

## Acts 16

# Do the ends justify the means?

(Does the Spirit of Christ work through any means to reach desired ends?)

### Introduction:

- Chapter 15 ends with Paul and Barnabas splitting up in their mission work. Paul takes Silas and after being “committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord” he travels through modern-day Syria and Turkey.
- In this chapter we have a number of Mission experiences where Paul reveals something of his pattern and practice in ministry. We can assume that this is a series of glimpses into the way the Spirit ministered through Paul.
- We can try to draw principles from these pictures of the Spirit’s work that would instruct us in what to expect of the Spirit today.
- We might look at these six stories as examples of the Spirit’s leading. These ways of the Spirit are often neglected.
- These seemingly unrelated stories share a common theme, they each deal with the question of “ends” and “means.”

### 1.

**The Spirit frees us from the Law of Moses.**

**The Spirit binds us to the law of love.**

“<sup>1</sup> And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, <sup>2</sup> and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> Now while they were passing through the cities, they were **delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders** who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

- We rejoice in our freedom from the Law of Moses as a Covenant of condemnation but we are to never assume that we are free from the constraints of the law of Christ (love).
- Paul had no inclination to make circumcision a necessary sign of faith but he did see it as an appropriate sacrifice so as to not be an offense to those who were weaker. **I Cor.9** “<sup>20</sup> And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law.”
- How much of our freedom are we willing to give up so as to have a more effective ministry. At Xenos Fellowship in Ohio, elders in the church are asked to divest themselves of all personal wealth (above minimum living standards) so as to have a more effective inner city ministry. Are we willing to give up any thing?

- The Apostles had been given the authority to – bind and loose. **Jn.20:23** “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they have been retained.” **Matt.18:18** “Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
- There is good reason for us to give special attention to the epistles, as they constitute the doctrinal boundaries for the Christian life.
- Is fair to say that in each of the many decisions that we make every day, we are favoring our call to freedom or our call to love others?

## 2.

**The Spirit commissions us to go into the world.**

**The Spirit may guide our steps along the way.**

<sup>6</sup> And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; <sup>7</sup> and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; <sup>8</sup> and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And **a vision appeared to Paul** in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us** to preach the gospel to them.

- Paul and Luke “concluded”. This suggests that they had to interpret the significance of the vision together. It was not transparent but needed reflection.
- The Spirit’s “forbidding” in verse 6 is not explained. It may have been through circumstances that needed to be interpreted as well.
- It is one thing to be **prompted** by the Spirit (this may be open to various interpretations and may require notarization) and quite another to being **told** by the Spirit (this is a decree that cannot be challenged).

## 3.

**The Spirit anoints the preaching of the Word.**

**The Spirit opens the heart of the listener.**

<sup>11</sup> Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a {Roman} colony; and we were staying in this city for some days. <sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. <sup>14</sup> And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and **the Lord opened her heart to respond** to the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

- We note that Lydia’s faith awakening was the fruit of Paul’s speaking and the Lord’s opening of her heart. Both were important.
- This passage has a parallel in Luke 24:45 where Jesus opened the mind of the disciples to understand the Scriptures.

- Luke often indicates that the message was heard because of persuasive argument but he indicates that the Lord also plays an important part in awakening faith in a person.
- Why one person believes and another does not is a mystery. We must be careful to avoid two mistakes.
  - 1) I am fully responsible to persuade another person to believe.
  - 2) What I do or say is insignificant because God's election to faith will happen no matter what I do or don't do.
- God's role in our faith is evident in many texts.

#### God's call to repentance and faith:

- **Acts 5:31** — “. . . to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness . . .”
- **Acts 11:18** — “. . . God has granted to the Gentiles repentance . . .”
- **Rom.12:3** — “. . . God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”
- **Eph.2:8-10** — “. . . and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God . . .”
- **II Tim.2:25** — “. . .if perhaps God may grant them repentance . . .”
- **Acts 9:15** — “. . .he is a chosen instrument of Mine . . .”

#### God's call of individuals:

- **Acts 13:48** — “. . . as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”
- **Gal.1:15** — “God . . . who set me apart, even from my mother's womb . . .”
- **Jer.1:5** — “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you . . .”
- **II Thess.2:13** — “. . . God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation . . .”
- **Rom.9:11** — “. . . for though {the twins} were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to {His} choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls. . .”
- The tension between human responsibility and divine foreordination must be respected.

Human responsibility		God's foreordination
“And as for you, you meant evil against me”	<b>Gen.50:20</b>	“but God meant it for good”
“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontious Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do . . .”	<b>Acts 4:27-28</b>	“. . . whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.”
“but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.”	<b>Deut.29:29</b>	“The secret things belong to the Lord our God,”
“Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you” <b>Zach.1:3</b>		“Convert us, O Lord, to thee, and we shall be converted.” <b>Lam.5:21</b>

## 4.

**The Spirit is concerned about the end result.**

**The Spirit is concerned about the means to get there.**

<sup>16</sup> And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling. <sup>17</sup> Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." <sup>18</sup> And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

- Even though this spirit of divination was preaching the truth, Paul was not pleased. The ends did not justify the means. The Devil is often in the means as well as the details.
- Note that when a person is casting out demons in Jesus' name but is not one of the disciples, Jesus says in Luke 9:50 "Do not hinder him for he who is not against you is for you." Then in Luke 11:23 he says "He who is not with Me is against me; and he who does not gather with me, scatters." But in this context Jesus is addressing the activity of demons.
- Our witness for Christ is not only in what we accomplish but how we accomplish it. Kingdom goals can be blemished by carnal means.
- We can learn a lot from secular business but one thing we will not learn is that God often chooses to use "the things that are not" to confound "the things that are." Consider Jesus' choice of the disciples. **I Cor.1** "<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; <sup>27</sup> but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, <sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> that no man should boast before God."
- It is interesting to note how intolerant people become when there is a financial price to be paid. You can tell a lot about a person's heart by looking at the way they relate to money in their personal life and in the church. Money is a factor in most decisions but it is not the most important factor and in some cases it should not be a factor at all. This is especially true when basic principles of the Kingdom are on the line.

## 5.

**The Spirit delivers us from trouble.**

**The Spirit uses us to deliver others from trouble.**

<sup>19</sup> But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, <sup>20</sup> and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, <sup>21</sup> and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." <sup>22</sup> And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order {them} to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard

them securely; 24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened. 27 And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" 29 And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that {very} hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his {household.} 34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

- Suffering and persecution always provide an opportunity for a response of grace and faith. It is not our circumstances but how we respond to them that mark us as walking in the Spirit. Jesus was our example.
- Household salvation included preaching to the whole household. Note however that Paul's instructions for salvation are "believe" not "be baptized." Water baptism is an outward sign of faith.
- Why do some Christians baptize infants? See theology notes #812 on [apptoteach.org](http://apptoteach.org).

Baptism of the infant is understood as a sign of the covenant, signifying membership in the visible people of God. Baptism in the New Testament replaces circumcision in the Old Testament as the covenant sign. The promise of salvation which it symbolizes is to be personally appropriated, by faith, by the child when the age of accountability is reached. In the Lutheran understanding, it is the faith of the parents which supplies the faith associated with the sign of baptism in the New Testament.

- **Gen. 17:11-13** "You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant."
- **Luke 18:15-17** "People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'"
- **Acts 2:39** "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."
- **Acts 16:15** "When she [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home."
- **Acts 16:33** "At that hour of the night the [Philippian] jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized."

- **I Cor.1:16** “Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.”
- **I Cor.7:14** “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”
- **Gal.3:14** “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”
- **Col.2:11-12** “In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

## 6.

**The Spirit calls us to be innocent as doves.**

**The Spirit calls us to be wise as serpents.**

<sup>35</sup> Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men."  
<sup>36</sup> And the jailer reported these words to Paul, {saying,} "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace."  
<sup>37</sup> But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."  
<sup>38</sup> And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans,  
<sup>39</sup> and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city.  
<sup>40</sup> And they went out of the prison and entered {the house of} Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.”

- Paul was not above using the secular system to his advantage in building the kind of respect that would win him a hearing.
- As a result of this appeal, Paul was able to safely stay in the city and continue his ministry.
- There are varieties of gifts, ministries, and effects. **I Cor.12:4-6** “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.” God is concerned about means and ends.