



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul's Second Missionary Journey, Part 1

Acts 15:36-16:10

November 11, 2007

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- ❑ Conflict in the modern-church seems ever-present. Church splits seem to be commonplace today. However, this is not something that is new with the 21st Century American Church. In fact, the new church dealt with conflict often.
- ❑ Luke has already, earlier in Chapter 15, described the conflict with the Judaizers over circumcision. Also, Paul speaks of another intense internal conflict in Galatians 2:11-14:

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”

- Yet, one of the most well-known divisions in the early church will occur immediately following the Council of Jerusalem.
- At the Council, through the convening of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, the church addressed a controversial and divisive issue head-on and maintained the unity of the young, growing church in Jerusalem and beyond.
- Yet, ironically, two of the men [Paul and Barnabas] who attended and spoke at the Council will part company over a much more personal issue.

I. Paul and Barnabas Part Ways

- ❑ Luke concludes his section on the Council of Jerusalem, stating, **Verse 35**, “But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.”
- ❑ Then, in the very next Verse, **Verse 36**, Luke writes, “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.’”
 - The ‘after some days’ reference may mean that Paul waited until winter turned into spring and travel conditions became more favorable.
 - What is clear; however, was the Paul deeply cared for the believers in the churches he had established several years earlier. They were not simply ‘numbers’ to him; they were brothers and sisters in the faith who, like all of us, needed strengthening and encouragement.
 - The Greek word, here, translated “visit” is *episkeptomai* and is related to *episcopo* [where we get the word *Episcopal*]. It is a word that refers to pastoral oversight and care, and it is the word used for caring for widows, orphans, and the sick.

- In other words, the impetus for Paul’s Second Missionary Journey was a genuine and sincere desire to care for those he had seen converted during his first journey.
- As one pastor writes, “[Paul] was no hit-and-run evangelist...In the long run, the work of a well-taught, mature, spiritually strong congregation has a far greater impact than massive evangelistic crusades.” In fact, in Colossians 1:28, he wrote, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”
- Then, Paul states, **Verses 37 – 41**, “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. But Paul chose Silas and left being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”
 - It really should be of no surprise that Barnabas wanted to take John Mark on the Second Missionary Journey with Paul and him. We read in Colossians 4:10 that John Mark was Barnabas’ cousin. Not only this, Barnabas was the “son of encouragement”. He, no doubt, was willing to encourage his cousin and give him a second chance to prove his commitment to the Gentile mission. The second missionary journey would be his chance.
 - However, Paul was not so willing to give John Mark the second chance. As a result, a “sharp disagreement” occurred between Barnabas and Paul.
 - The word translated “sharp disagreement” means anger, irritation, or exasperation in a dispute.
 - In other words Paul and Barnabas did not simply “agree to disagree.” The argument was so significant that they parted ways.
 - Some have suggested that Barnabas and John Mark were not as comfortable with Paul’s “law-free” effort of reaching out to the Gentiles.
 - In fact, Paul charged Barnabas [along with Peter] with hypocrisy in Galatians 2:13, when he withdrew from eating with the Gentiles out of fear of the party of the circumcision.
 - Yet, regardless of the underlying cause [if one even existed] of their disagreement, Paul and Barnabas possibly never worked together again in the same context. We can surmise this, as this is the last mention of Barnabas in the Book of Acts.

- However, this “melancholy disagreement” [as John Calvin referred to it] did not end in permanent bitterness between the two men. In fact, Paul would later refer to Barnabas in a positive light in 1 Corinthians 9:6.
- Not only this, but Paul will later write to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4:11: “Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.” Paul also references Mark positively in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24.
- Lastly, John Mark will later become a close associate with the apostle Peter [1 Peter 5:13], and will even have the privilege of penning one of the four Gospels, which bears his name.

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- Even though Paul, Barnabas and John Mark would later reconcile, the truth remained that, prior to the Second Missionary Journey, they had such a disagreement that they parted company.
- In place of John Mark, Luke writes, in **Verse 40**, that Paul chose Silas to be his travel companion.
 - It seems, from earlier in this chapter, that Silas was a leader in the Church at Jerusalem. Luke refers to him as a “prophet” in Acts 15:32, and it appears that he was gifted in the area of preaching and teaching.
 - Furthermore, Silas was a Jew, and as a result, he would be allowed into the synagogue, which was a central aspect of Paul’s missionary strategy.
 - Secondly, though, Silas was a Roman citizen [16:37], which would ensure the protection of his rights, along with Paul, throughout the Roman Empire.

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- From this account in the final portion of Acts 15, several truths emerge:
 1. The first point is that Luke’s inclusion of this division attests to the truthfulness of this account. It would have been unlikely that someone would have made up such a story, as it potentially puts both Paul and Barnabas in a bad light.
 2. Secondly, this account demonstrates that the apostles were not some “super-humans.” They were “real people” with normal human feelings and emotions. When the modern Christian understands this truth, then it becomes possible to relate to the experiences of the early Church. The words of the New Testament are no longer antiquated words of wisdom, but eternal propositional truths which transcend time and place.

3. Thirdly, while not condoning the division between Paul and Barnabas, it reveals the reality of such occurrences. Paul was clearly a passionate, “Type-A” personality. The reality is that people who are passionate about biblical truth will occasionally [even often!] have disagreements. At times, unfortunately, these escalate and cause deep division and wounds. The Body of Christ always suffers when this happens; yet, tragically, it is not uncommon.
4. Fourthly, although members of the Body of Christ often divide because of different conflicts, it does not mean that reconciliation is impossible. Even as “personal” as this conflict was for Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark, Scripture records that they all reconcile in the future.
5. Finally, and most significant, in God’s providential design, **out of this conflict emerged two missionary journeys**: (1) Paul and Silas left for Syria and Cilicia; and (2) Barnabas and John Mark left for Cyprus [**Verse 39**]. As one scholar would later write, “Out of one pair two were made.” Even in this midst of this “sharp disagreement”, God was in control. This example demonstrates a powerful truth to us all. While the church may go through times of division and conflict, the world does not stop and the Gospel message continues to spread.

II. Timothy Joins the Missionary Team

- ❑ As Paul and Silas left for the Second Missionary Journey, they chose to take the over-land route, through Syria and Cilicia [**15:41**].
- ❑ Eventually, they came to the cities of Derbe and Lystra [**Verse 16:1**]. It had been in Lystra where Paul had healed a man who had been lame from birth [14:8-10]. Furthermore, it was also in Lystra where the crowd, following his healing of the lame man, tried to worship Paul and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus, respectively. After Paul and Barnabas rejected such idolatry, the crowd, influenced by Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, stoned Paul.
- ❑ Luke, then, writes, in [**Verses 1-3a**], “And a disciple was there [in Lystra], named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him...”
 - This is where Paul will meet Timothy. Young Timothy will later play a significant role in the life and ministry of Paul. The Apostle will write two letters to the young man which will be included in the Scriptures. Further, Timothy will serve as Paul’s “right-hand man” [1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philippians 2:19]. Paul will also refer to Timothy later as a “true child in the faith” [1 Timothy 1:2; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 1:2].
 - Here, Luke writes that Timothy was “the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek...” [**Verse 1**]

- The young Timothy, as well as his mother, had likely been converted during Paul’s First Missionary Journey, some five years earlier.
 - We later read that his mother was a Jewish Christian and her name was Eunice [2 Timothy 1:5]. Also, his grandmother Lois was also Jewish [2 Timothy 1:5].
 - Interestingly, Timothy’s father was Greek [non-Jewish]. It is quite possible that by this time Timothy’s father was no longer living. The reason for this was because the verb in “was a Greek” is written in the imperfect tense. This would also explain the close relationship of Peter and Timothy, like a father and son.
 - **It is quite significant that Timothy was both Jewish and Greek. As a result, he would have the uniquely qualified to preach the Gospel and minister to both Jews and Gentiles throughout the empire.**
 - The reason for Luke’s inclusion of the information concerning Timothy’s parents was because, in accordance with Jewish tradition, the religion of the mother became the religion of the child:
 - In the *Mishnah*, the Jewish body of rabbinical literature, *b. Yebam.* 45b, a child is to be raised in accordance with the mother’s nationality and religion: “And the law is that if an idolater or a slave cohabited with the daughter of an Israelite, the child [born from such a union] is legitimate, both in the case of a married, and in that of an unmarried woman.”
 - As a result of this tradition, Timothy was considered, among the Jews, to be Jewish.
- In **Verse 3**, Luke continues, “...and he [Paul] took him [Timothy] and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”
- There is no question, given his later letters, that the Apostle Paul strongly supports the idea of Christian freedom and liberty [Galatians 5:2; 1 Corinthians 7:18].
 - Yet, even so, as Darrell Bock states, “[Paul] is sensitive to how [the law] works in a mixed community and in the context of the gospel [1 Corinthians 9:19-23].
 - Therefore, because of Paul’s sensitivity to the convictions and consciences of members of the Jewish community, he circumcised Timothy. Once again, this was imperative, because in the mind of the Jew, Timothy was a Jew because his mother was.

- ❑ At first glance, this act by Paul may seem inconsistent with the agreement at the Council of Jerusalem.

John Stott writes, “Little minds would have condemned him [Paul] for inconsistency. But there was a deep consistency in his thought and action. Once the principle had been established that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, he was ready to make concessions in policy. What was unnecessary for acceptance with God was advisable for acceptance by some human beings.”

- ❑ Paul’s clear intention in circumcising Timothy was to remove any potential stumbling block or issue which may offend the Jews and hinder the missionary team’s evangelistic efforts among this group. A debate among the Jews in the area as to whether or not Timothy should be circumcised would have only side-tracked the primary mission of the men: to proclaim the Gospel. Therefore, Paul wisely removed the potential distraction.

“Instead of making Timothy a sideshow to the gospel in terms of whether he was a Jew or not, Paul permitted circumcision so that the gospel would remain the main topic.” Darrell Bock

- ❑ Furthermore, Timothy would have never been allowed in the Jewish synagogues [which was Paul’s missionary “strategy”] had Timothy been uncircumcised. In fact, he would have been considered an apostate, one who intentionally violated the explicit commands associated with the Abrahamic covenant.
- ❑ It is important to note that Paul did not insist on every male being circumcised. Rather, he had Timothy circumcised because he was considered Jewish. On the other hand, he never insisted that Titus, a Gentile, be circumcised [Galatians 2:3-5; 1 Corinthians 7:17-24]. In fact, he should not be circumcised. An uncircumcised Gentile was not offensive to the Jews; but an uncircumcised Jew most certainly was.
- ❑ Thus, Paul’s decision to circumcise Timothy was perfectly consistent with the “judgment” at the Council of Jerusalem. Paul was not demonstrating a belief that circumcision saved, for he vehemently rejects such an idea throughout the New Testament. Rather, he is demonstrating a genuine sensitivity to religious convictions of the Jews of his day.
- ❑ Not only are Paul’s actions consistent with the Council of Jerusalem, they are consistent with his later writings.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23: “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

- ❑ This passage in 1 Corinthians clearly gives the rationale as to why Paul circumcised Timothy.
- ❑ Yet, once again, as with the “judgment” at the Council of Jerusalem, so it is here in 1 Corinthians 9 – the context is essential. In the 1 Corinthians passage, the Apostle Paul had just concluded a discourse on being sensitive to one’s conscience, specifically in the area of meat sacrificed to idols.
- ❑ Therefore, what Paul is explaining in 1 Corinthians 9 is that **believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should act in such a way as to avoid unnecessarily offending someone by violating their religious convictions and sensitivities**. This is what Paul means by being “all things to all people” [1 Corinthians 9:22].
- ❑ Therefore, Timothy’s circumcision was a living example of what it means to be “all things to all people.”

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- ❑ Unfortunately today, however, we have fundamentally misunderstood Paul’s words and actions, and we have used them as a justification for our own.
- ❑ The pastor of one of the largest churches in North America writes, “[The typical person who comes to our church] prefers casual, informal meeting over anything stiff and formal. He loves to dress down for the mild climate [in our area]. We take this into account when planning services to attract [him]. For example, I never wear a coat and tie when I speak a [our church] services. I intentionally dress down to match the mind-set of those I’m trying to reach. I follow Paul’s strategy given in 1 Corinthians 9:20: “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.” In my situation I’m sure Paul would say, “When in southern California I became like a southern Californian in order to win southern Californians!”
- ❑ Yet, such an understanding of 1 Corinthians 9 reveals a most basic understanding of the concerns of Paul in the context.
- ❑ Again, Paul was concerned about **avoiding unnecessary religious offense**.
- ❑ Not only this, when we use Paul’s words to justify a worship service or a church subculture that matches the surrounding community, we have, once again, misinterpreted Paul’s words and actions.

<p>For example, in Acts 15-18, Paul, Silas, and Timothy were <i>going to Jewish people</i>. They were not attempting to lure or draw the Jews to their place of worship. Paul’s “all things to all people” principle was not intended to be a tactic to attract pagans. Such an approach would be quite disingenuous, insincere, and unauthentic.</p>
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- ❑ Paul’s point was that when he *went out to proclaim the Gospel to certain groups of people* that he would avoid unnecessarily offending them for the sake of the Gospel.

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- ❑ Thus, a modern-day application of Paul’s words, therefore, is not the implementation of a “seeker-sensitive” service. It is not a license to attempt to replicate the surrounding culture in a “Christian” context.
- ❑ However, if, for example, I went into the Muslim world during the holiday of Ramadan [which recently concluded], I would fast during their times of fasting, rather than asserting my biblical “right” to eat whenever I so desire. Why? In order to not unnecessarily offend them and therefore create an additional boundary to the gospel.
- ❑ The same would be true if I went to India, in an area that is heavily populated with devout Hindus. I would choose to eat and act in such a way that is consistent with their beliefs [so long as I was not forced to compromise any biblical commands] in order to “place their rights above my own.”
- ❑ In this country, if I were to go to an impoverished area I would not wear designer clothing or expensive jewelry. The reason is: what would be the gain? The likelihood that I would offend them who could not afford such luxuries should weigh heavily on my mind, to the point of influencing the way in which I dress.

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- ❑ Therefore, Paul’s decision to circumcise Timothy, and his words in 1 Corinthians 9 are ultimately consistent with Christ’s “emptying of Himself”, as described by Paul in Philippians 2. It is also consistent with the apostle’s words in Philippians 2:3-4, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”
- ❑ Timothy could have certainly told Paul, “I am not going to be circumcised. I am saved by grace, and to undergo circumcision would demonstrate an acquiescence or a “giving in” to the unbiblical demands of Jewish pagans. So often, we want to assert our individual rights as Christians. In this case, Timothy would have been *technically* be “in the right”.
- ❑ Yet, such an assertion would, again, miss the most basic of all Christian attributes: love. In **1 Corinthians 13:1**, Paul writes, “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”
- ❑ John MacArthur states, “In New Testament times, rites honoring the pagan deities Cybele, Bacchus, and Dionysius included ecstatic noises accompanied by gongs, cymbals, and trumpets. Unless the speech of the Corinthians was done in love, it was no better than the gibberish of pagan ritual.”
- ❑ Thus, we can “say the right thing” but if it is done in a manner that lacks love, we are no different than the pagans.

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- Therefore, as Christians today, we should, like Paul and Timothy, boldly proclaim the Gospel message, while, in love, remaining mindful of those things which could unnecessarily offend the people we are evangelizing.

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- Then, in **Verse 4**, Luke writes, “Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.”
 - They likely had the letter from the Council that had originally been sent to Antioch.
 - The essence of this letter was simple: all men, both Jew and Gentile, are saved by grace through faith, but be sure to avoid unnecessary offense to others, specifically the Jews.
 - As a result of the effort of the missionary team, **Verse 5**, “...the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.”

III. The Holy Spirit Prevents the Missionaries from Going to Asia

- Luke continues, in **Verses 6-8**, “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.”
 - We are not told *how* the Holy Spirit prevented the missionaries from entering into Asia [although some have postulated that Silas (referred to as a prophet in Acts 15:32) prophesied, through an utterance, that they should not go], we are simply told that He did.
 - Some have wondered why Paul was prevented from going into Asia. Some have suggested that, since Peter later wrote to the Christians in Asia and Bithynia [1 Peter 1:1], that Paul was prevented from going there in order to allow Peter to do so later.
 - Yet, ultimately, the reason for God “blocking” Paul’s effort was not to stop them, but to redirect them.

IV. Paul Receives the Macedonian Call

- Luke writes, **Verses 9-10**, “A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”
 - Although Paul, Silas, and Timothy were prevented from entering into Asia, they were called, in a vision, to Macedonia [Greece].

- This account demonstrates one of the powerful truths of God, as it relates to knowing his will.
- Paul and Silas set out, on the Second Missionary Journey, to encourage those evangelized during the first journey, and enter into Asia for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel there for the first time.
- No doubt they earnestly prayed about this, seeking God’s will. Certainly, had someone asked them, “Do you believe it is God’s will for you to enter into Asia?” They would have said, “Yes.” Given their limited knowledge and understanding of God and his will, Paul, Silas, and Timothy simply obeyed God, walking in obedience to His revealed will.
- However, God had different plans. Although God prevented Paul, Silas and Timothy from entering into Asia, He taught the missionaries, and us today, a powerful lesson: although we do not fully understand God’s will, we are to walk in simple obedience, and God will direct us, and change us. We are to simply trust Him and obey Him.
- This type of “prevention and permission” still occurs today.
- William Carey, the father of modern-day missions, in the eighteenth century, desired to go to Polynesia in the South Seas, in order to proclaim the Gospel. However, God redirected him to India.
- Adoniram Judson went to India first, and then was driven to Burma.
- Finally, the nineteenth century Scottish Presbyterian medical missionary, desired to go to China; however, the Opium Wars broke out. The London Missionary Society suggested that he go to the West Indies; however, these islands already had a medical presence. Finally, a friend, Robert Moffat, suggested that he go to Africa where he [Moffat] had observed “the smoke of a thousand villages, where no missionary had ever been.” Therefore, after planning to go to China, God, through a series of events, directed Livingstone to Africa.

- ❑ Although God prevents the team from entering into Asia, this will be the first time that Gospel will go to the European continent.
- ❑ Campbell Morgan writes, “That invasion of Europe was not in the mind of Paul, but it was evidently in the mind of the Spirit.”
- ❑ After Paul’s vision, Luke writes, **Verse 10**, “When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”
- ❑ This is the first of the “we” passages in the Book of Acts. From this, we assume that now Luke is a travel companion of the missionary team.
- ❑ “...**And the Gospel message continues to spread...**” for “God had called us to preach the gospel to them [the Macedonians].”
- ❑ Paul’s Second Missionary Journey began with a sharp disagreement and division between Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark. This section concludes with the Gospel going into Europe for the first time.
- ❑ Indeed, “God causes all things [to include sharp disagreements] together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.” [Romans 8:28]