



'RESPONDING PROPERLY TO THE CALL OF GOD'

Scripture: Acts 16:6-15

By: Dr. Stan Frye

President Of Gateway International Missions, Inc.

P.O. Box 667

Taylorsville, NC 28681

Office Phone: 828-632-2344

E-Mail Address: gimi@charter.net

Website: gatewayinternationalmissions.com

"Learning How To Discern God's Call For Your Life"

Introduction

Today as I begin writing this booklet as a commentary on Acts 16:1-15, I must begin by saying that right now I am almost 74 years old, and I have been in the Gospel ministry for over 55 years. I have pastored eleven churches throughout America, preached over 1,300 revival meetings in 33 states here in America, and I have taught over 100 Leadership Training Seminars in Africa. Therefore, I think I might be able to address the subject of this sermon and booklet with a lot of personal and pastoral knowledge. Thus, as I try to write this booklet, it is my sincere prayer that each person who reads this exegetical commentary might indeed complete the task, and hopefully, come to understand that God always calls every saved person to a life of personal ministry. As someone stated a long time ago, "God doesn't call the qualified, but He qualifies those He calls after every saved individual responds positively to this wonderful call to Christian service.

Now, I do want to mention that I sincerely believe that God first calls every person to salvation, and He indeed saves every man, woman, boy or girl that will come to Him, put his or her trust in Jesus, repent of his or her sin, and then, make a public commitment to follow Christ the rest of his or her life.

The second thing that God calls every saved person to is a life of sanctification or holiness, which begins at the moment of salvation when God saves and sets the person aside to follow Christ. Then, this newly born again child of God has been given many mandates to live righteously and follow a life, which will demonstrate a pattern of holiness for others to follow. And truly, there never can be a life of positive testimony before others, unless there is a daily sanctified pattern of life. Thus, it is so important to remember that no saved child of God will ever be able to determine God's perfect will for his or her life unless he or she is walking with God through a daily living and growing relationship with Jesus Christ. But, if this saved and sanctified child of God wants to ever respond to the personal call of God, then, this precious saved person must live every day a sanctified righteous life, which will keep this saved person close enough to Jesus in order to discern Jesus call and will of God for him or her!

The third thing that God calls every born again child of God to is to a life of separation from the world. Do you remember the following verse, which Paul wrote to the church in Rome. Please read this verse carefully. **"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."** (Romans 12:2) In other words Paul is telling the Roman believers that they never will know the perfect will of God for their lives unless they stop aligning themselves with the world, and trying to live under the world's pressure. Thus, each of us is to refuse to let the world tell us how to live, refuse to let the world try to influence us to live by its principles, and we are to refuse to listen to the world's voice, regardless of who tries to get our listening attention, and even, try to push us with its powerful influence to live by the world's words and wisdom, rather than the Word of God and the spiritual wisdom only given to dedicated sold out and separated believers.

Finally, the fourth thing that God calls every born again believer to do is to surrender his or her life to the complete service of our Lord and Savior and spend his

or her entire life serving others with sharing the love of God and the Gospel message with a lost and dying world. So, every child of God receives at least four personal calls from God to totally and completely surrender to Christ in order to use his or her life in a very fruitful and productive way. But, I must remind you that no one will ever be totally and completely used by God until he or she hears the call, looks with vision at what God desires for himself or herself, and then, have the courage to step forward and try to walk through the open doors in order to serve Christ fully. And, I must tell you that just like the passage of Scripture from the Book of Acts, which we are going to study in depth with this study, we must always be willing to stop when God closes the doors. And then, we must be willing and courageous enough to walk through the doors that God opens for us. Therefore, I am truly praying that God might use this study as an instrument to get every child of God into the place of ministry where God has called him or her.

As I just mentioned in the previous paragraphs, God surely calls every saved person to a life of ministry and service. And, we definitely need to stop and realize that the greatest people on earth who are following Jesus Christ are those who have the mind of a servant or ministry to others. Let me give you three verses, which are the words of our Savior, and hopefully, you will see that the greatest people in the Kingdom of God are those who come to understand their calling, and then, they respond by being God's servants. So now, let's take a close look at the story of Paul being called to Macedonia.

Let's Look At The Background For This Great Passage Of Scripture.

The true background for these verses we are studying in Acts 16:6-15, is the fact that Paul the Apostle was starting his second missionary journey on the plan of going to Asia Minor, and then, even up north to Bithynia along the Black Sea. This original plan would have taken Paul to what was Bithynia, Cappadocia, and probably, he would have gone to the China area to share the Gospel. May I tell you that if God had not stopped Paul in Troas and redirected him with the vision of a man calling him over to Macedonia, I would not be here writing about what God has and is doing in America, and you would not be reading this story. You see, folks, when God stopped Paul and redirected him to Macedonia, this was the first time that the Gospel reached what would later be Europe, and of course, the conversion of Lydia who was the first European convert. Then, because of the dedication and sacrifice by so many early Christians who were saved as the result of Paul's changed direction and calling, the Atheistic Roman Empire under the leadership of many Caesars, would ultimately be completely destroyed by the progress of Christianity. This destruction took place about 20 years after Paul took the Gospel to Macedonia and the surrounding areas. And, I think I need to say that if we ever want to bring down the evil empires, we must do so by the preaching of the Gospel in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Before moving forward, I do need to tell you that when Paul got ready to make this second missionary journey, he was in Antioch, along with Barnabas and some other very dedicated servants of God. As Paul was making his preparation to leave, Barnabas came to Paul and told him that John Mark now wanted to travel again with

Paul and Barnabas. You may remember that John Mark started out with Paul and Barnabas, but when the team got to Pamphylia, where the team started preaching the Gospel, for some unknown reason, John Mark, who was the nephew of Barnabas, decided to leave Paul and Barnabas and headed back to Antioch. Now, it was time for Paul to start this second journey, and uncle Barnabas, now wanted to take John Mark with them again. But, Paul was furious and began to tell Barnabas that John Mark was not going with them again because of his cowardliness on the first trip. The argument between Paul and Barnabas got so heated, that they decided to not go together on this second trip. So, Paul chose Silas to take Barnabas' place, and Barnabas took John Mark and headed out to the Island of Cyprus. Thus, you now have the background for this Scripture we are now going to study together, verse-by-verse. So, let's get started with the exegesis of Acts 16:6-15. Therefore, it is time for us to learn how we must respond to the call of God. But, may I add that right now in the world, but especially here in the U.S.A., it seems that very few believers are responding to the call of God in our churches. So, the numbers presented to us by statisticians about people getting saved and then following the call of God to help win the world to Christ are declining terribly. And, if by chance you don't believe this, then, just stop and think about when was the last time some young man in your church came forward publicly to tell the church that he had been called to preach. Then, how long has it been since some man or woman surrendered his or her life to full-time Christian service as a missionary, Christian School teacher, or language translator, in your local church. My point is that the fields are white unto harvest, but the laborers are very few. Please pay attention to the following four verses of Scripture. **"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest."** (Matthew 9:35-38) So friends, if we are going to reap the harvest of souls, we must have dedicated and faithful servants of God who will respond positively to God's call and go and help reap the harvest. Maybe, everyone of you that read this booklet should just surrender your life to the answering of God's call for your life. Will you do it?

I. RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD DEMANDS A WILLINGNESS TO STOP. vs. 6-7.

I sometimes believe that in our fast-moving and wild social media driven society, very few truly saved people are stopping long enough to even look for or listen to God's call for his or her life. It would seem that even those who profess that they are saved are so attached to their smart phones and other electronics that they just can't seem to stop long enough to find God's will for their lives. I will tell you that this is truly a tragic thing because not one genuinely saved person will ever be happy until he or she discovers the will of God for their personal ministry and service. Just remember that God doesn't just save us in order to provide eternal fire insurance.

But, He saves us to find our place in helping to build His Kingdom in His worldwide effort to reap the harvest. Therefore, every child of God must stop long enough to find God's perfect will for his or her life, and then, this God-called servant must pay the price to get the right training and preparation to do a wonderful job for Jesus as He reveals His plan and purpose for our lives.

A. We must understand that these stops are divine in design. v. 6a

Just stop and think about Paul's second missionary journey. He had his plan to take the Gospel all the way up to what is now the Ukraine, and then, he had plans to take the Gospel to China, as we know it today. But folks, God had better plans for Paul's ministry, because our Lord is omniscient and He knows the places where the most souls will be saved. Thus, God often times has to Sovereignly stop His servants from going their way, because He has a better place for them to serve. My question today is, "Has God recently stopped you from going in the wrong direction?" If He has, have you gotten alone with Him to discover the direction for your call? If not, today you need to STOP and pay attention to what God wants to show you, and then, totally surrender your life to Him!

B. We must understand that these stops are difficult to discern. v. 6b

Well now, if you are truly seeking to fulfill the call of God for your life, then, you need to seriously understand that sometimes it is very hard to discern the call of God for your life. In the last part of this verse 6, nothing is shown to us about how Paul must have felt, when God supernaturally sent a man, an angel, or maybe, even, Jesus Himself, in order to reveal God's call and direction for Paul and his traveling companions journey in order to take the Gospel to the entire world starting there in Macedonia, the place that would one day be called Europe. And, we do need to remember that Europe was the place where the first missionaries and preachers came from to carry the Gospel to the entire world. So, my dear friends, **WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT THE EVENTS IN THIS STUDY OF PAUL RECEIVING A DIFFERENT DIRECTION FOR HIS LIFE TRULY CHANGED THE ENTIRE WORLD AND HUMAN HISTORY!**

C. We must understand that these stops are definite in direction. v. 7

In this verse, Luke who wrote this book, tells us that when God stopped Paul from going on north and northeast, He stopped him with the Holy Spirit, who always gives definite directions to anyone that will pay attention and follow the definite directions, which God the Holy Spirit provides.

I believe that I need to tell you a little story about something that happened in my past life that truly gives authenticity to this story of Paul being redirected to another field of ministry. When I was just over 29 years old, I strongly felt led to resign the church, which my wife and I planted here locally in North Carolina, and move to Jacksonville, Florida to complete my seminary training at the Luther Rice Seminary. This move was truly one of the most difficult that we ever had to make. But, we knew

that God was leading us to go to Florida. So, we did move to Jacksonville and took up residence in a small rental house. Moving into this house was very difficult because here in North Carolina, we had been living in a beautiful new two-story home. But, we were there in Florida, and rather than having to oversee a local church, I went to studying almost night and day.

While living there in Jacksonville, my family and I attended the great First Baptist Church, where Dr. Homer Lindsay, Jr. was the senior pastor. This church at that time was one of the greatest soul-winning churches in America. Thousands of people in this great church constantly lived to tell people how to get saved, and then, how to follow Jesus. Well, while attending church there in Jacksonville, God connected me with a business layman, named Mickey Parrish. Getting to know Brother Mickey was a great blessing because he and his wife, Alice, love winning souls to Jesus. And, by working with Brother Mickey in soul-winning, I began to go with Mickey's teams of soul-winners that went regularly to the Florida State Prison to present the Gospel to hundreds and hundreds of prisoners every month. As God would plan it, I fell in love for the prison ministry, and little did I know that God sent me to Florida to give me a big stop before moving on in another direction.

In 1976, I graduated from seminary, and we moved back to North Carolina, where I started a full-time evangelism, which ended up taking me to 33 states to preach the Gospel. Then, in the early 80s, our family and I moved to pastor and lead a church in Lynchburg, Virginia. We took this church, which had a history of many divisions and splits. Well, we were there for four years, and when we left, I was totally convinced that I needed to go back on the road traveling preaching revival meetings and seminars. So, we moved back to North Carolina once again, and I restarted my evangelism ministry. While we were in Lynchburg for four years, I still made a number of trips back down to Florida to preach the Gospel in that old State Prison. Sometime later, Brother Mickey Parrish and his wife, Alice, decided it was God's will for them to sell their business and move to Nairobi, Kenya to start a great prison ministry in that beautiful country. My wife and I had prayed for Mickey and Alice often, but neither of us had ever been to Africa.

One day we were at home together when our phone rang. It was Brother Mickey in Africa. He called to ask me to come to Kenya and preach in the prisons. Well, immediately I said no, for I had no desire or feeling to start working in Africa. So, while on the phone with Mickey, he said, Brother Stan, won't you even pray about coming to help him in the prisons there in Africa? So, I agreed to pray about making my first trip to the Dark Continent. At that time, I had no desire to even make one trip to Africa. But, as I began to pray about Africa, it was but a few months until I had raised the money for the trip. Then, in short order, I got on a plane by myself here in North Carolina, and flew from here to Nairobi, Kenya, while passing through Amsterdam Holland. We arrived at the Nairobi airport and when the tires on the plane touched down on the tarmac, I can still hear the voice that spoke to me. This voice spoke and said, "Well, Stan, you are now at home in Africa." Folks, I had no earthly idea that God had brought me through Florida to work in the prison just to prepare me for years and years of prison work in the continent of Africa. So, just like God's angel or Jesus, Himself, spoke to Paul in Troas and told him he needed to turn west in another definite direction in order for him to respond to God's call. Well, after working in

prisons now for 46 years, never would I have believed or even imagined that when God took me to Africa, He was redirecting me from revival meetings and pastoring churches to becoming the President of Gateway International Missions, Inc., which my wife and I still try to lead, even with our ages being a little older. So, God has a plan for stopping his servants from going in the wrong direction in order to send them to the most productive fields of service. I would like to appeal to each one of you who might be reading this booklet to just stop and be still until God shows you which direction to go in. Truly, God has a plan and a perfect will for you, because He needs every one of us to get completely sold out to "bringing in the sheaves."

II. RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD DEMANDS A WILLINGNESS TO SEE.

vs. 8-9.

Well now, God stopped Paul's plan to go to Bithynia and Asia, and then, He re-directed him to Macedonia, which would later become Europe. It was time for Paul to discover the will of God for his life, and to follow that will of God in the direction of God's revelation of the fields of harvest just ahead where God wants every one of His servants to be fruitful in the Kingdom work. So now, let's look at three important things in order for us to get the vision of where God wants us to serve, even if it means that He must change our entire life directions.

A. To see, one must be in the right place. v. 8

As I start to exegete this verse, I would like to insert some tremendous information that I got from the website of "The Journal Of Biblical Accuracy." I hope you will take the time to read this explanation of how God stopped Paul from going in the wrong direction, and then, he was given the vision in the dream while at Troas, and God changed Paul's plan and sent him in another direction.

Biblical Information On How Paul Came To Europe Acts 16:6-10

"Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them.

Many of us may have found ourselves before closed doors. Many of us may have tried to move in one direction, pursuing something that is generally God's will, only to find out that the door we are knocking on is not open. Well, we are not the only ones. This has also happened to the Apostle Paul. His purpose was to preach the Word of God. He had already done a great work in Asia. As we read in **Acts 16:5 'the churches were strengthened in faith, and increased in number daily.'** Great was

the work that God had done through Paul in that region and he wanted to carry it on. However, in this effort he found the door closed—not by the devil, not by the people, but by the Holy Spirit. As the Scripture says, "They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia." Then, they tried to go to Bithynia—also Asia Minor—but again the Spirit did not permit them. Yes, one can have purposes that are in alignment with the will of God in general and accordingly to knock on some doors—yet these may not open. The reason—and as we will see, this happened in the case of Paul as well—is because the Lord wants to direct these purposes to paths that reflect better His will. In the case of Paul, the doors God closed brought them finally to Troas, just opposite to Macedonia, the place where God wanted them to be. When they were in Troas, the Lord gave them instructions: He didn't want them in Asia any longer, but in Macedonia. It was time for Europe to hear the Word of God as well and it was there where God wanted them to go now.

If you know that something is God's will, but you still haven't found a door open: **'Knock and it shall be opened to you', says the Word (Luke 11:9)**. Paul didn't sit in Jerusalem or in Antioch, waiting for the vision. He was knocking on doors. He was on the way. Though the doors he tried were closed, they finally brought him through all of Asia Minor to Troas, just the opposite place of where God wanted him to be. It may be that the doors you knock on are closed. However, the Lord does not say 'sit and it will be opened to you'. He says KNOCK. And if some doors are closed, He will open the one He wants for you."¹ Therefore, folks, in order to find the calling of God and visualize the task before us, we must go to the right place and stay there until God gives the vision of where we are to be going in answer to His call.

B. To see, one must be really perceptive. v. 9a

May I tell you that I love this 9th verse. I love it because it gives to Paul an extremely clear call to go to the fields where God desired him to go. And, it is very obvious to me that Paul was now wide awake and open to God's specific call, even if he had been dreaming. Either way God sent an angel to give Paul the vision for his upcoming ministry assignment. Some people believe that this was an angel that brought Paul the vision and call. I don't know for sure, but this may have just been a Christophany, where Jesus Himself appeared to Paul to give him his upcoming assignment. I truly believe this might have been the Lord because of the great significance of the new directions that God wanted Paul to take. You see folks, God is our Sovereign God, and He not only knew His plans for Paul, but God knew and formed the plan for the Gospel message to go to Europe, where ultimately the greatest missionaries would one day be. But, we do need to know that when the man in the

¹ The Journal Of Biblical Accuracy, website, By: Anastasios Kioulachoglou. Page 1

night vision told Paul that he was begging Paul to come over to Macedonia and help them, Paul had to be very attentive and really perceptive. If Paul would have closed his mind like so many modern Christians do, the Gospel may never have gotten to the Western World. And, I must tell you that the reason so little work is being done to present the Gospel to the world today is because so many professing believers are wrapped up in themselves, and they don't want to even consider that God might be calling them; especially, if it is out of their comfort zone.

May I ask you if you are trying to deny or run from the call of God because of your selfishness, or maybe you have just settled down in your lesser place of service because you don't want to leave your family, or even, possibly, have to go back to school to be trained and equipped for God's calling. The only straight forward thing I will say is that if you don't be really perceptive of God's call for your life, and then, follow that call wherever it may lead, you are going to be the most miserable person on earth. There is no greater peace on earth, than to be living and serving in God's perfect will, trying to help build the eternal Kingdom, rather than to be building an earthy kingdom which will not last!

C. To see, one must be ready for performance. v. 9b

Well, my dear reader, are you ready for the trip to get you to where God has called you, or, are you backing off of your commitment, because the journey might look too long or hard. May I tell you again that unless you are ready to perform the work that God has called you to do, you will never be happy, even if your present circumstances seem more comfortable and less challenging. There is a world of difference between knowing the will of God, and in carrying out that perfect plan. My plea to you is for you to count the cost, break the ties, check out your values in life, and evaluate what things are really important in this life, as they are compared to the life, which is to come. Do you remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, when He stated the following verse. **"But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."** (Matthew 6:33-34) You see, beloved reader, you will never be ready for the performance of God's call and perfect will for your live without getting your value system right. If you place the things of this world, like clothing, food, a job, or even, a very precious friend before the will and work of God is done, then, you will have a horrific awakening when you stand before Jesus at the Judgment Seat Of Christ. My question again is, "Are you ready to do the work of God, which He has called you to do, or, are you occupied with all of this temporary stuff down here, which seems to draw and fixate your attention?"

III. RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD DEMANDS A WILLINGNESS TO SURRENDER. vs. 10-11

We now come to the third point of this written sermon on responding to the call of God. We have already seen in Scriptures the changing of Paul's direction for his second missionary journey. God had other plans than those of Paul, who had laid out his plans to travel to Galatia, Bithynia, and then, all the way to Asia. God's plans for Paul and his colleagues were to go to Macedonia, which later became Europe. Truly, when the stranger appeared to Paul in a night vision, he pleaded with Paul to come over to Macedonia and help them. Whether the person in the night vision was an angel of the Lord, or whether it was Jesus Himself, this man made it very clear that Paul and his team of three others (Luke, Timothy, and Silas) were being given a new direction for them to take the Gospel to the Western world, starting out with Europe. And, we must not forget that Lydia, a devoutly religious woman, was the first European convert. Her conversion started out the long history of the growth and development of Christianity. Yes, there was much suffering for the believers in those days, and some even died a martyr's death. But yet, this historical event in the life of Paul and his team members was the beginning of a long-term history of success for the Christian Church and all of its members.

Up to this point in our study, we have seen that in order to respond properly to the personal call of God, there first has to be a willingness to stop going in our own direction, and then, allow God to redirect us to His perfect will and plan for our lives. This is what Paul had to do when he came down to Troas. It was here that God wanted to give him his personal assignment to take the Gospel message to Macedonia and far beyond, even eventually to Rome itself.

The second point that we have looked at in this study was and still is that once God stops us from going in our own planned direction, we must stop and be very attentive to the vision God has for us. This is what happened to Paul and his brothers in the Lord, and it was there at Troas where God gave Paul a new vision of the work of the Lord that was before him. So, we must be willing to stop what we are doing, and then, change the direction we are going, unless that direction is the one that God has planned for us.

III. RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD DEMANDS A WILLINGNESS TO SURRENDER. vs. 10-11

Now, as we take a look at the third point in our text, it is extremely important that we truly understand what it means to totally surrender to the call of God without reservation. Surely, when it comes that any soldier in a warfare has to stop and surrender, it becomes a very difficult thing for him to do so. But yet, in order to move on to another field of opportunity, there must be a total and complete surrender to

our Lord and Savior. Oh yes, we may have a very difficult time relinquishing control of our lives, and start going in the direction that God is calling us. But truthfully, there never will be a victory or a harvest of fruitfulness unless we give up possession of everything we are and own if we are going to fulfill the call of God for each of our lives. We cannot, and we must not, hold any thing back, but instead, we must change our attitude about whose we are, and also, we must come to understand that everything in our possession is simply temporary. Therefore, we must be willing to recognize that everything we have here on this earth belongs to God. We are just to be stewards of what God loans to us, while we are here. Thus, there has to be a day when we come to Jesus as genuine believers and surrender our bodies, our minds, our talents, our money, and all of our selfish desires to our Lord Jesus Christ, if we are going to fulfill the call of God and become fruitful in our service to the King. This all starts with a denial of self, and a new commitment to Christ Who owns everything, including us. Let me now give you the words of an old hymn, which we have song for years in our churches. But, I believe very few Christians ever get serious enough to turn a deaf ear to the voices of this world, and give everything to Jesus. Let's look at this old hymn, "All to Jesus I Surrender." And, as we read or sing this old hymn, why don't you just totally and completely surrender your every thing to Him. Just sing or quote these following words and see how God will speak to your heart about genuine surrender!



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All to Jesus I Surrender

We have left everything to follow you! Mark 10:28

C F C G⁷ Em G⁷ C F C G⁷ Em C

1. All to Je - sus I sur - ren - der, all to him I free - ly give;
 2. All to Je - sus I sur - ren - der, hum - bly at his feet I bow,
 3. All to Je - sus I sur - ren - der, make me, Sav - ior, whol - ly thine;
 4. All to Je - sus I sur - ren - der, Lord, I give my - self to thee;

F C G⁷ Em G⁷ C F C G⁷ Em C

may I ev - er love and trust him, in his pres - ence dai - ly live.
 world - ly plea - sures all for - sak - en, take me, Je - sus, take me now.
 may thy Ho - ly Spir - it fill me, may I know thy pow'r di - vine.
 fill me with thy love and pow - er, let thy bless - ing fall on me.

REFRAIN
 F C G G G⁷ C

I sur - ren - der all, I sur - ren - der all.
 I sur - ren - der all, I sur - ren - der all.

F C F C/G G⁷ C 7

All to thee, my bless - ed Sav - ior, I sur - ren - der all.

Judson W. VanDeVenter, 1896
 Alt. 1990

SURRENDER 8.7.8.7 ref.
 Winfield S. Weeden, 1896

Now, if you have carefully read or sung the words of this great old hymn, you should be ready to completely surrender your life to Christ without holding anything back. We must remember what Jesus told the disciples as He was reaffirming the

Great Commission. Let me give you these profound words. **"And there went great multitudes with Him: and He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."** (Luke 14:25-27) Therefore, my dear friends, let's enter the study of these next two verses dealing with complete surrender with the attitude, "God, what call do you have for my life, and what is Your perfect will that I must do in order to be totally surrendered to You?"

A. This surrender demands a compliance to the call. v. 10a

The first part of verse 10, we discover some tremendous truth about surrender. This verse tells us that just as soon as Paul had received the night vision there in Troas, he and his little team of servants were ready to comply with the call in obedience. In this verse, you might see as you read that the writer, Luke, changes his style of writing from talking about Paul and his two other friends, Silas and Timothy, and he used the word "we" in talking about their willingness to surrender to the call of God, where He was leading them. Most scholars believe that it was here that Luke, the Physician, came to join Paul and his little team of servants. Truthfully, we don't know why Luke came to get with Paul and his other two friends. But, there are some that believe that Paul may have been very sick, and maybe he had sent for Luke to come and help him. We certainly don't have the answers to all of those things that happened over 2,000 years ago, but we do have the truth that Paul and the other three men of God were ready to obey God's call and comply with God's redirected plans for their lives. Therefore, if we are going to be totally surrendered to the will of God in answering God's call, then, we must be ready to comply with God's commands, if we are going to be fruitful in reaping the great harvest of souls.

B. This surrender demands a confidence in the call. v. 10b

There is an amazing thing in the second part of this verse 10. As we read the latter part of this verse, we must discern that Paul and his team most assuredly came to realize that the call they had received from the man in Macedonia as indeed a very credible call. And, because of their assurance of the call, they were confident that they needed to get started in the right direction, where God was leading them. And, I must tell you that this should always be our response to the call of God. When God calls us away from the direction we may have been going, then, rest assured that if it is God calling, then, we must have confidence in the call.

There is one outstanding thing that I see in this verse. There was no argument from Paul or from the other three brothers that maybe this was not God calling. But, Paul had such a close relationship with Jesus, that he knew if he received a call from someone who spoke for God that he could have complete confidence in the call. And, there is another thing I notice about Paul's response to this new call from a night visitor was that Paul never showed any reluctance or fear when he received the call. Therefore, we must know that Paul's total confidence was in the Word of God. And

therefore, I must tell you that when God reveals His calling for our lives, we must not stop and argue with Him. We need to comply with the call by start making preparations for the journey ahead, and we need to leave where we may be when God speaks to us, and we must move forward without fear. And, I will add one other thing. If we are trying to obey God's call, and we get sidetracked just a little, God will close those wrong doors and guide us back to the path He has for us to travel. And, I would just like to remind each of us that Paul knew he was being called to preach the Gospel to those who had never heard, and therefore, he must quickly respond and move toward the destination where God wanted him to go in order for multitudes more to get the Good News of the Gospel message as quickly as possible.

C. This surrender demands a commitment to the course. v. 11

God sent His messenger to tell Paul in the night that he was going in the wrong direction with his ministry. But now, he needed to change direction and quickly start moving toward the redirected direction, which God wanted Paul to go. Of course, as I have stated so many times already, God wanted Paul to get to Macedonia, which would eventually become Europe. And, this call was so significant because there was a rich business lady named Lydia that desperately needed to hear the Gospel message and get genuinely saved. And, even if there was not a proper Jewish synagogue there in Philippi in order for Lydia and the others to attend, there was special place reserved for prayer down near the Aegean Sea, where the ladies had been meeting. Thus, God knew who needed to get this lady saved in order to begin the great ministry to Europe and beyond to the Western world.

Dr. Adrian Rogers, one of God's greatest preachers who ever lived on this earth used to say, "We have had enough commitments to Christ! Why? Because it is possible to have one area of our lives committed to Christ, while at the same time not having other parts of our lives committed to Jesus." Dr. Rogers used to emphasize so much the concept that what we need in our churches is not commitment, but total surrender, which we have been talking so much about in this booklet. Dr. Stephen Olford, another one of God's wonderful servants, who is now in heaven with Dr. Rogers, used to say, "Partial obedience is total disobedience." Therefore, folks, we need total commitment and complete surrender of our lives to Christ, if we are going to respond properly to God's call.

Presently, as I have been writing this booklet on my computer, I have just come across an article on what Biblical Commitment means. I would like to interject this article in this study. Please read this short article carefully.

The Scriptural Meaning of Commitment

"How do we inherit eternal life? How can we come to know God, the living God? We shall see that in Biblical teaching, the answers to these questions are inseparably linked to our commitment to God. Commitment is an action on our part in response to God. There is no point talking about commitment unless we have at least the intention to commit. Our purpose, then, is to call forth a specific active response to God, and not just to increase our head knowledge. I will base this book on the Bible, the word of God, and not on human ideas or opinions. Our goal is a breakthrough in our relationship with God. As for those of you who have already made some kind of commitment to God, my hope is that any hindrance that may still stand between you and God will be removed.

Partial Commitment is no Commitment

Many Christians drag on in the Christian life year after year in partial commitment to God. But in the Bible, partial commitment is no commitment at all. The Lord Jesus says, "I wish that you were cold or hot" (Rev.3:15, HCSB). "Cold" means turning away from God all together. Yet in the mind of the Lord, that is not quite as bad as being lukewarm—neither here nor there. You may be 80 percent for God and 20 percent for the world, but the truth is that not even 95 percent is good enough for God. He requires of you nothing less than *total* commitment.

Many Christians are crippled in their Christian lives because of half-hearted commitment. They don't experience the joy and peace of the Christian life. They can't communicate with God, and God doesn't listen to their prayers. The problem is that their commitment has not been settled: they are not totally committed to God.

The Christian Life Does Not Work Without Total Commitment

On the basis of God's word, there is simply no way to live the Christian life without total commitment. That is the fact of the matter. It is not a matter of theory but a matter of reality and experience. You will discover for yourself that the Christian life simply won't work if you don't commit totally to God. Does God answer your prayers? If He doesn't, then something needs to be sorted out about your commitment. There are even people in full-time ministry who have commitment problems, but they realize this only after entering the ministry. This is a miserable situation to be in. You may have given up everything to serve the Lord, only to find out that you have no spiritual power, no joy, and no fellowship with God. Holding back a little something for yourself will undermine your commitment. All in all,

commitment has to do with the most important subject of all: our relationship with God.

Commitment in the Church Today?

The subject of commitment runs through the whole Bible. If we take it out of the Bible, we won't have any Bible left to read, for commitment lies at the heart of our relationship with God.

When I was a young Christian, no one told me about commitment. I did, however, have the advantage of knowing God in China at a time when it was dangerous to be a Christian and when our pastors were being sent to labor camps. We knew very well that without commitment, we would not survive as Christians. So commitment to God was not something that the church had to spell out explicitly. When I finally arrived in Hong Kong, I said to myself, "It's so wonderful to be in this free society where I can worship God in church or buy a Bible at a bookstore. But when I started visiting the churches there, I soon realized just how dead the Christians were. My heart sank. I said to myself, 'This is freedom'? These Christians have no life in them! I simply couldn't fellowship with them about the Lord. I couldn't talk to them about the deep things of God, or for that matter the elementary things.

When I shared with them about what God had done in my life, they couldn't understand what I was talking about. They gave me a puzzled stare as though I had come from outer space. After hearing about my experiences of God, they would say to me, these things took place in the book of Acts but not anymore. Did you come straight out of the first century?'

I said to myself, 'What's happening here? I can't even fellowship with my fellow Christians.'

As I listened to the church sermons, I soon discerned a lack of emphasis on the deep matter of our relationship with God. When I conversed with some of the pastors, I felt that I was talking with some businessmen. They seemed less interested in a relationship with God than in church income or church property. They were constantly thinking about expanding this facility or that facility, or doing outreach in order to expand the organization, much like a business trying to expand its market. I felt sick in my heart, and wondered what exactly was the problem.

For a long time I couldn't pinpoint the problem. But as I waited on the Lord for an answer, and examined what the Bible may have to say about it, I began to see that the root problem was a lack of commitment. People in our so-called free society are not interested in committing to God. The church's failure to teach commitment has resulted in the dead churches all around us. Whenever I raised the subject of commitment, many would say to me, 'If you talk about commitment, no one will go to church or become a Christian. The cost is too high!' To this I would answer, 'But commitment is taught everywhere in the Scriptures.'

That is why we will look into the Bible to see what it says about commitment. Don't accept what I say out of my own opinion—see for yourself what the Bible teaches about it.

The Bible teaches not just commitment but *total* commitment, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Total commitment is the foundation of our relationship with God. Commitment is sometimes stated explicitly, other times implicitly. In the latter case, the statement would make sense only in relation to commitment. If you remove the element of commitment from it, the sentence would lose its meaning."²

So, my dear beloved saints, "Are you fully surrendered to Jesus? And, are you serving Jesus with partial commitment or total commitment?" I pray that it is total commitment, because not one of us will ever truly respond to the call of God for our lives, until we put everything in our lives that is secular and selfish on the back burner, and just simply live for the purpose for which God created us and put us here to fulfill His perfect will for our lives.

IV. RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD DEMANDS A WILLINGNESS TO SHARE. vs. 12-15

We now come to the last point in this study of God's call of Paul the Apostle from his planned journey on the way to possibly Galatia, Bithynia, and even on to Asia. But, the truth was that Paul and his friends were following the plans that Paul made for the trip, while God had other plans for him and his mission. We have already seen that in order to respond properly to the call of God, there must be a stop to wait for God to give the vision of His plans for each of us as believers. Then, once God gives us the vision of the direction He has for us, then, we must open our eyes and be really perceptive of what God has planned for us, and of course, how to get started in that direction. The third point which we have looked at is that once we respond to the call of God by stopping to wait for His guidance, then, get a vision of the direction and places God wants us to go, and then, come to the place to where we totally commit ourselves to full surrender of our lives to Jesus for the plan and work He has planned for us, then, the next and last point is that we need to be ready to take the Good News, which God has called us to share, and to share it with everyone we possibly can in the places where God calls us to go. So now, let's look at three very important things about sharing the Gospel that we have been called to share.

A. There must be a willingness to share in strange cities. v. 12

² Christian Disciples Church Website, By: Erick Chang, Page 1.

After Paul and his three friends set sail for Macedonia, they started out from Troas, and then, went to the Island of Samothracia, where they spent a night. Then, the very next day they sailed to Neapolis, a port town on the coast of the Aegean Sea. Once they arrived here, they no doubt began preparing for their first evangelism stop in Philippi. This city was named after Phillip the Second, the father of Alexander the Great. Anciently, Philippi was the site of a rich gold mine. King Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) seized the mines in the area, fortified the city, and named it after himself. Later it became a Roman Colony (Acts 16:12) and, at the time of the New Testament, was more a military town than a hub of major commerce. Later on, because this city of Philippi became that Roman Colony, the town became very popular. And truthfully, my recognition for the city of Philippi has to do with Lydia, the first European convert, who responded to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then became the beginning of the great movement of Christianity into the Roman world. It is believed that because of the Christians starting out at Philippi, the Roman Empire was eventually defeated and destroyed just simply because of the impact these early Christians made on that part of the known world. We must never forget that Paul loved the city of Philippi, and he cherished the relationship with the church he founded in that beautiful city.

So, when God stopped Paul and his team from going on to ultimately Asia, and He then brought them over to Asia Minor and ultimately to Macedonia, this must have been a challenge for Paul and the others because this city of Philippi was a strange city to this missionary team.

Therefore, if we are going to respond to the call of God for our lives, we must be ready to travel to those unknown cities and there preach and teach the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, even if going there takes us out of our comfort zones. And, I will tell you from my many years of experiences in the ministry that if God calls and places us in some initial discomfort, just remember that in order to increase our territory, there will be other times when God calls us to get out of our comfort zone. Could I please ask you how well you deal with being led out of your comfort zone? Just remember that in order for us to reach those hard-to-reach places, we may just have to ask God to increase our faith and lead us personally until we have overcome our fears; especially when He leads us to some strange cities and towns. Now, let's move on to the importance of sharing the Gospel message in strange circumstances.

B. There must be a willingness to share in strange circumstances. v. 13

As we take a deep look at verse 13, please notice that on the Sabbath Day (Saturday), Paul took his team of four people and moved down to an inter- waterway, which led out to the nearby Aegean Sea. The reason that Paul didn't go into a synagogue was because there were not enough Jewish men there to establish a

synagogue. Starting a synagogue required at least 10 strong Jewish men in order to get the synagogue started. So, undoubtedly, there were not enough men there to build a synagogue.

So, Paul came and arrived in Philippi, and it must have been then that he was told that there was not a synagogue, but that there were some devoted religious women who gathered each week to pray together. So, Paul led his little team of four, and they went down to join the women for prayer. It was then that Paul shared the Gospel with Lydia and the other women in these strange circumstances. During the presentation of the Gospel, Lydia responded by faith and got saved. Thus, was the beginning of the Gospel message in Europe, and for the rest of the Western world. The things that happened on this special Sabbath day down near the river that ran out into the sea was one of the most crucial days in all of human history.

And so, may I tell you that if we are going to respond properly to the call of God for our lives, I assure you that God will definitely lead you into some strange circumstances. I really can attest this because one morning back in 1976, I was invited to go and preach to and witness to some very strange people in the Florida State Prison. It was surely strange because it was the beginning of my personal witness for almost 7 years to Ted Bundy. Truly, this was just one of these strange circumstances, but I assure you that there would be hundreds more as I continued to try and respond properly to the call and will of God.

Let me also ask you this, "Are you ready for God to take you to some strange places and then have you preach and teach the Gospel message to hundreds and hundreds of people right in the midst of strange circumstances?" If you are not yet ready, please know that time is running out for every born-again child of God, because Jesus is going to come again very soon. And, if we are going to win thousands more to Christ, then we must go where He sends us, and we must respond properly when we get there!

C. There must be a willingness to share in strange congregations. vs. 14-15.

The little group of people gathered with Lydia down near the river was not a very large group. But, when Paul, Timothy, Silas, and Luke arrived, truly, it was a strange thing that there were no men gathered with the ladies. But, we can be sure that this strange gathering was just the beginning, because it was not very long until Paul was taking the Gospel message to other cities in Macedonia, and in the surrounding areas. But folks, let me tell you that as a Senior citizen preacher who has pastored eleven churches, I can tell you that all through my 55 years of ministry, the women and small children have always responded easier to the Gospel than the men and youth. And, I have found this to be true also in Africa. The only problem with this is that because there are so few men in our churches, the women are having to carry

the load for outreach and development. We need to pray that God might send a true heaven-sent revival that will bring us a new crop of men and yes, some respectful youth, that will want to get involved in taking the Gospel message to the ends of the earth, even if responding to the call of God demands that they get out of their comfort zones and into the strange cities where so many people need the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Great Commission is seriously dependent upon the courage and commitment of God's servants who are willing to respond properly to the call of God.

Conclusion

Well, it has been many hours since I started writing this booklet on how believers should be responding to the call of God. It has been a wonderful exegetical study with much practical application, which I pray that every reader will apply to his or her life. Surely, we are in a day when so very few genuine believers are surrendering to the call of God, and it is strangely scary that we can all go to church for many years, and never see a young person or even older adult that will walk down an aisle and surrender his or her life to the call of God. But yet, this is what genuine Christianity is all about. And truthfully, it really alarms me that so few church people seem to be bothered by this lack of response to surrendering to the call of God. Like one old timer told me many years ago, evangelism and world missions is just one beggar finding Jesus as the bread of life, and then, taking this bread of life to other beggars. We sincerely must have on our hearts what Jesus has on His. And, the verse that I get this truth from comes from **Luke 19:10**, which says, "**For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.**" You see my dear friends, until we have on our hearts that which Jesus has on His, we will never be tempted or inclined to seek the call of God and respond to it personally as every child of God should be doing. Just let me tell you again that God doesn't save us as individuals just to provide eternal fire insurance. No, when He saves any person, He not only saves this person to take him or her to heaven. But, He saves every person to recruit or enlist them in the army of the Kingdom of God. I want to scream from the housetop that God didn't send Jesus to die on the cross just to forgive us our sins. But, He saves every person to give them some spiritual gifts, which must then be used in the winning of other people to Christ in order to eventually help complete the bride of Christ, which He is returning soon in order to take the bride to heaven for the marriage of the Lamb. So, let's stop, see, surrender, and get equipped to share the Gospel message with the rest of the entire world. If we are going to do this, then, we must remember and keep remembering that our precious Lord Jesus Christ is not one of many ways to go to heaven, but He is the only way. How dare we contribute to the eternal fiery destiny of lost sinners, when we know most assuredly that Christ is truly the only way to heaven. (John 14:6).

