

Trusting in the Lord to Guide

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Text: Acts 15:36-16:10

Acts 15:36–41

Paul and Barnabas Separate

[36] 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.” [37] Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. [38] But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. [39] And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, [40] but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. [41] And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (ESV)

Acts 16:1–10

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

[1] 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. [2] He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. [3] 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. [4] 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. [5] So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

The Macedonian Call

[6] And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. [7] And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. [8] So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. [9] And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” [10] And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (ESV)

Main Point: Though twists and turns will come, God's people can trust His sovereign hand to guide them

I. God is always working, even through human weakness (15:36-41)

“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...we shall never be all of a mind till we come to heaven, where light and love are perfect.” -- Matthew Henry

“God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” -- Westminster Confession of Faith

II. God Shapes Us So We Can Serve Others (16:1-5)

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. -- 1 Cor. 9:19-22

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” -- Hebrews 2:17

III. God Shuts Doors and Opens Others (16:6-10)

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm
Deep in His dark and hidden mines, With never failing skill

He fashions all His bright designs, And works His sovereign will
--William Cowper, 1779

Questions for Discussion/Application:

- Re-read the text, Acts 15:36-16:10. What initial observations and insights do you have from reading this text?

- In the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, God was still at work advancing the gospel and accomplishing His kingdom purposes. How is God's sovereignty a comfort and encouragement to us in the midst of difficult circumstances and situations we face?
- In what ways are you personally needing right now to trust God in the midst of perplexing and difficult circumstances?
- Re-read verses 6-10. How have you experienced God's leading over the years through God opening and closing doors?
- When doors are closed that we had hoped God would open, what should our response be as Christians?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God to help us to live the Christian life, trusting fully in Him -- that He is sovereign and He is good in all things.