

Acts 16:1-15

Conforming For A Cause

? In what ways have you tried to “blend in” before (e.g. school, work, on a team, etc.)? Do you think you were successful? Why or why not?

Romans 8:22-30 (NIV)

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

2 Cor. 3:12-18 (NIV)

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Philippians 3:17-21 (NIV)

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that

enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

? What does conformity mean in these contexts?

? What does it look like for us to be “conformed” or “transformed” into the image of Christ?

? In what ways is this different or similar to how you’ve viewed conformity in the past?

? How can conforming have positive consequences (either specifically from these passages or in life in general)? Negative?

“As we are conformed to the image of Christ, he is made more and more the center of all things.”
~John Piper

Acts 16:1-15 (NIV)

¹Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ²The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

⁶Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹²From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of

Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

? In chapter 15, we read a lengthy dispute about how believers did *not* need to be circumcised. Can anyone give a summary of what happened in that chapter? Why do you think that Paul would now circumcise Timothy (16:2)?

? Besides conforming physically (Timothy's circumcision), we also see Paul's travel plans disrupted several times due to re-direction by the Holy Spirit. In what other ways have we seen Paul guided by the Holy Spirit? How have you personally been led by the Holy Spirit?

? We can approach different aspects of our faith as either "open" or "close-handed" issues when viewing them through the lens of conformity. What might be some examples of open issues? Closed? How do we know the difference?

"It was Timothy's mixed parentage that made Paul decide to circumcise him before taking him along as his junior colleague. By Jewish law Timothy was a Jew, because he was the son of a Jewish mother, but because he was uncircumcised he was technically an apostate [*violator of the covenant*] Jew. If Paul wished to maintain his links with the synagogue, he could not be seen to countenance [*admit as acceptable*] apostasy. He set his face implacably against any move to circumcise Gentile believers like Titus (Gal. 2:3-5), but Timothy was in a different situation."

New International Commentary On The New Testament: Acts, pg. 304

? What's at stake when we compromise on open vs. close-handed issues?

? How do we strike the balance between conforming for the sake of the Gospel vs. becoming “of” the world (John 17:14-15)?

? What are ways that we can (or should) acclimate to those we want to minister to?

? In what ways can conforming actually *hinder* our ministry (personally and corporately)?

For Discussion And Accountability

? In what ways are you being conformed to the image of Christ? Are there areas where He is calling you to greater conformity?

? Are there areas in your life, whether generally or in ministry specifically, where you are conforming in a way that hinders the Gospel? What steps can you take to course-correct this week?