

*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. Acts 13:1*

Acts 13:1-41 is a vivid illustration that God chooses followers with widely different personalities and with diverse backgrounds and that those chosen can evolve down paths that differ in notoriety but are equal in the eyes of God. The diversity of those chosen to be early leaders of the church is obvious in verse 1. God chose two, Barnabas and Saul, who were opposites in terms of personality and temperament to minister to the Gentiles in Cyprus.

The evolution of Christ’s followers occurs in Verses 4-12. Barnabas had been mentioned first and Saul last in verse 1, indicating that Barnabas presumably was the leader in Cyprus. However, Saul’s passion propels him to leadership in their confrontation with the false prophet, Bar Jesus. This miraculous confrontation triggered the rise in Paul’s ministry that was extensively recorded. The evolution of this servant is further emphasized by naming him Paul rather than Saul and Paul being mentioned before Barnabas in subsequent writings.

Barnabas’ ministry probably was more low-keyed as compared to Paul but was effective because he was known as the “son of encouragement.” It is interesting to speculate how the early church might have evolved if quiet, but effective, Barnabas had not encouraged and convinced others in the early church to accept Saul into the ministry.

How many women and men do you know in Bethel who are Barnabases and Pauls? I suspect that you can name many who are unique in temperament and personalities but are equally committed and effective in their service to and love of the Lord. We often think that the early Christians had almost superhuman qualities but we can see the Barnabases and Pauls serving God today as in the first century.

*Dear Lord, we thank you for the diversity of your servants who differ in many ways but labor in unison to serve you and your people. Help each of us to appreciate the uniqueness of your servants so that we can receive your unique gifts. Amen.*

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