



Priority

The definition of priority from Webster is superiority in rank, position, or privilege. The order of preference based on urgency, importance or merit.

The book of Acts begins with the doctrine of proof. The doctrine of visible proof is then vitally connected to doctrinal content, that being the doctrine of promise as given in the Old Testament with special emphasis on the promise of the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit. By referring to the doctrine of promise and a reference to John's baptism, the natural result was the disciples connecting this with the kingdom concept. This is what came to their minds immediately.

Therefore, in Acts 1:7, Jesus had to turn their attention to the immediate priority established by the doctrine of promise, the coming of the Church Age and away from the kingdom. This introduces us to the doctrine of priority. This does not mean that we should not care or know about the time and seasons that exist. 1 Thess. 5:1.

"He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; " (Acts 1:7, NASB)

"Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you." (1 Thessalonians 5:1, NASB)

Therefore, Acts 1:8 brings them to what they should be concerned for, that is, their priority at the outset of Christianity, evangelism. This is priority #1 at both the beginning of the Church Age and the beginning of a local church in a new area.

" but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." " (Acts 1:8, NASB)

Classifications of Priorities in the Scriptures

Various classifications of priorities in the scriptures include: The priorities of the local church as a unit. The priorities of the pastor of a local church. The priorities of the board of a local church. The priorities of a husband in the home. The priorities of a wife in the home. The priorities of a man in training for the ministry. The changing priorities of a local church. The priorities of children as determined by parents. The priorities of life within the framework of the divine institutions.

Classifications of Priorities

Priorities of a local church at its beginning.

In Acts 2:42 and Acts 1:14, "continually devoting themselves" is προσκατερέω (proskartereō) and means they continued steadfast in doctrine, in the verbal teaching. They did this before the church was formed.

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42, NASB)

"These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." (Acts 1:14, NASB)

In Acts 6:4, "devote ourselves" is also προσκατερέω (proskartereō) and here means to give constant



attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word by the communicators. In Acts 2:46, “continuing” is προσκαρτερέω (proskartereō) and means to continue all the time in a certain place.

""But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."" (Acts 6:4, NASB)

"Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart," (Acts 2:46, NASB)

In Galatians 2:9, they continued with one mind in “fellowship” or κοινωνία (koinōnia) in the Greek. Fellowship here involved participation and sharing - sharing of labors, good, etc. Fellowship also involved friendship which is the right hand of fellowship and a sign and pledge of fellowship. It also involved joint material contributions with collections as an exhibit of the proof of fellowship.

"and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." (Galatians 2:9, NASB)

In Acts 2:46, they continued with one mind in breaking bread began with a normal human significance and ended with a spiritual one - the feeding of the multitudes as an aftermath of their taking in spiritual food. Matt. 14:19; Matt. 15:36.

"Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds," (Matthew 14:19, NASB)

"and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people." (Matthew 15:36, NASB)

At this point, Jesus combined the natural factor of eating with the Old Testament unleavened bread concept with the memorial concept of His death. The feast of unleavened bread had the significance of fellowship with Christ in the spiritual life. Matt. 26:26.

"While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." " (Matthew 26:26, NASB)

Breaking of bread would bear the significance of the fulfillment of the feast of unleavened bread from the Old Testament standpoint and the memorial to the death of Christ and the fellowship with Christ for the believer in the Church Age. Acts 2:46.

"Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart," (Acts 2:46, NASB)

In Acts 20:7, the breaking of bread as the Church Age progressed became a definite part of organized worship as stated on the first day of the week. The breaking of bread in Acts 27:34-36 has within the context the thought of nourishment based on security.

"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight." (Acts 20:7, NASB)

""Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish." Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat. All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food." (Acts 27:34-36, NASB)



In 1 Corinthians 10:16, the breaking of bread now has adopted the spiritual meaning as we know it today in communion. In 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, the normal sharing of a meal together is set distinctly different from the breaking of bread in communion.

"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16, NASB)

"Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk." (1 Corinthians 11:20-21, NASB)

In Acts 6:4, they continued devoted to prayer. "Prayer" is προσευχή (proseuchē) and is a word of sacred character being limited to prayer to God. It gives prominence to devotion.

"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:4, NASB)

In Philippians 1:19, "prayers" is δέησις (deēsis) and has the significance of need or indigence - a condition of poverty. Prayer is a seeking, asking, entreating. It is also used of requests addressed to man. It gives prominence to the expression of personal need. It is used of imploring God in regard to a particular matter. Luke 1:13.

"for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," (Philippians 1:19, NASB)

"But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.'" (Luke 1:13, NASB)

They were together and shared their common conditions. In Acts 2:44, ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό (epi to autos) is an idiom also occurring in Acts 1:15 and meaning "all together." This would be an emphasis on the assembling of believers together.

"And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;" (Acts 2:44, NASB)

"At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said," (Acts 1:15, NASB)

They continued daily with one accord in the temple. The participle is the same as in Acts 2:42 for "continued." In Acts 2:46, "daily" is the preposition of norm and standard κατά (kata) with ἡμέρα (hēmera) and means day to day. The temple was the place of evangelizing as well as exhortation.

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42, NASB)

"Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart," (Acts 2:46, NASB)

In Acts 2:46, "breaking of bread" is same as before, the present active participle. "From house to house" is κατ οἶκος (kat oikos) and is a classic idiom. This differs from the normal perpendicular significance of the up and down idea of *kata*. This is the horizontal usage of things being on the same plane. This emphasizes the common platitude upon which they measured their homes or status. There was no status rank system in their mental attitudes toward their homes. The breaking of bread here was not that of holding communion in various places, but the normal eating and having meals on a common basis.

The "taking" is μεταλαμβάνω (metalambanō) and means to partake of food or nourishment. "Gladness" is ἀγαλλίασις (agalliasis) and means in extreme joy, gladness, exultation. "Sincerity of heart" is



ἀφελότης (aphelotēs) and means with simplicity, singleness. This is the proper mental attitude.

The priorities of a local church as it moved into adolescence and maturity.

The priority of a local church is utilizing all the spiritual gifts for smooth function. In Acts 6:3, the word “select” is ἐπισκέπτομαι (episkeptomai) and is the first aorist middle imperative and means to look for one to employ, to look for, to inspect, to examine.

“Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.” (Acts 6:3, NASB)

The phrase “whom we may put in charge” is ὃς καθίστημι (hos kathistēmi) and means to set one over, to place one in charge. The ministry of the apostles was such that they could not function as the leaders of the local church and therefore the local church needed its own leadership.

Function of the Seven Leadership Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church

It is very interesting that we have arrived at seven leadership spiritual gifts for the Church Age as to permanent functioning ones. They are pastor-teacher, evangelism, teacher, administration, exhortation, service, and giving. This would be parallel to the 1 Timothy 3 passage where the office of deacon is inclusive of more than just the administration gift.

Acts 6:1-3 is usually ascribed to the singular function of deacons in the administrative capacity in freeing the pastor for his work, but a close look will show the context of leadership established in a local church to free the apostles to do their work.

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.” (Acts 6:1-3, NASB)

The phrase “of this task” plus “serve tables” yields the following truths when viewed together. In Acts 6:2, “serve tables” is the present active infinitive (purpose) of διακονέω τράπεζα (diakoneō trapeza) and means to minister to one, to minister supply food and the necessities of life, to relieve one’s necessities by collecting alms, to provide, take care of, distribute, the things necessary to sustain life. It means to serve or wait at a table and offer food and drink to the guests. It is not the purpose of the apostles to leave the Word of God and serve tables. Matt. 25:44; Rom. 15:25; Acts 6:2.

“Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’” (Matthew 25:44, NASB)

“but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.” (Romans 15:25, NASB)

“So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” (Acts 6:2, NASB)

In Luke 10:40, “serve” is διακονέω (diakoneō) and means to put food on tables, satisfying of human needs. The ministry of the apostles was a spiritual one, not one of mechanics, satisfying human needs, etc.

“But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.”” (Luke 10:40,



NASB)

There is an analogy here between the apostles to the multitudes compared to the pastor-teacher to the local church. The apostles did many things, then came to their priority. It is the same with the pastor-teacher where he does many things, then comes to his major priority. The phrase “of this task” in Acts 6:3 is οὗτος χρεία (houtos chreia) and is translated “duties” or business, which broadens their responsibilities beyond the singular need in context to include all the duties and functions of a local church.

""Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." (Acts 6:3, NASB)

If you take the narrow context of the “need of dispersing money” then you would relate this to a narrow function of the administrative gift, for example, on a deacon board. But taking this in the broad sense of duties and business, this includes all the functioning spiritual gifts within a local church, not just the seven leadership spiritual gifts.

In order for the apostles to follow through on their immediate priorities, the local church had to assume all its immediate priorities. Likewise, in order for a pastor in a local church to fulfill his immediate priorities, the deacon board must by the same token assume their immediate priorities.

Therefore, when a local church moves into a spiritually maturing period, the role of the pastor-teacher becomes such that the board must assume much more responsibility for spiritual gift function than it had previously. At the outset, the pastor-teacher did many things, but now the board assumes more and more of the details to allow the pastor-teacher to function in his newly acquired responsibilities.

In Acts 6:4, the priority of the apostles is analogous to the priorities of the pastor-teacher. This passage does not say “the teaching of the Word,” but rather “the ministry of the Word” which means here in context to minister a thing unto one, to serve someone with or by supplying anything that would benefit that person. This would include all factors necessary to the teaching of God’s Word, such as study, preparation, etc. This is a much broader term than simply the act of teaching. This is much broader than just the communication of the Word.

""But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."" (Acts 6:4, NASB)

The second major priority of a growing local church is stabilization in the spiritual growth process with Bible doctrine. The first priority frees the pastor-teacher to pursue his second priority. Acts 15:30-36; Acts 16:5.

"So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out. [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.] But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord. After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."" (Acts 15:30-36, NASB)

"So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily." (Acts 16:5, NASB)

In Acts 11:22-23, Barnabas encouraged the church at Antioch. The word “encourage” is παρακαλέω



(parakaleō) and means to encourage, challenge, motivate, warn, etc. The phrase “remain true” is προσμένω (prosmenō) and means to be steadfastly devoted to the Lord, to keep your eyes on the Lord, foremost before you.

"The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;" (Acts 11:22-23, NASB)

In Acts 14:21-22, “strengthening” is ἐπιστηρίζω (epistērizō) and means confirming, exhorting, preparing for increasing pressures, to strengthen more, to render more firm in their Christian faith. The phrase “to continue” is ἐμμένω (emmenō) and means to continue in doctrine, the body of faith.

"After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."" (Acts 14:21-22, NASB)

This word is also used in Acts 18:23, Acts 15:32, and Acts 15:41 in the present active participle. This is a continual principle in a growing congregation. In Acts 15:32, “encouraged” is παρακαλέω (parakaleō) and means to exhort, challenge, and encourage.

"And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples." (Acts 18:23, NASB)

"Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message." (Acts 15:32, NASB)

"And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches." (Acts 15:41, NASB)

A Closer Look at Barnabas

Barnabas was the son of consolation, exhortation, and encouragement. When other disciples were afraid of Paul, Barnabas encouraged them and brought them to Paul to allay their fears. Acts 4:36; Acts 9:26-27.

"Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement)," (Acts 4:36, NASB)

"When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 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 out boldly in the name of Jesus." (Acts 9:26-27, NASB)

When the Antioch church had grown and multiplied greatly, the Jerusalem church decided to send someone to minister to them. They sent Barnabas with the gift of exhortation to fulfill this function. Acts 11:21-22.

"And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch." (Acts 11:21-22, NASB)

When the timing was right to get Paul and bring him to Antioch for a ministry, it was Barnabas who came through again. When the church at Antioch was led into their missions ministry, it was Barnabas that was sent with the Apostle Paul. This gift of exhortation works well with a pastor-teacher and with



individuals as well as groups. Acts 11:25; Acts 13:1-4.

"And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;" (Acts 11:25, NASB)

"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to 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, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:1-4, NASB)

When the legalism issue came up in the Jerusalem council, it was Barnabas that was picked to accompany Paul. The gift of exhortation in Barnabas exhibited a blind spot of being influenced by others. When the issue of extending grace to a fallen brother occurred, Barnabas, not Paul, was the one to stand behind John Mark. Barnabas had a great deal of patience and was positive in outlook. Acts 15:1-2; Acts 15:39.

"Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue." (Acts 15:1-2, NASB)

"And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus." (Acts 15:39, NASB)

Barnabas got caught up in a legalism problem with Peter at Antioch before the Jerusalem council, but had responded to the admonition of Paul and was straightened out when the circumcision issue arose. The Antioch church benefitted from the encouragement ministry of Judas and Silas. Gal. 2:1; Acts 15:32.

"Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also." (Galatians 2:1, NASB)

"Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message." (Acts 15:32, NASB)

Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia encouraging and strengthening the churches. In Acts 15:41, "strengthening" is ἐπιστηρίζω (epistērizō) and means to make solid, strong, make firm, strengthen. In Acts 16:5 and Acts 18:23, "being strengthened" and "strengthening" are στερεόω (stereōō) and στήρίζω (stērizō) and both mean to strengthen, make firm, to render constant and to confirm one's mind.

"And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches." (Acts 15:41, NASB)

"So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily." (Acts 16:5, NASB)

"And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples." (Acts 18:23, NASB)

Principles of Application

Local churches are often misunderstood by members or attendees who do not understand the priorities of the local church at that time or for a certain point in time. Nothing remains static for a local church.



The leadership of the local church needs to understand the trends and stages that the church is going through.

The leadership of the local church needs to communicate to the congregation what are the immediate priorities and the future priorities of the local church. The leadership will communicate this first from the text and secondly from the policy adopted.

For a local church to carry out its priorities, the function of all the leadership spiritual gifts must be exercised. When individuals fail in their priorities, then the local church is curtailed in realizing their priorities.

A realization of priorities does not eliminate the possibility and need for flexibility. For example, it is understood that the priorities of the pastor include studying, teaching, troubleshooting, and leadership in the family. But that does not exclude socializing, fellowship, recreation, etc.

We must learn to respect the priorities of others, but at the same time be free to exercise ourselves to them. The priorities of individual believers go through spiritual growth stages just like the local church does. The new believer has certain priorities, as does the growing believer and the mature believer.

The believer must recognize the growth distinctions within other believers and not judge them because they don't seem to have the same priorities that they have. Priorities are designed to guide you not destroy you. They cannot become a legalism system of regimentation.

Priorities fall into two categories: the spiritual priorities and the divine institution priorities. Due to the above principle, the believer is responsible for the harmonizing of these priorities to keep a balance in life. At certain stages, one category of priorities may be more predominant than the other. There are times that the spiritual priorities almost seem to wipe out the divine institution priorities. Other times, the divine institution priorities seem to be greatly curtailing your spiritual priorities. But, as you stay with it, time will balance out the two categories.

There are times when certain spiritual gifts are prominent to accomplish certain priorities of a local church. To accomplish the priority of spiritual growth and stabilization, the gift of pastor-teacher is vital. To accomplish the priority of training men for the ministry, the local church needs the gift of pastor-teacher. To teach the children, the gift of teacher is needed. To accomplish the priority of evangelism, the local church needs the gift of evangelism. To accomplish the priority of an expanded ministry, the gift of administration is vital.

When the congregation increases, the potential for problems, misunderstandings, and questions increases. The church gets away from the people. They say, "This isn't the church we used to know, love or enjoy." "It's moving too fast and I'm not sure if I can keep up or get used to it." This calls for the gift of exhortation.

The gift of exhortation is able to convey the proper encouragement and the proper exhortation to solve and avoid problems before they occur and while they are still building. The gift of exhortation has the following characteristics. It is not afraid or intimidated by the countenance or status of the person or group to which it ministers. It is a much needed gift in a local church to balance instruction with encouragement. Acts 9:26-27; Acts 11:21-22.

"When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 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 out boldly in the name of Jesus." (Acts 9:26-27, NASB)



"And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch." (Acts 11:21-22, NASB)

It has vital sensitivity to the timing factor. There was a right time for Paul to return to Antioch. Barnabas knew this and brought him back. It works well with other communication leadership gifts. Acts 11:25; Acts 13:1-4.

"And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;" (Acts 11:25, NASB)

"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to 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, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:1-4, NASB)

It works well with individuals as well as with groups. It has blind spots to certain influences of others. Barnabas was influenced by the legalism antic of Peter and fell into it. Acts 11:25; Gal. 2:1.

"Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also." (Galatians 2:1, NASB)

It has a particular characteristic of patient optimism. It not only goes the second mile in help, but the third and the fourth as well. An example is Barnabas and John Mark in Acts 15:36-39. Its function of exhorting and encouraging is directly related to stability in the local church.

"After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus." (Acts 15:36-39, NASB)