

Acts 15:35–16:5

Means by Which the Spirit Strengthened Churches in Faith and Increased Them in Number

**Saturday, November 19, 2022 ▫ Read Acts 15:36–16:5**

*Questions from the Scripture text: Who speaks to whom in v36? Where does he suggest they go? To do what? Whom did Barnabas want to bring (v37)? Why did Paul insist not to (v38)? How does the argument proceed (v39)? What happens to Paul and Barnabas? Whom does Barnabas take? Where does he go? Whom does Paul choose (v40)? What is done to them before they depart? By whom? Unto what? Through where does Paul go (v41)? Doing what along the way? Until he comes to where (16:1)? Who was there? The son of what ethnicity woman? Of what faith? What ethnicity is his father? What people spoke of him in what way (v2)? What did Paul want Timothy to do (v3)? What does he do to Timothy? Because of whom? And why? Through where do they go (v4)? What does he deliver to them? What happens to the faith of the churches (v5)? And what happens to the number of the churches?*

**How does the Lord strengthen His church?** Acts 15:36–16:5 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these eleven verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **the Lord strengthens His church by His blessing upon follow-up ministry by partially sanctified men and the church's unity in doctrine and practice.**

**Follow-up ministry.** It is Paul who desires to go and follow up on their first missionary journey (15:36a). The decision of the Jerusalem Synod has obvious implications for them (16:4), and as Christian love always is, he is interested to know how they are doing (v36b). There is obviously the intent to "strengthen the churches" (v41), and indeed by the end of the passage, the Spirit tells us that "the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily (v5).

**Partially sanctified men.** One of the reasons to know how they are doing, and strengthen them, is that both the churches generally and the elders under whose care they left them (cf. 14:23) are fallible men. But so are young ministers. John Mark had washed out of the first missionary journey (v38, cf. 13:13), and Barnabas wants to use bring him, ostensibly to give him another opportunity for serving and growing. But seasoned ministers are also growing, and there is a sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas (v39a).

One thing that we see here is that not all conflict must be resolved in order for men to continue ministering. Barnabas takes Mark anyway and sails to Cyprus. The text speaks more fully positively of Paul's departure in that he and Silas are commended by the brethren to the grace of God. But it does not necessarily speak negatively of Barnabas.

Barnabas's labors pay off, and later Paul not only commends Mark to the Colossians (cf. Col 4:10) but even specifically requests Mark as very useful to him in ministry (cf. 2Tim 4:11). Sometimes, finding an imperfect way forward is blessed by God to the curing of some of those imperfections. Mark ends up trained, and the relationship ends up restored, even on this side of glory.

**The church's unity in doctrine and practice.** A great part of that strengthening of the churches for which Paul is laboring comes by unity of doctrine and practice. Paul and Silas are delivering the decrees of the Jerusalem Synod (v4), but also practicing in the spirit of that decree by seeking the removal of offense for the proclamation of the gospel.

While requiring circumcision of Gentiles was an obstacle to the gospel that the council had rejected, Timothy was a half-Jew (v1). As such, he was considered wholly holy, set apart to God just as much as if his father had been holy (cf. 1Cor 7:14). His mother Eunice was a believer, as well as his grandmother Lois (cf. 2Tim 1:5), and the brethren spoke well of him in his own right (v3). But all the Jews knew his father was a Greek (v3b). Not as a mere concession to keep them happy, but as a removal of an obstacle for gospel ministry, Paul circumcises him (cf. 1Cor 9:20).

We maintain unity by holding to the pure doctrine of the Word and not adding anything in doctrine or practice that would bring men's consciences under one another's opinions rather than under the Spirit in the Scripture. But it is each of our privilege when we have an opportunity to lay aside our rights in order to serve better the peace and growth of the church.

Why is separation sometimes necessary in the church? How are you seeking to be strengthened? How are you participating in Christ's method of strengthening His church by His servants? How are you pursuing unity of doctrine with your church? What rights are you laying aside for peace and ministry?

*Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for strengthening us by one-another's service, and especially by the ministry of the gospel. Please bless and use our preachers and teachers so that we may all be of one, stable, Scriptural mind with Christ. Keep sanctifying us, and help us to love and forgive one another. Give us the humility and grace to lay aside our own rights or privileges wherever that would be helpful. Give us that mind that is in Christ Jesus, we ask in His Name, AMEN!*

**Suggested songs: ARP197 "Christian Unity" or TPH404 "The Church's One Foundation"**

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Acts 15 verse 36 through 16 verse 5. These are God's words. Then after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, let us now, go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached, the word of the Lord and see how they are doing. Now, Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.

But Paul insisted that they should not take with them. The one who had departed from them in Pamphylia. And had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas.

And departed being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia. Strengthening the churches. Then he came to Derby and Lester and behold, a certain disciple was there named Timothy The son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.

He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and the Cunningham Paul wanted to have him, go on with him. And he took him in circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region for they all knew that his father was Greek, And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them, the decreased keep Which were determined by the apostles and elders, a Jerusalem.

So, the churches were strengthened in the faith. And increased in number. Daily. So far. The reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. I hope it's something that each of us desires and each of us prays for that. All the true churches would be strengthened in the faith and would increase in number.

Well, the conclusion to this passage tells us that this turned out to be a means or what's recorded here. Turns out to be a means. By which the churches were strengthened in the faith. And increased in number daily. And when we hear that we want to know, what is it that the Holy Spirit used to do this?

And how may we? Come by the same blessing that our church would be strengthened in faith. And that our church would be. Increased in number. And there are Four different things. At least that we see here. The. Almost certainly by this point. Will be the way in which we will hear the passage organized as we are claim.

In the public worship, on the Lord's Day. The first is by follow-up ministry that Hearing the gospel, preached and being made alive by the spirit coming to faith in Jesus Christ. This is not the end. Of the Christian life. This is the beginning of the Christian life. And that the Lord continues to minister to us.

Through men, whom he sends who speak the word to us, through shepherd us. By use of that word. Just as in creation, you have the creation by the Word of God's power and then you have him upholding all things by the word of his power. So also in redemption, he brings us into faith.

By the Ministry of his word and he also grows us in faith largely by the ministry. Of his word. So there's follow-up ministry. Follow-up ministries is vital unnecessary and necessary because it's Jesus's way. Of growing us up. Into himself. Now. The people who do this ministry are themselves growing, their partially sanctified.

They are not. They are not. Super believers of a different. A sort of faith or Under a different sort of grace. Than we are. They are hopefully those who are more mature, who reflect? And they're sanctification the qualifications that we see in Scripture. Of whom the scripture can tell us to all of their example.

And submit to them, and And see the outcome of their faith. In order to imitate that. But it is a faith of like quality because it's a faith that rests in Jesus. It's a faith that the Holy Spirit is measuring out and growing by His grace. And that's why we are able to imitate them if we didn't have the same faith and be dependent on the same grace that it would make no sense to say imitate them.

And in the Lord because we wouldn't have the means whereby To imitate them. And so it's not that we take encouragement from the unsanctified state, Barnabas and Paul and John Mark. But, We do take encouragement from the fact that the Lord used men even in such a state and that he did not leave them in the state that there were in, but continued to grow them.

Paul here is cast and a better light than Barnabas and Barnabas takes. John Mark. There's nothing said in. The two of them being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And so, Paul is continuing to function in submission to the church seeking As part of, Of God's of Christ's covenant people on earth, the blessing of Christ and to operate.

Within the The structure that the Lord Jesus has. Built into his church because it's the Lord, Jesus who is operating in his church. When we say, we go to, we want to grow by going to church tending public worship and Hearing preaching and taking the supper and praying and Day by day.

At home in private worship and family worship What we're saying is. We want to grow by the work of Jesus. And since Jesus uses these things, this is why we attend upon them. And then when we do, Attend either, private worship, family worship, public worship, etc. We want by faith, the look to Christ, even though we don't do so very well and we ask God, therefore as we did even Before this family worship and always before family worship and in the public worship.

Ask the Lord. To be the one who. Helps in the worship, sustains, the worship brings himself, glory in the worship and grows us. By the means of grace. In his worship. So, we know That Paul a sinful too and There's a sharp contention between him and Barnabas. Thankfully, the Lord does not require men to be sinless.

To be useful in the ministry or to be qualified for ministry. The Session of the church at Antioch didn't say, now Paul, we'd love to commend, you to the grace of God, but you've got to be perfectly reconciled with Barnabas You guys have to kiss and make up and and tell each other.

How completely willing you are to minister with one another before we would be willing to send you I know that sounds ridiculous. To us but I have been in Presbytery meetings. We're similar things were being required of men. Even though there was not a particular sin, At least. On the part of the man that they were going to require enough or trying to require enough.

But just two men who had not been able to reconcile and could not or a man in a session in that case and could not Continue to minister. With one another, the way Paul and Barnabas. Were unable to hear. But, Barnabas is. Still useful to God. We know this isn't the last of his weaknesses.

You remember in Galatians, chapter 2, When Peter comes down, Or when when Peter is in Antioch and some come down from Jerusalem and And Peter suddenly changes his mind about sitting at the Gentile table. At the fellowship meals. And he tells us there that even Barnabas was taken up with upcracy.

Of the Judaizers, just pretty amazing since Barnabas was the Antioch, you know, one of the Antioch and delegates to the assembly to the Synod in chapter 15, that decided the opposite of what he ended up doing. So, men are still sinful. And thankfully. Barnabas actually knew that with respect to John Mark.

And we know that Barnabas grew and we know that John Mark grew one of the ways we know that is and The last of Paul's letters that we have in the New Testament, He tells Timothy to come and to make sure he brings Mark with him because he's very Marc is very useful to him.

And the ministry. Well, speaking of Timothy. One of the reasons it appears that Paul didn't bring, didn't want to bring John Mark, is because he was actually looking for someone to disciple in the ministry. When he gets to Derby and he identifies, Timothy and Timothy's faith as well, spoken of, by everyone there.

He identifies who his understudy is going to be. A man that he is going to train. To be an elder. And eventually, as we are learning and in our reading through first Timothy, and Is going to be one who trains future elders. So that's the third thing. First, there's Follow-up ministry of the word second that this ministry is done by those who themselves need to be growing by the word.

There are partially sanctified. Men and third. Now, by men who train other men? That there is there is an ongoing chain as it were in the laying one of hands from one generation to the next. And that this is Christ's way of strengthening his churches and in the faith and multiplying them in.

Number is giving them New generations of Shepherd teachers, who also must do as we hear Paul telling Timothy to do. In one of the letters, do the work of an evangelist? So we see that This was already begun, not just with Barnabas and John Mark and Paul and Timothy.

But the elders who had participated in this Synod And that brings us to. The fourth unity and Unity in doctrine and practice. Across the churches. So that which had arisen because of a situation in Antioch Paul. And Timothy. Are delivering. To the churches that they are revisiting. Now, from the first missionary journey, it wasn't just for Antioch.

It was for antioch, it was for Jerusalem, it was for Lystra, it was for Derby. It was for Iconium. And, and so forth. The churches are unified in. Scriptural, doctrine unified in Scriptural, practice under the decisions from Scripture, Remember it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us It wasn't that the Apostles and elders who gathered in Jerusalem on that occasion were Were asserting for themselves and authority next to Scripture.

But as an authority under Scripture and by scripture, And says that they delivered to them, the decrees to keep These are not in competition with or other than the degrees of the Lord Jesus. Remember, he said all authority in heaven and earth were given to him and that as they went into all the nations, they were making just to

make disciples baptizing them into his name as his subject members of his church, his covenant people apart from the world and teaching them to keep all that Christ had commanded them.

Well it is Christ to commands. By way of his gathered apostles and elders. And when it says, Apostles and elders at Jerusalem, it's not talking about, it's not saying the session of the Jerusalem church because certainly the apostle Paul would not leave himself out of that. We can't read first and second Corinthians and Galatians and his strong assertions of his own equal apostleship.

Even though he was, He had an extraordinary and late calling and ordination to the office, but he strongly asserts his equal apostleship to theirs and so and it says the apostles, it doesn't mean all the apostles but Paul. And when it says the elders, it doesn't mean only the elders from the Jerusalem church.

It's talking about where the Synod was held. That the that the Lord Jesus as apostles and elders. Representing. And coming from all of the churches at the time, had gathered in Jerusalem and that that which the Lord, Jesus commands, he commands everywhere. He doesn't have one set of doctrine practice for this church over here and then another culturally accommodated, set of Doctrine and practice for this other church over here, like the Missiologists and the church planting experts like to tell us.

No, One doctrine, one practice, one Christ. And he's the one who strengthens His churches in faith and he's the one who increases them in number. And therefore we see the fourth. Aspect of what he used to strengthen the churches and faith and increase them. In number daily. And that was unity of doctrine and practice.

A unity which Paul? Of course, pursued, with Timothy, We know that Timothy didn't have to be circumcised. But his mother was a Jew and rather than that becoming an issue. Instead of the you don't want the identity of Timothy and his Israelite status. To become the issue instead of the identity of Jesus and His Son of God, status as the resurrected redeemer and Savior.

So it's not, it wasn't necessary, it wasn't required. That Timothy be circumcised to require it to actually be a violation of the gospel. But it was useful for ministry to the Jews. He became a Jew. And, To use the Apostles language from another place. In order that they could deliver this one doctrine of Christ from the scriptures for all the churches in order that they could deliver.

Instructions. About this one practice of Christ. For all the churches in the scriptures. So, those are the four things and we We each ought to seek to avail ourselves. Well, Of the ministry of the word. And something for you boys to pray that if the Lord would have, you be a shepherd teacher in his church?

That. That that would be a good work. He desires the office of overseer desires a good work, not just a good position, a good work. And so you should be seeking from the Lord that he would be producing in you The, the character for that and Leave to him whether he will call you and ordain you into the eldership certainly.

You'll need all of those qualifications to be a good husband. And to be a good father And we should avail ourselves of the ministries that the Lord has appointed for us. It's going to be. Something in your marriages, my dear daughters. The God will appoint you a husband to be part of Christ's plan for the way he bathes his bride with his word and your husband's Will have the duty of Bathing their bride.

With the word. And so you already now, practice and seeking Christ to work in you By the ministry of your father. In in the word and these worship times and it's good practice for your heart as you seek the same Christ. Lord willing. Lord sparing us, it'll be a different man for you one day when you're married.

But it'll be the same Christ. Who is, who is conducting that ministry and so we have L ourselves Of the ministry of the Word. We remember that those who minister to us and we also all must be growing. So it shouldn't surprise you when you find that I'm a center and you're the future that your husband is a sinner.

And let that not dissuade you of what Christ wills to do through me? Or. Through them, the supplies also to our elders. Now and And in the future. The partially sanctified men and we should be seeking in prayer. That the Lord would continue from one generation to the next.

That even now although it's not really the next generation, the younger children, there's kind of a continuum at any moment in time, but that within the family and within the congregation, you seek to disciple and Especially with the boys. You don't indulge the The self-indulgent worldliness silliness living for entertainment, living for pleasure.

That is such a part of the fleshly mindset and such a part of the mindset of the world. But if the Lord strengthens his churches in the faith and increases them in number, By. What he does through the ministry of his word and through subsequent succeeding, generations of men.

Think of the young boys in the church as future men, And make prayer and investment. In them. And then, of course, always Be seeking to improve in your understanding of Scripture that the one doctrine and the one practice that Christ has for all his churches and all places that we will be.

Understanding it more and more and implementing it. More and more. The Lord help us each in our part and may the Lord hear our prayers. As we ask him to do this in his church, Let's do so. Now. Our Father in heaven, how we thank you that you have given us Christ to be our prophet, our priest, and our king.

And we thank you, Lord, Jesus for the ministry of your spirit, to proceeds from the Father, and from you, whom you have poured out. To accomplish that work in your church of applying your redemption to us. We pray. Lord that we would see your church increase. That it would be strengthened in faith and increased in number.

And so we do pray. For the ministry of your word, day by day in each home and week by week. In the assembly and we do pray. For. The sanctification. Of those men whom you are saving and calling. To various shepherding and teaching ministries. First in their home. So then those in the congregation we pray for succeeding, generations, of faithful elders.

Whom you would use in your church. For this work. And we pray Lord that there would be Reformation. That there would be reformation of doctrine that there would be reformation of worship and discipleship and And godliness. In your churches and that this Reformation would be used by you to produce revival.

In which you pour out your spirit as a blessing. Upon a church that you have purified that you have. Sharpened in it. And it's theology. That you would pour out your spirit and give life. And multiply And strengthen. Lord. We ask you to do these things rejoicing. That this is.

Whom you have revealed yourself to be as the God, who does this even in the passage that we have just considered granted to God, we ask in Jesus name, Amen.