

Timothy

From [Timothy](#) , an article in Wikipedia.

Timothy is mentioned in the Bible at the time of Paul's second visit to Lystra in Anatolia, where Timothy is mentioned as a "disciple". Paul, impressed by his "own son in the faith," arranged that he should become his companion. Timothy was the son of a Jewess, but had not been circumcised, and Paul now ensured that this was done, according to the text, to ensure Timothy's acceptability to the Jews. According to McGarvey Paul performed the operation "with his own hand", but others claim this is unlikely and nowhere attested[citation needed]. He was ordained and went with Paul on his journeys through Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas, Philippi, Veria, and Corinth. His mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, are noted as eminent for their piety and faith, which indicates that they may have also been Christians. Timothy is praised by Paul for his knowledge of the Scriptures (in the 1st century mostly the Septuagint, see Development of the New Testament canon#Clement of Rome), and is said to have been acquainted with the Scriptures since childhood. Little is known about Timothy's father; only that he was Greek.¹

From W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*.

The seeds of Gospel truth had been sown in the heart of Timothy before he met Paul. The instruction received in childhood, the sight of St. Paul's sufferings, the hearing of his words, the example of the 'unfeigned faith, which first dwelt in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice,' (2 Tim. 1:5) and whatever other influences the Holy Spirit had used for his soul's good, had resulted in the full conviction that Jesus was the Messiah. And if we may draw an obvious inference from the various passages of Scripture, which describe the subsequent relation of Paul and Timothy, we may assert that natural qualities of an engaging character were combined with the Christian faith of this young disciple.

¹Wikipedia article: *Saint Timothy*.

The Apostle's heart seems to have been drawn towards him with peculiar tenderness. He singled him out from the other disciples. 'Him would Paul have to go forth with him.' (Acts 16:3) This feeling is in harmony with all that we read, in the Acts and the Epistles, of St. Paul's affectionate and confiding disposition. He had no relative ties which were of service in his apostolic work; his companions were few and changing; and though Silas may well be supposed to have supplied the place of Barnabas, it was no weakness to yearn for the society of one who might become, what Mark had once appeared to be, a son in the Gospels.

Yet how could he consistently take an untried youth on so difficult an enterprise? How could he receive Timothy into "the glorious company of Apostles," when he had rejected Mark? Such questions might be raised, if we were not distinctly told that the highest testimony was given to Timothy's Christian character, not only at Lystra, but at Iconium also. (Acts 16:2) We infer from this, that diligent inquiry was made concerning his fitness for the work to which he was willing to devote himself. To omit, at present, all notice of the prophetic intimations which sanctioned the appointment of Timothy, we have the best proof that he united in himself those outward and inward qualifications which a careful prudence would require.

One other point must be alluded to, which was of the utmost moment at that particular crisis of the Church. The meeting of the Council at Jerusalem had lately taken place. And, though it had been decided that the Gentiles were not to be forced into Judaism on embracing Christianity, and though St. Paul carried with him "the Decree, to be delivered" to all the churches," yet still he was in a delicate and difficult position. The Jewish Christians had naturally a great jealousy on the subject of their ancient divine Law; and in dealing with the two parties the Apostle had need of the utmost caution and discretion. We see, then, that in choosing a fellow worker, for his future labors, there was a

peculiar fitness in selecting one whose mother was a Jewess, while his father was a Greek.

We may be permitted here to take a short retrospect of the childhood and education of St. Paul's new associate. The hand of the Apostle himself has drawn for us the picture of his early years. (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15) That picture represents to us a mother and a grandmother, full of tenderness and faith, piously instructing the young Timothy in the ancient Scriptures, making his memory familiar with that 'cloud of witnesses' which encompassed all the history of the chosen people, and training his hopes to expect the Messiah of Israel.

It is not allowed to us to trace the previous history of these godly women of the dispersion. It is highly probable that they may have been connected with those Babylonian Jews whom Antiochus settled in Phrygia three centuries before: or they may have been conducted into Lycaonia by some of those mercantile and other changes which affected the movements of so many families at the epoch we are writing of; such, for instance, as those which brought the household of the Corinthian Chloe into relations with Ephesus," and caused the proselyte Lydia to remove from Thyatira to Philippi"

There is one difficulty which, at first sight, seems considerable; viz. the fact that a religious Jewess, like Eunice, should have been married to a Greek. Such a marriage was scarcely in harmony with the stricter spirit of early Judaism, and in Palestine itself it could hardly have taken place." But among the Jews of the dispersion, and especially in remote districts, where but few of the scattered people were established, the case was rather different. Mixed marriages, under such circumstances, were doubtless very frequent. We are at liberty to suppose that in this case the husband was a proselyte. We hear of no objections raised to the circumcision of Timothy, and we may reasonably conclude that the father was himself inclined to Judaism:" if, indeed, he were not already deceased, and Eunice a widow.

This very circumstance, however, of his mixed origin gave to Timothy an intimate connection with both the Jewish and Gentile worlds. Though far removed from the larger colonies of Israelite families, he was brought up in a thoroughly Jewish atmosphere: his heart was at Jerusalem while his footsteps were in the level fields near Lystra, or on the volcanic crags of the Black Mount: and his mind was stored with the Hebrew or Greek words of inspired men of old in the midst of the rude idol-

aters, whose language was 'the speech of Lycaonia.'" And yet he could hardly be called a Jewish boy, for he had not been admitted within the pale of God's ancient covenant by the rite of circumcision. He was in the same position, with respect to the Jewish Church, as those, with respect to the Christian Church, who, in various ages, and for various reasons, have deferred their baptism to the period of mature life. And 'the Jews which were in those quarters,'" (Acts 16:3) however much they may have respected him, yet, knowing 'that his father was a Greek,'" and that he himself was uncircumcised, must have considered him all but an" alien from the commonwealth of Israel"

Now, for St. Paul to travel among the synagogues with a companion in this condition, and to attempt to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, when his associate and assistant in the work was an uncircumcised Heathen, would evidently have been to encumber his progress and embarrass his work. We see in the first aspect of the case a complete explanation of what to many has seemed inconsistent, and what some have ventured to pronounce as culpable, in the conduct of St. Paul. 'He took and circumcised Timothy.'" How could he do otherwise, if he acted with his usual" , farsighted caution and deliberation? Had Timothy not been circumcised, a storm would have gathered round the Apostle in his further progress.

The Jews, who were ever ready to persecute him from city to city, would have denounced him still more violently in every synagogue, when they saw in his personal preferences, and in the co operation he most valued, a visible revolt against the law of his forefathers. To imagine that they could have overlooked the absence of circumcision in Timothy's case, as a matter of no essential importance, is to suppose they had already become enlightened Christians. Even in the bosom of the Church we have seen the difficulties which had recently been raised by scrupulousness and bigotry on this very subject. And the difficulties would have been increased tenfold in the untrodden field before St. Paul by proclaiming everywhere on his very arrival that. circumcision was abolished. His fixed line of procedure was to act on the cities through the synagogues, and to preach the Gospel first to the Jew and then to the Gentile."

He had no intention of abandoning this method, and we know that he continued it for many years." But such a course would have been impossible had not Timothy been circumcised. He must necessarily have been repelled by that people who en-

deavored once (as we shall see hereafter) to murder St. Paul, because they imagined he had taken a Greek into the Temple (Acts 21:29, with 22:22). The very intercourse of social life would have been hindered, and made almost impossible, by the presence of a half heathen companion: for, however far the stricter practice may have been relaxed among the Hellenizing Jews of the dispersion, the general principle of exclusiveness everywhere remained, and it was still "an abomination" for the circumcised to eat with the uncircumcised.

It may be thought, however, that St. Paul's conduct in circumcising Timothy was inconsistent with the principle and practice he maintained at Jerusalem when he refused to circumcise Titus (Gal. 2:3). But the two cases were entirely different. Then there was an attempt to enforce circumcision as necessary to salvation: now it was performed as a voluntary act, and simply on prudential grounds. Those who insisted on the ceremony in the case of Titus were Christians, who were endeavoring to burden the Gospel with the yoke of the Law: those for whose sakes Timothy became obedient to one provision of the Law were Jews, whom it was desirable not to provoke, that they might more easily be delivered from bondage. By conceding in the present case, prejudice was conciliated and the Gospel furthered: the results of yielding in the former case would have been disastrous, and perhaps ruinous, to the cause of pure Christianity.

If it be said that even in this case there was danger lest serious results should follow, that doubt might be thrown on the freedom of the Gospel, and that color might be given to the Judaizing propensity; it is enough to answer, that indifferent actions become right or wrong according to our knowledge of their probable consequences, and that St. Paul was a better judge of the consequences likely to follow from Timothy's circumcision than we can possibly be. Are we concerned about the effects likely to have been produced on the mind of Timothy himself? There was no risk, at least, lest he should think that circumcision was necessary to salvation, for he had been publicly recognized as a Christian before he was circumcised, and the companion, disciple, and minister of St. Paul was in no danger, we should suppose, of becoming a Judaizer.

And as for the moral results which might be expected to follow in the minds of the other Lycaonian Christians, it must be remembered that at this very moment St. Paul was carrying with him and publishing the Decree which announced to all Gentiles that they were not to be burdened with

a yoke which the Jews had never been able to bear. St. Luke notices this circumstance in the very next verse after the mention of Timothy's circumcision, as if to call our attention to the contiguity of the two facts. It would seem, indeed, that the very best arrangements were adopted which a divinely enlightened prudence could suggest. Paul carried with him the letter of the Apostles and elders, that no Gentile Christian might be enslaved to Judaism. He circumcised his minister and companion, that no Jewish Christian might have his prejudices shocked. His language was that which he always used, 'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing. The renovation of the heart in Christ is everything.' Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.' (Rom. 14:5) No innocent prejudice was ever treated roughly by St. Paul. To the Jew he became a Jew, to the Gentile a Gentile: 'he was all things to all men, if by any means he might save some.' (1 Cor. 9:20-22)

Iconium appears to have been the place where Timothy was circumcised. The opinion of the Christians at Iconium, as well as those at Lystra, had been obtained before the Apostle took him as his companion. These towns were separated only by the distance of a few miles; and constant communication must have been going on between the residents in the two places, whether Gentile, Jewish, or Christian. Iconium was by far the more populous and important city of the two, and it was the point of intersection of all the great roads in the neighborhood. For these reasons we conceive that St. Paul's stay in Iconium was of greater moment than his visits to the smaller towns, such as Lystra. Whether the ordination of Timothy, as well as his circumcision, took place at this particular place and time, is a point not easy to determine. But this view is at least as probable as any other that can be suggested: and it gives a new and solemn emphasis to this occasion, if we consider it as that to which reference is made in the tender allusions of the pastoral letters, where St. Paul reminds Timothy of his good confession before "many witnesses," (1 Tim. 6:12) of the "prophecies" which sanctioned his dedication to God's services ((1 Tim. 1:18), and of the "gifts" received by the laying on of "the hands of the presbyters" (1 Tim. 4:14) and the Apostle's "own hands." (2 Tim. 1:6)

Such references to the day of ordination, with all its well remembered details, not only were full of serious admonition to

Timothy, but possess the deepest interest for us. And this interest becomes still greater if we bear

in mind that the “witnesses” who stood by were St. Paul’s own converts, and the very “brethren” who gave testimony to Timothy’s high character at Lystra and Iconium; that the “prophecy” which designated him to his office was the same spiritual gift which had attested the commission of Barn-

abas and Saul at Antioch,² and that the College of Presbyters (1 Tim. 4:14), who, in conjunction with the Apostle, ordained the new minister of the Gospel, consisted of those who had been” ordained in, every church” at the close of that first journey.

²Compare 1 Tim. 1:18 with Acts 13:51 to 14:21.