

The Local Church At Antioch



Foundations (Day 261)
by Derek Prince

Last week we discussed the role of laying hands on functioning in spiritual gifts. The next purpose of the laying on of hands is connected with the sending out of apostles from a local church.

The local church at Antioch in Syria provides the clearest example of this.

> "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:1-4)

This passage provides a great deal of information about the way in which, according to the New Testament, a local church conducted its affairs.

First of all we notice that in this church at Antioch two definite spiritual ministries were present and were recognised by the church: those of prophet and teacher. Within the congregation five men were recognised and mentioned by name as exercising these ministries.

Second, we notice that these leaders in the congregation not only prayed, but they also fasted. Furthermore, they did not merely fast privately as individuals, but they fasted together in a group.

This is in line with Joel's prophetic exhortations for the last days.

> "Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord." (Joel

1:14)

> "Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly." (Joel 2:15)

After these exhortations to united fasting by God's people, there follows the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

> "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." (Joel 2:28)

Since the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is for us in these days, it is only logical to acknowledge that the exhortations to united fasting in the same prophecy of Joel are also for us. It would be illogical to apply the exhortations to fasting to some past or future age, while reserving the actual outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the present. In fact, the whole context of Joel's prophecy makes it plain that periods of united fasting and prayer are one main preparation which God's people should make if they wish to enter into the fullness of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, as promised by God for these last days.

Joel's prophecy lays special emphasis on the leaders of God's people. Joel 1:14 specifies "the elders"; Joel 2:17 specifies "the priests, who minister to the Lord." Thus the spiritual leaders of God's people are called upon to set a public example in this matter of fasting.

Devotional

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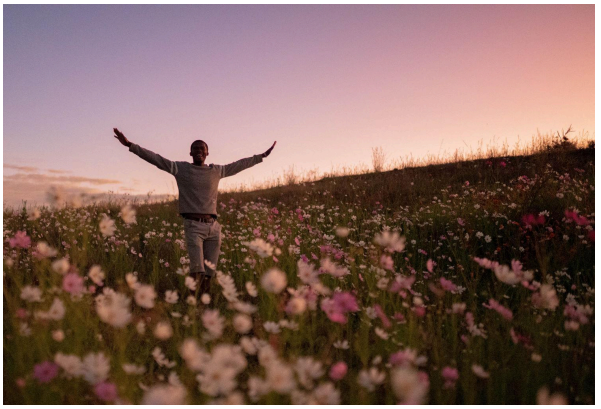

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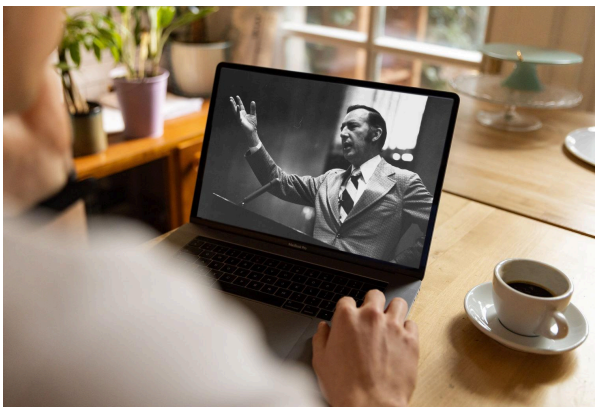

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