

## The Second Missionary Trip: Preparation, Part 2 – Timothy (Acts 16:1-5)

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### Introduction

1. Paul's desire to take Barnabas to visit the churches they planted during the first missionary trip (15:36) was modified after the two men differed over the proposal to take John Mark with them.
  - a. While many see this dissension in a negative light, the context of the passage suggests that their differences were conviction-driven, not fleshly striving (2 Tim. 2:24). Those who conclude that the disagreement and resultant separation demonstrates that "the best of men are but men" must be careful not to find sin where none resides.
    - 1) It is out of character to their devotion to Christ and His service in the gospel (15:26).
    - 2) It is contrary to the spirit of church unity recently supported in the Council at Jerusalem (15:31).
    - 3) It makes Paul out to be a hypocrite in light of his many (10+) admonitions in his letters for believers to be at peace and live harmoniously (Rom. 12:18; 14:19; 15:5, *et al*).
    - 4) It must be imposed on a context that is totally silent about any rebuke or admonition against the missionaries. On the contrary, the church sent them out with their blessing (15:40).
  - b. While disagreeing about the suitability of John Mark for missionary work, both men acted on conscience and principle, the result being that John Mark was restored to God's service as a valuable servant (2 Tim. 4:11). Their separation was providential and necessary to the salvaging of the ministry of John Mark.
2. Although Paul and Barnabas separated from each other, they pursued their original plan to strengthen the churches (15:41), Barnabas going south and sailing to Cyprus with John Mark, and Paul taking a northern overland route into Asia Minor, accompanied by Silas.
3. Luke does not record any further information on Barnabas. This must not be taken as a negative attitude toward Barnabas. Rather, it is the natural result of Luke's primary focus on Paul's ministry as the chosen apostle to the Gentiles. Second, Luke was Paul's companion for the rest of his ministry, even accompanying him to Rome.
4. An important observation supporting Paul's conviction as to the suitability of John Mark is the opposite opinion of the apostle when he met Timothy in Lystra. Paul wanted to take Timothy with them. What was it that he saw in Timothy that was lacking in John Mark?

### I. Paul's Encountering Timothy

1. Timothy's background (vv. 1, 2)
  - a. His race (v. 1)
    - 1) His mother was a Jew and a believer (2 Tim. 1:5). It is very likely that Timothy's mother and grandmother were converted to Christ on Paul's first trip to that city (Acts 13:8-23).

- 2) Timothy was raised to honor the Word of God as the source of salvation (2 Tim. 3:10-17). We do not know whether Timothy was converted under Paul's ministry, but Paul refers to him as his "son in the faith" (1 Cor. 4:17). Since his mother was a convert of Paul's, if she introduced Timothy to Christ, Paul could still claim him as a son in the faith.
- b. His was of mixed race, his father being a Greek (Gentile holding to Hellenistic principles).
  - 1) There must have been a great scandal in his mother's marriage to a Gentile. Nothing is said of his father, leading many to conclude that he was no longer in Timothy's life for whatever reason. Perhaps he was deceased.
  - 2) Timothy was also uncircumcised, his father being a Gentile, which may also be explained by the lack of Jewish influence. His mother either neglected this important Jewish ritual or his father forbade it. Nevertheless, Timothy was raised as a Jew.
2. His reputation (v. 2)
  - a. His high regard among the believers ("well spoken of") indicates a level of spiritual maturity and integrity that accompanies leadership. This is a qualification necessary to leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:2, 7, 10). This means that Timothy was serving in some leadership capacity and was highly regarded in that role. No wonder he attracted Paul's attention.
  - b. His reputation was not limited to the church at Lystra, where Paul found him, but he was known also in Iconium. Based on Acts 20:4, many believe that Derbe, not Lystra, was Timothy's home.

## **II. Paul's Enlisting Timothy**

1. This desire was clearly based on Paul's impression of Timothy—his seeing the same qualities that earned his reputation among the believers. His selfless commitment to the cause of Christ is evident in his willingness to submit to circumcision in order to accompany Paul.
2. Paul had Timothy circumcised.
  - a. Some interesting questions.
    - 1) How does this action square with the Council's decision not to require circumcision of the Gentiles? Timothy's father was a Gentile and not a proselyte. However, his mother was a Jew, and, thus, Timothy would be regarded as a Jew in the Jewish community. If his father were a Jew and his mother a Gentile, Timothy would not have been regarded as a Jew and the circumcision would not have been a matter of concern. However, how is circumcision important to either Jew or Gentile under the New Covenant?
    - 2) It also seems to contradict Paul's consistent teaching that circumcision has no value (Gal. 6:15, 16, 1 Cor. 7:17-20). One should particularly notice Gal. 5:1-6 where Paul argues that one who submits to circumcision has, in effect, cut himself off from Christ. Was Paul here found in a weak moment? Did he succumb to Jewish pressure and compromise? Was he not really sold on the position he had taken in Antioch and

Jerusalem so that, in heat of battle, he became more pragmatic in order to avoid confrontation?

b. Solutions

1) One approach

a) The argument: making a distinction between circumcision as a means of righteousness and as an act of obedience. The Law of Moses cannot make anyone righteous (Gal. 3:21). The Jews, however, mistakenly thought that it could (Romans 10:3). Thus, they saw circumcision as necessary to law-keeping. The Council at Jerusalem rejected the legalistic application of circumcision but not circumcision itself. By extension, Christians are not under the law for the purpose of obtaining righteousness, but they are under law as a means of consecration. Being born again enables one to understand properly the meaning of the law and, with the power granted, submit to the law for obedience. Timothy was free from the legalistic mindset and so could undergo circumcision as an act of true worship and devotion.

b) Problems: (1) Nowhere in the New Testament are believers urged to be circumcised if they have come to a proper understanding of the spiritual nature of the act and do not regard it as an instrument of self-righteousness. (2) The reason that circumcision is now regarded as nothing stems from the fact that it has found its fulfillment in Christ. The purpose that it served in preparing for the age of salvation is now completed. Physical circumcision has been replaced by circumcision of the heart (Col. 2:8-17). (3) The context does not support this understanding. The passage clearly teaches that Paul's motive to have Timothy undergo circumcision was because of the Jews. It had nothing to do with Timothy directly. This concern was also related to Paul's decision to take Timothy with him. In his uncircumcised condition, Timothy was a hindrance to the gospel preached to the Jews. It would only reinforce their unfounded accusations that Paul's ministry was aimed at destroying the Jewish faith.

2) A better solution: Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy was consistent with his philosophy of ministry. In this instance, circumcision would not benefit Timothy personally, but his submission to it would allow him to "become all things to all people" in order that by all means he might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22). We have freedom in Christ; however, we must be willing to forsake our rights, liberties, and privileges for the sake of Christ and the gospel. No Jew would want to associate with Timothy. No synagogue would open its doors to him. As Paul's associate, Paul would also be extremely limited in his ministry to the Jews. Reaching his kinsmen after the flesh was his great burden (Romans 9:1-3).

### III. Paul's Philosophy of Ministry (vv. 4, 5)

1. All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient (1 Cor. 6:12-20; 10:23).
2. "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them" (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

### Application

1. Jesus Christ does not demand circumcision, but he does demand absolute devotion with faithful service to His cause. In this case, circumcision serves this end.
2. People who insist on their freedom betray a loyalty to their self-made idols, not to Christ.
3. Would you be willing to undergo the knife if it would be the means whereby God would bring many to His salvation?