

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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## CHRISTIAN DECISION MAKING

Acts 16:1-10

July 25, 2021

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Today's sermon has three points:

- Why did Paul choose Timothy?
- Why did Paul circumcise Timothy?
- Why did God redirect their missionary plans?

## WHY DID PAUL CHOOSE TIMOTHY

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 16:1-3

*Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup> The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*

**EXPLANATION:** The first time Paul and Barnabas visited Derbe and Lystra, the people responded by trying to worship them as gods. When they objected, they stoned Paul and left him for dead. Paul's ability to return to such places is a good indication of his complete trust in God. He was not afraid because he knew that his future was always in God's hands.

Once there, he met a young man named Timothy. We know from other scriptures that Timothy was the son of Eunice and the grandson of Lois. His father was Greek and is never mentioned by name. Because of the tenses used in scripture, it is assumed that his dad was already dead. Eunice and Lois were women of faith and are credited as having raised Timothy to know the Lord.

Timothy had a good reputation among believers, and we can assume that something about the young man must have impressed Paul. After the conflict that Paul and Barnabas had over John Mark, maybe Paul was convicted that he needed to be a

mentor to a younger disciple.

If the Lord gave Paul explicit instructions regarding the choice of his missionary team, the Bible does not tell us about it. It seems that God allowed Paul the freedom to make that choice by himself, and Paul chose well.

Paul and Timothy grew very close. Two of the books of the New Testament were written as letters from Paul to Timothy, and Paul mentioned him by name in several other places, referring to him as a brother, a co-worker, and even a “son in the faith.”

**ILLUSTRATION:** Saint Augustine, a theologian, philosopher, and bishop who lived during the early sixth century, said, “Love God and do whatever you please: for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved.”

**APPLICATION:** Sometimes God gives explicit instructions. The Bible has lots to say about what is and is not sin, how we should and should not act. However, there are times when God seems to remain silent. Should you buy a car, and if so, what kind? Should you take the job offer or keep looking? Does the Lord care if you name your son Bob, John, or something else? Sometimes we have two or more really good choices. If we are intent upon drawing closer to God and glorifying him in whatever we do, if we are not sinning by choosing one way or another, then like Paul, we can have confidence that God will be with us regardless of which way we choose. Sometimes God gives us freedom to make a choice. And Paul chose Timothy.

## **WHY DID PAUL CIRCUMCISE TIMOTHY?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 16:3-5

*Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.*

**EXPLANATION:** If you remember the sermon from a few weeks ago, verse three may give you reason to pause. Let's read it again, "*Paul wanted to take him (Timothy) along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.*" In the last chapter, we read about Paul and Barnabas's impassioned plea to the elders of the Jerusalem church regarding the very issue of circumcision.

Some of the Jewish Christians were pushing Gentiles to be circumcised and to follow the law. They believed these steps were necessary to really be a Christian. In essence, they wanted Gentiles to first convert to Judaism before becoming a Christian. Paul effectively argued against this practice and explained that salvation is by faith alone. The elders agreed and wrote a letter to the churches saying as much. In fact, this decision is mentioned here in verse 4. As Paul and his team traveled from church to church, they read the letter that the Jerusalem church sent for clarification. So, then, why did Paul think it necessary to circumcise Timothy?

Jewish boys were customarily circumcised when they were 8 days old, but Timothy was not. This is probably because of his Greek father's resistance. When Paul circumcised Timothy, he was doing what a father would normally have done for a Jewish son. In no way was Paul insinuating that Timothy needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. The scriptures already stated that Timothy was a "disciple" and that he had a good reputation among "believers." So, if it was not for salvation, why did Paul ask Timothy to undergo this surgical procedure?

Basically, it was a matter of practicality. In this ministry, Timothy would be working around and with Jews. To avoid unnecessary complications and delays, Paul thought that it would be helpful for Timothy to be a "full-fledged" Jew. In addition, this would allow him access into the synagogues where Paul often went first to preach. In some of Paul's later writings, he would speak about this more. In 1 Corinthians, he talks about becoming all things to all people in order that he might win some to the Lord. Paul did not take the stance that all Gentiles needed to be circumcised or that any needed to be circumcised for salvation, but in this particular instance, he knew that Timothy's circumcision would help their efforts to be more effective ministers of the gospel.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A few years ago, a Southern Baptist pastor here in the States gave his congregation a report about a foreign ministry their church supported. The American church helped fund a Filipino missionary and ministry where young locals learned to become pastors and missionaries themselves. When the first student graduated from the program, he was sent to a nearby village to begin his ministry. Extremists killed him on the very first Sunday. A second young man graduated, and the missionary asked him if he would be willing to go to that same village. The student agreed and was killed on week two. The Filipino missionary was devastated and considered whether another man should be sent to a group of people who so obviously did not want to hear the gospel message. Still, another young graduate stepped up to the plate. He willingly took the assignment knowing the odds.

**APPLICATION:** That does not make sense, does it? The first pastor who was killed – well, he did not know any better. He didn't know the people would kill him. The second pastor? He was willing to give it one more try. But the third pastor? He knew the risks. He knew the chances of success were slim. He knew that he would most likely die, and he went anyway. Some of you might think it doesn't make sense to keep sending someone.

Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy also does not make sense to a lot of people. We read it and shake our heads. We think, "Why did you do that, Paul?" Even theologians over the course of history have debated his motives. Just like the missionary who went into that hostile land knowing that he would most likely never win a single soul for the kingdom, sometimes what we do will not make sense to the people around us. Our family may question us. Our friends may shake their heads. People might even try to talk us out of certain decisions. But you know what? It's not about them. Our decisions may not always make sense to everyone else. The important thing is whether they make sense to God.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A friend of mine was preaching a revival in South America. The first night of the revival, very few people came. The next day, the pastor of the church put candles in all the windows and lit them so they could be seen from outside. That night the church house had plenty of people. Why? Because to the locals it was not really a church service if there were no candles.

**ILLUSTRATION:** An American woman who reaches out to Muslim women in this area wears the head covering - the hijab - that Muslim women wear in order to have

immediate acceptance among them. The hijab does not mean she is Muslim, but the Muslim woman are comfortable around her.

**EXPLANATION:** You may be thinking *that's just common sense*, but circumcising a grown man is rather extreme, especially when Paul argued against it. I agree. Here's why Paul did it. Not only so that Timothy would have immediate acceptance among Jews, but it was so that Paul did not have to argue this point over and over.

## **WHY DID GOD REDIRECT THEIR MISSIONARY PLANS?**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 16:6-10

*Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

**EXPLANATION:** Like most good teams, Paul and his fellow missionaries had a plan. They were going to take the gospel to Asia. This was probably not the huge continent that we consider Asia today. Scholars believe that it was limited to the Roman imperial province called Asia. Still, I imagine that the team was excited to head out in a new direction, but then God stopped them. We do not know how the Holy Spirit stopped them from going into this area, and we certainly do not know why, but the mission came to an abrupt halt. Of course, the evangelists did not let one little setback derail them. So, they set off to Bithynia, an important area of commerce and trade located in what is now central-northern Turkey. But, once again, the Spirit of the Lord intercepted them and would not allow them to go there.

Just imagine their frustration. They were willing. They were eager. They had prepared well and were ready to move forward to fulfill Jesus's commands to go and teach all the nations. Why would God prevent them from doing what he'd asked them to do? Was this really from God, or was it a tactic of Satan? You wonder if Paul and his team huddled up in prayer, questioning themselves, questioning the

Lord.

One thing is sure. This decision had nothing to do with God's love for the people in these areas. Peter, in his first letter, writes to Christians in these very locations. So, God was at work there and would continue to be. Of course, he loved them. Of course, he wanted them to know the salvation message. Still, for some reason, he did not want Paul and this missionary team to go there at this time.

**ILLUSTRATION:** The two young Filipino men who were killed for their faith were not alone in their sacrifice. Many disciples and followers of Christ have died as martyrs for the kingdom cause. Why does God allow things like that to take place? Why does God allow good people to suffer? Why does God allow bad things to occur in our lives? Sometimes, when things go wrong, it's because of our sin. We are reaping what we have sown. Other times, however, there seems to be no reason for our pain. Sometimes God just does not make sense—at least not to us.

- Paul chose Timothy because he was eager to learn. Paul knew he himself was getting older.
- Paul circumcised Timothy so that Timothy would have acceptance among the Jews.
- God directed their missionary plans for reasons we do not know.

What about the third Filipino man? What happened to him when he went into that village? He lived and is still preaching there today. The assistant pastor of the American church that sponsored his school went to that village a couple of years ago. He baptized new believers in the very creek where one of those first pastors was killed. Thank God, that young pastor did not rely on his own wisdom or even the wisdom of those around him. He listened to God, and because of his sacrifice and the sacrifice of those around him, people in that village now know and love the Lord.

**CONCLUSION:** In a very clear way, God eventually directed Paul and his team. Once they knew where God wanted them to go, they went immediately to Macedonia. Among Christians today, this is known as the Macedonian call, and it's very important. Why? Because this is the first written record of the gospel being preached in Europe. For most of us, this is the origin story of our faith. This is the beginning of how the gospel came to us.

This is Christian Decision Making 101. Follow the example of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

- Like Timothy, live a life of service and submission to Christ so that when God gives you choices, you will make decisions that are pleasing to him.
- Like Timothy and the circumcision deal, do not worry about what other people think; do the right thing.
- When your situation is unexpectedly interrupted, stay attentive to the Holy Spirit. Know his voice and obey because you can be confident that he has a plan and that, in the end, it will all work out for the good.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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