

PLANT A CHURCH OF CHRIST

Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor, found a friend in a man called Barnabas. Barnabas was a faithful Christian who heard about Saul's conversion to Christ. While other Christians were skeptical of Saul's conversion, Barnabas boldly went out to meet Saul and introduced him to the apostles and elders of the church of Christ in Jerusalem. These two men, Saul and Barnabas, became the greatest church planters among the early Christians.

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

Saul of Tarsus the persecutor was not trying to plant churches of Christ, but he became one of Jesus' best church planters. But you too can be a church planter!

Three years after his conversion to Christ Saul came again to the city of Jerusalem. When he left Jerusalem three years before, Saul had left with papers in his hand that authorized him to stamp out Christianity. But now Saul was returning to the city as a preacher of the gospel of Christ, a church planter. However, when Saul arrived in Jerusalem, the church would not have anything to do with him! That's right! Luke tells us that "when [Saul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he [Saul] went in and out among them [the church] at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord." ([Acts 9:26-28](#))

And so began a friendship between Barnabas and Saul. Saul had to leave the city of Jerusalem shortly thereafter because the very men who had once commissioned him to destroy the church of Christ were now his enemies. The Rulers plotted to kill Saul, just as they had plotted to kill other Christians. The Lord, in a vision, told Saul to leave the city. So the Lord's man fled from Jerusalem and sailed to his home town of Tarsus in Cilicia.

A few years later Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem to Antioch of Syria because they had heard that the church of Christ had been planted in Antioch. Barnabas was sent to check out the rumor. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch he found indeed Jesus' church established. "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for

Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." (Acts 11:25-26 ESV)

"Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. [One day] While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:1-4 ESV) Thus began what is known as the First Missionary Journey of the apostle Paul. On that journey at least five churches of Christ were planted. At least one church was planted in Cyprus. In ancient Turkey, the church was planted in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. These four churches in Turkey were later known as "the churches of Galatia." Years later the apostle Paul wrote a very important letter to the churches of Galatia. (Galatians 1:2)

Later, on Paul's second Missionary journey he traveled with another man named Silas. That team traveled a far greater distance than did Paul and Barnabas. In that second journey Paul visited the churches he and Barnabas had previously planted and strengthened them. In Lystra Paul invited a young Christian by the name of Timothy to join him and Silas on their journey. When they continued the journey, Paul and those with him planted at least five more churches of Christ. How did they do that? How can people plant a church of Christ? Can it still be done in the modern world? It took three things for Paul and his helpers to plant churches: it took a Sower, Seed, and the Lord of the harvest. The Sower can be anyone who has the Seed of the Word of Christ. The Lord of the harvest is Jesus himself, who adds the saved (those who hear and obey the Word) to His Church. (Acts 2:47) When Jesus adds a saved person to his church, the church is planted in the location where that person lives.

Do you remember Jesus' parable about the Sower? "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among

thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." (Mark 4:3-8 ESV)

Jesus gave this interpretation, "The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience." (Luke 8:11-15)

The seed represented the word of God. Therefore, the seed that was sown in the four kinds of ground was the same seed. The ground was different. And so it is in sowing the seed of God's Word today. Sowers should sow only God's Word! The seed, however, falls on different kinds of ground. When Jesus sent out his apostles the first time to just the Jewish population, Jesus warned his apostles that they would find a mixed reaction among the hearers of the gospel. "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." (Luke 9:5 ESV) Notice that in Jesus' parable only 25% of the soil was described as "good" soil. Therefore, if you are a sower of the Seed of Christ then you may search a long time before you find the good soil. Good soils, good hearts, are in the minority. They are hard to find. But they are out there. And Christian sowers are supposed to scatter the seed over all the soils, no matter what kind it is. The church of Christ springs up when the SEED of the Word of Christ is sown. Peter calls this SEED the "imperishable seed" of the living and abiding word of God. (1 Peter 1:23) And he says to his readers, "This word is the good news that was preached to you." When that imperishable seed is preached and someone, or more than one, obeys the good news, that person or those people are added to the church of Christ by the Lord himself. (Acts 2:47) This is how the church grows up in a location. Someone hears the Word of Christ. He or she believes it and he or she repents of sin, confesses faith to someone who baptizes him or her in the

name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the words of Jesus, that person is saved. Jesus adds that person to His church. Paul put it this way, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13 KJV) You see, the Word of Christ is also the Word of the Holy Spirit. Paul also put it this way in Galatians 3:27, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:27-28 ESV) Friends, when a person is baptized into Christ the church of Christ is planted.

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20) A church of Christ gathering is two or more Christians who gather with Jesus at His appointed times. Jesus' first century churches gathered on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). "Breaking bread" is a reference to what is called "the Lord's Supper". The Lord's Supper contains only two elements, unleavened bread and the fruit of the grape. Jesus used those two elements to represent his body and his blood. You see the sacrifice of Jesus' body on the cross, and the shedding of His blood are the very elements that justify God's forgiveness of human sin. And so, the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week is a memorial for that great sacrifice. In the first day of the week assembly Christians also worship Christ and God in music. They sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in their hearts to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:19) They do that in order to praise God and Christ and to encourage on another by lifting up their praise together. The teaching and preaching of the New Testament of Christ is also a part of Christian assemblies. The Word of Christ edifies us and instructs us in the ways of the Lord Jesus. Paul reminds us that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV) And so the church of Christ is to be zealous of every good work. This is the reason that Christians are commanded "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper...." (1 Corinthians 16:2 ESV)

Can you plant a church of Christ in your community? Yes, you can. After you repent and are baptized and been added to the church by the Lord, you too can cooperate with the Lord of the Harvest. You can scatter the SEED of the Word of

God that you have believed and obeyed. You can see who will hear, believe, repent, and be baptized and be added to the church of Jesus Christ. Will you obey Christ today, and become a church planter? Christ needs you.