**Paul Begins to Train Timothy**

(Acts 16:1-5)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A somewhat out-of-shape man joined a gym one day, and said to the personal trainer, “I want to impress girls. Which machine should I use?” The trainer sized him up and said, “The ATM machine in the lobby.” He replied, “I’m serious! How about I start my training with a little shadow-boxing?” The trainer said, “Sure. Know yourself out.” Finally, *the trainer* said, “Okay, if you’re really serious, tell me what kind of squats you’re used to doing.” The man answered, “I’m used to doing *diddly* squat!”

Speaking of *training* people, as we begin Acts 16 in our study of this historical book, the Apostle Paul is about to take a young man named Timothy and begin to train *him* for the ministry. The story begins in Acts 16:1, where it says of Paul,

**“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek.”**

Now as I’m sure you know, Timothy ends up being an important man in the New Testament. Paul wrote two epistles to him, and Timothy helped *him* write *six* of his *other* eleven epistles. That’s more than half of them! So he was a major player in the New Testament, and a significant figure in the new program of grace that God gave to the Apostle Paul.

And the first thing we learn about Timothy in verse 1 is that he was already a “disciple” when Paul picked him out to train him. That means he was already *saved,* and Paul didn’t have to lead him to the Lord.

And that’s something I sometimes get asked about at *Berean Bible Society,* because of how Paul *described* Timothy in I Timothy 1:2, where he calls him,

**“...Timothy, *my own son in the faith...”***

We know that that was Paul’s way of saying that he *had* led Timothy to Christ because in Philemon 1:10, he talked about a man he called

**“...my son Onesimus, *whom I have begotten in my bonds...”***

While Paul was in the “bonds” of a Roman prison, he helped a man named Onesimus to be spiritually reborn. That made him Paul’s spiritual son. But how could Paul have fathered *Timothy* if he was already a disciple? I suppose some might suggest from this that he was a Jewish kingdom saint who had believed the kingdom gospel and received Christ long before Paul came to his home town. But that’s a position that would present an awful lot of doctrinal problems too numerous to mention.

The solution is to remember that *this was not Paul’s first visit* to this area. Seven years earlier, some unsaved Jews ran Paul and Barnabas out of town when they were ministering in Iconium, and

**“They...fled unto Lystra and Derbe....*And there they preached the gospel”* (Acts 14:6,7).**

*That’s* when Paul led Timothy to Christ! And that makes him a member of the Body of Christ, not a kingdom saint.

But we know Paul had a little *assistance* in helping Timothy get saved, because long before Paul came to town, verse 1 of our text says that Timothy had a mother who was “a Jewess which believed.” So she was probably the reason Paul wrote to Timothy and reminded him that

**“...*from a child* thou hast known the holy scriptures, *which are able to make thee wise unto salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus*”* (II Timothy 3:15).**

Timothy’s mother prepared his heart to believe on Christ *by teaching him the Scriptures from his childhood!*

And do you know who prepared *her* heart to believe? When Paul wrote,

**“I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, *which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois,* and thy mother Eunice” (II Timothy 1:5).**

It was *Grandma Lois* who prepared Timothy’s mother’s heart to believe, so that she in turn could prepare Timothy’s heart. So if you need proof of how important it is for moms to teach children the Word of God—and bring them to church where they could hear *more* of the Word of God—you’re seeing it in Timothy.

And now that Timothy is saved, Paul can train him so he in turn could train others, as Paul challenged him to do in II Timothy 2:2, where he told him,

**“...the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, *the same commit thou to faithful men,* who shall be able to teach others also.”**

Paul told him, “I trained you, now you train others, so they can train still others!” That’s been going on for 2,000 years now, and I’ve been doing it with a young man named Joshua Dennis for what *seems* like 2,000 years! We’re also training Oscar Ochoa Jr. at our church as well.

But since Lois and Eunice got saved before Paul came to town preaching *grace,* that makes *them* Jewish kingdom saints. That means they won’t get raptured with Timothy to live in heaven in eternity. But don’t feel sorry for them! They’ll catch up with Timothy in New Jerusalem after the millennial kingdom is over, so they won’t miss out on any family reunions in eternity!

But since Grandma Lois raised Momma Eunice in the Jewish faith, she would have taught Eunice what Moses wrote about marrying Gentiles in Deuteronomy 7:1-3:

**“When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee...thou shalt make no covenant with them...*Neither shalt thou make marriages with them...*”**

But we know Tim’s mother Eunice didn’t listen to that, because verse 1 of our text says that his father was a Greek, or a Gentile. *All* the Gentiles were Greeks after Alexander the Great *conquered* all the nations and *made* them Greeks.

Now mixed marriages like that usually didn’t happen *in Jerusalem,* because the Jews’ faith in the law of Moses was *strong* in Jerusalem. But in other countries where Jews lived, mixed marriages were fairly common, for their faith in God’s law was *not* as strong in those areas. And that includes the area of Lystra and Derbe, where Timothy’s parents met and married.

That should tell you that if you want to be strong in *your* faith in *Paul’s* gospel, you need to be in church around God’s people as much as you can. I don’t say that just to fill the seats of our churches. I say that because it’s spiritually good for you.

Now Acts 16:1 *also* says that Timothy’s mom was a Jewess “which believed.” And when it *doesn’t* say that his father was a Greek “which believed,” we have to conclude that she was married to an unbeliever. Some Gentiles believed the kingdom gospel and became proselytes to Judaism, but Timothy’s father didn’t seem to be one of them. And mixed marriages like *that* can be very difficult.

And they usually don’t produce a great man of God like Timothy! That’s why Luke used the word “behold” there in verse 1. The Bible uses that word when it is pointing out something that’s *wondrous* and *unexpected—*like a great man of God coming out of what we call an unequally yoked marriage (IICor.6:14-18). But if you’re *in* a marriage like that, just do what Tim’s mom did and *teach your children the Scriptures from an early age.* You never know what God will be able to do with them if you do.

Now since it had been seven years since Paul led Timothy to Christ, that was enough time for what we read about in the next verse of our text to happen, where it says that Timothy:

**“Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:2).**

By the time Paul returned to this area, Timothy had a good reputation among the “brethren” in the churches in—not just *one* city, but *two.* We know that part of that was Paul’s doing, for after Paul led Tim to the Lord back in Acts 14, he and Barnabas went back to that area a *second* time and did what Luke says in Acts 14:21,22:

**“...they returned again to Lystra....*Confirming the souls* of the disciples, *and exhorting them to continue in the faith.”***

So part of what made Timothy a well-known man of God in two separate cities was the *confirming* Paul gave him a year after he was saved. And by the time the apostle made this *third* trip to Lystra and Derbe, he saw so much that he like in Tim that he decided to take him on as an apprentice, or understudy.

Of course, since Paul was always on the road, that meant Timothy would have to travel *with* him, as we see in verse 3 of our text:

**“Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:3).**

Now when Paul picked a half-Jew like Timothy to travel with him as one of his helpers, that’s a type of what’s going on in the Book of Acts. You see, Paul’s *first* helpers (Barnabas and Silas) were full-blooded Jews, Jewish kingdom saints. But now Paul picked a half-Jew/half-Gentile to be his helper. Later he’s going to pick a full-blooded Gentile named Titus to help him in the Lord’s work.

That’s a picture of how God’s servants went from being Jews to Gentiles as the dispensation of grace unfolded in Acts. First God had *Jews* to serve Him, then a half-Gentile, then a full-blooded Gentile. That progression has led to where we are today, with God’s servants being found solely among the Gentiles.

And there’s *more* typology with Timothy. As you may remember, he was on the *sickly* side, prompting Paul to tell him to

**“Drink no longer water, *but use a little wine* for thy stomach's sake *and thine often infirmities”* (I Timothy 5:23).**

In the Bible, wine is a type *of the Holy Spirit,* as we see with what happened at Pentecost:

**“...they were all *filled with the Holy Ghost*...others mocking said, These men are *full of new wine”* (Acts 2:4,13).**

Do you know why liquor stores are sometimes called things like “Hometown Wine *& Spirits”?* It’s because when you get drunk, another spirit takes you over—a spirit that is *not* you—and makes you do things you wouldn’t ordinarily do—just like the Holy Spirit took over those believers in Acts 2 in a *good* sense.

So Timothy’s need of *wine* is a type of the early church’s need of *the gifts of the Spirit* that enabled *them* to do things they couldn’t ordinarily do. Of course, once the Bible was completed, then *it* became the thing that enables us to do all the things that God wants us to do.

But one thing never changed, and that was how Timothy—being a Jew and a Gentile in one body—was a picture of what we read about in I Corinthians 12:13, where Paul says that

**“by one Spirit are we all baptized *into one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles...”**

The church of today is made up of Jews and Gentiles *in one body,* the Body of Christ—just as Timothy was a Jew and a Gentile in one body. That made him the perfect man for Paul to take with him, as he went around *telling* people about the Body of Christ, because he could point to him as *a living example* of it.

Now we’re not told how old Timothy was when Paul began to train him for the ministry. I was 15 when my first pastor began to train me, and I suppose there might be some who’d say that that’s too young to do any *serious* ministerial training. But I think Timothy was *even younger.*

When Tim got saved seven ears earlier, I figure he was 5, and started training here at 12. You’re probably thinking, “How do you figure that?” Well, look what Paul told Timothy twelve years after he started training him in I Timothy 4:12, where he wrote,

**“Let no man despise *thy youth...”***

Twelve years after Paul started training Timothy, he was still considered *a youth.* The only way I can figure that could happen is if he got saved at age 5, and started training seven years later at age 12, because that would make him 24 when Paul said not to let anyone despise his youth.

Think it through. If Paul started his apprenticeship at age 18, as I guess the norm would be in our own day, then twelve years later he’d have been 30. In a day when the life expectancy wasn’t anywhere near what it is today, it would be hard to call a man of 30 a youth.

Of course, that doesn’t explain why I theorized that Timothy got saved at age 5, and not 4 or 3. Josh says that his eldest daughter came to know Christ when she was 3, and this is not uncommon in homes where the Bible is the focus of family life. But if Timothy was saved at age 5, then he would have begun his training at 12—and what do we know about the age 12 in Scripture? It’s about the age when a Jewish father would barmitzvah his son, and suddenly his *boy* became a *man—*a man who was old enough to start his spiritual apprenticeship with an apostle.

Now all of that tells you two things. First, children can get saved at a very young age. People sometimes scoff when they hear that a child trusted Christ, but Timothy proves they shouldn’t. I can’t tell you how many times Thornton Harrison, the Sunday School teacher at the church I pastor, stood up during Sunday announcements to say that a visiting child had gotten saved in his class that morning. So it’s never too early to begin giving a child the gospel, and praying for his soul.

But the example of Timothy *also* proves that the age of 12 isn’t too young to start serious training for the ministry. I know I was serious at 15, and I still have some homework papers that I did for my first pastor to prove it! It’s *never* too young to start getting serious about serving the Lord.

But now, if Timothy was a member of the Body of Christ, *why’d Paul circumcise him* in verse 3? I mean, we just came out of Acts 15, where Paul convinced the Jerusalem Council that men didn’t *need* to be circumcised and keep the law to be saved. So is Paul being hypocritical here?

Before you answer, remember that later Paul is going to write the epistle of Galatians, where he comes down *hard* on those dear saints for even *thinking* about getting circumcised, reminding them that

**“...every man that is circumcised...*is a debtor to do the whole law”* (Galatians 5:3).**

Circumcision was the first thing a man had to do to begin keeping the law of Moses. But if you did it, it obligated you to do the *rest* of the law—and we are *not* under the law! So why did Paul circumcise Timothy?

Well, you’ll notice that verse 3 doesn’t say that he did it because Tim’s mother was a Jew. It says he did it because his father was a Gentile, and all the Jews *knew* that his father was a Gentile. And Gentiles were *notorious* for their strong aversion to circumcising their sons.

For example, even the Gentile wife of Moses himself *refused* to circumcise her son until God threatened to *kill him* if she didn’t (Exodus 4:24-28). And if it was well-known among the Jews in those quarters that Timothy wasn’t circumcised, that meant when Paul went to *preach* to those Jews in their synagogues, Tim wasn’t going to get past the front door. You see, Jews didn’t *let* uncircumcised men into their houses of worship. We know it would have gotten Paul *killed* if he brought a Gentile in to the *temple,* for that’s what almost happened when some unsaved Jews *accused* him of that. Acts 21:27-31 says that,

**“...the Jews...when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people....Crying out, Men of Israel, *help:* This is the man, *that...brought Greeks also into the temple*, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they *supposed* that Paul had brought into the temple.)....*And...they went about to kill him...”***

So it’s clear that Paul circumcised Timothy *out of respect for the convictions of the Jews.* Hey, isn’t that what James just decided that members of the Body of Christ should do, back in Acts 15:19-21, where he declared,

**“Wherefore my sentence is, *that we trouble not...*the Gentiles....But that we write unto them, that they abstain from...*blood*. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”**

James didn’t tell those Gentiles to avoid eating blood because *the law* said not to eat blood. He told them not to eat blood so it wouldn’t offend the convictions of the Jews.

And that’s what Paul is doing here. It’s what he *always* did, according to what he told the Corinthians when he explained how

**“...unto the Jews I became as a Jew, *that I might gain the Jews;* to them that are under the law, as under the law, *that I might gain them that are under the law...*this I do *for the gospel's sake...”* (I Corinthians 9:20,23).**

Paul says, “I’ll act like a Jew under the law if it’ll give me a chance to *preach* to a Jew under the law, and gain his soul.”

As we discussed in a previous lesson, you have the liberty to eat blood, but if you are dining with a Jew who you’re trying to gain for Christ, why not order your steak well done instead of rare. Just smother it with Heinze 57 sauce as God intended well done steak be consumed!

But now, let me ask you a question. If it was okay to be religiously circumcised, is it also okay to be *baptized?* I sometimes get asked that by grace believers who move to an area where there’s no grace church, so they find a Baptist church that is preaching the gospel and teaching the Scriptures as best they know how. These grace believers are eager to share what they know about the grace message, of course, so they volunteer to teach when a position opens up—only to be told they *can’t* teach because they’re not baptized.

So they ask me if they should get baptized to gain the Baptists with an understanding of Paul’s gospel. And since Paul circumcised Timothy to gain the Jews, you’d think I’d tell them it’s okay to be baptized to gain the Baptists.

You say, “You can’t tell people to get baptized, because water baptism was once required for salvation. So to get baptized would confuse the truth of the gospel, because the truth of the gospel *today* is that men *don’t* have to be baptized with water to be saved.

But circumcision was *also* required for salvation, and Paul circumcised Timothy. Well, if it’s okay to be circumcised, why wouldn’t it be okay to be baptized?

Here it helps to remember that circumcision wasn’t just for salvation, and it didn’t just obligated you to keep the rest of the law. Circumcision was also *the thing that made you Jewish.* That is, it wasn’t just a part of their *religion,* it was part of their *nationality.* So Paul circumcised Timothy to make him acceptable to the Jews *as a member of the Hebrew nation,* and *not* to make him acceptable to the Jews as a member of the Hebrew *religion.*

But water baptism is different! It is not a part of *anybody’s* nationality to be Baptist. Jews could trace their family lineage back to Abraham, the man who was *given* the rite of circumcision. But Baptists today can’t trace their family tree back to John the Baptist, the man that Baptists point to as the father of their church, so to speak.

Now if that’s not clear, look what happened when Paul brought one of his *other* helpers to the Jerusalem Council. Paul says,

**“...neither Titus, who was with me, *being a Greek,* was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, *who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus,* that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; *that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”* (Galatians 2:3-5).**

Paul *refused* to let a full-blooded Gentile like *Titus* be circumcised because the Jews were saying he couldn’t be saved without it. They were insisting that had to join the Jewish *religion* by being circumcised to be saved—just as Gentiles had done for centuries before that under the law. So letting *Titus* be circumcised wouldn’t be an example of Paul gaining the Jews. It would be an example of the Jews gaining Titus. It would be an example of Titus joining their religion.

But Paul let *Timothy* be circumcised to join the Jews *nationality,* to get the Jews to join *Paul’s* religion, so to speak! But you cant get baptized to join the Baptist nationality, for there’s no such thing! So the only reason to be baptized today would be to join *their* religion. And based on what Paul says about Titus there, he wouldn’t give place to that—no, *not for an hour.* And neither should you, if you want the truth of the gospel to continue. For the truth of the gospel in the present dispensation of grace is that water baptism has no place in God’s program for today.

Well, now that Paul has picked Timothy to “go forth with him,” it was time to go forth with him! Acts 16:4 says,

**“And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.”**

Now in case you forgot what “decrees” it’s talking about there, it was the ones we just finished reading about that were made in Acts 15, the ones James made when he told the Gentiles they didn’t have to be troubled to keep the law, but that they should abstain from blood so as not to offend the Jews. The elders of the Jerusalem church then joined him in wring a letter *telling* the Gentiles about that decree. And Paul is not *delivering* that letter wherever he goes.

And now he could point to Timothy as a living example of someone who got circumcised to keep from offending the Jews! Talk about going the extra mile so as not to offend someone. Circumcision for a grown boy is an extremely painful procedure. But it was one that the young man was willing to undergo to be sensitive to the convictions of the Jews. If you haven’t learned by now, it’s *always* good to be a living example of what you teach, *whatever* you’re teaching. Because, if you will, you’ll find that will help people believe what you’re saying, as it did for Paul in the final verse of our text:

**“And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5).**

As a grace believer, I’m sure you know what it is that establishes believers in the faith, right? Paul ended his epistle to the Romans with a prayer, saying,

**“Now to him that is of power to stablish you *according to my gospel...”* (Romans 16:25).**

It’s *Paul’s gospel* that establishes believers in the faith, the body of truth that God committed to him. So when Paul *preached* his gospel, verse 5 begins with a “so,” saying that because he preached it, believers were established.

And all of this ended up being the first step in Timothy’s training. And it is extremely significant that Lesson #1 was how to be respectful of the convictions of others as you share grace truth with people. I say that it’s significant because somehow a lot of grace believers seem to have *missed* Lesson #1. Many of them seem *oblivious* of the convictions of others as they share grace truth with them, even *belittling* their convictions and running roughshod over their beliefs.

Don’t you be one of them! Don’t be like the grace believer who lives next door to a 7th Day Adventist who thinks it’s a sin to cut the grass on Saturday, but he cuts his grass on Saturday anyway. Then, when his neighbor objects, he whips out his pocket New Testament—which he just “happens” to have on him—and shows him where Paul says we are not under the law!

That is *not* showing the same spirit that Paul showed with Timothy! Paul didn’t try to crash the gate of the synagogues with Timothy, carrying a protest sign that declared “We’re not under the law!” He graciously *yielded* to the convictions of others, and you should too.

Then, if years from now your neighbor find out that you *don’t* believe we are under the law of the sabbath, but you observed it all those years out of respect for his convictions, he’s not going to think you’re a *hypocrite.* He’s going to think you’re *gracious,* and *respectful,* the personification of the grace message you profess to believe. And that will win him over to grace faster than being a stubborn, ungracious, pig-headed grace believer for sure!