

4/24. Acts 15:22-35

PRAY

[Act 15:22-27 ESV]

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

23 with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.

24 Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,

25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.

The reason it seemed good to send out a letter to the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia was because back here in Acts 15 verse 1

[Act 15:1 ESV] 1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

We had an unauthorized message that had been sent that basically said you had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved by Christ

This was troubling to the Apostles, the elders and in fact the whole church as they didn't want any false teachings to become doctrine and to take away from what was the true message of Jesus.

Even when Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem to the church relating all they had seen and done, they encountered a similar way of thinking from some.

[Act 15:5 ESV]

5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

We have a pretty good idea about how Jesus felt about the Pharisees,

[Mat 5:20 ESV] 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

[Mat 23:13, 25, 27 ESV]

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. ...

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ...

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

One might say that Jesus wasn't really a fanboy of some of the actions of the Pharisees

What the council here is hoping to address (did I mention that Acts 15 is titled the Jerusalem Council) and verses 22 through 34 is titled *The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers*

Luke in his gospel tells us that Jesus said:

[Luke 12:1 ESV]

1 In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Remember earlier in Acts 15 at verse 10, this very issue was discussed

[Act 15:10 ESV]

10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

Referring to the group of Pharisees that were insisting on Circumcision for the Gentiles.

Therefore, it was decided to send a letter to the Gentile Brothers, not only a letter, but they will also send Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, Judas called

Barsabbas, we don't really hear much more about after this chapter, Silas plays a larger part later accompanying Paul.

Again Acts 15: 25-27

25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.

So, we have Paul and Barnabas, Judas and Silas, and the letter, and Judas and Silas will tell you the same things that are in the letter by "word of mouth"

Four guys and a letter, two men charged with repeating the same thing that is in the letter, and it isn't because Paul and Barnabas were strangers to the folks in Antioch and Syria

Why was it felt necessary to also send Judas and Silas, remember these men grew up as Jews under the law, they were there to testify as to the truth of what the council had decided as from:

[Deuteronomy 19:15 ESV]

15 "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

This was what we call now a “rule of evidence” by the way, the current “rules of evidence” comprise at least 67 numbered rules, an untold number of pages, and that is just the federal version.

Now that we have established the foundation (federal rule of evidence #602, personal knowledge of witness) what did the letter say?

Acts 15

28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:

29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

Realizing that I had just used about one thousand words to get us to the point of actually reading the content of the letter, I thought maybe I should count the words in the letter,

56 words, and they didn't even mention circumcision

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, I am certainly not going to try to disagree with this source, and they did list GOD first

Abstaining from things sacrificed to idols, a word used 121 times in the ESV translation, not once used in a positive light, it all stems from

[Exodus 20:4-5 ESV]

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.

Likewise, sexual immorality was and is considered something to “refrain from”

[Ephesians 5:3 ESV]

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

These were pagan practices, and very common at the time

Then again so were the other two prohibitions mentioned in the letter

Eating of blood and strangled “food”

But I seem to remember Peter's vision from chapter 10

[Act 10:12-15 ESV]

12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."

15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

GOD made blood and you couldn't strangle something unless GOD made it.

Why would the council ask the Gentiles to refrain from these two things, let's look to something Paul would later write?

[1Co 8:13 ESV]

13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

The council simply wanted to have the Gentiles to not be in a position to tempt or cause hard feelings with their Jewish brethren.

Let's recap what we have learned so far

There was an issue in the church, leadership came together and enlisted the spirit of the LORD for solution that all agreed upon (having come to one accord) that

addressed the real issue, it wasn't circumcision, but about sitting next to your brother in Christ and flaunting things he has been taught were sins his whole life.

Keeping the love of Jesus at the forefront of the church.

Acts 15

31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

32 And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.

33 And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.

34 Some Greek manuscripts exclude this verse. The ESV related footnote for 15:33 states:

Some manuscripts insert verse 34: *But it seemed good to Silas to remain there*

35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

I think Luke has a message for us in these verses:

As with most things that involve men, a disagreement arose, the lesson is in how it was handled, they didn't have protests or riots, they came together and debated the subject.

[Act 15:6-7 ESV]

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

They had guidance from the HOLY Spirit.

They used both these to come up with a solution that addressed the real problem.

I think that this is the lesson for us, if we can't address things in this fashion in our own lives, in our relationships, in the body of our church fellowship, where everyone should be coming together in Love and respect and in fear of the LORD are we not as bad as the Pharisees, wanting to go back to the LAW, as interpreted and enforced by man, instead of the simple message of Love for GOD and for one another we are taught by Jesus

Let's talk about the world for a moment, if I were a CEO or someone in charge of a project that would have people spending long times together working toward a common goal, might I not want to pick people that were capable of coming together, debating in a civil manner and resolving the issue, walking away with no ill feelings toward each other (as a follower of Christ I personally would want them to confirm with the Holy Spirit that they were in GOD'S will)

How about if I were NASA and wanted to send people to mars, a trip that requires confinement together for years, maybe I would spend about \$140 Million this year alone to find ways to select people that could get along with each other.

I wonder if I were going to try to find people to spend eternity together, maybe I would give them a simple example of someone that showed us how to have love for each other, and would see if they followed him with their hearts. Just saying