

10. Creativity and Vision

In our last topic, we concluded by pointing out the fact that creativity will cause a person to be able to have a vision for the development of a third and fourth spiritual generation. Today, we will focus on how the early church helped people develop that kind of a vision. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul said, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” In this verse, we see four different groups: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and others also. In this last letter to Timothy, Paul was continuing to remind Timothy to have a vision for a third and fourth spiritual generation.

We have already seen how Christ expanded the vision of the twelve, by helping them develop a vision for the next towns, as He took them with Him when He traveled throughout Galilee, to Jerusalem, to Judea, and to many other places. Matthew 15:21-28 also tells us how Christ took the disciples to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Today, we want to see how the apostles, and others, helped other Christians develop a vision for spiritual reproduction.

Christ expanded the vision of the one hundred and twenty disciples by gathering devout Jews from many different nations in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples were even given the ability to share the Gospel in the languages of all of the people there that day. In addition to sharing the Gospel with these Jews from many parts of the world, the Lord expanded the vision of the disciples to reach people, from other countries, who they did not even know. Christ used a very creative way to expand the vision of the disciples to see the spiritual needs of Jews in other countries. A few chapters later, when persecution scattered the Christians to many different places, many of them had already met people from those places as a result of the Day of Pentecost and the following period of months.

When persecution forced the early believers to flee from Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, we read that while the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, the rest of the Christians were scattered. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” The rest of Acts 8 tells how the Gospel spread to the Samaritans, to a man from Ethiopia, as well as to the entire surrounding region. Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”

In Acts 10, the Lord led Peter to go to the house of a Gentile by the name of Cornelius, who lived in the city of Caesarea. Later, Peter was questioned by many of the Christians for going to the home of a Gentile and eating with him. Peter carefully explained how the Lord led him to the house of Cornelius. The early Christians rejoiced to see that God was concerned for the salvation of the Gentiles. This was one of the ways Peter used this occasion to expand the vision of the disciples in Jerusalem.

However, Acts 11:12 tells us about a second way Peter used this occasion to expand the vision of some of the disciples. That verse says, “Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.” From this verse,

we see that Peter had learned, from the example of Christ, how to expand the vision of others. Since he had his vision expanded by going with Christ to other areas, when he went to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, he took six brothers with him to help expand their vision. They saw how God worked in the lives of the Gentiles and saw that God could use them, as Jews, to share the Gospel with the Gentiles. What happened in the lives of these brothers is summarized in Acts 10:44-45, where we read: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” These six brothers would never be the same after that event, because their vision had been expanded to include the Gentiles.

After the persecution, some of the Jews had fled even further than the surrounding regions. Acts 11:19 says, “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” Here, we see that these Jews had their vision expanded, but only to the point where they shared the Gospel with other Jews who were originally from Judea or Galilee.

However, the Lord was about to expand their vision to other people. Acts 11:20-21 says, “But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews), preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Some of the Jewish believers were not from Jerusalem. They were Jews who had grown up in the Gentile regions of Cyprus and Cyrene. As a result, these Jews had a vision for the Hellenists. Again, God honored their vision, and a great number of Hellenists turned to the Lord.

When the church in Jerusalem heard what had happened, they immediately sent one of their leaders, who had also grown up in Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Since Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus, he made a perfect “bridge” to the Hellenists, because he understood their culture. Barnabas immediately recognized the need for another teacher who also understood the Gentile culture. As a result, Acts 11:25-26 says, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” We see that because they had lived among Gentiles, and were now seeing Gentiles become Christians, the Lord began to assemble a team, who had a vision for the Gentiles, in Antioch.

The Lord then expanded the vision of the leadership team in Antioch. Acts 13:1-3 says, “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.” The church immediately sent out the original two leaders of the leadership team to take the Gospel to other regions.

In each place they went, they began by sharing the Gospel with the Jews in the synagogues. They

began there, because many Gentiles went to the Jewish synagogues to learn more about God. Acts 13:42-43 says, “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”

A “proselyte” was a Gentile who wanted to learn about God, and so, went to the Jewish synagogue to hear the Old Testament taught. These Gentiles provided “a bridge” between the Jews and the Gentiles, because they were Gentiles who had become familiar with the Old Testament. The next Sabbath day, the Jews turned against Paul and Barnabas, because they saw the interest of the Gentiles. As a result, Acts 13:46 says, “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’” Because God had given Paul and Barnabas a vision for the Gentiles, they now made their primary ministry to the Gentiles. Later, Paul and Barnabas took other Jews with them to help them expand their vision. Acts 15:39 says Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus. Acts 15:40 says Paul took Silas with him. Then, in Acts 16:1-3, we see that they added Timothy, who was half-Jewish and half-Gentile, to the team to help him develop a vision for the Gentiles. From that point on, Paul continued to add both Jews and Gentiles to the team to give them a vision for the world. Acts 20:4 says, “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.” Here, we see that Paul was multiplying the number of those who were taking the Gospel to other Gentiles by taking them with him to expand their vision for others.

Christ wants us to use our creativity to expand the vision of others and help them see the needs of people who do not know Christ. As we help them expand their vision, by helping them to see the needs of people who are without Christ, and without hope, many will begin to use their creativity to share the Gospel with people of other cultures, other religions, and other ethnic groups. People who are led by the vision of Christ will learn to cross barriers by building bridges to share the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you help other Christians learn to cross barriers and build bridges in order to share the Gospel with people who are without Christ and without hope.