

Acts 16

Read Acts 16:1-5: We are now moving from church expansion into church development. Paul and Barnabas and many others have spread the message of salvation in Jesus the Christ across Asia. Now the landscape has become a bit of a free-for-all. You have Judaizing legalists from Jerusalem going around preaching that Jesus is not enough. They are telling these impressionable new Christians that you have to keep all of the traditions and the Mosaic Law as well to be saved. The whole point of the Law was to show all men that they are violators of righteous living; in need of *a better way* to get right with God. The entire history of mankind is one of moral failure.

Satan tries to corrupt anything that is beautiful and healthy. The false teachings came in like an avalanche, flooding all of the churches. It became confusing as to who was in charge. Now Paul had a huge job of weeding out all of the nonsense from all kinds of self-appointed experts. He had to develop a stable of lieutenants to make these corrections; and more importantly, teach the pure word of God.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ¹⁶ But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. ¹⁷ And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, ¹⁸ who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. ¹⁹ Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (2 Timothy 2)

Here are some of the false doctrines being brought into the new churches:

False Doctrines in the Early Church Addressed by Paul

During his ministry, the Apostle Paul confronted various false doctrines that threatened the purity of the Gospel and the unity of the early church. Here are some key false teachings Paul addressed:

1. Legalism

- **Description:** Legalism emphasized strict adherence to Jewish law and rituals as necessary for salvation.
- **Paul's Response:** In *Galatians*, Paul argues that faith in Christ, not law, saves believers (Galatians 2:16). He emphasizes grace over works.

2. Gnosticism

- **Description:** Gnosticism taught that salvation was through secret knowledge and that the material world was evil.
- **Paul's Response:** In *Colossians*, Paul refutes this by affirming the goodness of creation and the sufficiency of Christ in salvation (Colossians 1:16-17).

3. Asceticism

- **Description:** Some taught that strict self-denial and ascetic practices were essential for spiritual growth.
- **Paul's Response:** In 1 *Timothy* 4:1-5, he warns against those who prescribe abstaining from certain foods and marriage, affirming that all things created by God are good.

4. Antinomianism

- **Description:** This doctrine suggested that because grace abounds, moral law is irrelevant.
 - **Paul's Response:** In **Romans 6**, Paul strongly refutes this notion, stating that grace should lead to a life transformed, not a life of sin.
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5. Judaizers

- **Description:** A group advocating that Gentile Christians must follow Jewish customs (like circumcision) to be saved.
 - **Paul's Response:** In **Acts 15**, at the Jerusalem Council, Paul defends the position that faith in Christ is sufficient for salvation, without the need for works of the law.
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6. Super Apostles

- **Description:** Paul faced challenges from self-proclaimed leaders who boasted about their credentials and spiritual experiences.
 - **Paul's Response:** In **2 Corinthians 11**, he defends his apostolic authority and teaches that true apostleship is rooted in humility and service.
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7. Misinterpretation of Resurrection

- **Description:** Some denied the resurrection, questioning the hope of believers.
- **Paul's Response:** In **1 Corinthians 15**, Paul passionately defends the resurrection as the cornerstone of the Christian faith, linking it to the hope of believers.

Today, we still have errant teachings in existence. There are cults who claim to follow Jesus, but the details of *who they say that Jesus is does not match with the scriptures*. Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses do not match the fundamentals of Bible-believing Christianity in many ways. There are also churches who elevate their denomination, or their leaders or teachers beyond what is biblical. This includes the Church of Christ, Boston, The Recovery Movement, etc... There are also churches who inject non-biblical positions, such as Catholic traditions with their Pope infallibility and prayers to Mary and the saints, etc...

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. (Deuteronomy 4:2)

There are also very liturgical churches that include a lot of repetition and rote recitations.

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (Matthew 6:7)

Young Timothy was a disciple, who Paul encountered on his journeys. A disciple is a person who takes his faith seriously enough to roll up his sleeves and seriously research the scriptures. There is a more distinct level of discipline and commitment to continue growing in their faith. Our family was blessed to become involved in the AWANA children's ministry. The program is patterned after young Timothy's scriptural training. The program runs from pre-school through High School; and it includes memorizing over a thousand bible verses. These young men and women became stand outs, and the training benefitted them significantly.

Most churchgoing believers are *fed* a message by their pastor or from their favorite radio bible teacher. That is all good, but spiritual development has much to do with taking more responsibility for your own spiritual nourishment. Do others feed us, or do we make the effort to dig into the scriptures and meditate on them ourselves? The biblical word for meditating on scripture comes from the same word used for a cow chewing her cud. She burps up her food over and over and re-chews it to get all of the nutrients out of it. Likewise, we too are expected to take our time chewing on and more-fully contemplating scripture. If you read your verses like a newspaper, then it will only impact you like a newspaper. The scriptures are called a sword; since they are supposed to open us up for inspection and personal revelation, and for removals of hidden spiritual tumors.

God sees around the next corner. Paul unknowingly would need Timothy and other disciples for more than one reason. He would soon become incarcerated. When Paul was imprisoned, his ability to dispatch young Timothy and others to correct false doctrines and encourage the saints was limited to written letters from his jail cell. These letters (epistles) essentially are our New Testament scriptures. If Paul had not been arrested, we would not have much of our New Testament.

Paul was no longer a proud man who was out to prove his achievements or his correctness. Now he was willing to humble and re-invent himself to gain an audience with anyone who could be saved.

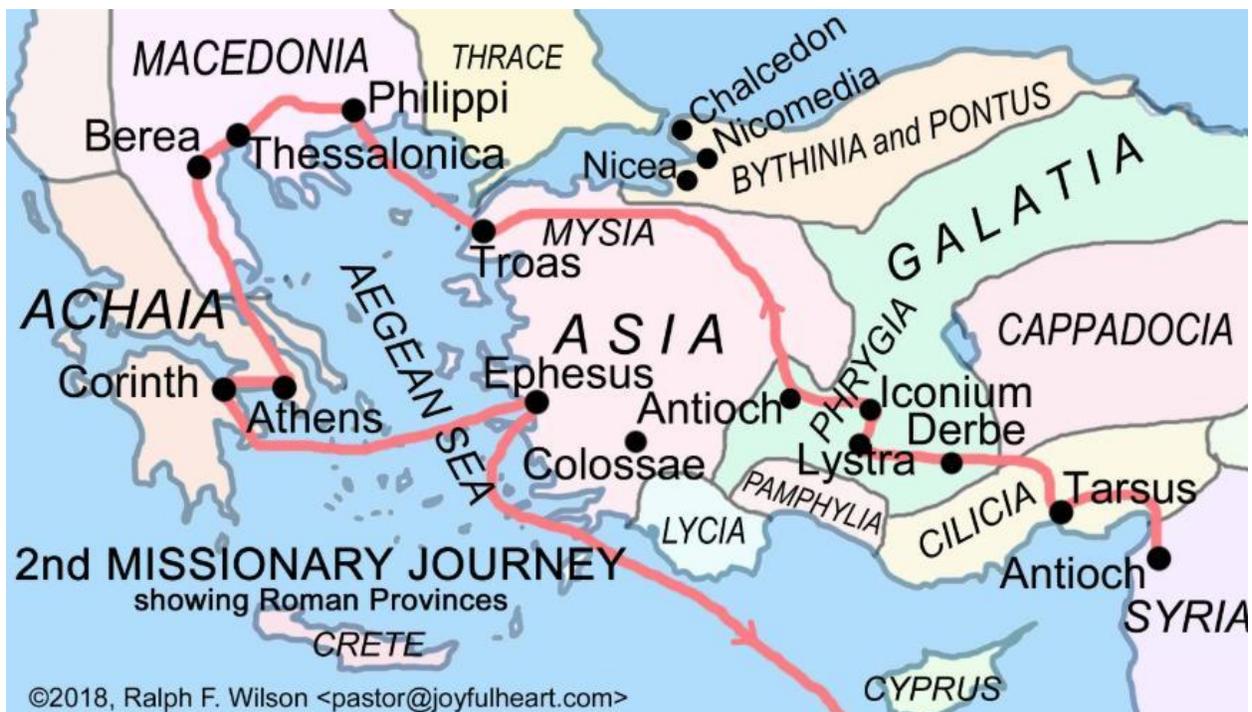
If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3)

Paul saw the value in connecting with people for the sake of the gospel. Accordingly, he had Timothy circumcised. Paul taught that circumcision was not a faith essential; but it represented a barrier to those who were predisposed to legalism. Timothy was half Greek and half Jewish; so he tried to leverage his knowledge and connection to both worlds to win as many souls for Christ as possible.

Read Acts 16:6-10: This paragraph is considered where Dr. Luke joins Paul in his journey. Luke wrote the gospel of Luke as well as Acts. You will notice how the narrative changes from *they* to *we* mid paragraph.

The Holy Spirit is not all about only *green lights*. There are inexplicable closed doors that seem like otherwise good opportunities.

They were not permitted to minister in Asia, but they could move on into Europe. The Bosphorus Strait between Greece and Turkey separate Asia and Europe.



Read Acts 16:11-15: Many of the new churches were from planned destinations in their journeys. Others were from stopovers or en-route places. We think that we know how to proceed; but the Holy Spirit sees more clearly the things that we cannot.

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4)

A synagogue is typically where local populations of Jews gather for worship and prayer. Why did they always consider a place by the river to be good for prayer? They have many ceremonial washings. Some remote places have so few Jews. The Greek word synagogue means to

assemble or gather. It originated in the 6th century BC, where Jews were living away from their homeland. The minimum requirements for a synagogue were:

- 10 adult men
- Copies of scripture
- A space where men could pray
- A mikvah is a body of water used for related ceremonial cleansings and baths
- Most ancient synagogues faced Jerusalem.

Paul was in a sparse region of Jews when he met a woman named Lydia, by the river. She was part of a local prayer group. She became an underwriter of the gospel. She was a successful businesswoman. Some businesspeople can very effectively leverage their freedoms and finances and contacts to be very efficient. They have no church bureaucracy to restrict them. Lydia became an underwriter of the gospel.

Read Acts 16:16-24: Following Jesus is all about becoming a blessing to your community. We do not seek conflict; much to the contrary. Invariably, as you help people, you will collide with those who bring harmful elements into the community. Paul exorcised the demon out of a slave girl who was following them around and creating confusion and distractions. Her slave owners were furious, because she had become a profitable side show that brought her owners income...much like an exotic animal. The slavers brought in trumped up charges against Paul, saying that these men were causing disruptions to their community. It is exactly like this who hate President Trump. Their exposed fraudulent activities outweighed any harmful impact on their people. Our battle is not against all of the anti-protesters. It is against the demons who are blinding people, and promoting every aberrant lifestyle under the sun.

Read Acts 16:25-34: It can seem that the world is against us at times. Oddly, they pay close attention when we get into trouble. The prisoners are curious about what becomes of these men who follow God. Paul and Silas were essentially showcased throughout the jail, as they were beaten, and placed in stocks. They are getting more attention than real criminals; as they are surrounded by thieves and murderers.

Paul and Silas began to praise God; which must have seemed very strange. God performed a mighty miracle, by setting all of the prisoners free. That is what God does. He sets us free from our bondages to sin and other entanglements.

The jailer knew that his life would be taken if one prisoner escaped. He was going to commit suicide, until Paul stopped him. He told him that nobody had escaped. The man was so taken that he brought Paul home to lead his family to salvation in Christ.

Read Acts 16:35-40: Paul's Roman citizenship may have come in handy. I had not noted previously that Silas was also a Roman citizen. Roman citizens were protected. Wrongful punishment brought severe legal consequences. They just asked Paul and Silas to go quietly.