

**Differences of Conviction** Acts 15:36-16:5 [www.bible-sermons.org](http://www.bible-sermons.org) October 8, 2017

In the last few weeks we've seen the momentous change that occurred in the early church when they established the fact that Gentiles did not need to keep the laws of Moses to be saved. Peter even made the point that it was by the grace of God that Jew and Gentile are saved (Acts 15:11<sup>i</sup>). We saw in Paul's letter to the Galatians the declaration that no one is saved by the works of the law. The only way we can be right with God is by faith in what Jesus did for us (Galatians 2:16<sup>ii</sup>). In Jesus' death, our sin debt is paid. In His resurrection, we are empowered to live in newness of life. Paul ends Galatians chapter two by saying that if it was possible to be made right with God by being good, for if man could be good enough to please God, then there was no need for Christ to die or for God's grace (Galatians 2:21<sup>iii</sup>). We could just obey His laws to be righteous; but we all know that is impossible for mankind. We all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23<sup>iv</sup>).

This is the great difference between the God of the Bible who is perfect in holiness and requires justice and the god or way of all other religions. All other faiths require a person to earn their right to enter heaven or bliss or nirvana. The Bible says man's heart too wicked and good deeds don't negate justice for bad ones. Jesus made the radical declaration that sin wasn't only wicked acts, but was also the desires expressed in our thoughts (Matthew 5:28<sup>v</sup>). Mankind often looks at his own goodness by comparing with other people, but God's standard is Himself, and we all fail. That is why we need God's grace and to accept the justice He provided for us in Jesus. The God of the Bible has the highest standard, but also the greatest love and grace of any religion.

Establishing the conviction and understanding that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone caused the missionary movement to exponentially increase. It is a conviction that is alive and well in Bible believing churches, but many reject the message today saying it is an antiquated idea. Granted, it is an ancient idea. It goes all the way back to Abel's sacrifice (Hebrews 11:4<sup>vi</sup>). It was a concept thousands of years old at the time of Christ. And in fact, the sacrificial death of Jesus on our behalf was the fulfillment of dozens of prophecies and types and shadows going back thousands of years. But it certainly is not antiquated. It is as relevant today as ever. This decision of the council only confirmed what had been foreseen by the prophets and declared by Jesus. There is nothing antiquated about the love of God for imperfect people (Romans 5:8<sup>vii</sup>).

Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch and joined the preaching and teaching team there. *<sup>36</sup> And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."* Acts 15:36 The spiritual welfare of new disciples should always be on our hearts. Have you led someone to Christ, or been an influence in their conversion, or just happen to be associated with someone who has recently come to faith in Jesus? How are they doing? Are they growing in the faith? Are their beliefs still biblical? Just as we long to hear our children are doing well and staying on track, so we desire that our

spiritual children are growing in the faith and spiritually healthy (Galatians 4:19<sup>viii</sup>). Paul was ready to go back and check on them despite the hardships he had endured there and the dangers he would face again.

*<sup>37</sup> Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.* Acts 15:37-38 Remember that Mark is the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10<sup>ix</sup>). While Mark had failed to persevere with them on the last mission, his cousin Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36<sup>x</sup>), wanted to give him a second chance. It was Barnabas that first introduced Paul to the Apostles (Acts 9:26-30). It was Barnabas who searched him out and brought him to help in Antioch. Barnabas had a big heart. But Paul was an uncompromising leader who does not want the gospel hindered in any way.

We see their difference in gifts in the letter to the Galatians. Peter had come to Antioch to visit the mostly Gentile church. When other Jews came up from Jerusalem, they ate their kosher food at a separate table and Peter and Barnabas joined them. Paul rebuked Peter and thereby Barnabas as well. He exposed their hypocrisy by telling them they acted one way before the Jewish brothers from Jerusalem came and another way after they came. By separating themselves from the Gentiles, the unspoken message to the Gentiles was that we all better obey the laws of Moses and that we are somehow better if we do (Galatians 2:13-14<sup>xi</sup>). Barnabas big heart for his Jerusalem brothers caused him to compromise. Paul's passion for purity and truth called them on their hypocrisy. These are the same two differing gifts that were clashing over whether to take John Mark with them when going on another mission trip.

*<sup>39</sup> And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.* Acts 15:39-40 Two great men can fiercely disagree over something on which we see two sides in Scripture. There is the encourager who has compassion and helps others (1 Thessalonians 5:14<sup>xii</sup>). There is the purist, who recognizes the importance of the mission and understands that leaders should be above reproach and be tested (1 Timothy 3:2<sup>xiii</sup>). There is no clear instruction as to what to do in these situations. Luke does not tell us if one party made the right choice. The only hint as to how the church felt was that it commended Paul and Silas to the grace of the Lord. Nothing further is said about Barnabas and John Mark's mission.

These kinds of disagreements arise in ministry, in churches, and denominations. It isn't necessarily an issue of right and wrong. Matthew Henry mentions this kind of disagreement in his commentary. He wrote, "Even those that are united to one and the same Jesus, and sanctified by one and the same Spirit, have different apprehensions, different opinions, different views, and different sentiments in points of prudence. It will be so while we are in this state of darkness and imperfection; we shall never be all of

*one* mind till we come to heaven, where light and love are perfect.”<sup>xiv</sup> There will be a day when we are all of the same mind, but that day is not yet. Until then, we should cordially agree to disagree and follow our conviction without bitterness or anger.

Out of this strong disagreement, the missionary effort was doubled. That isn’t a bad thing, and in fact it very may well be what God intended. Though the disagreement was sharp, the two men did not lose respect for one another. Later, in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he wrote that Barnabas was a fellow laborer who shared his life and labor (1 Corinthians 9:6<sup>xv</sup>). In the second letter to Timothy, Paul asked for John Mark to be sent, as he would be helpful for the ministry<sup>xvi</sup> (2 Timothy 4:11<sup>xvii</sup>).

Think of the boldness and dedication both these teams had. They had escaped a plot to stone them in one city, Paul had even been stoned and left for dead in another, and chased out of towns, and they knew they would probably face the same kinds of persecution if they returned. Nevertheless, they chose to do so. Unlike the previous mission journey, the Holy Spirit did not direct the elders to send them off. They had both already been set apart for this work, and that calling was still on both of them (Acts 13:2<sup>xviii</sup>). They went by faith, trusting God to lead and guide them.

Both teams first went through their homelands but would then go on to lands they had never seen and establish churches everywhere they went. Paul and Silas would see God break them out of jail (Acts 16:26<sup>xix</sup>), the Spirit guide them to regions where people were waiting to hear the good news, and have narrow escapes from life-threatening persecution. It was an honor to be called, and they went out trusting God.

<sup>41</sup> *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.* Acts 15:41 Syria had other churches besides the one in Antioch. Paul and Silas made their way through those churches and then traveled a Roman trade route that went through a high mountain pass on their way to the churches in Cilicia. That was the furthest point of Paul’s first missionary journey. They shared the decision of the Jerusalem council and encouraged them with the testimonies from other churches, as well as teaching them from the Scriptures.

<sup>1</sup> *Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.* Acts 16:1 Remember that Lystra was where Paul had been stoned. In the relatively new church established on the first trip was a disciple named Timothy. We learn from Paul’s later letter to Timothy of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice who were Jewish women that had taught Timothy the Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5)<sup>xx</sup>. Paul says nothing about the faith of Timothy’s Greek father so we might assume he was not a believer. He is spoken of in the past tense, so he must have died before this time. Marriage to non-Jews was forbidden, but it was not unusual among the diaspora.

One of our most important callings as Christian parents is to convey our faith to our children as Eunice and Lois had done. This passage just happens to come at the time of

the dedication of little Rex Taylor to the Lord. I love these God-incidences when God times our present text to something that is happening in the congregation. It reminds us that God is in the details. Because Eunice and Lois were faithful to teach their grandson and son the Scriptures and the importance of faith, Timothy would become a disciple of Paul and a gifted teacher in the churches. He would co-author letters with Paul and be sent by Paul to handle problems that arose in the churches of Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17<sup>xxi</sup>), Philippi (Philippians 2:19<sup>xxii</sup>), and Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2<sup>xxiii</sup>).

*<sup>2</sup> He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.* Acts 16:2 This is one of the qualifications of an elder, to be a respected member of the community (1 Timothy 3:7<sup>xxiv</sup>). His faith and character stood out enough to be noticed by others.

*<sup>3</sup> Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.* Acts 16:3 Because he was well known in the Jewish community as the son of a Greek, Paul thought it necessary to remove any hindrance from Jews hearing the gospel from Timothy, so he had him circumcised. That is revealing, because in the letter to the Galatians Paul mentions that Titus went with him to Jerusalem and the brothers allowed him, an uncircumcised Gentile, to be among them as a brother (Galatians 2:3<sup>xxv</sup>). The council had already decided there was no need for Gentile converts to be circumcised. This exemplifies Paul's belief that we should be all things to all men to win them. We should give up our rights and privileges that might offend others. We don't have to, but we are willing to do so that they might hear our message of the love of God demonstrated in Jesus (1 Corinthians 8:9<sup>xxvi</sup>).

It has been said that **we all need a Paul**. That is someone who can mentor us, someone who has been down the road we are heading down. That person should be the godly example that we hope to become. They may make mistakes, like Barnabas and Peter did, but their heart is to serve the Lord and the evidence of their love for Jesus is seen in their decisions and manner of life.

We all need **a Silas**, a brother or sister in the faith that comes along side us to walk with us in our calling. We need their encouragement and comradery. Often this is our spouse. But it may be another person who has the same vision and direction in life that we do. This is a rare privilege that we should not pass up when God provides it. Men, we have a hard time accepting this need, but if we pass it up out of pride, we miss a real blessing.

We all also need **a Timothy**, someone younger in the Lord whom we can teach and lead in a godly way (2 Timothy 2:2)<sup>xxvii</sup>. We have learned lessons that we need to share with others. Jesus told us to disciple others (Matthew 28:19<sup>xxviii</sup>). A Timothy is someone eager to learn from you. Other than your spouse, these should be three of the most important people in your life. You share the victories and trials with them. You learn

from one another and inspire one another. We live in a world that is eager to discourage us from full surrender and faith in Jesus. That is one reason why the comradery of these three is so needed. Can you identify them in your own life? If not, do you have an idea who they might be? Stay aware and open, and pray for God to direct you to each of these.

*<sup>4</sup> As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.*

Acts 16:4 As they journeyed through the cities they shared the three points from the Jerusalem council. Some of those churches had already been influenced by the Judaizers. They needed to know they were not under the yoke of the Law. But they also needed the reminder to not appear to be compromising with idolatry so that their testimony would be pure (1 John 5:21<sup>xxix</sup>).

*<sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.*

Acts 16:5 Through the visits by Paul and Silas, the affirmation that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, and Scripture that Paul and Silas no doubt shared with the churches, the believers were strengthened in their faith. When believers are strengthened in their faith, they attract others to faith. They are emboldened to share the gospel of Jesus with others. The result is that the church grew numerically every day. We, too, need to understand the message to those early churches. We need to be different from the world around us. James calls it keeping ourselves unstained from the world and having a heart for the needy (James 1:27<sup>xxx</sup>). That is a result of the new life in us when we put our faith and hope in Jesus.

In closing, we have seen that though we may have sharp differences with fellow believers, we still need to respect and honor one another, and certainly never harbor any bitterness (Hebrews 12:15<sup>xxxi</sup>). Do you have a Paul in your life? How about a Silas? And how we all need a Timothy! Are we being strengthened in our faith so that we spiritually mature and so that the church can grow? If not why not? Are our priorities misplaced? Are we taking to heart what God is showing us? Let us take a moment of silence to consider what we have heard and how the Spirit of God would apply it to our lives.

#### Questions

- 1 Why was the Jerusalem council's decision so important?
- 2 What was the contention between Paul and Barnabas?
- 3 What can we learn from it?
- 4 What was the result?
- 5 Was their bitterness? How do we know?
- 6 How did Timothy come to faith?
- 7 Why was he circumcised?
- 8 How did God use Timothy?
- 9 Do you have a Paul, a Silas, and a Timothy?
- 10 What did they share with the churches?

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<sup>i</sup> **Acts 15:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

<sup>ii</sup> **Galatians 2:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>iii</sup> **Galatians 2:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

<sup>iv</sup> **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

<sup>v</sup> **Matthew 5:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

<sup>vi</sup> **Hebrews 11:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

<sup>vii</sup> **Romans 5:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>viii</sup> **Galatians 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

<sup>ix</sup> **Colossians 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),

<sup>x</sup> **Acts 4:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,

<sup>xi</sup> **Galatians 2:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

<sup>14</sup> But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

<sup>xii</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

<sup>xiii</sup> **1 Timothy 3:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

<sup>xiv</sup> Henry, Matthew, *Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 200

<sup>xv</sup> **1 Corinthians 9:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?

<sup>xvi</sup> John Piper sermon: Barnabas, the Weakness of a Great Leader

<sup>xvii</sup> **2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

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<sup>xviii</sup> **Acts 13:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

<sup>xix</sup> **Acts 16:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

<sup>xx</sup> **2 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

<sup>xxi</sup> **1 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Philippians 2:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **1 Thessalonians 3:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,

<sup>xxiv</sup> **1 Timothy 3:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Galatians 2:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **1 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Matthew 28:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>xxix</sup> **1 John 5:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

<sup>xxx</sup> **James 1:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;