



Message #36
"GOD'S GUIDANCE"
(Acts 16:1-10)

This passage conveniently divides into two distinct sections: 16:1-5 and 16:6-10. Both of these sections have significant importance and consequence....for then and for now.

ACTS 16:1-5: BUILDING THE TEAM

At the end of Acts 15, we saw that Paul and Barnabas, having split up as a team, went their separate ways. Barnabas took John Mark and headed off to Cyprus and Paul selected Silas and headed north from Antioch to Tarsus (Paul's hometown) and on to the towns he and Barnabas had previously visited, strengthening the churches as they went.

When they came to Lystra, Paul asked a young man of faith, Timothy, to join the team. Timothy, as we well know, becomes a devoted associate of Paul and a leading figure in the New Testament church.

TIMOTHY:

Timothy was a young man who had been blessed to have a Christian mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) who had nurtured him in the faith. Eunice was Jewish and Timothy's father was Greek (probably deceased by this stage).

The fact that he was of mixed heritage (Jewish and Greek) would have been an advantage in missionary service. He would have had access to both cultures. However, there was one slight obstacle. Timothy was not circumcised.

So, 16:3 tells us that Paul circumcised Timothy.

This is a very interesting point given the broader context And the recent controversies surrounding circumcision and Gentile believers.

The Jerusalem Council, with great encouragement from Paul and others, had ruled that salvation is by grace alone and the Gentiles did not require circumcision in order to be counted among the saved.

And, yet, here was Paul circumcising Timothy! Some commentators have suggested this is some kind of hypocrisy. However, this is not an inconsistency, it is actually a very different thing.



Paul had been a very vocal opponent of placing circumcision (or anything else for that matter) as a requirement for salvation....we are saved by God's grace alone, not by anything man did or didn't do.

But Timothy was already saved....his circumcision had nothing to do with salvation.

Paul circumcised Timothy so that he would be able to serve more effectively.

Unless he was circumcised (even though he was a Jew), Timothy would not have been welcomed into the Jewish synagogues. This would have severely limited his opportunities of evangelizing the Jews.

Hence, circumcision for Timothy was a price to be paid to serve more fully in the task God called him to.

Paul was not being inconsistent. In fact, he explains his attitude in 1 Corinthians 8- 10, saying that we should humbly submit ourselves and our preferences to the needs of others.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:4-13. How does an attitude like Paul's help believers?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. How does this attitude advance the gospel?

Timothy was willing to go through this painful experience so that he could serve God. Too often, Christians are unwilling to "pay the price" to serve God more fully.

**What are some modern-day examples that reflect the principle we see in Paul circumcising Timothy: that is, of removing impediments for the sake of the gospel?**

---

**DISCUSS: The Four Cs...**

**How do Comfort, Convenience, Complacency and Compromise prevent a Christian from being fully submitted to God and His will?**

---

**GETTING PERSONAL**

**What would it look like for you to surrender your rights or personal preferences**

- for the sake of Christians?
  - for the sake of non-Christians?
- 

After recovering, Timothy joined Paul and Silas as they travelled from town to town, delivering the good news established by the Jerusalem Council (Gentiles did not have to adopt Jewish practices in order to be saved).

**ACTS 16:6-10 – A CHANGE OF PLANS**

As Paul and the team travelled westward, they had then intended to head down to Asia (probably around Ephesus) but were prevented from doing so by the Holy Spirit (16:6).

So they then planned to head northwards (Bithynia) but, again, were not permitted to by the Holy Spirit (16:7).

Luke does not tell us exactly how they were stopped from following these plans. It was probably what we might call a “check in the spirit”....you just don’t have a peace about doing something. In spite of everything else, it just seems like God is saying “No” and until you change your plans accordingly, you do not have peace.

God has a history of changing people’s plans...usually, it is easier for people who are already active in serving God to be redirected by Him. For example, David Livingstone tried to go to China, but God sent him to Africa instead. Before him, William Carey planned to go to Polynesia, but God guided him to India. Adoniram Judson went to India first but was driven on to Burma.

Likewise, we need to trust God for guidance...and even for redirection.

**Have you ever had an experience of God changing your plans?**

---

In 16:9 we learn of a dream that Paul received of a man in Macedonia (northern Greece) calling out for Paul to come over to Macedonia. Given how God (the Holy Spirit) had closed doors to Asia and Bithynia, he now saw this as a clear guidance from God. The Lord was not just closing doors, but was now opening new doors of opportunity for the gospel to be preached in Europe.

**What do you think it looks like to have a life and ministry that is led by the Holy Spirit today?**

---

It is not wrong to make plans and have goals. But we must ensure that those plans and goals are submitted/surrendered to God and His will. We must be careful not to just be expecting God to “rubber-stamp” what we want to do. See: **Proverbs 16:9** and **James 4:15**.

**What are your greatest fears about being guided by God?**

---

**What experiences have you had of God’s guidance? What methods does He use to guide us in His will?**

---

And, finally, Acts 16:10 is the first of Luke’s “we” statements. Previously, he has referred to Paul and the team in the third-person (they/them), but here he uses the first-person designations “we” and “us”. It is a good reminder to us that Luke was not just a scribe, but an active member of the team with Paul, Silas and Timothy.