

## ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

### XXXIX. Restricting Our Liberties To Enhance Our Ministries

(Acts 16:1-5)

#### I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 16:1-5 records how Timothy under Paul's leadership chose to restrict a liberty he had before the Lord in order to enhance his ministry effectiveness, a passage we do well to study for our insight and application:

#### II. Restricting Our Liberties To Enhance Our Ministries, Acts 16:1-5.

- A. When Paul and Silas began to go on Paul's second missionary journey, and they had come to the cities of Lystra and Derbe, they encountered a man named Timothy who was well-reported by the believers who were in Lystra and Iconium, Acts 16:1a, 2.
- B. Significantly, this man was a great match for Paul in his own apostolic ministry:
  - 1. Timothy's mother was a Hebrew where his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1b), so Timothy knew well both Jewish and Gentile thinking like Paul who had come as a Hebrew from Tarsus that had exposed him to "Greek culture and its philosophies" along with his Hebrew background, Ibid., p. 375; Philippians 3:4-5.
  - 2. We also know from Philippians 2:19-22 that Timothy possessed the virtue of putting the interests of Christ ahead of his own interests like Paul did, making him a great spiritual companion for Paul.
- C. Accordingly, Paul desired that Timothy join him in his missionary outreach, Acts 16:3a.
- D. However, since Timothy's mother was a Hebrew where his father was a Greek, Timothy had not been circumcised (Acts 16:3b), and this created a great obstacle to Timothy's ministry to Hebrews:
  - 1. The Hebrews to whom Paul and Timothy would be preaching the Gospel would be offended if a man like Timothy who had come from a Hebrew mother were not circumcised, Ibid., p. 398.
  - 2. Such an offense could seriously impair the credibility of Timothy to Hebrew listeners, and since he would be a ministry companion of Paul, it would then become a stumbling block to the Gospel Paul preached!
- E. On the other hand, the recent Church Council at Jerusalem had decided that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised to be saved, cf. Acts 15:1-29! Indeed, another helper to Paul was the Gentile Titus, and Titus had not been compelled to be circumcised when he had visited the Jerusalem Church with Paul, Galatians 2:3 with 1:8-9; 5:2. Thus, from the spiritual perspective, nothing would hinder Timothy's standing before God were he to have remained uncircumcised!
- F. Nevertheless, Paul himself taught that we believers should give no offense to Jews, to Gentiles or to the church of God, but to seek the benefit of others that they might be saved, cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31-33. Accordingly, Paul took Timothy with Timothy's implied consent and circumcised him, for all the Jews in that area knew that his father was a Greek and had not had his son circumcised at infancy, Acts 16:3b.
- G. Then, in a remarkable turn of events, Paul, Silas and Timothy travelled through the cities Paul had evangelized on his first missionary journey delivering the decrees of the Jerusalem Council from the apostles and elders who had decided that circumcision was not necessary for Gentile believers, Acts 16:4.
- H. Accordingly, these churches were strengthened in the faith and grew in numbers daily, Acts 16:5. Had Timothy not been circumcised, both the strengthening of these new churches and the addition of Jews to their numbers might not have been as great, but with the obstacle of concern removed with Timothy's circumcision, the Word of God grew and multiplied!

***Lesson:*** *Though Timothy had every spiritual right before the Lord not to be circumcised, to enhance his ministry, he submitted to being circumcised by Paul, removing a significant obstacle to evangelizing unsaved Jews.*

***Application:*** *(1) May we be willing to restrict what spiritual liberties we have in the Lord to enhance our ministry to needy people to whom the Lord calls us to minister. (2) Since Timothy submitted to a relatively dangerous and painful surgical procedure as an adult in his era all to enhance his ministry, God expects us to take steps that might risk our own physical welfare and comfort if necessary to further the cause of Christ. (3) At times we may need to restrict the exercise of our liberties to get along with our coworkers like Timothy did to cooperate with Paul and Silas. (4) Though Timothy did not need to be circumcised as a believer, but only as a public figure in ministry, we need to be ready to exercise greater degrees of liberty restrictions the greater the ministry profile that we have.*