

PAUL: A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

By

F. B. Meyer, B. A.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

A LESSON OF GUIDANCE

(Acts 16)

Oh let Thy sacred will
All Thy delight in me fulfil!
Let me not think an action mine own way,
But as Thy love shall sway,
Resigning up the rudder to Thy skill.”
- Herbert

AFTER a brief respite, Paul proposed to Barnabas that they should return to visit the brethren in every city wherein they had proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fared. This was the beginning of his second missionary journey, which was to have far-reaching results.

Barnabas suggested that they should take Mark with them as before, a proposition which his companion positively refused to entertain. Mark had deserted them on the threshold of their previous expedition, and there was grave fear that he might do so again. Barnabas was as strong on the other side. Perhaps he felt that he had some rights in the matter, as the senior in age, because of the tie of blood between himself and his sister's son. At last the contention reached so acute a stage that the Church became aware of it, and took Paul's side, for the narrative of the Acts tells us that when Paul chose Silas, and went forth, “**being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.**”

Whenever we are about to undertake some great enterprise for God, in proportion to its importance we may expect to encounter the strong man armed, “straddling across the way.” How often he attempts to overthrow us through the temper or disposition of our associates! The crew mutinies as Columbus nears the long-looked-for coast! Nothing tests us more than this. It is difficult to be resolute and gentle, strong and sweet. Beware of temptation from this side, fellow-workers.

If you are compelled to differ from your companions, let it be in love; let them feel that you have no interests to serve but those of truth. If Lot quarrels with you, it is best to give him his own terms and send him away; God will give you ever so much more than he can take. Only do nothing to drive the Holy Dove of God from your bosom. Perfect love is the only atmosphere in which the Divine Spirit can manifest his gracious help.

Through regions rich in flowers and natural beauty Paul and Silas traversed Syria and Cilicia, confirming the infant churches, which probably owed their existence to Paul's earliest efforts. So through the Cilician Gates to Tarsus, his native city. But there was no welcome for him there. Probably the old home was either broken up or forever shut against him; and the two companions in travel threaded the defile in the mountains behind Tarsus, which led them up to the central plain with its volcanic deposits and biting winds. After some days toilsome journey they came to Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium, so tragically associated with the former journey.

What a welcome Paul would receive! How many inquiries would be made after Barnabas! How much to tell and hear! There was, however, a special burden on the Apostle's heart.

On the occasion of his previous visit his attention had been arrested by a mere lad, who had been strongly attracted to him, watching with a lad's enthusiastic devotion his teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, and patience, and perhaps mingling with the little group that stood around him when he sank beneath the stones of those who a few days before had offered him worship.

He asked for Timothy, and was glad to learn that he had not been faithless to the teachings and training of the godly women who had watched over his opening character, and instructed him in the Holy Scriptures. It would seem that the whole family was more or less closely associated with the infant church life; so much so that, though the mother was a Jewess, she had not urged her son's compliance with the initial Jewish rite. It had therefore remained in abeyance, according to the broad and liberal views which Paul inculcated.

All the reports about Timothy were favorable. He was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. The more Paul knew of him the more he was attracted to him, and finally proposed that he should accompany him on his travels as his own son in the faith. He administered the rite of circumcision, not because he deemed it obligatory, but as a matter of convenience, that there might be no obstacle to the admission of his young assistant to Jewish synagogues.

A simple ordination service was then held, in which Timothy was solemnly set apart for his great work. The elders gathered round and laid their hands on his bowed head, and prayed. In answer to their believing intercession, he received the gift of sacred speech; and Paul, in after years, reminds him to stir up the gift that was in him through the laying on of his own hands and of those of the presbytery.

Thus the Spirit of Jesus led his servant to call new laborers into the harvest field and endow them with special qualifications for their work.

It appears, indeed, that Paul had remarkable power in these directions; for, in his Epistle to the Galatians, he expressly refers to his having ministered to them the Holy Spirit by faith; and when he laid his hands on the twelve disciples at Ephesus, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied. In the old time it seems to have been possible for men of God to receive for others, and transmit to them, by faith, spiritual gifts, adapting them better for their life work. But this was altogether distinct from any mechanical communication of sacramental grace, and was the peculiar prerogative of those who were themselves richly endued with the Spirit of Jesus.

Leaving Lystra, Paul and his companions visited the churches in the highland region of Phrygia and Galatia, everywhere distributing the letter of James.

They next essayed to go into the populous and influential cities of Asia Minor, such as Colossae, Laodicea, and Ephesus. What could they do better than bear the light of the Gospel to those teeming multitudes who sat in darkness and the shadow of death? Yet it was not to be: **“They were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to speak the Word in Asia.”**

In after years Paul would do some of the greatest work of his life in that very region; but just now the door was closed against him by the Holy Spirit. The time was not yet ripe for the attack on these apparently impregnable bastions of the kingdom of Satan. Apollos must come there for pioneer work. Paul and Barnabas are needed yet more urgently elsewhere, and must receive further training before under taking this responsible and arduous task.

The travelers therefore took a northern route, with the intention of entering the important province of Bithynia, lying along the shores of the Black Sea; but when they came to a point in the great Roman road, opposite Mysia, and were attempting to go out of Asia Minor into Bithynia, the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not.

Checked when they attempted to go to the West, they were now stopped as they sought to go to the Northeast; and there was nothing for it but to keep straight on, until they came out at the terminus of the road, on the seacoast, at the famous harbor of Troas, the ancient Troy.

There they met with Luke, whose presence is thenceforth denoted by the significant personal pronoun *we*; and thence the man of Macedonia beckoned the little missionary band across the straits to set up the banner of Christ on the hitherto untouched continent of Europe.

What an extremely attractive title that is for the Holy Spirit!

He is preeminently the Spirit of Jesus. When Jesus was glorified, He was given in Pentecostal fulness, and the chief aim of his mission and ministry is to glorify the Lord Jesus and gather together the members of his Body, fitting them for union with their Head. He is also the Comforter and Guide of the saints until the Church is presented faultless to her Lord; as Eliezer conducted Rebekah to his master's son.

It is interesting to study the method of his guidance as it was extended towards these early heralds of the Cross. It consisted largely in prohibitions, when they attempted to take another course than the right. When they would turn to the left, to Asia, He stayed them; and when they sought to turn to the right, to Bithynia, again He stayed them. He shut all the doors along their route, and bolted them; so that they had no alternative but to go straight forward.

In the absence of any prohibition, they were left to gather that they were treading the prepared path for which they had been created in Christ Jesus.

Whenever you are doubtful as to your course, submit your judgment absolutely to the Spirit of God, and ask Him to shut against you every door but the right one. Say, "Blessed Spirit, I cast on Thee the entire responsibility of closing against my steps any and every course which is not of God. Let me hear thy voice behind me whenever I turn to the right hand or the left. Put thine arrest on me. Do not suffer me."

In the meanwhile, continue along the path which you have been already treading. It lies in front of you; pursue it. Abide in the calling in which you were called. Keep on as you are, unless you are clearly told to do something else. Expect to have as clear a door out as you had in; and if there is no indication to the contrary, consider the absence of indication to be the indication of God's will that you are on his track.

The Spirit of Jesus waits to be to you, O pilgrim, what He was to Paul.

Only be careful to obey his least prohibitions; and where, after believing prayer, there are no apparent hindrances, believe that you are on the way everlasting, and go forward with enlarged heart.

**"Teach me to do thy will,
for Thou art my God:
thy Spirit is good,
lead me into the land of uprightness."**

Do not be surprised if the answer comes in closed doors. But when doors are shut right and left, an open road is sure to lead to Troas. There Luke awaits, and visions will point the way, where vast opportunities stand open, and faithful friends are waiting.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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