

# The Footprints of GOD

## A Prudential Decision made by St. Paul Applied to Covid Vaccines

I'd like to share a few thoughts on the covid vaccine since we are resuming our pilgrimages to Israel and other biblical and Catholic sites. Israel is currently mandating the vaccine as a prerequisite to enter the country. We will need to inform pilgrims that at this time they will need proof of the vaccine.

We will also inform them that it is the best possible time to visit the Holy Land without the crowds and long lines, with more time for prayer and immersion in the holy sites.

I found what I think to be an interesting biblical parallel about us making prudential judgments to lead people through the Holy Land even under these current conditions. We have no doubt of our calling to lead pilgrimages and the great good it does for pilgrims—all the deeply spiritual effects it has on pilgrims.

First, in 49 A.D. the Apostles gathered together for a council in Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15. It was a contentious gathering with some insights gained from the books of *Acts* and *Galatians*. The council debated the issue of circumcision and whether the surgery was necessary for salvation among the Gentiles. The Council of Jerusalem declared against the surgical mandate.

Assuming *Galatians* provides inside information about the inner workings of the council, Paul had criticized Peter to his face for being a hypocrite in regards to the issues of Jew and Gentile overshadowed by the issue of circumcision (Galatians 2, esp. verse 11).

Paul argued that the Judaizers were sneaking in among the brethren to steal away their liberty (Gal 2:4). The Judaizers from Jerusalem came to Antioch trying to impose “the works of the Law” on the Gentiles saying, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1) Paul was so angry he said he wished they would just castrate themselves (Gal 5:12).

Acts 15:28-29 concludes that circumcision was not required for salvation. Paul’s letters to the *Galatians* and *Romans* are mainly arguments for salvation by faith and not by works of the Jewish law, especially emphasizing circumcision.

Paul boasts that even later in Jerusalem he did not have his fellow-worker Titus circumcised, saying,

“But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you”. (Gal 2:1–5).

Now, back to the Council in Jerusalem In Acts 15. Remember the Council decreed that circumcision was not necessary.

Look what happened immediately AFTER the council while Paul was on his way through Asia Minor to deliver the decree (*dogmata* in Greek) which was binding on all the churches—the decree that eliminated the pernicious mandate of circumcision. The cutting of the foreskin would be a compromise, falling back into the bondage of the Judaizers and compromising the Gospel.

However, look what Paul does,

Acts 16:1–5: “Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ... Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.”

The very thing Paul despised and opposed he actually did! He railed against the imposition of circumcision as a mandate, yet for a prudential and practical reason he had his son in the faith Timothy circumcised to better minister among the Jews.

First, circumcision was objectionable and contrary to the Gospel. Second, it was not really safe either, the surgery being done under unsterile conditions with a flint knife using no antiseptic or anesthetic. Third, it was also being mandated by an authority—Paul’s preliminary audience in each city—the Jews (Acts 9:20; 17:2) Yet Paul applied the expedient surgery to Timothy.

I can imagine Timothy later speaking boldly to the Ephesians, exhorting them to stay true to the way of the Lord. One of them might stand up and ask, “Your father is Greek; were you circumcised?” Timothy says, “Yes.” The man then asks, “When?” Timothy responds, “By Paul after the Council of Jerusalem when he was delivering the decree regarding the removal of any requirement for circumcision for Greeks.” The man might respond,

“You took the expedient route and put the Gospel of liberty in question, and you tell us to stay true to the truth of the Gospel?”

Yet, with all this in mind, Paul took the expeditious path and made the prudential decision that Timothy would be circumcised. It seems that the same expediency and prudence of St. Paul concerning Timothy could be applied to the covid vaccine under certain situations. Even though I oppose it and fight the mandates, yet I made a prudential decision to enable us to fulfill the task that we believe God has called us to do.

I expect that some will oppose this understanding of St. Paul’s actions with Timothy, or at least disagree with my application of it. This is a very divisive issue and emotions can run high on all sides.