

Encouragement and Encouraging

To *encourage* someone doesn't mean to make them feel better, though that is often a result of being *encouraged*. Think about the word. It literally means to *fill with courage*. Sometimes, *courage* is required to accomplish a difficult, unpleasant, or intimidating task. *Courage* is also needed to take, stay on, or get back on a *narrow/strait* path (cf. Matthew 7:13-14). Thus, *courage* is required of every Christian, and *encouraging* one another should be the goal of every Christian, Hebrew 3:13.

Joseph was evidently a master-encourager. The apostles even renamed him "Barnabas," which translates as "*Son of Encouragement*," Acts 4:36. Many of us would love to be encouraging to our brethren, but don't really know how to go about it. Let's review some specific examples from the life of this great *encourager* of the Lord's people....

Barnabas encouraged by his example. Right after we're told of Joseph being renamed as *Barnabas*, the very next thing we witness is one of the reasons why- he *encouraged* others by his own example. You see, Barnabas "*owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet*" so they could distribute it to help poor saints, Acts 4:37, 32-35. "Preaching" can and should be *encouraging* (cf. Acts 15:32), but sometimes a good example can do even more to *encourage* and *embolden* others to courageously do the right thing(s)!

Barnabas encouraged by not being afraid of someone's past. Saul of Tarsus had been a violent persecutor of the Lord's church and its members, cf. Acts 8:1ff; 9:1-2. But after his conversion through the conversation with the Lord and the teaching of Ananias, he desired to become a part of that which he had formerly oppressed and victimized. Understandably, the church at Jerusalem both feared him- probably suspecting a trick and trap, and doubted him, Acts 9:26. So, here was a truly penitent and changed Christian man who desired to be part of the church's fellowship, but was being rejected and shunned, v.26. Enter Barnabas! Note v.27, "*But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.*" Barnabas didn't send a note with Saul, he got involved *personally*! Barnabas did not act without evidence, but neither was he so afraid of Saul's past as to reject the evidence, nor hesitate to present it to the church on Saul's behalf. Barnabas not only had *courage* himself, he instilled it in others also- the apostles and Saul, vv.28ff! We often admire the *courage* of the apostle Saul/Paul, but do we really think about who first *encouraged* him, and how he did so?

Barnabas encouraged by not being afraid of new things. For several years after the church's initial formation (Acts 2), the gospel was still being preached "*to no one except Jews alone*," Acts 11:19. But then, with God's blessing and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, some brethren at Antioch began preaching "*the Lord Jesus*" to Gentiles (non-Jews) also, vv.20-21. When the *Jewish* church at Jerusalem heard about these new *Gentile* Christians, they called on Barnabas to go and investigate, v.23. After he arrived on the scene, and "*witnessed the grace of God*" being manifested toward the Gentiles, Barnabas didn't recoil, pause, or hesitate because this was so new and different. Though a Jew himself, the *Son of Encouragement* "*rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord*," v.23. It's a good thing Barnabas didn't prescribed to the old adage, "If it's new it isn't true, and if it's true it isn't new!" Obviously, neither did he jump in and start *encouraging* this new practice without first investigating it first hand, and noting the *presence* and *blessing of God*. But there is no doubt, that Barnabas wasn't afraid of *new* things that were approved of God, nor did he hesitate to supply additional *courage* to those who were doing them.

Barnabas encouraged by teaching the truth. When it came time for missionaries to be sent out to "*the remotest part of the earth*" (cf. Acts 1:8), there should be no surprise that the Holy Spirit would select Barnabas to go with Paul, Acts 13:2ff. The *Son of Encouragement* had courageously led by example, been unafraid of a converted persecutor's past, and had been fearlessly willing to support and encourage those who blazed a new trail in reaching the lost. Now he would take on an even more active role in proclaiming the truth of the gospel to those destined for destruction by sin throughout Asia Minor. You see, *encouraging* isn't just about making someone feel better, it is also about filling them with *courage* by **your** example and courage in standing for and proclaiming the gospel. May we all take to heart these lessons, and be *encouragers* like Barnabas! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)