

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CLEAR DIRECTION (ACTS 15:22-29) MOVING FORWARD

After coming to a conclusion on how to handle the balance between Jewish and Gentile Christians, the church in Jerusalem decides to draft up a letter and send representatives back with Paul and Barnabas.

- The decision was discussed as a group, and then the final decision was made by the pastor, James.

PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY OF THE CHURCH

Paul and Barney were heading back to Antioch anyways, so why couldn't they just tell the believers the decision of the council?

- They would have represented only one side of the debate. Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas, two elders of the Jerusalem church, went with them to ensure the integrity of the church.

TRANSPARENCY IN THE CHURCH

Paul and Barney were trustworthy, but because it would have been easy for the converted Pharisees to claim a one-sided council, the church gave full transparency with a letter and representatives of both sides.

- **We're to "live above reproach" and "avoid even the appearance of evil." One way we do this is transparency.**

WE ALSO PROTECT INTEGRITY WITH HUMILITY

The letter sent back to Antioch contained an apology for the trouble the Judaizers may have caused. This did a couple things.

1. It showed that the church at large disagreed with the Judaizers.
2. It teaches us to **acknowledge and apologize** for the church's mistakes.

LIFE WAS CHANGING

The letter also acknowledges that the requirements mentioned may seem burdensome for the new Gentile converts, but it is best for them and the church as a whole.

- As new Christians, the dramatic change can be difficult. But, **we must learn that God and good church leadership want the best for people.**

"PERMISSIBLE BUT NOT PROFITABLE"

Some changes in our Christian walk are not done because the bible says so but because we are obeying leadership or personal convictions from God.

- **We must be careful with this! We must have trustworthy leaders and humble, God fearing, and church honoring congregants.**

IT GOES BEYOND JUST SALVATION

The letter to Antioch mentions the majors that the Gentile converts need to focus on to be righteous Christians, but the core of this issue goes beyond just going to heaven.

- **We are to honor each other and honor and submit to authority. If we fail in this, we will never reach a place of greatness.**

WHY DIDN'T PAUL EVER MENTION THE LETTER?

Many wonder why Paul never talked specifically about his letter in his epistles. Though he didn't cite it specifically, he does mention the same principles in 1 Corinthians 5-7 and 8-10.

- Paul also focused on salvation, and the debate over social customs was not central to his epistles' themes.

APPLICATION (ACTS 15:30-35)

READING THE LETTER IN ANTIOCH

The letter to the church in Antioch would have also been heard by many from Syria and other surrounding areas. When the Christians heard the decision from Jerusalem, they "rejoiced because of its encouragement."

JUDAS AND SILAS WERE ALSO ENCOURAGED

The elders from the Jerusalem church enjoyed being in Antioch and stayed long enough to "strengthen them with a long message."

- These men had the gift of prophecy. **Prophecy is a motivational gift of the Spirit. Through this gift, God makes believers aware of needs that He wants to meet through them.**

"...SENT BACK IN PEACE."

When Judas and Silas' time was done in Antioch, they were "sent back in peace." The slight rupture amongst Jewish and Gentile Christians had been fixed and relationships had been restored.

- **Conflict resolution amongst believers is taught by Christ (Matthew 18), Solomon (Proverbs 12), James, and Paul.**

WE TRY, BUT DON'T ALWAYS SUCCEED

Two factions would forever remain in the church, and Paul would forever be a polarizing contributor to the Bible (very much so today). James and the others made a genuine effort at unity, but unfortunately it doesn't always work.

- **We cannot always ensure unity, but we must continually strive for it!**

WE SKIPPED A VERSE

Many of your translations will not have v34. This isn't a problem with the Word, but later manuscripts omit what might have been a later scribe's addition about Silas staying in Antioch.

- This shows the great care by which scholars and theologians have taken to maintain the integrity of the Bible.

SEPARATION (ACTS 15:36-41) "AFTER SOME TIME HAD PASSED"

Roughly a year and a half had passed since the council in Jerusalem. V36 marks the beginning of another new chapter in the church, Paul's 2nd missionary journey.

- Paul's initial motivation was to reconnect with the new churches and encourage them, and Barnabas agrees to go along.

BARNABAS ASSUMED MARK WOULD JOIN THEM

Remember, Mark went along on the first missionary trip, but because of a disagreement with Paul, he bailed and returned home.

- Though Luke doesn't say exactly why, Paul was adamant about Mark not joining them because he deserted them years ago.

THIS DISAGREEMENT BECAME A BLOWUP

Paul and Barnabas were dear friends, but the idea of Mark coming along put a wedge between them.

- Did Mark seem unrepentant to Paul? Did Paul think he would water down the decision of the council to the Gentile converts? We don't know for sure.

WE DO KNOW THIS...

Paul and Barnabas intended to take one team out, but God wanted two groups that could cover more area in the same time frame. Barnabas took Mark and headed towards Cyprus. Paul took Silas with him into Syria and Asia Minor.

- Silas was also able to affirm the council's decision with Paul. God put two more balanced teams together.

DOES THIS MEAN GOD DESIGNS FALLOUTS?

Sometimes no and sometimes yes. God wants reconciliation between Christians and with non-believers (Romans 12:18), but if His plan is being hindered, God will allow things to happen to move His will forward.

- **Though God is sovereign, we also have free will. Sometimes it's not God or Satan, but us.**

HUMANS MAKE MISTAKES

- We see with many people in the Bible that they are human just like we are. Paul was polarizing, Mark had bailed, people argued and there were divisions.
- This should encourage us. **We see that we too can be used by God.** We also learn how dependent we are on His grace and mercy.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

- Though people make mistakes, **God is in control.** This doesn't excuse our actions, but it helps us
- trust that God's plan will ultimately come to fruition.
- It should bring us comfort that **nothing is outside of God's knowledge or control!**

FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE THAT LOVE HIM

- Through hard times, broken relationships, temptations, trials, and even the mistakes we have made, God will work things out and help those who are **humble enough to repent, willing to submit, and genuinely love Jesus.**
- **God loves us, despite us!**