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UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUPERNATURAL CALL AND MINISTRY

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“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:1-3)

Believers are often hesitant to ask how God supernaturally calls someone; they want to understand in a simple and practical way how

God calls, works and separates someone or something to Himself.

The answer most often brings about two different Christian currents; one of hyper-spirituality and the other of hyper-intellectuality. Hyper-spirituality encourages calling, separation, and function without much clarification or practical application; at times mingled with mysticism. In this

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current Christians are often confused because there is little willingness for true understanding and explanation of the supernatural. As for the hyper-intellectual current, explanation of calling and separation to service is done through humanistic and psychological approach; and due to philosophical details believers tend to get lost amongst the many scientific facts and elaborations, which in the end lead the believer far away from the supernatural work of God because of all the explanations of supernatural symbolism and the attempts to clarify in a hyper-intellectual way.

Neither of these currents are healthy, yet I am certain that the answer lies somewhere in the middle. I believe that supernatural calling and separation is infused with practical biblical principles, which exist as a good balance, as opposed to mere faith presented to many without practical application. Therefore, the supernatural with application and understanding is key to comprehending God's call and separation.

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► **GOD'S SUPERNATURAL CALL OFTEN COMES WITH REQUIREMENTS WHICH THE PERSON MUCH FULFILL IN ORDER TO KNOW THAT THE CALL IS TRUE.**

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2-3)

There is no doubt that their call was supernatural. In the course of this ministry the Holy Spirit spoke in an unbelievable way separating Barnabas and Saul for mission work.

We say that God is the one who gives the gifts, raises up ministers, speaks, and separates those for ministry; however, when someone asks us to explain for them in a practical way what this means we often become lost. If we can't give an explanation to believers or clarify for them the work of the supernatural then they run the risk of going to the extreme in a sincere desire to understand the supernatural, all the while misunderstand what it really means. In an effort to help them gain a right understanding we may answer with, "God told me..." and there is where it stops. It is unfortunate to see how they often miss God's will for their life assuming that they have heard God's voice and understand supernatural calling. Failure to listen to good counsel often leads to failure of some sort; divorce, discouragement with ministry, and disillusionment with God; in extreme circumstances one may lead their followers into utter spiritual failure. In the end, even though it may appear that they sought for a supernatural call from God, many turn from Jesus and return to the world in bitterness.

Satan has the goal to confuse the understanding of the work of the supernatural and turn believers from the right path. He does not want believers to fulfill God's will for their life. He brings discouragement so they will give up because of the distorted picture they have of supernatural callings and function in general.

If we turn back to the text and look at it a little closer we will see clearly some practical patterns and applications of the supernatural call and separation to ministry. In the previous chapter we read that Barnabas and Saul were not unfamiliar people, rather they were believers who were already being used in ministry. They were people with a strong testimony of salvation from sin; people whom the Lord had been using for years in supernatural ministry. We must take into account that sometimes months or years often pass between the chapters in the book of Acts. These people whom we find in the church in Antioch were people whose gifts, calls, and ministry were already established in the church in Jerusalem and who evangelized publicly.

We see here a clear example of how a person can know if they have been truly called by God; a practical requirement of supernatural calling and function. These people were already prophets and teachers with experience and recognizable gifts; they were involved in the work of the local church, mission work, and worked among other churches – in Jerusalem, for example. These were not people who came out of nowhere and after a couple of days announced that God was supernaturally sending them into ministry. The church was not unfamiliar with their character and ministry.

We see that they were not self-sufficient and were not self-called, which happens in isolation; they were not

passive judges of everything in the local church while idly waiting for God to instruct them to work. We see that they were very active in their local churches; they used their gifts in many ways after the Holy Spirit descended on the church. The Word confirms for us that we see the surroundings in which this call of the Holy Spirit took place, which was when as one, "They ministered to the Lord and fasted..." (Acts 13:2a)

They did not leave their jobs, disconnect themselves from the church and their regular activities, and go off in the mountains somewhere to better hear the voice of God; rather they clearly presented for us in general the clear and supernatural biblical requirements. Today Christians rarely fast and pray, their stomachs continue growing as God continues to speak to them. I personally doubt that we can experience a supernatural call if we are not disciplined in fasting and prayer; this is still one of the definite requirements of the supernatural. While they

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had knowledge of the Word, possessed good characteristics, and perhaps were highly educated, they did not rely so much on these things thinking that because of their character and education the Lord would supernaturally use them; rather they waited and actively served in the church, fasted and prayed when at once the Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” (Acts 13:2b)

God will separate someone or something for His purpose or work if that person is already active in His kingdom work or that object is surrendered for His purpose. Often false humility or vanity deceives us into thinking that we cannot give so much of our time so we often wait for just the right moment, doing nothing at all, while waiting on God to speak supernaturally to offer a certain position. Often these believers do not wish to serve in the local church; instead they want to serve where people will not know much about their character so they can sell their spirituality to others in exchange for position or vanity. God speaks to them, but not in their churches and through their leaders, but in other “spiritual places”; such as in private meetings, seminars; through their neighbors and guest speakers who don’t know their personal life.

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We see, then, that supernatural function always has practical requirements and a practical function that cannot be neglected and thrown aside. The Word is fulfilled in this call in a right way; the church recognized their supernatural call, with the laying on of hands they were released to the mission that God had for them, which according to the Old and New Testaments did not mean that they went without the blessing of the church in respect to the regulations of recognition and release into mission work from the authority of the Antioch church, which in that time meant the laying on of hands. “And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:3)

► **2. SUPERNATURAL LEADERSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THEIR MISSION ASSIGNMENT WAS VERY PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC.**

“So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:5)

The Word says that they were supernaturally sent “by the Holy Spirit”; but let us see what kind of purpose was behind the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was not a strange spirit or a ghost that spoke to people without thinking or planning ahead of time. Often when we say that the Holy Spirit is working, we think of people speaking in tongues, being healed or raised from the dead. Of course, these things are good and useful works of the Holy Spirit if the goal is to give glory to Jesus, to see people repent and believe in Him. However it may seem, the Holy Spirit is not a strange spirit that requires us to stop thinking and living in order. We see that the Holy Spirit supernaturally lead them in a very practical and strategic way

He first led them to Seleucia, the sea-port of Antioch, which was about 30 kilometers west of Antioch; all of which was a part of the great Roman Empire and the cities were very well connected by what was known as the Roman Road. Sea-ports were strategic places and often led the economic and social centers of that time. In Seleucia they sailed to Cyprus and landed in the sea-port city of Salamis where they preached the word in a Jewish Synagogue. Salamis was the capitol city of Cyprus. What is interesting is that Barnabas was from this Salamis where he had many relatives; he understood the culture of that city very well. As soon as they arrived, Barnabas and Saul taught in the Synagogue because they were proficient in the law – they were teachers.

According to their deeds it is clear just how many practical details are written about supernatural leadership; they did not travel to small villages where almost nobody lived, where the culture and language was unfamiliar to them, saying to themselves that it doesn't matter that they don't understand anything because they are being led by the supernatural Holy Spirit.

Many believers fail to understand that the Holy Spirit is creative and very practical; because of this misunderstanding they make foolish decisions without any type of strategy; not taking into account their different cultural and sociological surroundings. In addition to raising the dead, healing, and deliverance, the supernatural is very useful for renewal of the mind given by the Holy Spirit. Surely they used the Roman Road for their own journeys, they went to the closest sea-port, thirty kilometers from Antioch, into a well-known territory, which was the hometown of Barnabas, into a familiar culture and where a familiar language was spoken and where many

relatives and friends lived as we read in Acts 4:36: "And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." (Acts 4:36-37)

Additionally, he was a Levite and used his knowledge, as Paul did, in order to teach in the Synagogue. Because of their vast knowledge, the Jews asked them to teach in the Synagogues. The Holy Spirit supernaturally worked through their background, relationships, understanding of the culture, language, and knowledge of the Word because the supernatural has a practical purpose. Because so many believers misunderstand the true work of the supernatural they often try to explain it in mystic terms, which can explain why so many are easily led astray by dangerous and destructive doctrines. We see more practical applications in chapter 13, where we read about Luke's first trip and the first time Saul's new name Paul is mentioned. As a Roman citizen Paul had three names (we are not sure of the third one). The name Paul usually meant "small one". When God changed him He did not

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discard his name Saul, as we tend to think, just because he became a Christian, rather by this he was supernaturally emphasizing his mission to preach to pagans. Therefore, to the Jews he was always known by the name of Saul, but when the Holy Spirit supernaturally led him to Cyprus and to much of the greater Roman population he worked under the name of Paul. His dual-citizenship was supernaturally planned by the Holy Spirit; he didn't discard his education, familiar language and his citizenship so the Holy Spirit could supernaturally work; yet it is equally certain that these didn't help him to know Jesus better, because we can't know Him better with diplomas, understanding foreign or dead languages, or having multiple citizenships. This is where many Christians "confuse apples with oranges", they do not understand that the supernatural leadership of the Holy Spirit also includes quality, strategic, and practical everyday decisions.

We must not think that the leadership of the Holy Spirit is such that we don't understand what we are doing and why; or that it is enough just to simply say that we are led by the Holy Spirit without any kind of practical use or purpose; if it were this way then we would have to ask ourselves what kind of spirit would lead us to confusion, wrong decisions and illogical things; what kind of spirit would lead

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us contrary to the Word of God. Maybe these things are supernatural, but we must question the source of this supernatural call and leadership. The supernatural, therefore, can often be practical application which includes making good and strategic decisions lead by understanding of our surroundings as well as using our natural gifts or learned skills that have been surrendered for the purpose of the kingdom.

► **3. SUPERNATURAL MINISTRY IS THE DOCTRINE OF THE LORD.**

"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." (Acts 13:6-12)

After preaching in Salamis, being led by the Holy Spirit, they had the opportunity to preach as they traveled the island until they reached Paphos (or New Paphos), which was the Greek sea-port town on the other side of Cyprus. The supernatural is never confusing and spontaneous, rather is often led by

order in conjunction with strategic plan (our God is a God of order not confusion); the Holy Spirit led them to complete their mission as they went through all the towns along the island ending up in Paphos, which was the capitol city of the province with a good commercial relationship with Judea. Therefore, taking advantage of this good relationship, the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, was open and invited them to his home to share the gospel.

The Word tells us that they met Bar-Jesus (translated “son of Joshua), a sorcerer and Jewish false prophet. In that time it was known that these Jewish false prophets and sorcerers were “the best” so that it was often normal for them to lead people to themselves by their philosophy, from which people sought wisdom, or by false prophesies, as in the case of Elymas. While they traded with the Judeans, the deputy of the country thought that it would be good to have this kind of man around as a counselor. And this is where conflict came in. Elymas knew that if the deputy converted he would be left without a job, because he was a false prophet – a sorcerer; a forbidden practice to the Jews.

Here we see one of the main functions of the Holy Spirit, the unveiling of the heart of man and his sin. “Then Saul (who also is called Paul) filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on him and said, “O, full of all guile and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:9-10) Supernatural leadership by the Holy Spirit is practical application; although Elymas is a prophet, in some way he showed an openness to Judaism; Paul and Barnabas proved that a greater power existed and a greater presentation of the gospel. What this false prophet did not have was the doctrine of the Lord. “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.: (Acts 13:12)

What was this doctrine? Was it apologetics. Were they just sharing information; did they convince the deputy that it was good? No, it was a doctrine that the Pharisees and other disciples feared; a doctrine of power and might and supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit with practical purpose. Elymas wasn’t blinded just to prove how God can blind someone; a book wasn’t written about this supernatural act. Firstly, supernatural doctrine and workings were to reveal unrighteousness and sin, craftiness and evil were uncovered; yet while he prophesied he was a son of the devil, an enemy of righteousness because he hid the “right ways of the Lord”.

This is the supernatural and doctrines of Christ; the Holy Spirit has come to reveal sin (in today’s modern revivals we rarely see people testify of deliverance from sin); He stood with truth and righteousness, He demonstrated Christ’s

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gospel with power and might, evil spirits fled from people, and for them this was a “new doctrine”, supernatural wonders with practical application. Jesus Christ was not just a healer who cast out demons and raised the dead; He was a proclaimer of the gospel, He spoke about principles of the kingdom, had mercy on the lost, cried and wept over Jerusalem; He told the multitudes that they had to leave all if they wanted to follow Him – and this is the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit that we need. How can we leave our jobs, ambitions, parents, children and love Him more than all else without this power? This is the supernatural that we must not forget or ignore, because if we forget we will have supernatural foolishness without character; gifts without righteousness, callings without blessings, and church membership with unchanged hearts and lives.

The supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit are filled with practical applications and principles of the kingdom of God, which is why we must use our renewed minds to make decisions, create strategies according to biblical principles without discarding education or culture because these things make up the whole of the

supernatural call and service. Let us not forget that our skills and talents are not dependent on a greater knowledge of Jesus, but let us also not forget that we cannot present the gospel only from an intellectual standpoint and that we cannot come to know Jesus through intellectual knowledge. The doctrine by which the deputy was shaken was not just information, rather a demonstration of power that led him to believe (Acts 13:12). This is why we seek of the Lord to call and lead us in the good, right, practical and supernatural way!

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