

Two Partnerships

Acts 16:1-5

By Phillip Kayser at DCC on 1-13-2008

Any time you have a predominantly pagan society that you are reaching out to, the church will have to minister to people like Timothy and Timothy's mom. His dad was a pagan and his mom was a believer. We know from 2 Timothy 1:5 that Timothy's mother was Eunice and his mother's mother was Lois. Both were believers, and both were married to unbelievers. And Paul reached out to people like this and included them in his churches and helped them to break out of the cycle. Both sets of parents were in a partnership that was not equal, and yet it was recognized in 1 Corinthians 7 as a partnership that needed to be committed to. Lois and Eunice had stresses and difficulties that other homes do not. And rather than isolating such people, Paul made sure that the church affirmed them. This shows Paul's churches were not perfectionistic. There were people in his churches that had had divorces. We know from 1 Timothy 3 that Paul even allowed converts who were polygamists to be members of the church. They couldn't be elders. But they needed the ministry of the church as well as needing to be able to minister to others. And Paul gave them an outlet for such ministry. And I believe this passage is a great corrective to the perfectionism of some churches in this regard.

I think it is also a great encouragement to those who have found themselves unequally yoked through no fault of their own. I have a relative who was in a similar predicament. She was fooled into marrying an unbeliever. The man was a member of the church, who attended every Sunday and sang in the choir. Outwardly he seemed to have every appearance of being a good church member. When he asked for her hand in marriage he seemed like a fine young man, but nobody bothered to investigate. As soon as they were married, he announced that he only went to church to get a good, submissive wife. He was not a Christian and had no interest in church. He was a drunk and she had an awful life with him. What she needed was a church that could come alongside and encourage her without putting undo expectations upon her. There was only so far that she could go. And I think this passage illustrates that.

But there is another partnership in this passage that is quite different from marriage. Marriage obviously is a life-long commitment. It's a permanent partnership. And so in one sense it is not even fair to compare

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that to the partnership that Paul enters into with Timothy. But I think there are lessons to be learned from the contrasts and comparisons of both. Paul enters into a ministry relationship with Timothy that ends up becoming a life long friendship and partnership in ministry that is perfectly yoked. You see, a yoke is something that an ox is harnessed into that you can't get out of – at least for a time you can't get out of it. And if you are unequally yoked, one of the oxen is having to pull most of the weight. And as we examine these two partnerships I think you will see principles that can be applied to business, politics, marriage and other situations. But for sure I want us to have a handle on how we can help single mom's, mom's married to unbelievers and others who have found themselves in difficult yokings, whether it is through their own fault or not.

I. God's grace working despite a partnership that was unequally yoked – the story of Eunice and her Greek husband

A. First, it is important to realize that such a partnership is dangerous, and a happy outcome should not be assumed. Here are the dangers:

1. Such believers are often distanced from God's people (v. 1)

And the first thing that I want to look at is why being unequally yoked is so dangerous and such a difficulty to bear. It is true that Eunice had a happy outcome with at least one of her children. But it is not the ideal. There are six dangers we will look at, and then we will look at three answers that the power of God's grace provided in this situation.

Verse 1 says, **Then he came to Derbe and Lystra.** The first thing that we find here is that this is a strange place for a Jewess to be. These cities were on the farthest fringes of the Roman Empire - a long way from Israel or any major Jewish settlement. There may have been some other Jews here, but apparently very few. Not enough to form a synagogue in Lystra. The Jews who stoned Paul in chapter 14 had followed him from 100 miles away. They didn't even live here. And when Timothy's great grandfather moved here, he perhaps had no idea of the negative influence of being in a place where there were so few (if any) fellow-believers living. 2 Timothy 1:5 indicates that Grandma Lois was a believing and practicing Jewess. So it is almost certain that Great-grandpa was at least a practicing Jew. Why did he come here? Was it because of a great business opportunity? We are not

told. But I think we can confidently say that it was not a wise move.

When a Christian husband moves to a new area, his first thought should be to the spiritual welfare of his family. “How will this impact my children?” His first thought should not be salary raise. What good will it do to have a great salary and lose your kids? He should not move to a city where there is no godly church. I would change my job rather than do that. It is for our own good that the Bible mandates that we not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

Anyway, somewhere along the line, Great Grandpa must have consented to marrying his daughter Lois off to a person who was not a believer. I think we can deduce that from 2 Timothy 1:5. So, Eunice, the mother of Timothy grows up with a father who has either never had the faith or has stopped practicing the faith. And with an unbelieving husband, other priorities take place that can remove a woman far from the influence of family and church. Now at first that may seem like a neat freedom to a Christian rebel, but eventually it becomes a terrible burden. And it may not be a physical distance from God’s people like Lois and Eunice had. It may simply be that the husband wants the wife to do things that conflict with going to church, or conflict from Christian fellowship, but you can count on it, being unequally yoked is usually going to bring some degree of distance from God’s people. So distance is the first problem.

2. Rarely does the man become a believer through the wife, though the reverse frequently happens (v. 1 with 2 Tim. 1:5).

A second problem is the continued unbelief of the person that you marry. Verse 1 goes on: **And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was a Greek.** The “but” is contrasted with her belief and her practice. How many times have I seen a young girl marry an unbeliever with the thought that she will change him? It almost *never* works that way. In fact, I have never known of an example where it has worked from the woman’s side. Timothy is a grown man, and his father has still not believed. Some people might think, “Well, pastor Kayser gave statistics in Acts 2 that showed a high percentage of men being able to lead their unbelieving wives to Christ. Why not marry an unbelieving wife, and she will just come along?” But the two things are quite different. Here are the statistics that I gave in Acts chapter 2. If a child is the first to come to Christ in a family, there is a 3.5% likelihood of the whole family coming to Christ. If the woman is the first one in the family to come to Christ, there is a 17% probability that the whole

family will come to Christ. That's pretty low odds. If the man is the first one in the family to come to Christ, there is a 93% probability. So that is where some people find comfort in marrying an unbelieving wife. She'll just become a believer and we'll live happily ever after.

But there is a huge difference between a believer rebelling against the Lord by marrying an unbeliever, and the situation of a couple both being pagans to start with. The first case is that the man is deliberately violating what God considers to be a fundamental command. So why should he expect a godly harvest when he plants ungodly decisions? When a man deliberately marries an unbeliever, his influence goes way down. So even the 17% on the woman's side and the 93% on the man's side is unlikely to happen. We'll get to the hope section, but I want you to see the danger. Timothy is significantly older, and yet his dad is still an unbeliever. You can expect that to happen.

3. The pagan and Christian cultures often clash and/or get syncretized (vv. 1,3)

The third danger is that pagan and Christian cultures often clash and/or get mixed in unhealthy ways. We call that syncretism. Verse 1 again: **a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was a Greek**, Notice that it doesn't simply say that his father was an unbeliever. That is implied in the word "but," and we have already looked at that in point 2. But this is talking about something in addition to addition to unbelief. Luke said, "*but his father was a Greek.*" Luke is setting up as an explanation the lack of circumcision in the next verse. If you know anything of the history of the Maccabees, you know that the Greeks despised circumcision. There were two cultures in this home: a Jewish culture and a Greek culture. And the two would have constantly been in conflict over food, rituals, Sabbath days, hygiene, dress code and a host of things. Here's the interesting thing that gives us hope later on: The text indicates that Eunice was a practicing Jewess, which means that this Greek man allowed her to import a huge amount of her culture into the home. It meant that she didn't eat pork, wore only certain kinds of clothing, practiced purification measures and followed the ceremonial law. But not all pagans would have been as generous or would have allowed such concessions.

Getting married to an unbeliever automatically brings either 1) cultural differences affecting every area of life (which sets up a tension), or 2) it brings compromise – one of the two. And that brings up an important side point. Just as a pagan convert to Judaism would have had enormous cultural adjustments, the same should be true of a convert to Christianity. But sadly, it is not true. The Bible shouldn't just affect our souls. It's not

just a ticket to heaven. It affects how we think, how we work, how we view ownership of property, our attitudes to rights and values, our treatment of women, our sexual practices, our views on politics, our attitudes to the future. Just as one example: you have been seeing how the feminist culture of America has radically influenced Christian homes and churches even without people realizing it, because Christians have not been self-conscious about those cultural differences. They are not proud of their cultural differences. That's just in the one area of feminism. Now you multiply that 100 times over and you have the kinds of pressures to compromise when an unbeliever brings all of his pagan cultural values, attitudes and practices into a Christian home. The influence is usually so profound that the Christian gets dragged down and looks no different than the Greek. That did not happen here. This woman retained her Jewishness. She chose to live as a Jew would live. And that would have been extremely difficult. So I think she stands as a rebuke to homes where both parents are Christians, but they are living like Greeks. So we need to learn from her on that.

4. The unbeliever can easily undo what you are doing spiritually (2 Tim. 1:5; Acts 16:1; Ezek. 16:44)

The fourth danger is that the unbeliever can easily undo what the Christian spouse is trying to do. One of the ladies in my dad's church up in North Vancouver related how this happened to her. When she was younger a young man really wanted to marry her. She knew she shouldn't marry an unbeliever, but he kept making promises that he would respect her faith and that he wouldn't hinder her from going to church or the kids from going to church at all. That would be their decision. And he stuck to his word in a sense. But he always set up his fun expeditions at church time and told his children that it was their choice – they could go to church or go swimming; go to church or go fishing; go to church or go to the theme park. And it was hard for the children not to choose the fun thing. And he effectively wooed their hearts away and undermined everything that she tried to do to raise them to fear the Lord – simply by presenting choices.

Now that was deliberate, but usually it's not even conscious. It just happens without your realizing it. I watched a Laurel and Hardy 1932 film called *Piano*, which showed the two trying to get a piano up a huge flight of steps. And it takes them all afternoon to do it. And it's a pretty funny show. But once they got it inside, Hardy was tidying up the place by stacking all of the wood on one side of the room, and Laurel would come along and tidy up by moving Hardy's pile to the other side of the room. They were constantly undoing each other's work. That's what's going on in a mixed marriage,

even when the partners aren't trying to undo each other. We have only one example of that in this passage. And it is deliberate. Eunice as a Jew would have wanted her son circumcised. His father refused. What could she do? But there were no doubt a number of other ways in which this influence was felt.

5. Possible exclusion of children from the church (Acts 16:1-3 with Gen. 17:12-14; 2 Tim. 3:15)

The fifth danger is that frequently the children are not able to join the church and partake of the Lord's Table. Verse 2 says, **He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.** And by region, Luke is referring to the Phrygian district and the Galatian province that they were going to be traveling through next. There apparently was no synagogue at Lystra. If you compare what we have read here with 2 Timothy 3:15 you know that Timothy believed in God from the time he was a child and he was probably well over thirty by now. He didn't have to be circumcised to be a member of the church. So he is a full orbed, baptized member of the church. But I am referring to his status in the synagogue long before the church was planted in Lystra. Back then, when he was a kid, he was a genuine Old Testament type believer before news of Jesus had even reached this area. And yet he was not circumcised. Which meant that he was not allowed any of the privileges of being a Jew. He certainly couldn't partake of the Passover. He probably was simply considered a God-fearer.

And if you realize that circumcision was the sign of admission into the covenant of grace you will see how irregular this was. Genesis 17:12-14 says, **He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any stranger who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.** So Timothy was a covenant breaker outwardly and excluded from the covenant privileges even though Paul says that he had been a true believer. There would have been a lot of pressure from the Jews to have him circumcised. But he wasn't. The only conclusion that can be reached is that the Greek father refused to let him be circumcised and that

was that. It is inconceivable that a woman with the godly characteristics that we will see in Eunice would *not* have covenanted with God in circumcision if she could have done so. That had been drilled into the Jewish consciousness. And so this is just another indication of the dangers inherent in being unequally yoked. The likelihood is that the children will not be able to be members of the church.

6. Being unequally yoked can be perpetuated into the next generation (2 Tim. 1:5 with Acts 16:1).

The last danger of being unequally yoked is that the parents can often perpetuate the same cycle to the next generation. It doesn't have to, but it can easily happen. 2 Timothy 1:5: **when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice...** Lois was married to an unbeliever and her daughter does the same thing. Ezekiel 16:44 speaks of unbelieving parents passing on their unbelieving ways by using the expression, "**like mother like daughter.**" You've maybe heard that expression. Well the Scripture uses it to show how easy it is for daughters to pick up their parents bad habits. It's not determined, but we all know how easy it is to happen.

A number of years ago I heard about one of the parents who had reprimand their children for shouting at each other in the other room. And when one of the parents got on their case, a child said, "But we were playing mummy and daddy." And they thought, "Oh-Oh. Are we having that kind of influence?" And I'm sure you have seen how easily children pick up on your bad actions. Eunice may not have had any choice since the fathers often arranged marriages, but certainly this is a danger that our young people should be aware of. Mothers in these situations need our prayers, our encouragement, our understanding and our support because it is hard enough to be a Proverbs 31 mother even when you have support, but these things make it even more difficult. We need to honor those of our loved ones who are trying. And we need to pray that God would do a special work and break through into the life of the whole family.

B. The power of God's grace to overcome those disadvantages:

1. Christian wives can persevere in their faith as Lois and Eunice did (2 Tim. 1:5 with Acts 16:1)

And there was a remarkable grace that was breaking through into the

life of Lois and Eunice and down into Timothy's life. God's grace can overcome these disadvantages. You may have come from families where there was abuse and lawlessness. But that does not mean that you have to be *determined* by that background. God's grace is powerful to change you. God's grace is powerful to help you persevere. Just think of *their* background. The immoral, polytheistic, lawless society of the Greeks is famous in our history books. Now their husbands *may* have been exceptions to the rule, but there is no indication in the Biblical text that that was the case. The polytheistic residents of Lystra had stoned Paul the year before. And if you read Acts 14 you will see that these Greeks were described as lawless, pagan idolaters who actually took their idolatry a lot more seriously than most of Rome did. Yet despite this background, mother and daughter both were virtuous, both believed the Scriptures and both taught the Scriptures to their children. God can make His people to persevere and to be more than conquerors in the midst of the most adverse circumstances. So the first point is that there is hope. God's grace is sufficient. In fact, 1 Corinthians 7 probably kicked in, and the father was being sanctified and kept from being worse than he could have been.

2. God's promise to multiple generations still holds true (Mal. 2:14-15; Acts 2:39; 16:31; 1 Cor. 7:14-16)

A second encouraging point in their lives can be seen in the *names* given to Eunice and Timothy. Eunice means literally blessing and victory from *eu* and *nike*. Lois was a woman asking for God's blessing and victory to shine through her situation. Timothy means either dear to God or honored by God. Here were women who were laying claim to God's promise to pass the faith from generation to generation. And this holds true even where only one member of the home is a believer. 1 Corinthians 7 says that **the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.** We are not told if the husbands of Lois and Eunice eventually become saved. We are only told about Timothy, but 1 Corinthians 7 goes on to tell the believer not to divorce his or her spouse **For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?** God's grace invades the whole family, and the promise of salvation to children held true for Lois as she saw her daughter Eunice become a believer and then saw her grandson Timothy grow up in the faith. So single Christian homes must have faith in God's generational promises. Where Malachi 2 warns us that

we cannot presume upon God's promises, Acts 16 is an encouragement to keep believing God to bring change. Some parents hide their faith, and that will just ensure that the promises won't be fulfilled.

There was a mother who was telling her little girl about life on the farm when she was growing up. And she said, "We had lots of fun down on the farm. I had a swing made out of an old automobile tire that swung from an oak tree, and I had a pony to ride, and I used to slide down the haystack in the summer and ride the sleigh in the winter." Her daughter was all eyes as she said, "I sure do wish I had met you sooner." We need to make sure that our children meet us sooner rather than later and that they learn all about our Christian heritage that we have stored up for them as a treasure. And as our children meet us and are put face to face with the Word of God being lived out, God says that His grace is powerful to claim them. Sometimes children will not embrace God's promises till much later in life, but we as parents can lay claim to God's promises and take great comfort from them. Even if the statistics are against this happening, lay claim to God's Word by faith.

3. God can help people to break the cycle and start progressively building a dynasty (Acts 16:1-2)

A third principle is that God's grace is stronger than paganism and can enable a person to break out of a bad cycle. In this case it was the third generation that made the greatest strides. As you know, Timothy became a great church leader with two of the books of the Bible addressed to him. He was so close to Paul that Paul treated him as a son. But Timothy is an example where the bad influence of previous generations is broken in one generation and where the good influence is building. It is paganism to fatalistically think that we are bound to repeat the mistakes of our parents. Don't be fatalistic. The Biblical phrase "like mother like daughter" was used to describe unbelievers, not believers who are being conformed more and more into the image of Christ. The Biblical pattern is for a parent to lay up an inheritance for the child so that the child does not have to start his generation from scratch. He can go further because he is now standing on the shoulders of his parents. That is the principle behind building a dynasty. It's progressive. If every generation has to start off from scratch, you will never build a dynasty. That is true in the area of monetary inheritance. But it is especially true of the spiritual inheritance that is given. Each new generation of Christians, if they are carefully instructed in the things of God, can go much further than the parents did.

C. The means God uses to break the cycle

1. Instruction by his mother in the Word (2 Tim. 3:15)

How did God break them out of that cycle? I see two hints in their lives of the means that God used. Please turn to 2 Timothy 3:15 where we see Eunice using the power of God's Word in her son's life. In 2 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells Timothy, **and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** The Scriptures are powerful in molding a person's life. They have a power that completely transcends our words and actions. And in context of the next verses it appears that Eunice used those Scriptures for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness to mature Timothy as a man who was complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. When Paul met Timothy in Acts 16:2 it says, **He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.** Paul taught him too, but the primary influence had been in the home.

But when did she begin? The Greek word that is translated as childhood has as its dictionary meaning "unborn child or embryo," though it is sometimes used of a newborn infant. This is actually one of those rare times where the NIV's translation of "from infancy" is actually more literal than the New King James since it is never used of those who are beyond the newborn stage. It is the word *Brephos*, which is used to describe John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb for joy. Some have thought that infants can indeed learn to understand rudiments of language from the womb. And whether this passage teaches that or not I am not ready to say, but the usage of the Greek word for unborn baby indicates strongly to me that there was never a time when the child did not hear the Scriptures being taught by the mother, and certainly that there was never a time in which the Scriptures were not the basis for molding and changing the child.

There was a mother who daily read to the baby right from the day it was born. Someone asked her if she really thought that the baby understood. It seemed a little strange to the visitor. She said, "I'm sure he doesn't understand now, but I want his earliest memories to be that of hearing God's Word." I like that. There should never be a time when the child is out of the atmosphere of Biblical instruction and application, and that means that the mother is going to be involved in this process much of the time. In fact, she was the only hope of it happening in this mixed marriage. I do want to point out that the father, as head of the home is the one who is primarily accountable to ensure that nurture occurs. He should be washing his wife and children in the water of the Word. But at the same time, mothers have

many more hours with the children.

2.The genuineness of faith lived out (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5)

The second hint given for why Lois and Eunice were able to overcome their circumstances can be seen in 2 Timothy 1:5 where Paul speaks of **the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.** The word for “genuine” means unhypocritical. Perhaps there was a hypocritical Jewish great grandpa, but this was the first unhypocritical faith. They lived what they believed. And our actions have a profound effect upon our children. I think I was profoundly affected by the faith my father and mother taught me. I learned a lot from them. But I was even more profoundly affected by the fact that they lived that faith out even when it wasn't convenient. It was a genuine faith. There was no hypocrisy to turn me off. When you have the word and an authentic living out of the Word, you have hope for change in your children and building a spiritual dynasty.

II.A partnership between Paul and Timothy

A.A believer (v. 1)

Moving on to the second partnership (and we are going to go flying through this section), it was the genuineness of Timothy's faith that made Paul want to have a partnership with him. Verse 1 says that he was a disciple, but 2 Timothy says that he had a genuine or unhypocritical faith. This is a must for partnership in church ministry. And people think, “Of course, in the church you would expect that.” But compromises are made in churches just like they are in families.

There is an Orthodox Presbyterian Church in San Francisco that is a case in point. And they don't mind my telling the story, because they repented. This is the church that has been attacked by so many homosexuals. Well, they got into trouble initially because they didn't think that an organist had to be a Christian. Organists are hard to find, and they had initially hired him simply because of his musical skill. But when his homosexuality came to the fore, they fired him. That just seemed a bit too much. And that raised a firestorm of protest, graffiti, death threats, disruption of services and other pressures. They had to rethink their ministry and have a policy that all ministry functions had to be based on faith. The treasurer needed to be a believer. The janitor needed to be a believer. They were pushed to that because the lawsuits forced them to be more consistent. And for those who

think that is being legalistic, we need to ask, “Is it a partnership?” If it is, then how can two walk together unless they are agreed? Faith really should be the foundation for our partnerships, whether that is in business or elsewhere. That doesn’t mean you can’t deal with pagans, sell to pagans or service them. I’m talking about true partnerships.

B. Commended by the church (v. 2)

The second thing that we see is that Timothy was commended by the church. Verse 2 says, **He was well spoken of by the brethren...** On any partnership, it is wise to get counsel from other believers before you make a decision. That’s one of the reasons for the courtship model that we follow for marriage. It gives the input of objective parents who hopefully aren’t emotionally blinded. It’s one of the reasons why we seek input from the brethren for deacons and elders. It’s one of the reasons why pastors must have credentials at Presbytery. We can easily make mistakes on partnerships just like my relative did, by not investigating.

C. Senior and junior relationship (v. 3) – somebody has to be in charge.

A third thing that made this partnership work out great is that someone was in charge. Verse 3 says, **Paul wanted to have him go with him. And he took him...** etc. Paul’s obviously the leader. There was a senior and a junior relationship. Somebody was in charge. I have another distant relative who had a partnership in a business where nothing was spelled out. They were both believers, but the relationship didn’t work well because no one was in charge to resolve disagreements. And there were frustrations.

D. A perfect fit for Paul’s team (v. 3 with rest of Acts & Epistles)

A fourth thing that made this such a good partnership is that Timothy was a perfect fit for Paul’s team. I am not a perfect fit for everyone’s team. You are not a perfect fit for everyone’s team. And there are people who would make a good elder in another church, but because they are philosophically opposed to our distinctives, they would not make a good fit for our ministry team. When partnerships are entered, it’s helpful to know if there is agreement on key issues and if the partners complement one another. I think that is the whole purpose of courtship – to find that out. It’s not enough that a husband and wife connect on a romantic level. Worldviews, personalities and practices should be discussed during courtship.

On the other hand, differences don’t necessarily mean there is not a

perfect fit. You could not get more different upbringing and background than Timothy and Paul had. Even their personalities appeared to be different. 2 Timothy 1:7 indicates that Timothy had a weakness of timidity. He tended to be very anxious and fearful. Paul balanced him out on that and even helped Timothy to be strengthened in that weakness. And we won't take the time today, but Paul and Timothy, though quite different from each other, were a great complement to each other.

E.A willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom (v. 3)

The fifth thing that I see about both Paul and Timothy is their willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom. You can see that sacrifice in verse 3: ... **and he took him and circumcised him...** At least I *think* circumcision is a sacrifice. That's got to hurt. Think about it. Yet Timothy showed that he always put the kingdom of God first. Now I should stress that this sacrifice was not done by compulsion. We know this from Paul's epistles where he indicated that he never approached such things from a spirit of compulsion. Voluntarism produces a far richer partnership than compulsion. And most good partnerships eventually have areas where one or the other partner is willing to sacrifice his or her own desires for the sake of the kingdom – voluntarily. That is a good character quality.

FA partnership that was under authority and accountable (v. 4).

Verse 4 indicates that the whole partnership was under authority. It says, **And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.** Paul modeled to others what it meant to live under authority. Sometimes you will find people who want everyone else to submit, but they won't submit to authority themselves. Good partnerships usually have accountability for both. When you women are looking for a good husband, find out if the man is accountable.

G.A testimony to the difference between legalism (Acts 15:5) and being all things to all men (Acts 16:3-4)

But the verse I just read does bring up a question: If the decrees of Jerusalem said that circumcision must not be imposed on the Gentiles, why did Paul want Timothy to get circumcised? Doesn't that seem a little strange after the huge debate in chapter 15? He refused to let Titus get circumcised. Let me read from Galatians 2 where Paul relates the situation of Titus a few

weeks or months earlier. Galatians 2:3-5.

Galatians 2:3 Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

Galatians 2:4 And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),

Galatians 2:5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Some have accused Paul of being inconsistent here. But let me make some quick observations to show that this was not a compromise. Paul understood the difference between legalism and being all things to all men.

First, the reason for requiring circumcision in both cases was quite different. Earlier with Titus, the Judaisers wanted to say that you couldn't be saved without circumcision (Acts 15:1), or some said that you couldn't be a member of the church without circumcision (Acts 15:5). But with Timothy it was different. Timothy was already a member of the church. The reason for his circumcision was to make him more effective in reaching the Jews. It's a totally different reason.

Second, it was voluntary, not imposed.

Third, Timothy was partially Jewish in his background, unlike Titus who was 100% Greek.

Fourth – neither Paul nor Titus used circumcision to exclude Gentiles from the church.

Fifth, we have already seen that Paul had no problem with Jews optionally observing ceremonial laws, so long as they did not see it as essential to Christianity and did not use them to separate themselves from Gentiles. This circumcision freed Titus up to minister to both Jews and Gentile effectively. There is no contradiction.

H. The result (v. 5 – “So” or “Therefore”)

Finally, the result of this partnership is seen in verse 5 – **So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.** What a beautiful tribute to the power of a good partnership in ministry. God's blessing was upon all that they did. That's what we want. We want His blessing.

Conclusion: our need of the ultimate Senior Partner (2 Cor. 6:1; 1 Pet. 4:13; Heb. 3:14)

Of course, none of this could have been lasting unless they were grounded in Christ, and He was the ultimate senior partner in their ministry.

2 Corinthians 6:1 (NLT) speaks of us being God's partners. 1 Peter 4:13 (NLT) speaks of being partners of Christ. Hebrews 3:14 (NRSV) says that we have become partners with Christ. Those are amazing statements when you think about it. If there was any unequal yoking, it would be us with Jesus. How could you get more unequally yoked?! Yet in His grace he has made provision to lift us up. His yoke is easy. Why? Because He as the senior partner is bearing the load. Though he needs nothing, He has made provision to make us indispensable in his kingdom. Though he could have accomplished everything with one spoken word, He has chosen to enter into a partnership with us; or as 1 Corinthians 3:9 words it – **God's fellow workers**. That concept ought to blow your mind. And that ought to humble us to the ground. What a privilege! But also, what a comfort! Let me relate a story.

“F.B. Meyer wrote about two Germans who wanted to climb the Matterhorn. They hired three guides and began their ascent at the steepest and most slippery part. The men roped themselves together in this order: guide, traveler, guide, traveler, guide. They had gone only a little way up the side when the last man lost his footing. He was held up temporarily by the other four, because each had a toehold in the niches they had cut in the ice. But then the next man slipped, and he pulled down the two above him. The only one to stand firm was the first guide, who had driven a spike deep into the ice. Because he held his ground, all the men beneath him regained their footing. F.B. Meyer concluded his story by drawing a spiritual application. He said, "I am like one of those men who slipped, but thank God, I am bound in a living partnership to Christ. And because He stands, I will never perish." (Our Daily Bread)

It is Christ's unequal partnership with us that enables us to overcome the mistakes we have made in our earthly partnerships. Have you blown it with your wife? His grace not only forgives you, but it empowers you and overrules your flubbed up situation and brings God glory. That doesn't mean that we can ignore the mountain climbing partners that we pick or the need to look at their qualifications. We can save ourselves a lot of grief if we take this passage seriously. But overarching everything is the importance of making sure you are connected solidly to Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our Faith. Amen.

Children of God, I charge you to let God's grace fill and transform every partnership that you enter into. And make sure you only enter into partnerships that glorify Him. But above all, be grateful that Jesus is willing

to be partnered with you in ministry. Amen.