

Grace Church
Roanoke, Virginia

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Lesson #38

ACTS
The Second Missionary Journey
Acts 15:36 - 16:10

We begin one of the most fascinating sections of the book of Acts -- Paul's second missionary journey in which God ultimately led him and his band of missionaries to take the gospel of Christ into Europe.

Acts 15:36 - 16:10 has so many practical lessons for us. but we have to dig around for them. This section shows us the pastor's heart, the humanness of men, the tricks of the devil, the overriding of God in human mistakes, the validity for making concessions in the area of ritual to unbelievers, the sovereignty of God in evangelism, and probably the one theme running through this whole section is ways to know the will of God. The question of God's will at times seems to be the most baffling and difficult problem a Christian faces, and, hopefully, this message will teach us the importance of moment by moment faith-obedience to Christ and the importance of resting in God who is guiding everyone of His children.

DESIRE FOR FOLLOW-UP (Acts 15:36)

“And after some days . . .” -- Paul and Barnabas had participated in the Jerusalem Council and then returned to Antioch of Syria to the local church there of which they were probably elders. At Antioch, these missionaries did not take a vacation. They were actively teaching and preaching the Word of God. “But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching, with many others also, the word of the Lord” (Acts 15:35). Notice it says that Paul and Barnabas “with many others” were ministering. The local church at Antioch did not have a one-preacher church. Actually, a number of men, probably elders, ministered in that one local church.

Grace Church has taken one more step towards being a New Testament church. Randy Pizzino has come to be our associate pastor and has taken over 50 percent of the preaching duties. This has taken some adjustment on the part of the congregation. It also causes individuals in the congregation to act in a mature way so as not to put their eyes on men but on the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Word.

“. . . 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.’” -- Apparently, after at least three years, the Apostle Paul became burdened about the saints in the local churches he and Barnabas had founded on the first missionary journey. The second missionary journey had, as its original motivation, the edification of the saints, not evangelism. Paul had a pastor's heart and wanted his converts in Christ to grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ. Like a devoted mother, he cared for his spiritual children. “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (III John 4). Paul understood how important it was for Christians to be grounded in Christian doctrine and practice and, therefore, committed himself to active follow-up.

For the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas received a call from the Holy Spirit and were appointed to this task by the local church at Antioch, but for the second missionary journey, God placed a strong burden on Paul's heart, a divine impulse to move out for God based on his concern for the saints. There was no vision, no Spirit directed call, no angelic appearance and no providential circumstances. There was only the deep concern of Paul and then Barnabas for the people whom they had led to Christ. They apparently could not shake this divine urging and they moved out for Christ to confirm the saints.

Once we have discerned that we have a divine urging from God, we must not wait. We must move out in faith and God will be with us in the matter and give us further clarification of His will.

Paul and Barnabas apparently did not have to seek further authority from the elders at Antioch for this new venture, since they were already given that authority before the first missionary journey. However, we assume that they did have the elder's blessing for this move.

DIVISION AMONG THE APOSTLES (Acts 15:37-41)

“And Barnabas was desirous of taking 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.” -- Whenever the Lord is about to do a big work, the devil is right there to attempt to destroy the work of God. Barnabas and Paul had a disagreement over John Mark, who had deserted Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. Barnabas was John Mark's uncle and perhaps Barnabas was motivated by family ties. We all know it is hard to be objective when our own family is involved. However, Barnabas, being a man full of wisdom, saw the potential in Mark and wanted to give him a second chance. Paul, however, did not want to take the risk of having Mark jump ship again. Why Mark deserted we cannot be sure, but there have been several suggestions: 1) Mark was from a wealthy home and was a pampered “momma's boy”; 2) Mark became homesick; 3) He was not able to bear the perils and rigors of pioneer missionary work; 4) He disagreed with Paul's theology and conflicted with Paul's personality; 5) Mark was very devoted to his uncle, Barnabas, and when the leadership of the missionary group shifted from Barnabas to Paul, this so upset Mark that he left; 6) He was just young, inexperienced and failed because he had to sort out his gifts as a Christian. Whatever, Mark left Paul and Barnabas.

The Lord Jesus has done a good work at Grace Church, but it is my personal opinion that the Lord is about to do a greater work in and through this congregation in the next five years. As we expand our ministries for the glory of God, we can expect Satan to make his attack. May God grant us grace not to fight and squabble and divide but to stand true for Christ and so resist the devil.

“And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, . . .” -- We have here the first major split between Christians. This shows us that even the apostles were human. They made mistakes. However, there may be several underlying reasons for this division: 1) Paul and Barnabas had different personalities. Paul was a choleric, a natural leader, self-sufficient, independent, decisive, opinionated, goal oriented, idealistic, ambitious, cool under pressure, courageous, determined, and success oriented. As a choleric, Paul was not too sensitive to the feelings of others, lacked compassion for others, was intolerant of the mistakes of others and may have held a grudge against Mark. Barnabas, on the other hand, was a phlegmatic, cool, calm, collected, easygoing, well-balanced, felt deeply for people, kind-hearted, and sympathetic. Barnabas, as a phlegmatic, was very easygoing and this probably drove Paul nuts at times. There was an obvious personality difference between these two men. 2) Paul may have been somewhat put out with Barnabas when he sided with Peter and withdrew fellowship from Gentile Christians in Antioch, falling into extreme Christian legalism. Paul had to rebuke both Peter and Barnabas.

Who was right in this controversy? Christians throughout the last two thousand years have tried to side with either Paul or Barnabas. My personal opinion is that both were right. Paul was looking at the work of Christ from a long range perspective and Barnabas was looking at the person of Mark from a short range perspective. Paul did not want to take the risk of defection by Mark for the whole ministry was at stake.

Paul believed that missionaries had to be tough, and knew that the ministry was demanding, and those who undertake the ministry should be prepared to go through with it and stick with it to the end. Quitters, in Paul's mind, always injure the overall cause of Christ. In Paul's thinking, nothing should stand in the way of the ultimate goal of total conquest for the gospel of Christ. However, Barnabas was looking at the young man, Mark. He saw Mark's potential, his gifts, his abilities and felt with a little encouragement and patience Mark could be a powerhouse for Christ. Sure, Mark failed, Barnabas reasoned, but who hasn't? All of us need a second chance at times and an opportunity to prove ourselves after failure. Barnabas was also right. However, the tragedy was that these two men could not get together in their thinking. They split up. This is so sad because Paul owed more to Barnabas than any other man, for Barnabas persuaded the apostles in Jerusalem to

give Paul a second chance when he was a young man. Also, Barnabas, when he left Paul, left the greatest leader of all time. Paul and Barnabas made a great team and added balance to each other's ministries.

This definitely shows us that Christian leaders do not always see eye to eye. Backgrounds, cultures and personalities play such a role in the way leaders think. There are times when differences are so great between two Christian leaders or organizations that a separation is required. In this case of Paul and Barnabas, God graciously overruled, for it was the secret will of God for Barnabas to take Mark to Cyprus and for Paul to take Silas to Europe. However, it was not the revealed will of God that they should divide in such sharp controversy. Their quarreling was not right and it was sin. There are times when the Spirit of God does cause Christians to go their separate ways, but they should do so with tears and with an agreeable understanding that the mind of the Spirit has been expressed in their divergent viewpoints. If we must separate, let us always do so in love.

How do you think poor Mark felt during this dispute? He must have been frustrated with Paul and excited when Barnabas decided to give him a second chance. We now know that Mark developed into one of the great missionaries of the first century and was honored by God to pen the Gospel of Mark. Apparently, Paul and Barnabas reconciled their differences and later ministered together (I Cor. 9:6). Furthermore, Paul, while quick to make a decision on Mark, also saw his shortsightedness and later recognized the usefulness of Mark to him in the ministry. "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service" (II Tim. 4:11).

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played the University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running 65 yards in the wrong direction. One of his teammates, Ben Lorn, outdistanced him and downed him just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory.

That strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question: "What will Coach Nibbs Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?" The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room. They sat down on the benches and on the floor, all but Riegels. He put his blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, put his face in his hands and cried like a baby.

If you have played football, you know that a coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during half time. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. Then the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time. Coach Price looked at the team and said simply, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He did not budge. The coach looked back and called to him again; still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second. Then Roy Riegels looked up and his cheeks were wet with a strong man's tears. "Coach," he said, "I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you, I've ruined the University of California, I've ruined myself. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life." Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegel's shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." And Roy Riegels went back, and those Tech men will tell you that they have never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half.

If we fail, my friends, God always gives us a second chance if we repent. We must remember there is always a second half, the game isn't over.

"... and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus." -- After this point in Acts, we hear absolutely nothing of Barnabas' work but we know from tradition that he had a great work in Cyprus, and, from Cyprus, a great work was carried on in North Africa. God had His hand on Barnabas, and it was the hidden plan of God to split up Paul and Barnabas so as to have two strong missionary teams instead of one. God turned their evil for good for the furtherance of the gospel.

“But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.” -- Paul took the young man Silas and continued on the second missionary journey. Some have thought that the brethren in Antioch sided with Paul in the dispute with Barnabas, but this verse does not say this. It merely says that they committed Paul and Silas to begin the second missionary journey as was originally planned.

DISCIPLESHIP IN TIMOTHY (Acts 16:1, 2)

“And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra.” -- Paul came back to these cities in Galatia where he had been persecuted. In Derbe, he was plotted against and in Lystra he was stoned and left for dead. Even after three to five years, it took a lot of intestinal fortitude for Paul to return to these cities.

“And a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, . . .” -- When Paul came to Lystra, he rekindled a friendship with Timothy, who apparently had been won to Christ by Paul as a teenager during the first missionary journey. Perhaps Timothy watched Paul being stoned in Lystra. Whatever, Paul refers to Timothy as “my true child in the faith” (I Tim. 1:2). Timothy was probably a teenager of sixteen or so when he received Christ and had greatly matured physically and spiritually over a period of three to five years. Timothy was a child of a Jewish mother who was a Christian, and a Gentile father who probably was not a Christian. Timothy, long before he came to know Christ personally as Lord and Savior, was well taught in the Old Testament by his mother and grandmother. “. . . and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15).

God has burdened Grace Church to start a new ministry, Grace Academy, because we sense a great need for Christians to have a place where their children can learn the scriptures and also learn all the disciplines of life from a Christian perspective. By God's grace, we hope through Grace Academy to have many Timothies.

“. . . and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.” -- Timothy's gifts of the ministry were recognized by the Christian brethren at Lystra and Iconium. He was approved by the elders and the congregation. Today, a man goes off to seminary to prepare to be a minister and often does so without having any ministry in a local church so as to be approved by the elders and saints. One of the great tragedies of our day is that in picking a man for the ministry we ask, “What university did you attend, what are your advanced degrees, what seminary did you go to, do you read Greek and Hebrew, have you had courses in theology and church history, have you studied homiletics (the art of preaching)?” However, it is not talent, looks or education that count in the selecting of men for the ministry but recognition by the elders and the saints of a man's gifts. If a person does not use his spiritual gifts in a local church before he goes to seminary, then seminary will never tell him whether he has the gifts. The man who has gifts for the ministry will use them in the local church and the elders will recognize these gifts. This is the acid test of a man's usefulness to the ministry--does he exercise his gifts and do the saints recognize these gifts?

Today there are springing up in a few places church-seminaries where young men are commended to the seminary by elders who recognize their gifts, and these students study and minister at the same time in and through the local church. This way a man preparing for the ministry receives on-the-job training. We hope, the Lord willing, to have a church- seminary at Grace Church in two to three years.

DELIBERATE CONCESSION TO THE JEWS (Acts 16:3)

“Paul wanted this man to go with him; . . .” -- On the recommendation of the elders and saints of Lystra, Paul recruited Timothy as a missionary. Timothy became an intern and received on-the-job training. At Grace Church, elders should be constantly watching out for young men and women with the gifts of the ministry and encourage them to pursue these gifts in an internship program or further study in a seminary, preferably a church-seminary.

“. . . and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.” -- Paul made a tremendous concession to the Jews in the matter of an external rite. He

had Timothy circumcised. Why would he do this when he absolutely refused to have Titus circumcised at the Jerusalem Council (Gal: 2:3)? Timothy was from a mixed marriage. His mother was a Jew and his father was a Gentile. According to a Jew, this made Timothy a Jew, and to be a physical Jew and be uncircumcised was an anathema. Paul knew that Timothy would have many opportunities to share the gospel of Christ with Jews and they would not listen to him if he was uncircumcised. So, for the sake of testimony, he had Timothy circumcised. However, in the case of Titus, the very gospel was at stake in which it was said, "If you are not circumcised, you cannot be saved." When the essence of the gospel was at stake, Paul would make no concessions. However, when the issue was not the essence of the gospel but testimony, Paul would make many concessions so men would listen to the gospel and be saved.

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law, thought not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, 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, that I may by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:19-22).

Paul made all kinds of concessions to legalistic unbelievers and legalistic believers in order to teach them the truth of grace in the gospel. Paul was a free man in Christ and not bound by taboos, but if men were bound by taboos, he accommodated himself to them to reach them with the grace of Christ. Paul was free to voluntarily put himself back under the Law of Moses, but he was never lawless, for he was always under the Law of Christ which is the law of love, and love always wants what is best for one's neighbor. While Paul was free to do the man-made taboos, he did not do them if they would offend believers or unbelievers. "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable (expedient). All things are lawful, but not all edify" (I Cor. 10:23). One of the great truths of Christianity is that a Christian is free to limit his freedom. A Christian must be adaptable to every situation for the glory of Christ.

If God should give me a definite call to preach to a group of high Episcopalians who stress externals to extremes, I would go, even though ritual, liturgy and formalism are not my bag. If I went, I would not try to change the system at that point so I could preach them the gospel of grace. Yes, I would wear a robe and turned around collar if this would give me an opportunity to preach the gospel. I would accommodate even if I did not believe these things for the sake of the gospel.

At Grace Church it is sometimes questioned why we ask our elders and deacons to refrain from drinking any alcoholic beverages while holding this office. Some have said this is legalism. Not so, for we are in the south and this is an offense to many Christians and non-Christians alike. This could easily offend people and close the door for the gospel or hurt our testimony. So we accommodate or make concessions in order that we might serve Christ effectively and be "above reproach" in our testimony.

DELIVERING THE DECREES (Acts 16:4, 5)

"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." -- As the cities in Galatia heard of the theological and practical conclusions of the Jerusalem Council, they rejoiced. They, too, were set free when they learned that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone and that Christian living is by grace through faith with voluntary restraint so as not to offend a brother in Christ.

"So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily." -- As the churches were being strengthened inwardly, they were increasing in number outwardly. The goal of a local church is to get every believer to be mature in Christ, so he can be a self-sustaining believer priest, using his spiritual gifts and carrying out an independent ministry in and through the local church.

"And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which

mightily works within me” (Col. 1:28, 29).

We need the Bible. We need doctrine. We need theology. We need encouragement. We need exhortation and we need diligent practice. When these things are evident then we have spiritually healthy Christians and spiritually healthy local churches.

DOORS CLOSING (Acts 16:6, 7)

“And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; . . .” -- Paul and his missionary team of Silas and Timothy fully intended to preach the gospel in Asia Minor and in the great cultural and political center of Ephesus, but the Holy Spirit stopped them. How the Holy Spirit stopped them, we are not told. As they moved out to the south, God closed the door. Paul went to the most logical place, in his mind, and what appeared to be an open door but God shut the door temporarily to Asia Minor and Ephesus in particular. Notice that the Holy Spirit shut the door after Paul had made the decision to move to Asia Minor. God opens and closes doors after we make a certain decision, not before we make a decision to do His will.

There is a great theological question which would arise in the mind of a careful reader of this verse. Why did the Holy Spirit forbid Paul to speak in Asia? Was it that the Europeans were more worthy than the Asians? No, for all men are guilty sinners. Was it that God knew that the Europeans would believe and the Asians would not, so He sent the Word where it would bear the most fruit? No, because God’s foreknowledge always depends upon His plan. Was it because God hated the Asians more than the Europeans? No, for God loves and hates whom He pleases. Why then? We don't know why except it was God's purpose and the Holy Spirit has a master plan of evangelism that will be carried out on schedule. God is sovereign and has a sovereign plan for this world, and He brings the gospel to individuals, nations and continents according to His time schedule.

This verse very clearly tells us that logic and need do not necessarily constitute a missionary call. Asia had great need and it was logical to go there, but God had other plans and they were directed towards Europe.

“And when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go to Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; . . .” -- They had been forbidden to go south, so now they logically looked to the north and Bithynia which is modern day Turkey, but again they were stopped. Paul was not rebuked because he tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit simply said, “No!” It was not the Spirit's timing to go to Bithynia. Surely this indicates that Paul had no peace about going south or north and he came from the east. This left only the west but that meant to cross over to Europe or go home. Paul did not assume that this is where God wanted him and he did not presume the sovereignty of God. He continued to pray and moved westward not knowing the clear will of God but moving out in obedience. If we could have interviewed Paul at that time, we might have said to him, “Paul, where are you going?” And his reply would have been, “I don't know!” He knew God was leading him but he didn't know where. He waited on God, probably in deep prayer, for further direction. God, we shall see, gave Paul clear direction when he needed it and not before.

This verse makes it clear that the command to preach the gospel to every creature must be accompanied by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes God shuts the door when we want to speak to a certain person, group or country for reasons unknown to us.

Some time ago I attended my 25th high school reunion. I wanted to go back to witness to some of my friends. I was asked to give a two minute talk and I had planned to speak of Christ. When it came time for me to speak, there was much boozing, shouting, noise, laughter and off-colored remarks. God kept saying to me, “Don't cast pearls before swine.” I had no peace, and when I was asked to speak, I declined. It was not the right place or timing, for they would have mocked the Lord I love.

DESPERATE CRY FOR HELP (Acts 16:8-10)

“And passing by Mysia, they came to Troas.” -- Troas was the ancient city of Troy which had such a

remarkable history. Troas was the closest point to Europe and God had led His missionaries that far, for He promised, "I will guide thee with mine eye." Of course, Paul was in the dark as to God's will but since the door was closed to the east, south and north, he moved westward, scratching his head about God's specific leading, even though he never doubted God's sovereign leading or his call to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: A certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" -- At the precise moment in God's plan, God gave Paul clear direction as to the will of God for him and his missionary team. Paul saw a vision. He received the Macedonian call. God called Paul and his companions to Europe, to the cultural center of the world, Greece, and to the political center of the world, Rome. This would include in time the taking of the gospel to the savage tribes of France, Germany, England and so on. Until the gospel came to Europe, most of our ancestors were filthy, dirty, heathen who worshipped idols, but the gospel of Christ and its effects upon culture changed all that. We should be so thankful that God sent the message of Christ westward.

"And 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." -- When God gave the vision, Paul responded immediately and left for Macedonia. When God makes His will clear to us, we must obey and never look back. Notice also that "we" and "us" are used here for the first time, for at this time Dr. Luke joined the missionary band of Paul.

Occasionally God speaks to us, not necessarily through a vision, in such an unmistakable way that we cannot deny that God has spoken. This kind of leading does not come often but it does come, and when it comes we must obey, never doubting and never looking back.

When God called me to Grace Church twelve years ago, He made it very clear this is where He wanted me. I was not the first choice of Grace Church. They wanted Reeb Jepson who declined. I wanted three other churches before Grace Church. Grace Church kept pursuing me and I kept putting them off, for I was sure these other churches would contact me. Finally Grace Church wanted an answer and I put a date about four or five weeks away at which time I would give an answer. I was sure that these churches would contact me before that time. The appointed date came, but the other churches had not contacted me. I prayed about it. Picked up the phone and accepted the call to Grace Church, and I never doubted the call or looked back. The very next morning one of the churches called and asked me to candidate. The next night another called. In both cases I declined. When I drove in my driveway in Roanoke, I went right to the mailbox. There was a letter from the church I was really interested in in California asking me to candidate, but God's will had been done. This just confirmed to me that this is where God wanted me. This, in my opinion was clear leading and confirmation of God's will for my life.

CONCLUSION

For you who are unsaved, are you crying inwardly like the Macedonian? He cried out for help for a whole continent and said, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." But perhaps you are saying, "Come and help me!"

Perhaps you sense you need forgiveness, for you are burdened with guilt. Perhaps you sense your great need of peace, for your soul is restless although you have all kinds of material things. Perhaps you sense your great need of assurance of life after death, but your soul does not know what happens beyond the grave. Perhaps you sense your need for purpose and direction in your life, but you are like a ship without a rudder. Who helped the Europeans? Christ! Who can help you? Christ! Only Jesus Christ can answer your desperate need for help. Will you accept Him as your Savior and bow to Him as your Lord? Christ will not only help you, He will save you and set your destiny towards heaven.