

“<sup>1</sup> ¶ Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father *was* a Greek: <sup>2</sup> Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. <sup>3</sup> Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. <sup>6</sup> ¶ Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, <sup>7</sup> After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.” (Ac 16:1-7 AV)

Here, in chapter sixteen, Luke records the progress of Paul and Silas after the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. This is the second missionary journey, and I would like to note several things about the beginning of this journey.

First: The incomprehensible Rule of the Spirit.

Second: Timothy, and Keeping Neutral Things Neutral

Third: Faith, and the Glory of God as Paul would later define them in the Book of Romans.

I. First: The incomprehensible Rule of the Spirit. Verse 6,7.

A. The Holy Spirit did not allow Paul and Silas to do mission work in Asia, Bithynia. This is incredible, but there are important lessons to be learned here.

B. What God has commanded the church in general, is not necessarily a command to me at this time and place.

1. The great commission was to the church but not to Paul in particular. He couldn't go to Asia and Bithynia.
2. The particular often seems in conflict with the general.
3. Be fruitful and multiply; get married, may not apply to every particular person in a particular time and place.
4. When I was young, all of us young people were told that everyone should do mission work. Some of my generation labored under the idea that they chose God's second best by going to college, getting married, being successful in their jobs, supporting their local church, and giving to missions.
5. It is tempting to think that your work is the most important work.

C. God is sovereign in every part of our lives.

1. I do not know how the Holy Spirit communicated this to Paul and Silas. Paul had a vision that sent him into Mesopotamia at this time; so maybe the other was imparted by a vision. I don't know.
2. I do not know why they were forbidden to do what they tried to do.
  - a. Maybe someone else was working in those areas.
  - b. Maybe civil disorder and chaos was coming; plague, etc. who knows. But the Holy Spirit decided they would be more effective somewhere else.
  - c. Jesus Christ rules His church by His word and Spirit
  - d. This is all we need to know.

II. Second: Timothy, and Keeping Neutral Things Neutral

A. The circumcision of Timothy. What a controversy this has raised in the church down through the years. Was Paul compromising the message that the Council of Jerusalem had just sent to the churches?

- B. It seems that verse 4 is a contradiction to the circumcision of Timothy.
  - C. On closer scrutiny, however, we will see that it was exactly in the spirit of the decrees from Jerusalem. Paul was not a flip-flopper. He had gone to Jerusalem to protest that it was a thing indifferent for a gentile to be circumcised. They did not have to become circumcised to be included in the family of God.
  - D. The issue was faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the sending of the Holy Ghost. That was the message that Paul preached. The heart of His message is found in Acts 13:32-41, that the Gospel was the fulfillment of the law and the prophets; that it involved forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; that they must not despise the Gospel and harden their hearts.
  - E. Paul did not want an indifferent thing [circumcision] to detract from the Gospel and become the issue. When it was already an issue, as it had become at Antioch and Jerusalem, then he would fight tooth and claw for the truth, that the Gospel might not be corrupted.
  - F. Many Jews in the area that they were now entering had not yet reached a mature decision concerning the Gospel, and Paul would treat them like babes, gently leading them to the truth about Christ.
  - G. Later, when Paul went up to Jerusalem, he would adamantly refuse to circumcise Titus, for the Gospel was mature and those in opposition were well informed as to its nature, and Paul would refuse again to let it dominate the conversation; this time by doing the opposite of what he had done earlier.
  - H. The reason I say these things is because of what Paul would write years later concerning indifferent things. This was in his epistle to the Romans and is pertinent to this matter.
- III. Third: Faith, and the Glory of God as Paul would later define them in the Book of Romans. I preached on this last year, but I would remind you of some things that are important. Romans 14:14-23 I will not go into the details, but speak of Paul's summary that is written here.
- A. Nothing is unclean of itself. Vs. 14. God created all things good. Paul says in another place that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. It means nothing of itself; just as the water of baptism means nothing of itself; or eating bread and drinking wine.
  - B. Sin is not in the thing itself, nor is righteousness in the thing itself. It is in the heart before God that the sin takes place. The knife is neither good nor bad, but it can be put to bad use in the hand of the murderer; and it can be used to save life in the hand of a surgeon. Alcohol can be a mocker and a deceiver and bring death and ruin to the idolater and drunkard, but can also make glad the heart of man. These things are indifferent in themselves but are not indifferent to the man who uses them.
  - C. The principle is in verse 22, 23, If the things of the world are not used in faith, then they become sinful. As our catechism says, Q91: What are good works?  
A91: Those only which proceed from true faith,[1] and are done according to the Law of God,[2] unto His glory,[3] and not such as rest on our own opinion [4] or the commandments of men.[5]
  - D. In both cases, the circumcision of Timothy and the refusal to circumcise Titus, Paul acted in terms of the principles set down many centuries later in the catechism, for by this

time these principles were well established in the church. Let us see how Paul met the test.

1. Both acts were acts of faith, faith in Jesus Christ as the One savior of men, and the Gospel which saves us from our sins.
  - a. Timothy: I do not want to obscure the Gospel among those hearing it for the first time. We will discuss that at the proper time, but right now, I want to know nothing but Christ and His crucified. We will keep the indifferent things indifferent by not making a big deal about it. But we will deliver the reports from Jerusalem.
  - b. Titus: The Jews have raised a fuss over circumcision. I will refuse to circumcise Titus because I do not want the Gospel obscured by this issue. Those that know that circumcision is indifferent will need to be strengthened in their conviction. I will not circumcise Titus so that the indifferent things will remain indifferent.
2. Both acts were according to the law of God, which requires that we love our neighbor as ourselves and not cast a stumbling block before him.
  - a. On one occasion we may drink to his edification; on another occasion we may refrain from drinking for his edification. "It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak." Rom 14:21
  - b. What are you talking about. Specifics. They will be different with each family and circle of friends. God will teach you. The principle is this: the things are indifferent; it is the use put to them that makes the difference. Try to keep the focus of Christ Jesus, whether you eat or drink. Love is the command.
3. Both acts were for the glory of God. It is glorifying to God if temporarily some liberty is sacrificed for the good of our brethren. Notice, I said temporarily. Paul is willing to give up meat forever if it would cause his brother to stumble, but as a permanent thing he calls those the demand to abstain from meat and drink the doctrine of devils; and he would write to the Galatians that insistence on circumcision was a departure from the faith. In every case, we must resist those who would allow the indifferent to obscure the Gospel, whether they are on our side or not. The Gospel is not meat and drink, nor is it circumcision or uncircumcision for Ga 6:15: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"
4. Neither was either act the mere opinion of Paul. He was not innovating, but as we have seen above, acting on the best principles of faith and obedience. He was not acting as a man pleaser in the first case; nor out of stubbornness in the second case, but in terms of faith, love and the glory of God

### Application

We will learn to walk in love, wisely, and temperately if we follow these principles. Faith, here, does not simply mean that you are convinced that you are right, for Saul killed Christians convinced that he was doing God service. The heart can be terrible wrong, if it is not taught by the word and spirit of God.

Although nothing in itself is defiled and sinful, yet sin can abound in their use if we do not remember these things. The very plowing of the wicked is sin, because he does not plow in faith. The tender mercies of the wicked can be cruel because they are not according to the law of God. The Gospel can be corrupted in the name of love and men's opinions are wicked when substituted for obedience, for God requires obedience and not sacrifice.

Liberty does not mean doing as you please and convincing yourself that you serve God, but it come from growth in Christ, and Hebrews tells us:

12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

13 For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Indifferent things, if they do not remain indifferent, can obscure the first principles of the oracles of God resulting in childishness. We must grow up in Christ in order to have our sense exercised to discern both good and evil. The good and the evil is in the use of the things, not in the things themselves.