WHY ACTS 16:14 DOES NOT SUPPORT CALVINISM

Acts 16:14 (KJV)
14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Acts 18:26 (KJV)
26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Acts 19:2 (KJV)
2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

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Acts 1:8 (KJV)

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
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The text is not always clear whether these are first time converts, or whether they are believers hearing “the way of God more perfectly.”

Convert Demographics

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Acts 16:14 (KJV)

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Acts 16:14 (NSV)

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which could not have possibly worshipped God, since she was unregenerate and totally depraved, did not have ears to hear us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the Gospel which was spoken of Paul.
Calvinist Assumptions based on the phrase “whose heart the Lord opened.”

- the Lord has to have opened Lydia’s heart or she would not have tended to the things spoken by Paul
- Everyone else who is saved has their heart opened by the Lord in the same manner
- no one who is unsaved ever has their heart opened by the Lord
- the Lord exclusively uses supernatural heart-opening measures, and does not use common, ordinary circumstantial means to open someone’s heart.
- This heart opening of the Lord is required for anyone to be regenerated.
- This heart-opening is a doctrinal requirement for salvation (John 16:7-11)
- believing on Christ requires something in addition to hearing (Rom. 10:14-17) which only the elect receive.
- Lydia was lost/unsaved
- The things spoken by Paul were the Gospel.
Calvinists will often go over to Luke 24:45:

**Luke 24:45 (KJV)**

45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

And try to conflate these two things to make them the same, basically because they both have the word “opened” and that makes things convenient for people who are proof-texting. We not going to get into the nuts and bolts of Luke 24:45 here, but the scenarios and intent are completely different. In one narrative, you have the apostles who do not yet have the Spirit, since Acts 2 hasn’t occurred, and who back in Luke 18:34 didn’t understand the death, burial and resurrection of Christ because it was hidden from them. You know, because they were not elect, and only non-elect people have things hidden from them. Back to the point. Luke 24:45 is about their understanding. It’s more academic. Acts 16:14 is more about the receptiveness of the heart, not the understanding of the mind.
Luke 18:31-34 (KJV)
31 Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.
32 For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:
33 And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.
34 And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.
When does regeneration take place with Lydia?

• When her heart is opened?
• Or when she heard the things spoken by Paul?
• Or when she believes them?
Paul encountered Ananias 3 days after his conversion and wasn’t baptized until them.

Lydia could have been converted prior to this time (Acts 16:14), and led to encounter Paul for grounding, as we’ll explore in a bit.

Paul had a vision earlier in the chapter of a man from Macedonia saying, “cover over into Macedonia, and help us” (v. 9). They interpreted this as being called to preach the gospel in that area (v. 10). We know that sometimes the term “gospel” is a reference not only to the initial message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but is also inclusive of what Paul calls “my gospel” (Rom. 2:16; 16:25), which includes all the doctrine for Christian living, and revelation of the mysteries of the one body, and many other things.
So, there are a few options regarding this man of Macedonia. Either he exists completely in a vision and is not a real person, or he is a believer who needs sound doctrine, or he is a lost person who needs to be saved. Now, if he is a lost person who needs to hear the Gospel so that he can be saved, it does not jive well with the Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity in which case he would not want to be saved, and would never seek God in any way until after regenerated. Of course, that never made a difference to them in the narrative of Cornelius either. So, this vision of Paul’s might make for some interesting conversation with a Calvinist.

Acts 16:9-10 (KJV)
9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.
10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.
1 Corinthians 16:19 (KJV)
19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

Revelation 2:18 (KJV)
18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;
The next thing said about her is, “Which worshipped God” (Acts 16:14). This is stated unequivocally, as if it needs no qualifier or explanation.

Where is Lydia, what day is it, and why is she there? According to verse 13, she’s down at the river side at a prayer meeting on the Sabbath day.

Now if we stop right there, does Lydia sound like a saved or a lost person. Be honest now. If you didn’t already have your mind made up about the narrative because of your stubborn gnostic presuppositions, what kind of description do we have so far? Does this sound like a totally depraved person who hates God and loves depravity? No. Not at all.

So, the Calvinists have a problem either way here. Either she’s already saved, in which case this cannot be a Calvinist proof text regarding gnostic requirements for regeneration. Either that, or she’s not saved, in which case you have a supposedly totally depraved person worshipping God, and going to a prayer meeting on the Sabbath day? Pick your refutation. I’ll let you have either one.
In Acts 2, the preachers speak in tongues but the converts do not. In Acts 4, five thousand men are converted and there’s no mention of tongues or baptism.

So far, only Jews are getting saved. In Acts 8, some Samaritans believe and are baptized but they don’t get the Spirit until Peter and John come lay hands on them. No tongues are mentioned. You want to make that one the standard?

In Acts 9, a bright light shines with a voice from heaven, and the convert is knocked off of his horse and blinded. Why that sounds exactly like what happened to Cornelius, doesn’t it.

In Acts 10, the preacher doesn’t speak in tongues, but the converts do, and they are baptized afterward, and no one needs hands laid on them. Also in Acts 10, the totally depraved person who has yet to be regenerated fears God, gives much alms to the people, and prays all the time. Looks like someone forgot to get the Calvinist distortion of Romans 3 to him in time before he could make a fool of the Gnostics with his pre-regenerate behavior.

In Acts 16, the totally depraved jailer who hates God and would never try or be able to seek God asks how to be saved.

In chapter 17, the totally depraved Bereans are described as “noble,” and they search he scriptures in verse 11, even though they don’t believe until verse 12.

Is what happened to Lydia the exact same thing that must happen to any convert, in the exact same way?

Could we apply that standard to any other element of conversion narratives in the book of Acts?
Acts 4:4 (KJV)

4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

Acts 8:5 (KJV)

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

Acts 8:12 (KJV)

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 8:17 (KJV)

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Acts 9:3-4 (KJV)

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Acts 10:2 (KJV)

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.

Acts 10:4 (KJV)

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

Acts 16:30 (KJV)

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Acts 17:11-12 (KJV)

11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12 Therefore many of them were信(believing) also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.
Acts 18:24-26 (KJV)
24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.
25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.
26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Acts 19:1-7 (KJV)
1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,
2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.
3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.
4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.
5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.
7 And all the men were about twelve.
Acts 11:14-19 (KJV)
14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.
15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.
16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.
17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?
18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.
19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

Acts 15:1 (KJV)
1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Acts 15:7-11 (KJV)
7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles [Cornelius] by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.
8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;
9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.
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Acts 16:13-15 (KJV)

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.
Acts 10:6 (KJV)
6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

Acts 10:43-45 (KJV)
43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.
44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.
45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

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9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10 ...
11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Titus 3:5 (KJV)
5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

1 Corinthians 1:21 (KJV)
21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.
This line of questioning is where Calvinists get creative and inventive. What you’ll find that his point is that instead of regeneration occurring at a single moment in time, they start to spread it out over the course of several successive events. They’ll say, “Well, you see, God was drawing Cornelius as he does with all of His elect.”

And things like, “God has to give them ears to hear before they can hear and respond to the Gospel.”

Okay, so is this totally depraved person regenerated when they get the ears to hear, or some time later on. After all, based on the Gnostic Calvinistic philosophy of the will, the person still hates God and will never choose God even if they hear about him without first being regenerated, so what good does having ears to hear do for anyone?

So now the Calvinist has the elect sinner getting incrementally saved and regenerated over a successive sequence of events, a little bit at a time.
Matthew 11:15 (KJV)
15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 13:9 (KJV)
9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 13:43 (KJV)
43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark 4:9 (KJV)
9 And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark 4:23 (KJV)
23 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark 7:16 (KJV)
16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 8:8 (KJV)
8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 14:35 (KJV)
35 It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 10:5-6 (KJV)
5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:
6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:24 (KJV)
24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
Matthew 11:15 (KJV)
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19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.
13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?
15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!
16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?
17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. [not by new magical gnostic ears]
Acts 16:14 (KJV)

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (KJV)

1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, *prayers*, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, *be made for all men*;

2 For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

3 For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
So HOW did God open Lydia’s heart? The Calvinist presumption is that God just supernaturally reached in there and flipped a magical switch to open her heart. But the text doesn’t specify the “how’ of this matter.

Hasn’t God opened your heart before? Hasn’t he done so quite a few times? Wouldn’t you say that God has opened your heart to some kind of truth at least 25 times since you’ve been saved, and perhaps many times before that?

So how did he do that? We don’t know for sure. Perhaps she had booming sales of Purple dye that week and she was thankful to God. Perhaps the sales bombed out. Perhaps she recently lost a child. Perhaps she just watched a close friend of hers get run over by a camel. Perhaps she heard a really good news article from the town crier that’s had her thinking.
John 16:7-11 (KJV)
7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.
8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:
9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;
10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;
11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

John 6:44 (KJV)
44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 7:39 (KJV)
39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Acts 7:51 (KJV)
51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.
Let’s talk for a second about the condition of the human heart in scripture. The Calvinists like to take verse like Jeremiah 17:9 and Genesis 6:5 out of context to try to make the argument that the human heart is incapable of responding positively to the Gospel unless it is first regenerated. But the narrative of scripture does not support this Calvinistic view. In Genesis 20:6, God tells a Dagon-worshipping pagan king that he had integrity in his heart, and that he knows he would have done the right thing in not taking Abraham’s wife for his own if he had been told the truth about her marital status. Furthermore, Calvinists like to take the concept of spiritual death from passages like Ephesians 2:1-4 and carry it over as if it were identical to physical death. Despite the number of times they’ve done this, I’ve still not seen a single one of them out evangelizing at any of the many cemeteries we have here in New Orleans. I guess they don’t practice what they preach. Nonetheless, it is not physical death, but spiritual death. Notice that when a person responds to the Gospel in Romans 10:9-10, it is parts of their living body that are used for this, the heart and the mouth, and not the dead spirit. The spirit is regenerated after the heart and the mouth respond to the Gospel in belief, which according to the same chapter, must only be preceded by a preacher preaching it to them.

**Genesis 20:6 (KJV)**

6 And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

**Romans 10:9-10 (KJV)**

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
Acts 16:15-16 (KJV)
15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.
16 And it came to pass [passage of an unknown amount of time?], as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

Acts 16:40 (KJV)
40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.
Biblical Interpretation
• Observation
• Interpretation
• Application
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