

15:36 *Returning to Visit the Believers*

THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY.

SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH: If it seemed necessary to the apostles to travel around, and to return often to the same cities where they had preached the gospel, and to visit the believers and to examine closely how they were, what justification will we have before God if we do not fulfill through our writings what they fulfilled by traveling with great toil on their feet and going spontaneously to those who were in need and teaching what is useful for salvation? CATENA ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 15.36-38.1

15:38 *Not Including One Who Had Withdrawn*

DIVERSE GIFTS AND CHARACTERS.

CHRYSOSTOM: Luke has already described the apostles' character to us, showing that one was more tender and forgiving and the other more strict and austere. For the gifts bestowed on them were different. That this is indeed a gift is clear. One befits one set and the other another set of characters. And if they should make an exchange, harm would result. . . . Likewise in the prophets we find different opinions and different characters. Elias, for example, is austere, while Moses is meek. Thus here Paul is more vehement. But notice even so his gentleness. "He thought best," it says, "not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia." . . . Although there appears to be a sharp contention, in fact it was part of the divine plan that each man should receive his proper place. Besides, it was necessary that not everyone have the same honor but that one should lead and the other be led. HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 34.2

15:39 *Sharp Contention*

THEY YIELD TO ONE ANOTHER.

CHRYSOSTOM: The point is not that they differed in their opinions but that they accommodated themselves to each other. Thus a greater good resulted from their parting, for which this provided an excuse. What then? Did they withdraw in enmity? God forbid! Recall how after this Barnabas received much praise from Paul in his epistles. "There arose," it says, "a sharp contention," not hatred or rivalry. The contention grew so great that it parted them. For what each supposed was advantageous, this he did

not admit after this because of his association with the other. I think that the parting took place advisedly and that they said to each other, "Since I wish to, but you do not, let us distribute the places so that we should not fight." Therefore it was because they yielded to each other that they parted. For Barnabas wanted Paul to prevail and so withdrew. Likewise Paul wanted Barnabas to prevail and he, too, withdrew. Would that we should part such partings to go forth for preaching. "Paul," it says, "chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord." A wonderful man is he, and very great! HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 34.5

15:40 *Paul Chose Silas*

FOR MARK'S INSTRUCTION.

CHRYSOSTOM: The sharp contention took place with good reason, to teach Mark a lesson and so that the matter should not look like stage playing. For would he, who had always yielded, not yield on this occasion? He who loved Paul so much that he sought him in Tarsus, brought him to the apostles, undertook the alms in common with him and received the business relating to the decree together with him? [Barnabas] would not have become angry for something like this. No, they parted from each other so that they might educate and bring to perfection those who needed their teaching. HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 34.7

15:41 *Syria and Cilicia*

GREAT GOOD COMES OF THIS CONTENTION.

CHRYSOSTOM: "And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." This too is part of the divine plan. For the Cyprians had shown nothing of the kind as was shown by those in Antioch and elsewhere. Those needed the softer character, but these needed such a character as Paul's. . . . For just as a general would not choose to always have a lowly baggage carrier, neither did the apostle. This both taught the others and instructed [Mark] himself. Did Barnabas act badly then? Not at all. It is out of place to even think such a thing. For how is it not out of place to say because of such a small thing that he acted badly? Look, in the first place, nothing bad happened if they, each sufficient for entire nations, separated from one another. Rather, a great good took place. Second, if this had not happened, they would not easily have chosen to leave each other. Please appreciate how the writer does not conceal this at all. But

if they had to separate, could it not be done without sharp contention? But it is through this especially that he shows what was human [in the preaching of the gospel]. For if this had to happen in the case of Christ, then all the more so here. Besides, the sharp contention was not trivial, since each argued on behalf of such things and with just reason. Had one of them been looking after himself and seeking his own glory, well then! But on the contrary, each wishing to educate and to teach, one went one way and the other another. What is there to find fault with? In many things, indeed, they acted with human judgment; for they were not made of stone or wood. HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 34.8

16:3 Paul Circumcised Timothy

NOT ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PREFERENCES.

CHRYSOSTOM: The wisdom of Paul is indeed amazing. He, who fought so many battles against circumcision, who moved everything for this, who did not give up until he had carried his point, once the decision was confirmed, he circumcised his disciple. Not only did he not forbid others, but he himself did this. "Timothy," it says, "he wanted as his companion." It is surprising that he even brought him along. "Because of the Jews," it says, "that were in those places." This is the reason for the circumcision. For they would not have endured to hear the Word from one uncircumcised. Nothing could be wiser. So in all things he looked to what was advantageous. He did nothing at all according to his own preference. And what was the result? Look at his success. He circumcised to take away circumcision. For he preached the decisions of the apostles. HOMILIES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 34.2

PAUL DID NOT FORSAKE MOSES.

AUGUSTINE: As to Paul's circumcising of Timothy, performing a vow at Cenchrea³ and undertaking on the suggestion of James at Jerusalem to share the performance of the appointed rites with some who had made a vow,⁴ it is manifest that Paul's design in these things was not to give to others the impression that he thought that by these observances salvation is given under the Christian dispensation. [His intent was] to prevent people from believing that he condemned, as no better than heathen idolatrous worship, those rites that God had appointed in the former dispensation as suitable to it and as shadows of things to come. For this is what James said to him, that the report had gone abroad concerning him that he taught people "to forsake Moses." This would be by all means wrong for those who believe in Christ, to forsake him who prophesied of Christ, as if they detested and condemned the teaching of him of whom

Christ said, "If you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, for he wrote of me." LETTER 82.8
TO JEROME.⁵

A GRADUAL FOLLOWING OF THE GOSPEL.

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS: There have been in the whole period of the duration of the world two conspicuous changes of people's lives, which are also called two Testaments, or, on account of the wide fame of the matter, two earthquakes; the one from idols to the law, the other from the law to the gospel. And we are taught in the Gospel of a third earthquake, namely, from this earth to that which cannot be shaken or moved. Now the two Testaments are alike in this respect, that the change was not made on a sudden or at the first movement of the endeavor. Why not (for this is a point on which we must have information)? That no violence might be done to us but that we might be moved by persuasion. For nothing that is involuntary is durable; like streams or trees that are kept back by force. But that which is voluntary is more durable and safe. The former is due to one who uses force, the latter is ours; the one is due to the gentleness of God, the other to a tyrannical authority. Therefore God did not think it behooved him to benefit the unwilling but to do good to the willing. And therefore like a tutor or physician he partly removes and partly condones ancestral habits, conceding some little of what tended to pleasure, just as doctors do with their patients, that their medicine may be taken, being artfully blended with what is nice. For it is no very easy matter to change from those habits that custom and use have made honorable. For instance, the first cut off the idol but left the sacrifices; the second, while it destroyed the sacrifices did not forbid circumcision. Then, when once men had submitted to the curtailment, they also yielded that which had been conceded to them; in the first instance the sacrifices, in the second circumcision; and became instead of Gentiles, Jews, and instead of Jews, Christians, being beguiled into the gospel by gradual changes. Paul is a proof of this; for having at one time administered circumcision and submitted to legal purification, he advanced till he could say, and I, brothers, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? ⁶ His former conduct belonged to the temporary dispensation, his latter to maturity. ON THE HOLY SPIRIT, THEOLOGICAL ORATION 5 (31).^{25.7}

HE ACCOMMODATED THE SYMBOL.

ORIGEN: [But] perhaps it has been recorded at some time or other with good reason that even the true worshiper who worships in spirit and truth ⁸ performs certain symbolic acts so that, by acting in a most accommodating manner, he might free those who are enslaved to the symbol and bring them to the truth that the symbols represent. Paul appears to have done this in the case of Timothy, and perhaps also in

Cenchrea and Jerusalem, as it is written in the Acts of the Apostles. 9 COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 13.111.10

ACCOMMODATING ONESELF FOR ANOTHER'S GOOD.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: Whatever . . . [the gnostic] 12 has in his mind, he bears on his tongue, to those who are worthy to hear, speaking as well as living from assent and inclination. For he both thinks and speaks the truth; unless at any time, medicinally, as a physician for the safety of the sick, he may deceive or tell an untruth, according to the Sophists. To illustrate: the noble apostle circumcised Timothy, though loudly declaring and writing that circumcision made with hands profits nothing. 13 But that he might not, by dragging all at once away from the law to the circumcision of the heart through faith those of the Hebrews who were reluctant listeners, compel them to break away from the synagogue, he, "accommodating himself to the Jews, became a Jew that he might gain all." 14 He, then, who submits to accommodate himself merely for the benefit of his neighbors, for the salvation of those for whose sake he accommodates himself, not partaking in any dissimulation through the peril impending over the just from those who envy them, such a one by no means acts with compulsion. But for the benefit of his neighbors alone, he will do things that would not have been done by him primarily, if he did not do them on their account. Such a one gives himself: for the church; for the disciples whom he has begotten in faith; for an example to those who are capable of receiving the supreme economy of the philanthropic and God-loving instructor, for confirmation of the truth of his words, for the exercise of love to the Lord. Such a one is unenslaved by fear, true in word, enduring in labor, never willing to lie by uttered word and in it always securing sinlessness; since falsehood, being spoken with a certain deceit, is not an inert word but operates to mischief. STROMATEIS 7.9.15

CIRCUMCISING TO END CIRCUMCISION.

CHRYSOSTOM: Before blessed Paul, who himself had received circumcision, sent Timothy to teach the Jews, he first circumcised him in order that Timothy, as teacher, might be more acceptable to his audience. So Paul [actually] engaged in circumcision in order to abolish it. He knew why he had circumcised Timothy but chose not to disclose his reasons to the disciples. In fact, if they had known that he had circumcised him with the intention of abolishing circumcision, they would have not listened to anything Timothy had to say, and all the progress he had achieved would have been lost. Indeed, their ignorance was quite useful. As long as they believed that he circumcised Timothy in order to preserve the law, they generously received him and his doctrine. Therefore, by receiving [that doctrine] little by little, and by being taught,

they abandoned their old customs. However, this would never have happened if they had known the reason from the beginning. In fact, if they had known, they would have opposed the circumcision and by opposing it they would have remained in their previous error. CATENA ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
16.1-3.16