

**Series: Acts**

**Lesson #58**

**Title: Learning Liberty**

**Scripture: Acts 16: 1-5**

**Date: February 26, 2009**

**Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey**

Our subject this time is: Learning Liberty.

**Proposal:** "Liberty" is deliverance from captivity into freedom.

Our flesh is captivity. We can not blame anyone else. If no one else existed but you, your flesh is all you need be in captivity to sin.

Sin is all we are in this flesh. When scriptures speaks of the flesh it means, something more than this covering over our skeleton: it means the spirit of the flesh, the will of the flesh, the heart of the flesh, called in scripture the "natural man." The will of the "natural man" is contrary to God. The natural desire of our flesh is not in subjection to God and can never be.

Christ Jesus the Son of God is the believer's Deliverer from this flesh. When the Holy Spirit creates a new spirit within the sinner, that "new man", is born of Christ Jesus the second Adam. It is a will, a new heart, a new spirit, an altogether new man--not the natural but a spiritual man. In this "new spirit" we are brought to behold the person of Christ and what he has finished for us. Beholding Christ we believe what he teaches us--that we are totally freed from our sinful flesh. The flesh no longer has anything to do with who I am or with my acceptance before God.

- The law agrees with God that there is no charge against me because Christ put away the guilt of my sin by satisfying justice for me. My "natural man" yet is full of sin, but in the spirit I have been freed from all sin.
- Death agrees with God that it has no claim on me. Because when Christ died, I died. **Hebrews 9:27:...****it is appointed unto men once to die**--I already died. My flesh will yet die, but the spirit created by Christ is life eternal--I have been freed from all death.
- The new spirit created within me by the Spirit of Christ agrees with God that I am free to enter into his presence, right now, and for all eternity.
- When this old, corrupt, natural spirit of Adam dies, my flesh will die, but because Christ took upon him flesh and entered into glory in flesh, he shall raise me a new body to be with my new spirit. **Job 19: 26: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:**

So you see how this flesh has absolutely nothing to do with giving me liberty--Christ is my Liberty.

**Remember our proposal:** Liberty is deliverance from captivity into freedom. It is another word for salvation. **Romans 8:2: For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.** Learning liberty is learning that our flesh has nothing whatsoever to do with our liberty in Christ.

It pleased the triune God to leave us in this dying, old, deceitful, corrupt, natural flesh, that we might learn that liberty is by, and through Christ Jesus alone, and the flesh profits nothing. From the first hour the Lord calls us to behold that Christ has delivered us from all bondage, until the last hour of this life Christ is teaching us that true liberty is by Christ Jesus alone. Liberty is the message of our text tonight.

**Acts 16: 1: Then came he to Derbe and Lystra:**

Paul sets out with Silas on his second missionary journey and goes to the southern most parts of Galatia.

**Acts 16: 1: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus**

Timothy is the one the Lord Jesus Christ is teaching. Timothy is learning liberty.

## **I. TIMOTHY HAD BEEN TAUGHT THE DOCTRINE OF LIBERTY**

**A. Timothy had been taught the scriptures.**

**Acts 16: 1:...the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed;**

1. He had been taught the scriptures by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois.

**2 Timothy 1:5: When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also...3:15: And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.**

2. The doctrine of liberty begins with the doctrine of captivity. We know nothing of liberty if we have never been in captivity. Timothy had been taught it in the scriptures.

**Psalms 51: 5: Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.**

**Isaiah 40: 6: The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: 7: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. 8: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. 9: O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!**

3. Timothy had this scripture:

**Deuteronomy 7: 7 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: 8: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn**

**unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.**

B. Prior to this time, Timothy had been taught the doctrine of liberty by Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

1. We know this because he is called a "certain disciple." One is only a disciple of Christ if they have been taught by Christ the Prophet, the Master--that is what the word "disciple" means. The doctrine--the teaching--is the doctrine of Christ--ABOUT HIM and TAUGHT BY HIM through the HOLY SPIRIT. Christ teaches in the heart what he taught when he walked this earth...

**Mark 10:18:...**(Christ said)...*there is none good but one, that is, God.*

Christ teaches in the heart through the Holy Spirit that **Luke 14:26: If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.**

Hating them is confessing that only Christ can deliver me--the flesh of my own kin and even my own flesh--can not do it--I hate what I am--I must have Christ. So Christ had taught Timothy that he had nothing to boast in for being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had learned that he brought nothing but sin with him into the world. Timothy had been taught that though he was absolutely destitute of all spiritual good in his natural flesh, Christ revealed himself in Timothy.

C. Not only this but Timothy had been taught that God's grace is unchangeable, unalterable, by the deeds of sinful flesh. His mother was proof and he was proof.

**Acts 16: 1:...the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:**

1. Timothy was born to parents who were unlawfully married.

**Eunice was a Jewess,...but his father was a Greek:** (the reason Timothy was uncircumcised)

Two spiritual applications: First, by our first generation, every elect child of God is born of an unlawful marriage between Adam and the strange harlot of unbelief (ask Hosea's wife, Gomer.) Thus we go many days uncircumcised in heart.

Secondly, just as the flesh profits nothing in adding to liberty---the sin of my flesh also diminishes nothing from it. **Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.**

2. Yet, in spite of Eunice's rebellion against God the Lord had mercy on her. And in spite of Timothy's being uncircumcised, the grace of God flourished in the heart of Timothy. That is what the second verse teaches us:

**Acts 16: 2: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.**

**Hebrews 11: 1: Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2: For by it the elders obtained a good report.**

- Adam's sin did not change God's grace toward his elect.
- Your sin did not change God's grace toward you.
- Eunice's sin and Timothy's sin had no bearing on God's grace. Liberty is being set free from sin. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

So Timothy had been taught the doctrine of liberty--the doctrine of grace--the doctrine of Christ. And he had learned something of what it is to be at liberty in Christ and to regard this flesh as unprofitable. Christ had prepared him. But he is a "certain disciple". The Lord chose Timothy to be his pastor, to serve Christ and to serve his brethren:

**Jeremiah 1: 4: Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 5: Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. 6: Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I *am* a child. 7: But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. 8: Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.**

What is it to serve the Lord? And serving the Lord means publishing to all that Christ is the Deliverer. That in him the believer is free from the captivity of sin of our natural flesh. So if we are going to serve the Lord we have to publicly confess the flesh profits nothing, instructing all to behold God. If I make a show in the flesh, I am putting confidence in my flesh or at least drawing attention to it and the servant of God has got to be made to see the flesh profits nothing.

Timothy had been taught it and had learned it...but NOW the Lord will have him to LEARN it!

## **II. TIMOTHY LEARNS LIBERTY**

**Acts 16: 3: Him would Paul have to go forth with him;**

**A. Paul was delivering the decrees ordained at Jerusalem to the churches throughout Galatia.**

**Acts 16: 4: And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.**

Two decrees:

1. It is NOT needful for Gentiles to be "circumcised" in the flesh.
2. It is necessary for Gentiles to abstain from **pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood** (Acts 15: 20.)
3. Now turn to I Corinthians 7: 17: and see that is what Paul tells us he ordained as he delivered these decrees to all the churches.

**I Corinthians 7: 17: But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. 18: Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. 19: Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. 20: Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. 21: Art thou called *being* a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use *it* rather. 22: For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ's servant. 23: Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. 24: Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.**

**Note:** Paul had just delivered these decrees to the church at Derbe and Lystra where Timothy was. He probably made mention of how he had just refused young Titus from being circumcised. Now Paul says to Timothy, "You need to be circumcised before I can take you with me."

B. He did it so that men would not be led away from Christ to the flesh.

**Acts 16: 3:...and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.**

- The places Paul was going were populated with Jews (in those quarters)
- They knew Timothy was uncircumcised--his father was a Greek.
- Those Jews in the places where Paul and Timothy would go had no idea that circumcision was not required.
- Therefore, Timothy would not be allowed in the churches unless he was circumcised.
- If not allowed in those places then Paul and Timothy could not have delivered the decrees that point men away from the flesh--to Christ.

C. The very decree Paul is delivering sets forth the spirit of God's commandments to his children in the law (the doctrine) of liberty. God's commandments taught to the believer in the new spirit is the law of faith and love.

1. That is exactly what Paul said in: **Galatians 5:6: For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love....**

- Paul says the same thing in I Cor 7: 19: **Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.**
- **1 John 3:23: And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 24: And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.**
- John said, **And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.**

Now the keeping of the commandments of God--that is something! But be sure you understand what God's voice says to the believe. Works performed in the flesh are nothing--but faith in Christ which worketh by love, not by the letter of the law, now that is something! It is called Liberty in Christ because Christ dwells in us.

Paul did not teach the letter of this decree but the spirit of this decree. What do I mean by that?

- Paul did not say, "The decree states that Gentiles do not have to be circumcised so we will not circumcise you Timothy. We will go in and preach to these will-worshipping Jews and if they don't like it that is just tough."
- That would have been the same binding, dead-letter, carnal spirit of those legalists who came saying, "Except ye be circumcised, ye can not enter into the kingdom of God."
- When circumcision helped men look away from the law and their flesh to hear the liberty Christ delivers us into--Paul circumcised Timothy. That is the spirit of liberty.

2. This is the spirit he has given us: **Galatians 5: 13: For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. ...26: Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.**

- Trusting Christ and loving our brethren means we believe Christ has delivered us and that our flesh profits nothing.
- Loving the brethren means we do not want to do anything that will draw the eye or the ear or the desires of the flesh TO the flesh.
- When I put emphasis on the flesh whether it be a good thing or an immoral thing it will do one of two things: it will cause men to be led away from Christ in thinking themselves righteous by their deeds or it will cause them to be lead away in lewdness. Either way I have led them AWAY from Christ. That is neither faith in Christ nor love for our brethren.

**Philippians 3:3: For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.**

**Romans 2:29 But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.**

## **APPLICATION:**

1. If the Lord uses you and I for the least thing in his service--amidst this assembly or any other--like he did young Timothy--he will give a submissive and teachable heart.

Remember the word of instruction from Hebrews--Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the END of their conversation. To what END was Paul instructing Timothy?

It was for the glory of Jesus Christ the Lord and so that the church's might be "established in the faith".

Timothy was given a submissive heart to deny his own flesh!

**Illustration:** Clay you can't do it!

2. The Lord proves us to be servants instead of self-serving.

Timothy was at liberty so that he did not have to be circumcised. It would not have altered his standing before God whatsoever. But if he rejected the one God gave to guide him, if Timothy would have insisted on having his own way he would have proven to be, not strong in the spirit, but weak because of the flesh. But Timothy would have proven to Paul that he knew very little about the liberty we have in Christ Jesus. He would have proven that he was yet in the flesh--more concerned with drawing attention to himself--in this case with his liberty--than with serving the Lord's people.

Such a weak believer will greatly hinder the edification of the saints. The flesh never profits. **I Corinthians 10: 23: All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. 24: Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.** (another's well-being, seek the other brethren's edification)

**Illustration:** We use our dispositions as excuses for our rebellion. Peter—ran in the tomb; I want forsake you, etc... Peter came from a long line of quick tempered, over indulgent people—so do we--we all came from Adam. But God knows how to deliver us from that. It is called liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ. We say we believe but he brings to a place where we really have to consider, like Timothy, am I serving my flesh? Am I drawing attention to my flesh? How then can I say I truly put no confidence in it?

The Lord brings to mind that though Christ was equal with the Father, yet he humbled himself and took upon the form of a servant, and became obedient even unto death." Because it was profitable for his brethren to lay down his life. His example alone, will not humble our heart, but his presence in our heart—the Power and Wisdom of God will. Then we always confess to the Lord and to our brethren like Timothy did, "I'll do whatever is best for the brethren. Let me be a help not a hindrance." That is what it is to be circumcised in the heart--to realize my flesh will only hinder and not help.

3. The most painful of trials are usually the most profitable.

Timothy is at least 20 years of age when he is told it will be best for him to be circumcised. But this painful trial proved profitable.

One, it made Timothy to realize that when Christ delivered us he truly saved us from this flesh.

Secondly, it was good for the brethren.

**Acts 16: 4: And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. 5: And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.**

Are you God's servant? Then you will hear his servants who have spoken to you the word of God and follow what they teach stirred up by Christ the end of their conversation.

Are you Christ's servant? Then you will walk in the spirit of liberty serving the brethren rather than in the dead, letter, insistence of this pride-filled flesh.

Are you truly Christ's? Then you will look back on whatever painful trial he has sent you through and say with joy, God did it, for the glory of Christ and the good of his brethren.

**I Corinthians 9: 19: For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20: And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21: To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22: To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. 23: And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*.**

The music from a heart of grace is concerned for the sake of Christ our Strength, our Deliverance, our Liberty! Its lyric is: **If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.**