

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, Associated

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #66

COMMENTARY ON: 15:22-31

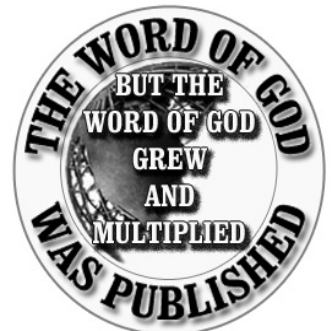
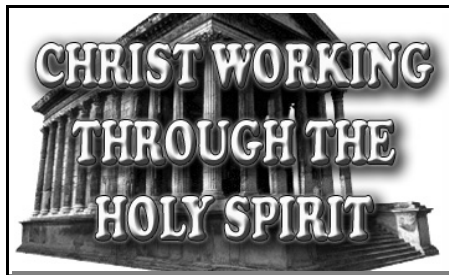
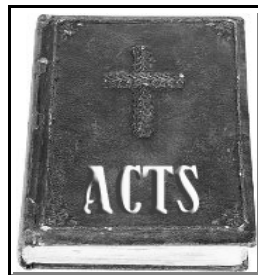
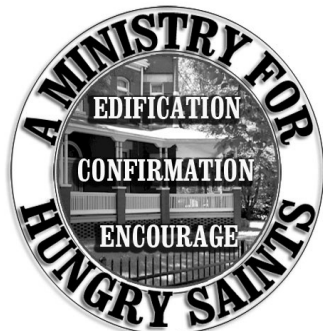
A LETTER IS SENT AND DELIVERED

Realizing the gravity of the situation the apostles and elders are confronting, and the seriousness of right doctrine, James has delivered a word that will result in protecting the Gentile believers against the encroachment of false teachers. They recognize the distinction between Law and grace, as well as what constitutes an unnecessary burden upon the believers. That, of course, postulates a keen awareness of the impact of powerless rules and regulations upon the human spirit. In a grand display of keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, there is perfect accord among the apostles, elders, and the whole church in Jerusalem. Keeping in mind that the answer to the dilemma they were facing was not perceived immediately – either in Antioch or Jerusalem – we are being made privy to the marvelous working of the Lord among His people. It is all done with decency and order, all the while maintaining sound minds and yielded hearts.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

" . . . 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." (Acts 1:8)

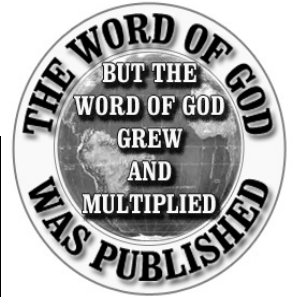


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 66



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.LITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833),WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

----- *Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification* -----
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

A LETTER IS PREPARED AND DELIVERED

^{15:22} "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: ²³ And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: ²⁴ Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: ²⁵ It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; ²⁹ That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. ³⁰ So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: ³¹ Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation." (Acts 15:22-31)

INTRODUCTION

Realizing the gravity of the situation the apostles and elders are confronting, and the seriousness of right doctrine, James has delivered a word that will result in protecting the Gentile believers against the encroachment of false teachers. Throughout the book of Acts, the church, or body of Christ, is consistently given high priority. There was an awareness that these people belong to God, having been purchased by Jesus' own blood (Acts 20:28). They were

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- **CHOSEN MEN WERE SENT (15:22b)**
- **THE MANNER OF THE LETTERS (15:23)**
- **THE IMPACT OF FALSE TEACHING (15:24)**
- **IT SEEMED GOOD TO US TO SEND CHOSEN MEN (15:25-27)**
- **IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (15:28)**
- **IF YOU DO THIS, YOU WILL DO WELL (15:29)**
- **THEY REJOICED FOR CONSOLATION (15:30-31)**
- **CONCLUSION**

the “*body of Christ*” (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12; 5:30). These are the people who are being built together for a habitation of God, and are the repository into which the fullness of Christ is being poured. As it is written, “*And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all . . . Now therefore ye are . . . of the household of God: And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*” (Eph 1:22-23; 2:19-22).

GOD WILL NOT GIVE HIS GLORY TO ANOTHER

In order to maintain an institutional emphasis in which the organization is primary, the awareness of these blessed realities is necessarily forfeited. As He has declared, God will not share His glory with another (Isa 42:8; 48:11) – not even an institution that purports to wear His name.

By saying that He will not give His glory to another, God means, among

other things, that His Divine attributes will not be devoted to something He did not originate. His power will not undergird an agenda or program that was not initiated by Him. He will not work salvation through something created by men. He will not give sanctifying power to a message that does not reflect His mind, or through which He is said to implement His purpose.

This is not a mere technicality. The God “*who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will*” (Eph 1:11), does not depart from that manner in any aspect of salvation, whether it pertains to it initially, or in its ongoing perfection in this world. **Those who say their methods bring one closer to God, or enable one to obtain more grace, have not told the truth.** Permit me to give you a few statements from men who claim to have instituted a procedure through which things accredited to Divine power are claimed to be accomplished.

- ⇨ “**We open the door to recovery** by sharing our experience, strength, and hope with one another. **This leads to a greater capacity for accepting God’s grace** and movement in our lives as we are working through issues that have robbed us of all hope for a better future.”
- ⇨ “The recovery process **enables us to move toward greater freedom** from addictive, compulsive and dysfunctional behaviors. **The freedom creates a peace, serenity, joy, and most importantly, a stronger personal relationship with God** and others.”
- ⇨ “The purpose of . . . is to fellowship and celebrate God’s healing power in our lives through ‘**8 recovery principles.**’ **This experience allows us to ‘be changed.’** By working and applying these Biblical principles, **we begin to grow spiritually . . . As we progress through the program we discover**

our personal, loving and forgiving High Power – Jesus Christ, the only and only true High Power.”

- ⇨ “Over the years I’ve witnessed how **the Holy Spirit has used this program to transform literally thousands of lives . . .**”
- ⇨ Of the Beatitudes: “But when you fully understand what Jesus is saying, you’ll realize that **these eight principles are God’s road to recovery, wholeness, growth, and spiritual maturity.**”
- ⇨ “Use of the CR Bible is strongly encouraged due to the fact that **it is the only Bible that directly corresponds to the CR curriculum.** The CR Bible has been designed to work with the resources developed and tested in the national and international ministry of CR.”
- ⇨ “The answer to the way **we are changed is by seeing that we continue to fall short of the glory of God** - Rom. 3:23. The present tense of the verb there points to ongoing action. **The humbling of confessing our sins works to conform us to be like Jesus who was humble and without sin.**”

Currently, the above programs have been instituted in nearly every state of the USA, as well as numerous foreign countries with thousands of churches having adopted them. Is it really true that these programs, and others like them open the door to recovery, lead to a greater capacity for accepting God’s grace, and create peace? Is it possible for a program instituted by men to create a stronger relationship with God, cause one to “be changed,” and discover Christ? Can such a program really transform lives, and be the road to spiritual growth and maturity. Precisely what kind of program requires that a special Bible be “designed to work with the resources” provided in that program?

My purpose is to show that the matter with which our text is dealing has not ceased to exist. There are still those who are not content for men to be complete in Christ. They offer additional means through which Divine objectives can be realized.

My purpose is to show that the matter with which our text is dealing has not ceased to exist. There are still those who are not content for men to be complete in Christ. They offer additional means through which Divine objectives can be realized. However, here is the caveat in the whole matter: **they are not Divinely revealed means.** If they are, in fact, valid, then God has given His glory to "another." In such a case, achievements that are credited to faith in Christ can actually be accomplished by adherence to a humanly devised procedure – and it is an extended procedure in which it is best to use a special Bible. How true can that be?"

Exactly what is the substantive difference between that approach and requiring believers to "be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses"? How is it that what is said to be accomplished by faith, can also be accomplished by following a list of special rules, or being circumcised, or keeping the law of Moses? If we are really "complete" in Christ, as Colossians 2:10 affirms, then how is it possible for transformation, peace, spiritual growth, and a personal relationship with God to be achieved by any other means?

This is the matter that is being resolved in our text. Certain Jews had required more than Christ to be saved – and recovery, transformation, obtaining grace, finding peace, and coming into a relationship with God, are all facets of salvation.

In order for this text to be profitable to us, we must see the principles that are being addressed in it, and see their bearing on special burdens that are being imposed on believers in our time.

I want to again remind you of the associations that have been made to this point with the salvation of the Gentiles.

To this point, the only things the Gentiles themselves were said to have done were:

- ⇒ Hear the Word (Acts 10:44).
- ⇒ Believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17).

⇒ Turned to God (Acts 15:19).

God is said to have given them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:17; 15:7-8), granted them repentance (Acts 11:18), purified their hearts (Acts 15:9), was saving them by His grace (Acts 15:11), and had taken out of the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14).

ASSESSING GOD'S WORK AT THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS

Assessments of this event: "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. . . . For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter" (Acts 10:44,46)

- ◆ The Holy Spirit fell on them who heard the Word (10:44). – Luke
- ◆ They received the Holy Spirit as did the disciples on Pentecost (10:47). – Peter
- ◆ The Spirit fell on them as on the disciples at the beginning (11:15). – Peter
- ◆ Peter remembered the promise of Jesus that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (11:16). – Peter
- ◆ God gave them the same gift as He did the disciples (11:17a). – Peter
- ◆ They had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (11:17b). – Peter
- ◆ God granted them repentance unto life (11:18). – disciples
- ◆ God gave them the Holy Spirit, as He did the disciples (15:7). – Peter
- ◆ God bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit as He did the disciples (15:8). – Peter
- ◆ God purified their hearts by faith (15:9). – Peter
- ◆ They were saved by the grace of God (15:11). – Peter
- ◆ God visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (15:14). – James
- ◆ These were people, who from the Gentiles, are turned to God (15:19) – James

Exactly where does being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses fit into that kind of description?

The point to be seen here is that theological difficulties, and issues pertaining to salvation, can only be resolved within the context of Divine working, and the understanding of what God is actually doing in salvation. All of that is set within the context of God's Word, which brings lucidity to the subject. This circumstance provides no room for men to receive glory, or for their wayward ideas to be dignified by being invested with Divine power.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LAW AND GRACE

The brethren in our text recognized the distinction between Law and grace, as well as what constitutes an unnecessary burden upon the believers. Peter boldly announced, "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11). He referred to the Law, as a means of salvation, in this way: "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?" (Acts 15:10). James saw the imposition of Law upon the Gentile believers as a troubling influence: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (Acts 15:19).

Throughout the last 40-50 years, I have become increasingly aware of the obtuseness of the modern church concerning the distinction between Law and grace. There is a vast difference between being saved by doing and saved by believing. Those who are unlearned in this matter suggest that being saved by grace through faith eliminates doing, blissfully unaware of the fact that it is really the only means through which acceptable doing can be accomplished. At the summary level, salvation is "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8). At the foundational level men are "justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:28). When it comes to what men "must" do, the commandments all relate to an appropriate response to the Gospel itself, not to humanly devised plans, or the deeds of the law. Thus we read of obeying "the Gospel" (Rom 10:16; 2 Thess 1:8), and obeying "the form of the doctrine of the Gospel" (Rom 6:17). Being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses does not fall into that category.

THE LESSER GLORY

The Old Covenant, that was based upon the Ten Commandments, which were "the words of the covenant" (Ex 34:28), did have a glory. That Old Covenant was, Paul said, "glorious" (2 Cor 3:7,9,10,11). However, it was an inferior glory that was caused to pass away by the greater glory of the New Covenant – like the light of the sun causes the moon to lose its glory. The New Covenant is said to be "rather

glorious” (2 Cor 3:8), and to “*exceed in glory*” (2 Cor 3:9). It has a glory that remains, and cannot possibly be superceded by any covenant that has a greater glory (2 Cor 3:11). **Something that has a lesser glory cannot possibly make a contribution to the effectiveness of what possesses the greater glory.**

The Old Covenant was the ultimate moral code, and stands for all such law. It was the solitary example of what it means to live by rules, or codified law. It is not possible to come up with a better code of outward conduct that was provided in “*the Law of Moses.*” You may be sure that if it makes no contribution to salvation, no law originated by men can do so. If it cannot bring transformation, peace, and fellowship with God, precisely who is the man who would presume to introduce a law, principle, or rule, claiming that it is capable of doing so.

If men really prefer a procedurally driven religion, then they must adopt the Law of Moses, for that is the only ordained Law of that sort. In the keeping of it, nothing can ever be omitted. Absolute perfect and unwavering compliance is required (Ex 23:22; Lev 18:5; 20:22; 26:14-16; Num 15:40; Deut 6:24-25; 11:22,32; 13:18; 15:5; 19:9; 28:1). Of course, once a person engages in a conscientious effort to keep all of the commandments of the Law without any exception, and to do so in a consistent, perfect, and unwavering manner, **he will come to the conclusion that he requires a Savior.** Only a single infraction produces this condition, to say nothing of continuing to live in such a manner, coming short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

One of the characteristics of man-made programs is that they allow for infractions, even though they may not be condoned. The person is thought to be making progress if they do not fall as

often, or may even be able to go for a considerable time without falling. The difficulty with such an arrangement is that the person never really sees the need for a Savior. They are taught to maintain the view that they will eventually be able to control, or manage, their flaws. As I am seeking not to be overly abrasive, this is an error of unspeakable magnitude, flying the face of the Divine assessment of humanity, as well as the message of the Gospel itself.

It is in its conviction of the absolute helplessness of the sinner that the Law “*is our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ*” (Gal 3:24). Of course, once brought to Christ, when faith has come, “*We are no longer under a schoolmaster*” (Gal 3:25). Those, therefore, who perpetrate “*schoolmaster*” type programs are reintroducing bondage to the people, not freedom. The perception of this circumstance is seen in this text.

Something to Be Seen

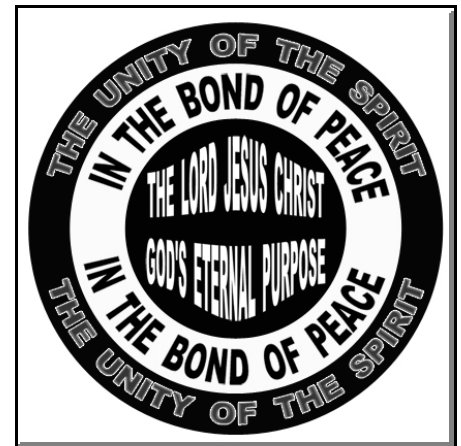
The response of Peter and James, together with the letters that are being sent out, postulates a keen awareness of the adverse impact of powerless rules and regulations upon the human spirit. This circumstance was one that could not be ignored, or tabled because of the imagined priority of saving lost souls. Souls that have been delivered, yet have returned to a code of law, are in a more serious condition that those who have never believed at all. Paul says that Christ has “*become of no effect*” to such people, and that they have “*fallen from grace*” (Gal 5:4). In such a case, he writes, “*Christ will profit you nothing*” (Gal 5:2).

Such statements have some alarming implications. The point here is that the people at this conference now saw it, and were prepared to do something decisive about it.

THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER

EVERYONE WAS PLEASED

Here is an example of keeping “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph 4:3). The Scriptural record of godly people is an example of the doctrine being lived out. The “*doctrine of Christ*” is not philosophical, but is the expression of truth that is accompanied with Divine power. If what men say they believe does not direct how they think and what they do, it is of no practical value, even though it may technically be called the truth. **Salvation is not delivering men from the power of darkness and translating them into the kingdom of Christ in spite of their response to the Gospel.** Their response, as constrained by faith and through the Spirit, is the appointed means of effecting the salvation of God.



In a grand display of keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, there is perfect accord among the apostles, elders, and the whole church in Jerusalem. **Keeping in mind that the answer to the dilemma they were facing was not perceived immediately – either in Antioch or Jerusalem – we are being made privy to the marvelous working of the Lord among His people.** It is all done with decency and order, all the while with the brethren maintaining sound minds and yielded hearts.

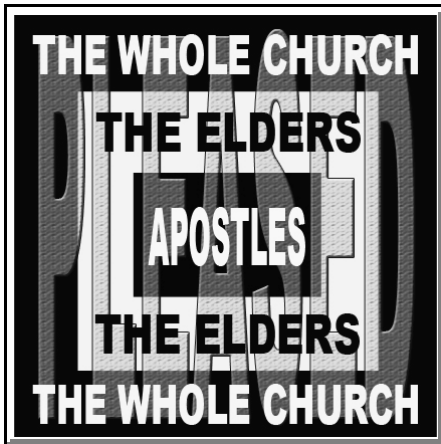
“ 15:22a **“Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church . . .”** Other versions read,

“*seemed good,*”^{NASB} “*decided to choose,*”^{NIV} “*with the consent of,*”^{NRSV} “*decided to,*”^{CJB} “*in agreement with,*”^{NAB} “*with the*

whole congregation,”^{TNT} “*with the whole assembly,*”^{YLT} “*voted to,*”^{LIVING} “*wanted to,*”^{IE} “*with the approval of,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “*in*

cooperation with,^{WILLIAMS} and “together with the whole resolved.”^{AMPLIFIED} “agreed to,”^{PHILLIPS} “then it seemed to the,”^{INTERLINEAR} and “seemed best to.”^{EMTV}

The words “Then pleased it” are translated from the two Greek word **Τότε ἔδοξε**. The first word means “Then, at that time,”^{THAYER} and “thereupon,”^{FRIBERG} The second word means, “to think . . . to judge,”^{THAYER} “to express one’s will or pleasure it seems best or good, decide,”^{FRIBERG} “be disposed,”^{UBS} “to regard something as presumably true,”^{LOUW-NIDA} and “to whom it may seem good, to whom it is a pleasure, to whom may be disposed in their heart.”^{LEH} What took place after the speech of James was a most marvelous work. There is no record of further dialog following the words of James. What he said was not thrown open to discussion. **Instead, there was immediate and perfect accord among everyone present – the apostles, the elders, and the whole church.** We know this included Paul and Barnabas, and those brethren who came with them from Antioch.



We do not know how many brethren constituted “the whole church” in Jerusalem. Indications are that there was a considerable number. Some time later, when Paul returned to Jerusalem, James referred to “many thousands of Jews” in Jerusalem, described as being believers – a term applied exclusively to those who were in Christ (Acts 21:20).

Not only were there probably a vast number of people present, there were also appointed and seasoned leaders: apostles and elders. Prophets were also present, Barnabas being one, and at least two more who will be named

later. **Yet, after a single statement made by James, there is perfect accord among these brethren – large in number, and broad in experience and insight.**

There are a number of things that are made known in this circumstance – things that confirm the truth of the doctrine that was held by the brethren.

- ⇨ **THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.** Here is an example of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Unity involves thinking alike as well as being together.
- ⇨ **THE UNITY OF THE FAITH.** We also have an example of “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13). Faith enables the minds of those possessing it to focus on the same thing and arrive at the same conclusions.
- ⇨ **THE SAME MIND AND THE SAME JUDGMENT.** Considering the number of the people and the scope of their experience, here is a marvelous example of the people of God having “the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). This is what the prophet referred to when he said, “for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion” (Isa 52:8).
- ⇨ **ONE ACCORD AND ONE MIND.** This is an example of being “likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil 2:2). Likemindedness is the result of having “the mind of the Lord” (Lev 24:12), or “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).
- ⇨ **ONE BODY.** This is also a wonderful commentary on what is meant by the expression “one body.” Not only is the body single, there is a harmony or accord, within it. Just as surely as there is a certain accord in a healthy human body, so there is harmony among those who comprise the body of Jesus Christ.

The absence of this kind of harmony in the modern church is largely owing to its diversion to the personal needs of individuals. **While there is certainly nothing wrong with meeting**

the earthly and personal needs of individuals, that is not the thrust of the work of the ministry. We are not left to conjecture on this. God has revealed the proper objective, and it is the business of the professed church to embrace it. The aim of appointed gifts given to the church is, “for the **equipping of the saints** for the work of service, to the **building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom **the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love**”^{NASB} (Eph 4:12-16).**

While all of this does involve each individual, it is THE BODY that is the point. It ought to be apparent why this is so. No individual is given everything belonging to the whole body. For one thing, no single person **can** contain the whole of the blessing. That is a capability belonging to Christ alone. Second, the Head of the body ministers to the individual parts in order that they might minister to the others. That is simply the way He works.

In this body of believers, three pivotal testimonies have been given by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas – with Paul and Barnabas delivering a joint testimony. After due consideration and due illumination, a single conclusion was delivered by James. Yet, through the words of these men, the hearts and minds of the others were brought into perfect accord.

At the conclusion of James’ word, there was not a single dissenting word! There you have evidence of the effectiveness of focusing on the salvation of God through faith, and the soundness of mind that it produces. In a very real way that is a protecting focus.

CHOSEN MEN SENT

“ 22b . . . to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas . . . ”

With unregenerate men, or with the spiritually immature, the more people that deal with an issue, the more possibility there is for disagreement. However, no such threat is apparent in the handling of the case before us. First, the church in Antioch sent some of their number with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. Now, the brethren at Jerusalem will send some of their number with those from Antioch, as they return to deliver letters of instruction to the brethren.

MEN OF THEIR OWN COMPANY

Other versions read, “men from among them,” ^{NASB} “some of their own men,” ^{NIV} “men from among their members,” ^{NRSV} “men out of their company,” ^{ASV} “men from among themselves,” ^{CJB} “some of their men,” ^{GWN} “representatives,” ^{NAB} “delegates,” ^{NLT} and “some of their number.” ^{MONTGOMERY}

It is apparent that the early believers had congregations, as opposed to being a mass of people who did not meet together, or that only met in small groups. These brethren determined to send men from their own “company,” assembly, or congregation. They were men with whom the people were familiar, and who had ministered among them. This is not the first time a choice was made from within a known group of believers.

- ⇒ Matthias was chosen from among the disciples who assembled together (Acts 1:23-26).
- ⇒ Seven men were chosen from among the brethren to administer the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:3,5).
- ⇒ Peter and John were sent by Jerusalem to Samaria (Acts 8:14).
- ⇒ Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:22).

The brethren in Antioch send relief to the brethren in Judaea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30).

- ⇒ Certain members of the Antioch church were sent with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem concerning the question of the necessity of circumcision and keeping the Law (Acts 15:2).
- ⇒ Now certain brethren are chosen to be sent back with the entourage from Antioch with letters for the brethren (Acts 15:22).

Note, there was perfect accord in each of these cases. No disruption or disagreement was found among the saints.

fathers of the congregation”(Num 31:26), “chief of the tribes” (Deut 1:15), “chief rulers” (2 Sam 8:18), “chief among the captains” (2 Sam 23:8), “chief of Solomon’s officers” (1 Kgs 5:16), “chief of the guard” (1 Kgs 14:27), “chief porters” (1 Chron 9:26), “chief of the singers” (Neh 12:46), “the chief musician” (Psa 4:1), and “the chief priest” (Jer 52:24).

Jesus spoke of those who would be “chief” among His disciples (Matt 20:27). Paul was perceived as a “chief speaker” (Acts 14:12). There were “chief women” in Athens who “believed and consorted with Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4).

The technical definition of “chief” is “To lead, i. e. a. to go before; b. to be a leader; to rule, command; to have authority over,” ^{THAYER}

In being a “Servant” Jesus was not meeting the desires of the people, giving them what they preferred, and carrying out their will. He was fundamentally the Servant of God, doing His will and promoting the Divinely revealed interests of the people.

JUDAS AND SILAS

“ . . . namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.” Other versions read, “leading men among the brethren,” ^{NKJV} “leaders among the brothers,” ^{NIV} “leading men in the brotherhood,” ^{NJB} “two of the church leaders.” ^{NLT}

“Chief Men”

There is such a thing as leading individuals – prominent for their work and insight. The Gentile world has “chief captains” (Gen 21:22), “chief of the butlers” (Gen 40:2), the “chief baker” (Gen 40:16)

Among the Jews there were “chief men” (Lev 21:4), “chief of the house” or “household” (Num 3:24), “chief over the Levites” (Num 3:32), “Moses and Aaron the chief of Israel” (Num 4:46), “chief

“leading, governing,” ^{FRIBERG} and “to go before, lead the way.” ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Jesus defined the manner in which this word is used among those who fear the Lord: “And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26).

A “chief” person is a servant – “he that doth serve.” The best way to more precisely define servant is to consider Jesus, who Himself is described as a “Servant” (Isa 42:1; 49:6; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11; Zech 3:8; Matt 12:18; Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30). In being a “Servant” Jesus was not meeting the desires of the people,

giving them what they preferred, and carrying out their will. **He was fundamentally the Servant of God, doing His will and promoting the Divinely revealed interests of the people.** He also pioneered the way to God, opening up a new and living way, and is leading the people in that proper way.

“Chief men” among the saints are those who lead the people in the ways of the Lord. They are the first to perceive the will and ways of God, then delivering them to the people. These are the people through whom the Lord speaks in new and spiritually refreshing ways. They are among those who perceive the will of the Lord more quickly. They can detect the encroachment of error in time to warn the people. Of themselves they are not better than the other people, but are more profitable to them. Their wisdom and insight does not promote their self interests, pride, or undue veneration.

“Judas Surnamed Barsabas”

“Judas” is the Greek form of Judah (Matt 1:2), and means “he shall be praised.” He is surnamed, a way of distinguishing him from other men with the same name. “Barsabas” means “son of [Bar] Sabas.” One of the men qualified to fill the place vacated by Judas was Joseph, also called “Barsabas,” or a son of Sabas (Acts 1:23). If this is the same Sabas, he certainly had two distinguished sons.

Other such designations include “Barjona” (son of Jonah – Matt 15:17), “Barabbas” (son of Abba – Matt 27:16), “Bartholomew” (son of Tolmai – Mk 3:18), “Bartimaeus” (son of Timaeus – Mk 10:46), and “Barnabas” (son of consolation – Acts 4:36).

“Silas”

This is the first reference to this man. He is mentioned thirteen times in the book of Acts (15:22,27,32,34,40; 16:19,25, 29; 17:4,10,14,15; 18:5). A considerable number of Scriptural and language scholars are of the opinion that “Silas” is a contraction of the name “Silvanus,” who is identified as laboring with Paul (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Pet 5:12). To my knowledge, there has not been a satisfactory refutation of this view. “Silvanus” is considered to be the Latin form of “Silas.” He was certainly a prominent figure in

the labors of Paul.

A REMINDER

It is necessary to remember how the early church addressed the intrusion

PEOPLE WITH THE NAME JUDAH/JUDAS

1. The patriarch Judah, son of Jacob – Gen 29:35; Matthew 1:2, 3.
2. One of the priests exiled to Babylon – Ezra 10:23.
3. Another priest during the time of Nehemiah – Neh 12:8.
4. A Benjamite, a ruler in Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah – Neh 11:9.
5. A priest who assisted in the dedication of the rebuilt wall of Jerusalem – Neh 12:34,36
6. One of the Levites who renounced his Gentile wife after the Babylonian captivity – Ezra 10:23.
7. One of Jesus’ brothers – Matt 13:55.
8. A person surnamed “the Galilean” – Acts 5:37
9. Son of Simon– John 6:71; 13:2, 26, surnamed (always in the other Gospels) ISCARIOT, to distinguish him from the other apostle of the same name.
10. The brother of James and an apostle– Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13
11. A disciple who entertained Paul – Acts 9:11

of questionable doctrine. It was treated in such a manner as to allow the discovery of the true nature of the doctrine. In other words, it was a way through which the Lord could make the truth known. The following reveals something of the nature of their approach.

- ⇒ **THEY CONTENDED FOR THE TRUTH.** First, those with some understanding disputed against the statement that it was necessary to be circumcised to be saved (15:2a).
- ⇒ **THEY SOUGHT FOR FURTHER UNDERSTANDING.** Second, with the absence of total agreement, the brethren determined to send Paul and Barnabas, with certain of their own number, to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem “about this question” (15:2b).
- ⇒ **THEY REPORTED WHAT THE LORD HAD DONE.** On their way, they declared the conversion of the Gentiles, causing “great joy among

the brethren” (15:3).

- ⇒ **THEY DECLARED WHAT GOD HAD DONE THROUGH THEM.** When they arrived in Jerusalem, and were received by the church and the apostles and elders, they “declared all things that God had done with them” (15:4).
- ⇒ **THEY CONSIDERED THE MATTER.** When some arose, affirming that circumcision and the keeping of “the law of Moses” were bound upon the Gentiles, “the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter” (15:5-6).
- ⇒ **THEY ENGAGED IN GODLY DISPUTATION.** Unwilling to accept this view, there was much disputation among the brethren over the matter, each presenting the opposing views (15:7).
- ⇒ **PETER REPORTED WHAT GOD HAD DONE THROUGH HIM.** After the discussion was finished, Peter reminded them that God had chosen him to open the door of faith to the Gentiles, again reporting what had taken place at that time (15:7-11).
- ⇒ **HOLY CONCLUSIONS WERE DRAWN.** Peter also presented some inspired conclusions:
 - God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit as He did to the disciples (15:8).
 - God purified their hearts by faith (15:9).
 - That it would be tempting God to impose a yoke upon the Gentiles that the Jews themselves were “unable to bear” (15:10).
 - The Jews would be saved “through the grace of God,” even as the Gentiles (15:11).
- ⇒ **MORE REPORTS OF WHAT THE LORD HAD DONE AMONG THE GENTILES.** Paul and Barnabas declared “what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (15:12).

⇒ **MORE GODLY CONCLUSIONS.** After every one had held their peace, James responded giving some more inspired conclusions.

- God had visited the Gentiles to “take out of them a people for His name”(15:14).
- This was in perfect accord with the declaration of the prophets

(15:15-17).

- The works of God are known to Him “from the beginning” (15:18).
- They should not trouble those who had turned to God from among the Gentiles (15:19).
- It would be appropriate to send

letters to the Gentiles clarifying what was really necessary (15:19-21).

What a marvelous example of arriving at a condition of both heart and mind where the people have the same mind and judgment! The natural man cannot do such things, for he is basically self-centered. **Only those with honest and good hearts can do this.**

THE MANNER OF THE LETTERS

“²³ And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.”

Unlike many, these brethren carried out what they had determined to do. You may recall that the church in Corinth had to be admonished to actually take up the funds they had said they would give to the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:10-11). No such admonition was required here. They did what they saw was right, not tarrying. Those who desire for God to “make no tarrying” (Psa 40:17; 70:5), should not themselves be noted for delaying and procrastinating. Even under the Law, the Lord told the people, “Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me”(Ex 22:29). Those who linger in a state of indecision or inactivity are not wise.

THEY WROTE LETTERS AFTER THIS MANNER

“And they wrote letters by them after this manner . . .” Other versions read, “wrote this letter,”^{NKJV} “sent this

letter,”^{NASB} “sent the following letter,”^{NIV} and “wrote thus.”^{ASV}

The words “after this manner” mean “as follows, or “thus,”^{THAYER} and “this (one) here,”^{FRIBERG} In other words, this is not an interpretation of what was said, or a certain view of what it might have meant. This is what was actually written with no modification.

THE APOSTLES, ELDERS, AND BRETHREN

“The apostles and elders and brethren . . .” Other versions read, “the apostles and the brethren who are elders,”^{NASB} “the apostles and elders, your brothers,”^{NIV} “the brothers, both the apostles and elders,”^{NRSV} “apostles and the elders, brethren,”^{ASV} “Apostles and the older brothers,”^{BBE} “emissaries and the elders, your brothers,”^{CJB} “apostles, and the elders, and the brethren,”^{DARBY} “^{APOSTLES}, and the Elders, and the brethren,”^{GENEVA} “from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem,”^{NLT} “apostles, and the elders, and the brethren,”^{YLT} “The apostles, elders and brothers at Jerusalem,”^{LIVING} and “The brethren, both the apostles and the elders.”^{AMPLIFIED}

I do not concur with some of the translations that represent the word “brethren,” or “brothers,” as applying only to the apostles and elders, or even to only the elders. While the Greek grammar can be construed to mean this, it appears to me that it is not a fair representation of the case. First, it was the decision of “the apostles, and elders, with the whole church” to send the letter (15:22). They all participated in choosing and sending the men who were to deliver the letter. I do not know what purpose is served by suggesting the letter was only from the apostles and elders.

It is quite true that the brethren in Antioch had sent their inquiry to “the apostles and elders” at Jerusalem (15:2). However, it presents a more accurate picture of the body of Christ to affirm the unanimity of the brethren in Jerusalem on this matter. The Gentiles would not be asked to do something – namely, yield to the counsel of the apostles and elders – that the rest of the brethren in Jerusalem had not done themselves. The strength of the letter is not only in the fact that it involved the assessment of the apostles and elders. That assessment also resulted in a conclusion and response that reflected the mind-set of the entire church in Jerusalem. There we have the mind of Christ received by all.

GREETING

“ . . . send greeting . . .” Other versions read, “Greetings,”^{NKJV} “may joy be with you,”^{BBE} “Dear brothers and sisters,”^{GWN} “Dear brothers,”^{IE} and “send their greetings.”^{PHILLIPS}

This reflects the nature of life in Christ Jesus, which desires the blessing and benefit of those who are in the Son. Even though there are times when believers must be corrected, there is an overriding desire for their benefit and the increase of their joy.

The Greek word translated “greeting” is χαίρειν (khah-ee-ro), which means “to rejoice, be glad in the proper and strict sense,” ^{THAYER} “be delighted,” ^{FRIBERG} and “to enjoy a state of happiness and well-being.” ^{LOUW-NIDA}

This reflects the nature of life in Christ Jesus, which desires the blessing and benefit of those who are in the Son. Even though there are times when believers must be corrected, there is an overriding desire for their benefit and the increase of their joy. The fundamental trait of the New Covenant is not to uncover flaws and deficiencies, but to bring about blessing. That is what compelled holy men of God to deliver rebukes and administer correction when it was required.

There is an approach to life in Christ that only seeks to address trouble and eliminate error. While such things are necessary, they are the means to a higher and everlasting state of blessing. In light of this kind of approach error is seen as a hindrance to blessing, and not merely the path to cursing. This by no means tones down the approach to correction – something that is taking place in this very text. Even under the Law this kind of desire was made known.

- **THE AARONIC BLESSING.** “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num 6:24-26).
- **THE DAVIDIC BLESSING.** “The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel” (Psa 20:1-4).

Apostolic greetings in the epistles also reflect this profound desire for the welfare and spiritual advanced of the people of God.

- **A PAULINE GREETING.** “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:7).

- **A GREETING FROM PETER.** “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet 1:2).

Wherever there is an institutional spirit, such as that reflected in spiritual Babylon, there is a total absence of this kind of spirit. It is not unusual to find sensitive souls languishing for lack of spiritual nourishment amidst the teeming activity of a church that is off course. Such a condition is an affront to the truth of God, and the evidence of aloofness from Christ.

UNTO THE BRETHREN

“ . . . unto the brethren . . . ”

Other versions read, “the Gentile believers,” ^{NIV} “the believers of Gentile origin,” ^{NRSV} “the brothers from among the Gentiles,” ^{CSB} “their non-Jewish brothers and sisters,” ^{GWN} “Gentile brothers and sisters,” ^{NET} “the brothers of Gentile birth,” ^{NJB} “who are of the nations,” ^{YLT} and “the Gentile brotherhood.” ^{MONTGOMERY}

There is more in this recognition than lies on the surface of the text. When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he spoke of his former mind-set – one from which he had then been delivered. “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). In this letter, there is not the slightest evidence that this thought was now present in Jerusalem. Now, after much disputation, discussion, and testimony, the people had seen that God was at work among the Gentiles. That perception overthrew any imagination they may have had concerning the supposed inferiority of Gentile believers.

ANTIOCH, SYRIA, AND CILICIA

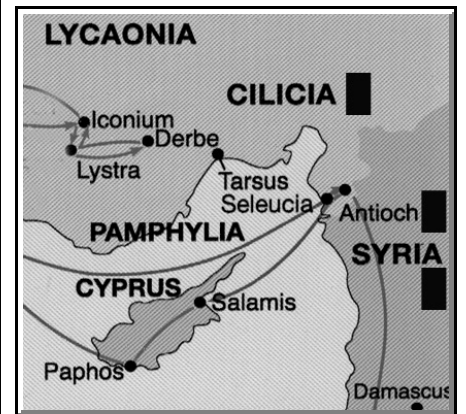
“ . . . which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.”

Antioch was a city, and Syria and Cilicia were regions. Syria was a province and kingdom in Western Asia. When Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:36), “His fame went throughout all Syria” (Matt 4:24). Luke says that at the time of the birth of

Jesus, “Cyrenius was the governor of Syria” (Lk 2:2). Later, Paul would go throughout Syria “confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41; Gal 1:21).



Syria was situated directly North of Galilee. It extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Tigris River, and from Canaan to Mount Taurus. Some Biblical cities located in Syria include Laodicea, Sidon, Tyre, Damascus, Joppa, Ashdod, and Gaza. One of the better known mounts in that area is Mount Nebo from which Moses saw the promised land (Deut 32:49).



Cilicia was bounded on the West by Pamphylia, with the Cilicia Sea on the South (Acts 27:5). When Stephen

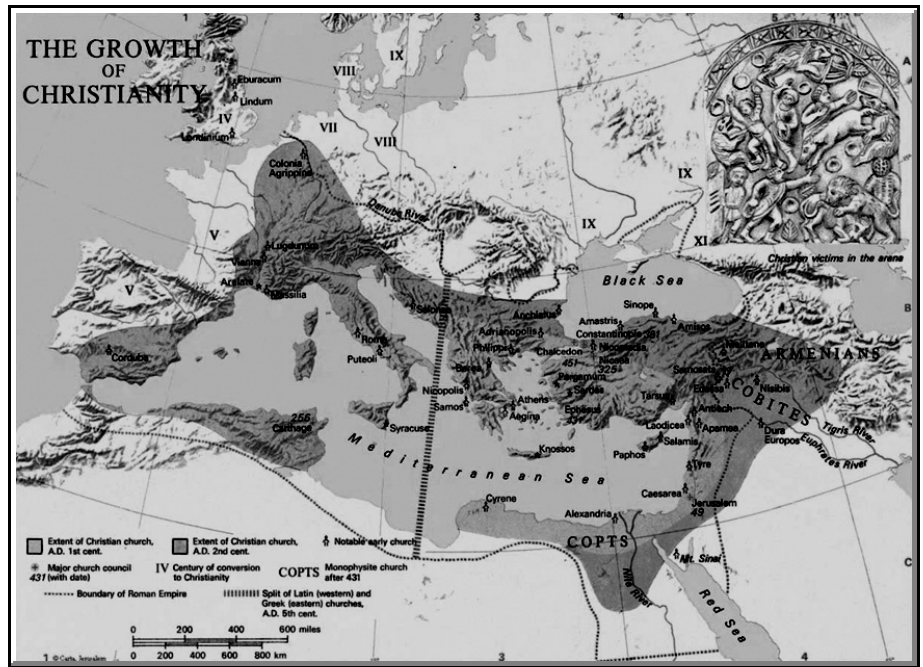
disputed with those in the synagogue of the Libertines, some aligned against him were from Cilicia (Acts 6:9). Tarsus, the home city of the Apostle Paul, is described as “a city in Cilicia” (Acts 21:39; 22:3; 23:34).

Prior to His ascension, when Jesus spoke to His disciples, He told them to be “witnesses” unto Him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Our text reveals the manner in which this commission was carried out. The disciples did not disperse in a disorderly manner, hopscotching, as it were, from place to place. They moved Northward into adjoining areas, saturating them with the Gospel. Then they moved Westward, covering every area with the good news of the Gospel. It was a kind of saturation of a vast segment of the world.

This was the manner in which Christ’s direction was fulfilled. It confirms that the Gospel was, indeed, for “every creature” (Matt 16:15). The only places they did not go is where the Spirit forbade them to go (Acts 6:6-7).

Knowledge of the Work of God

It is also important to note that the believers had extensive knowledge of



the work of the Lord in other areas. They met together, but their groups were not self-centered or self-contained.

They Were Concerned About Believers

It is also evident the early church was concerned about believers in others areas, determined to assist them in the apprehension of the truth, and protect them against the intrusion of

false doctrines. Of course, this type of concern has nearly been obliterated by sectarianism. As soon as the institutionalized church moves in, the concern for those outside of its own self-determined boundaries are forgotten. This is because a sectarian spirit is fundamentally carnal, or fleshly, and cannot think of the whole body – in synch with the Holy Spirit.

THE IMPACT OF FALSE TEACHING

“^{4A} Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment . . .”

How will the apostles, elders, and brethren in Jerusalem frame their response to the situation with the Gentiles. How will they refer to those who delivered an erroneous message? What will be the assessment of that message and its impact upon those who heard it? How will they describe their association with the propagators of the message that provoked the brethren in Antioch to send men to Jerusalem about the matter? The answers to these

questions will provides us with a glimpse of true spiritual life, and of its regard for relationships with those who wear the name of Christ.

CERTAIN WENT OUT FROM US

“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us . . .” Other versions read, “some of our number,”^{NASB} “Some persons from us,”^{RSV} “went out from amongst us,”^{DARBY} “some individuals who came from us,”^{GWN} “people coming from here,”^{NJB} “which departed from us,”^{TNT} and “having gone forth from us.”^{YLT}

The record of those who delivered the initial message of issue said they “came down from Judaea” (15:1).

That might lead to the conclusion that they were not actually a part of the Jerusalem church, but were isolated from it. However, James makes clear this was not the case. They were identified with the church, as were Ananias and Sapphira. And, like that pair who were judged of God, had been with them for some time with no apparent offense.

This is the first account of any doctrinal dissension in the early church, and even then, these men had not apparently expressed their erroneous view among the brethren. **However, upon hearing that some Gentiles had turned to the Lord, their own faulty view surfaced, and they thought it expedient to make an effort to bind it upon, what they**

conceived to be, weaker brethren. Apparently, until this time, with the majority of the church being Jewish, there had been no issue raised about circumcision. That is, it had not been associated with the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. The greatness of the salvation itself had overshadowed any flawed views of these brethren. However now, according to what seems to me to be Divine providence, their defective understanding had surfaced.

A Principle to be Seen

Certain issues can be introduced that force faulty theology to be expressed. In this case, it was the conversion of the Gentiles – a fact that many had not comprehended was going to take place. This unexpected event caused the erroneous views of certain to rise to the surface.

In our day, a similar thing has taken place. God has called His people to be holy (1 Pet 1:15-16; 1 Thess 4:7). There has also been considerable instruction given concerning the necessity of holiness (Rom 6:19,22; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Thess 3:13; Heb 12:14). Yet, in spite of this clear emphasis, a staggering measure of unholiness has pervaded the professing church. As Jesus said it would, iniquity is abounding, and the love of many has waxed cold (Matt 24:12).

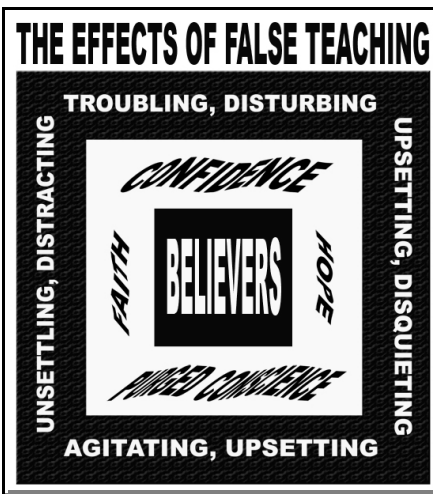
The rise of this condition has caused many who have embraced corrupt views to surface, and to peddle their theological wares. Those who have a twisted view of the security of the believer have stepped forward and are aggressive to teach that it is not possible to fall once a person professes faith. Others have been bold to offer solutions to a lack of holiness that are nothing more than expressions of the wisdom of men. It is now easier for them to sell their psychological ideas, procedural recovery plans, and the likes. Because the church is not growing as well as it could, some have also stepped forward to propagate their church growth and church planting programs, just as though they came from God. Others, seeing the fabric of the marriage and the family come apart, have risen to promote their ideas that life in this world is the primary life, and domestic life is the fundamental life.

Those who are marketing these approaches probably entertained flawed views all along. **However, there came a time when circumstances were introduced within the professed church that allowed them to promote those views with ungodly aggression.** What was formerly held as an opinion is now declared as a Divinely sanctioned methodology. It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of this situation.

TROUBLED YOU WITH WORDS

“. . . have troubled you with words . . .” Other versions read, “*disturbed you,*”^{NASB} “*upset you,*”^{CJB} “*confused you,*”^{GWN} “*disquieted you,*”^{MRD} and “*unsettling your minds.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

Here, the impact of false teaching is stated: troubling, disturbing, agitating, upsetting, disquieting, unsettling, distracting! As it is used here, the word from which “troubled” is translated has the following lexical meaning: “*to cause one inward commotion, take away his calmness of mind, disturb his equanimity; to disquiet, make restless.*”^{THAYER} and “*cause mental or spiritual agitation, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion.*”^{FRIEBERG}



If it is true that the peace of God will “*keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ*” (Phil 4:7), **what can be said of the unsettling and agitation of the believer?** Such troubling is an intrusion that causes peace to go away, and the heart and mind to become unstable. Do not doubt that such a thing

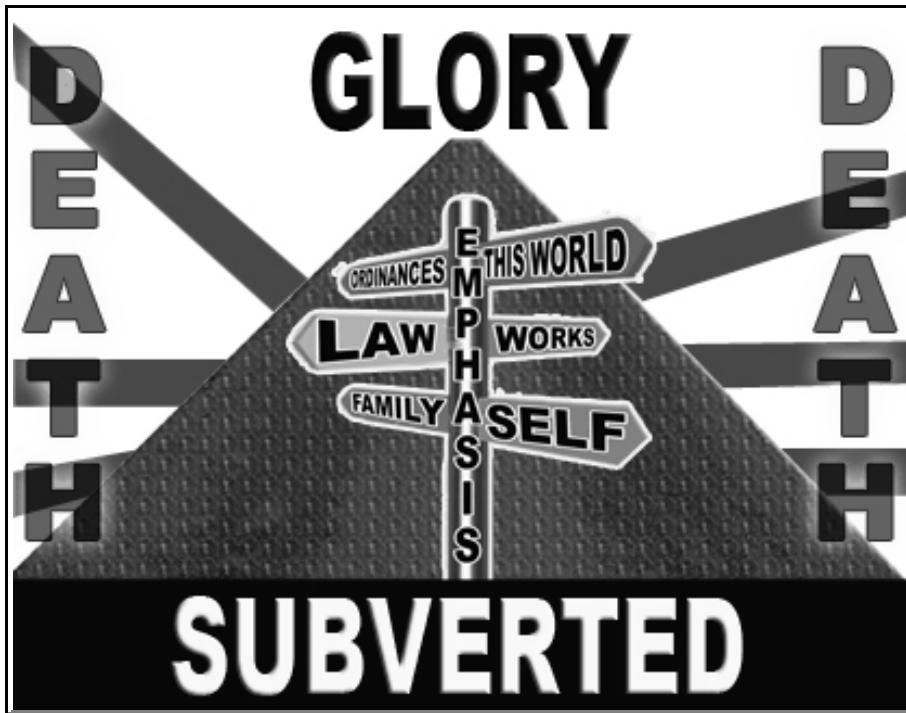
can happen! There are difficult times through which faith will lead us, and peace will maintain its sensitive rule during such times. However, false teaching changes the spiritual environment from calmness to storm, and from tranquility to disruption. It is not of the same order as the winds of adversity that blow upon us “*for righteousness sake.*” **False doctrine is the breath of Satan blowing upon the people of God, unsettling the environment, and causing all manner of adverse reactions within the hearts and minds of the people.** It causes a spiritual fog that blurs the vision, throwing things into a state of confusion.

The brethren in Jerusalem did not rush to the aid of the ones who taught the necessity of circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. They rather came to the assistance of those who were being impacted by what they taught. **Here is an excellent example of not having respect of persons.** Ordinarily, men think of such “*respect*” as not despising the lowly. But it also applies to not giving undue veneration to those who appear to have been exalted. The troubling effects of the teaching of these men who went out from the brethren in Jerusalem put their persons into the background, and brought the ones effected by their teaching into the foreground.

SUBVERTING YOUR SOULS

“. . . subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law . . .*” Other versions read, “*unsettling your souls,*”^{NKJV} “*troubling your minds,*”^{NIV} “*unsettled your minds,*”^{NRSV} “*putting your souls in doubt,*”^{BBE} “*unsettled your hearts,*”^{CSB} “*upsetting your souls,*”^{DARBY} “*cumbered your minds,*”^{GENEVA} “*disturbed your peace of mind,*”^{NAB} “*questioned your salvation,*”^{LIVING} and “*throwing you into confusion.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

The Greek word, from which “*subverting*” is translated, is different from the Greek word for “*troubled.*” Its meaning is, “*to turn away violently from a right state, to unsettle, subvert,*”^{THAYER} “*tear down, upset, unsettle,*”^{FRIEBERG} “*to break up one’s camp, march away.*”^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} In the English language, the word “*subvert*” means “*to overturn or overthrow from the foundation: RUIN.*”^{WEBSTER}



Here we go beyond agitation and confusion. It is possible for a ship to maintain its course in a storm, even though it will done with considerable difficulty. A driver can get to his destination, even if his vehicle is faulty, requiring frequent stops and repairs. But when the person navigating the ship is on the course leading in the wrong direction, or the driver of a land vehicle is on the a road going in another direction, there is no hope of arriving at the desired destination. **There are roads that, if traveled, guarantee you will not arrive at the proper destination.** A person desiring to journey to a southern city can travel forever on an East-West road, rendering it impossible to ever arrive at a Southern goal. A ship master can have his boat placed in a body of water that does not even have a docking point where he desires to go. If he aims to sail to India, and places his ship in Lake Michigan, or even the Mediterranean Sea, there is no possible way to arrive at India on those bodies of water.

Even so, there are doctrines that, even though they may be apparently simplistic and uncomplicated, manage to get the person on the wrong doctrinal road, or place them in the wrong sea of teaching. They get the people off-course, so they begin to think

differently. They will read the Bible differently, see God in a faulty way, and see salvation incorrectly.

Teaching that Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses did precisely that. Pursued to its logical conclusion that would lead to erroneous decisions. Here are some examples of such determinations.

- ⇨ That the Old Covenant did not have a lesser glory, and was never intended to be overshadowed by a covenant of greater glory (2 Cor 3:6-18).
- ⇨ That the New Covenant is really not new at all, but simply a kind of update of the Old Covenant (Heb 8:8-13).
- ⇨ That what is outward supercedes what is inward (Rom 2:29).
- ⇨ That faith does not accomplish what is declared of it (Acts 15:9; Rom 1:16; 5:1; 1 Pet 1:5).

In Our Time

Our time is marked by the dissemination of doctrines that throw the people of God off-course, heading them the wrong direction. Doctrines such as the teaching that we are locked into salvation, or that we can recover from sin

procedurally, or that we remain fundamentally sinful after we are born again. Such doctrines are not innocent. They tend to move the one who receives them off the narrow road that leads to life. **It does this by changing, or refocusing, their attention.** In regeneration one's attention is fixed upon Christ. Working through the powerful Gospel, the Spirit shows the individual the Lord Jesus, who is the appointed means of obtaining remission and glory – and those two go together. Immediately, Satan goes to work to move the attention of the individual from Jesus to things, and other matters that center in self and this world. His effort is successful when the person is subverted, exiting the "highway of holiness" that leads to glory, to take a road that eventually merges with the broad road that leads to destruction (Matt 7:13).

WE GAVE NO SUCH COMMANDMENT

"... to whom we gave no such commandment..." Other versions read, *"to whom we gave no instruction,"* ^{NASB} *"without our authorization,"* ^{NIV} *"with no instruction from us,"* ^{NRSV} *"we gave no such order,"* ^{BBE} *"we did not authorize these men to speak,"* ^{GWN} *"without any mandate from us,"* ^{NAB} *"acting without any authority from ourselves,"* ^{NJB} *"we did give no charge,"* ^{YLT} *"we didn't tell them to do this,"* ^{IE} and *"we gave them no express orders or instructions [on the points in question]."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

At this point, the ones sending the letter make no apology for the expression of the troubling teachers who went out from them. **Neither do they attempt to justify them or offer some kind of explanation that will reduce the seriousness of what they had taught.** It was the souls of the Gentile brethren that were at stake here, and therefore they made clear that the teaching to which they had been subjected did not originate with them – and the apostles had been given special knowledge to lay the foundation. James had also been given special insight on the matter before them. This is of significance, because the church is built upon *"the foundation of the apostles and prophets"* (Eph 2:20). Any teaching that was at variance with theirs could not possibly have been proper. The church is built upon the

foundation they have put in place. That is the point that is being made. This

remains true in our generation. The men who had delivered the erroneous word

had taken upon themselves to speak for God.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO US TO SEND CHOSEN MEN

²⁵ *It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,* ²⁶ *Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ²⁷ *We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth."*

The letter introduces the additional men who were being sent from Jerusalem. It will be interesting to take special note of their credentials. It reveals now the early brethren thought about Kingdom laborers.

IT SEEMED GOOD UNTO US

"It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord . . ." Other versions read, *"it seemed good to us, having become of one mind,"* *"we all agreed,"* ^{NIV} *"we decided unanimously,"* ^{NRSV} *"it seemed good to us, having come to one accord,"* ^{RSV} *"we have unanimously decided,"* ^{CJB} *"we all have thought fit, when assembled,"* ^{MRD} *"we have with one accord decided,"* ^{NAB} *"So we decided, having come to complete agreement,"* ^{NLT} *"it seemed to us a good thing, when we were come together with one accord,"* ^{PNT} *"we have passed a unanimous resolution,"* ^{WILLIAMS} and *"It has been resolved by us in assembly"* ^{AMPLIFIED}

The words *"seemed good"* speaks of the conclusion of deliberation, or sober thought. **After considering the matter there was perfect unanimity among the Jerusalem brethren.** This was a choice that pleased them all, for *"seemed good"* means that what was decided satisfied all of the brethren. They saw the propriety of what was being done and all agreed that it was the best thing to do. **This was done when they were all in assembly.**

Thus, *"the unity of the Spirit"* is articulated, giving an example to the Gentile believers of being of the same mind and the same judgment. This was

done after hearing all of the facts and issues involved and carefully weighing them in a public setting. Some church leaders have rarely, if even, been in a gathering with this kind of accord. **This was not a miracle, but the result of people cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, having a high regard for the will of God, and a profound love for the people of God.**

SENDING CHOSEN MEN

... to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul . . ." Other versions read, *"select men,"* ^{NASB} *"To choose some men,"* ^{NIV} *"choose representatives,"* ^{NRSV} *"official representatives,"* ^{NLT} and *"select certain men."* ^{WILLIAMS}

"have need of milk," and those who can subsist on *"strong meat"* (Heb 5:12).

These distinctions are not static, or ones into which believers is locked. They represent stages of development that are integral to growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), being changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18), or being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). It is refreshing to read of a vast assembly of people who considered it *"good"* to select spiritually competent men for the work of the Lord.

The point here is that the church in Jerusalem did not send novices to accompany the brethren who came from

I suppose that no one is fully able to delineate the effect of unseasoned leaders in the church, or the practice of vaulting novices to offices of leadership. That is not something that was practiced by the early church, and it ought not to be practiced by the church of our time.

While there are not distinctions within the body of Christ such as Jew and Gentile, male and female, and bond and free (Gal 3:28), **there are spiritual distinctions.** John referred to *"fathers,"* *"young men,"* and *"little children"* (1 John 2:13-14). Paul distinguished those who were *"spiritual,"* as being able to restore one who had been *"overtaken in a fault"* (Gal 6:1). He also referred to those who were *"perfect,"* or mature (1 Cor 2:6; Phil 3:15), and those who *"are strong,"* as compared with *"the weak"* (Rom 15:1). A distinction is also made between those who are *"teachers"* and those who must be taught *"the first principles of the oracles of God"* – between those who

Antioch. It was necessary that mature men be able to witness to the truth of the counsel that was being delivered, as well as the unanimity of the brethren in Jerusalem.

I suppose that no one is fully able to delineate the effect of unseasoned leaders in the church, or the practice of vaulting novices to offices of leadership. That is not something that was practiced by the early church, and it ought not to be practiced by the church of our time. It is good to consider that clarification and spiritual maturity are not necessarily united with advanced age. There are young men like Timothy who, taking

advantage of the grace made available to all believers, advanced beyond the normal boundaries of his years. There are children like Samuel, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishel, and Azariah, whose

This commendation pertains to Barnabas and Paul, who had subjected themselves to great danger for the name of Christ (Acts 13:50; 14:19). They were living examples of men who had given

even the slightest inconvenience causes them to draw back, ceasing to press forward. It is a sad circumstance, and has brought the weight of sorrow upon many laborers who have sought to benefit the saints of God. As for myself, I have a growing disdain for any message, or approach to preaching and teaching, that contributes to such an attitude. There is a kind of casual spirit that is being cultured in our day that is of great concern to me. People are actually being led into mediocrity by the pied pipers of faddish religion.

This kind of commitment is only possible when people give themselves wholly to the Lord, living “unto” Him who died for them and rose again.

spiritual advancement was unusual for their age. With all of the youth leaders and programs that are in place these days, you might think we would have a harvest of spiritually mature and informed young people. However, as a rule, there is little or no sign of such things. People have mistaken youthful zeal for spirituality, and they are not at all the same thing.

THEY HAZARDED THEIR LIVES

“Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Other versions read, *“risked their lives,”*^{ⓃKJV} *“given up their lives,”*^{ⓃBBE} *“dedicated their lives,”*^{ⓃCJB} *“committed their lives,”*^{ⓃNJB} *“jeopardized their lives,”*^{ⓃTNT} and *“endangered their very lives,”*^{WEYMOUTH}

The word *“hazarded”* is translated from the Greek word *παρὰδεδωκόσι*, which has the following lexical meaning: *“to give over . . . properly, to give into the hands (of another) . . . to give over into (one’s) power or use,”*^{ⓃTHAYER} *“of a self-sacrificial love give up, yield up, risk (one’s life),”*^{ⓃFRIBERG}

their lives to Christ, and were willing to go wherever they were sent, and deliver the words given to them to speak. Paul verbalized this attitude when he spoke to the elders from Ephesus: *“neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God”* (Acts 20:24). Again, he wrote To the Galatians, *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20).

This kind of commitment is only possible when people give themselves wholly to the Lord, living “unto” Him who died for them and rose again (2 Cor 5:15). While this is the objective for all of those in Christ Jesus, those who have actually done this have always been distinguished for it. Particularly in our time, living solely for the Lord is an exceedingly rare phenomenon. For many,

JUDAS AND SILAS

“We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.”

The intention was for Judas and Silas to bear personal testimony to the things that were written in the letters. There would be a perfect accord of their words with the instructions contained in the letters being delivered. This was because of their insight and spiritual understanding, not their mere familiarity with the letters.

I doubt that it was necessary for them to study the letters on the way to make sure they could rehearse them properly. Their attesting words were not intended to be a mere rehearsal of what was read. Rather, their independent comments on the subject would be in perfect accord with what was written. Should they be interrogated about the matter, there would be no conflict of their reply with the letters. That is because they were men of spiritual understanding.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things . . .”

In this text, we are being exposed to spiritual minds – the godly way of thinking. **We will find that the spiritual mind is in perfect accord with the Spirit of God.** A religion that permits

men to maintain a mind that is at variance with the Word of God cannot be true. Redemption brings accords between God and men, dispelling the variance that exists by nature. This accord is spelled out in the New Covenant. *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:*

and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb 8:10-11).

⇨ **THE MIND IS IMPACTED:** *“ I will put My laws into their mind.”*

- ⇨ **THE HEART IS MADE NEW:** “I will...write them in their hearts.”
- ⇨ **GOD WILL BE PERSONALIZED TO THEM, AND BE THEIR PREFERENCE:** “I will be to them a God.”
- ⇨ **GOD WILL BE INCLINED TO THEM:** “they shall be to Me a people.”
- ⇨ **THERE WILL BE AN EXPERIENTIAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD:** “they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.”

These descriptions are not theoretical, or in the abstract. **They actually take place in the new Covenant.** What we will now read is the result of this declared unanimity between God and man through Jesus Christ.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us . . .” Other versions read, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and unto us,”^{NASB} “it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours—”^{CSB} “The Holy Spirit and we have agreed,”^{GWN} “it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us,”^{NET} “It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves,”^{NJB} “The Holy Spirit thinks you should have no more burdens. We agree,”^{LIVING} and “it has seemed right to the Holy Spirit and to us.”^{PHILLIPS}

Perhaps you have heard men say of some word from God, “That is not the way I would have said it.” Or, some have referred to a Divine requirement and added, “But you know how we are, we just do not want to do what God says.” Ignorant men have a way of saying such things and making them sound intelligent, or reflective of the Christian norm. It is staggering to consider how much of this kind of talk is being heard these days.

However, our text presents a true picture of the thinking of those who are in Christ Jesus. Keep in mind that the “us” of the letter are “the apostles and elders, with **the whole church**” in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). The group is described as “all the multitude” (Acts



15:12).

Here is an example of “one mind and one mouth” (Rom 15:6), and being “of one mind” (2 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8). When was it that the Spirit’s mind on this matter was made known? It was doubtless when James spoke, following the discussions and the reports of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas (15:13-21). It is written that following James’ words, “the apostles and elders, **with the whole church,**” were “pleased” to have the letters James recommended to be written and sent to “the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia” (15:22). **Now, the letters confirm that the Jerusalem brethren had considered the words of James to be the expression of the Holy Spirit Himself.** Being themselves a spiritual people, they were in perfect agreement with the directive of the Holy Spirit. I acknowledge that this kind of accord makes no sense at all to an institutional mind-set. However, it makes perfect sense to those who have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

NO GREATER BURDEN

“. . . to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things . . .” Other versions read, “no greater burden than these essentials,”^{NASB} “not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements,”^{NIV} “not to lay any heavier burden on you than the following requirements,”^{CJB} “You only need to do these things,”^{IE} and “not to lay upon you any greater burden than these indispensable requirements.”^{AMPLIFIED0}

This is not intended to

encompass the totality of spiritual life, but only prohibitions spelled out by the Law. Note, there is no reference to living by faith (Heb 10:38), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), resisting the devil (James 4:7), pursuing holiness (Heb 12:14), seeking the things that are above (Col 3:1-2), or working out ones own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). Nothing is said about fearing God (1 Pet 2:17), desiring the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet 2:2), or keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). There is no reference to growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet 3:18), or putting on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-17). They are not told of the necessity of loving God (1 John 5:2), or believing Him (Rom 15:13; 1 Pet 1:8), or watching for the coming of the Lord (James 5:7-8).

No one should suspect for a moment that if all one did was “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication” (Acts 15:29), they would have fulfilled all that is required of believers, and be doing very well.

Keep in mind that the church in Antioch was an exemplary one. They had teachers and prophets (Acts 13:1). Barnabas and Paul had remained there for a whole year, teaching much people (Acts 11:26). This is the church from which Barnabas and Saul were called by the Holy Spirit whole the church was fasting and ministering to the Lord. After completing the mission to which they were called, and returning to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas remained “a long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:27) –

possible 4-8 years.

However, something had occurred for the first time there. Jewish teachers from Judaea had come and taught them that they could not be saved without be circumcised after the manner of Moses. **This was the first time such teaching had been confronted and weighed.** Even though there were prophets and teachers there, not the least of which were Paul and Barnabas, the matter was not sufficiently clear to arrive at an acceptable conclusion. They did not have the epistles of Paul to consult. Further, heaven did not send them a special word on the matter through their prophets.

- ⇨ Both Jews and Gentiles are “reconciled unto God in one body” (Eph 2:16).
- ⇨ Together, as “one new man” and “one body” those in Christ have “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18).
- ⇨ In Christ Gentiles are “no more foreigners,” but are “fellow citizens with the saints and household of God,” which was formerly limited to the Jews (Eph 2:19).
- ⇨ This means that all of the promises of newness that were given

Covenant. Later, Paul said it this way in his epistle to the Galatians: “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: **that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith***” (Gal 3:14). Notice that this “blessing,” which was not spelled out to Abraham, involves receiving the Holy Spirit – something that Peter had attested took place among the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius.

Continued Difficulty

To this day, professing Christians have considerable difficulty distinguishing precisely what it is that is realized in Christ Jesus. Men continue to approach the subject as though morality was the fundamental issue, and that morality is enforced by laws and ordinances. They fail to see that such an approach is precisely what was done under the Old Covenant. **They also forget, if they have ever known, that the administration of the Law did not make a single soul better, stronger, or more capable of obeying the Law of God.** Of course, that is not why it was given. It was rather given “*that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*” (Rom 3:19). **The Old Covenant identified the need, but did not supply the remedy.** During the initial development of the church, this was not so apparent. However, because of the nature of spiritual life, and the revelation of God, some clarity finally was realized. **However, even then, corrective teaching was required because of the difficulties associated with failing to see the superiority of living by faith** (Rom 6-8; Gal 3:2-5). Extensive teaching was also delivered to Jewish believers concerning the superiority of Christ Jesus and His priesthood (the book of Hebrews).

Continued Confusion

Our own time is marked by a pronounced ignorance on this subject – namely, the merging of Jew and Gentile into “one new man” in Christ Jesus. There simply is not much teaching being done on this subject. This is particularly reflected in an expression that has become quite common in our time –

The nature of the association of the church with Judaism was not clearly seen at that time. In fact, it was not until some time later that special insight on this association was given to Paul for proclamation.

The nature of the association of the church with Judaism was not clearly seen at that time. In fact, it was not until some time later that special insight on this association was given to Paul for proclamation (Rom 11:17; Eph 2:12-22; 3:3-6; Col 1:26-27).

- ⇨ In Christ, the Gentiles partake of the “*root and fatness of the olive tree,*” which is technically a Jewish tree. What is more, it is the “*root*” of that tree (the promises made to Abraham), that supports Gentile believers (Rom 11:17-18).
- ⇨ Gentiles, formerly “*without God in the world,*” have been brought close to God by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:12-13).
- ⇨ The Old Covenant, which was a wall separating Jew and Gentile, has been broken down in Christ (Eph 2:14-15).
- ⇨ From the Jews and the Gentiles, and in Christ Jesus, God has made “*one new man*” – a new creation, and new generation, or family (Eph 2:15).

exclusively to the Jews, belong to the Gentiles who have lost their former identity, and, in Christ, have become “*fellowheirs*” (Eph 3:6).

- ⇨ Now, even though Christ was promised to the Jews alone (Deut 18: Isa 9:6-7), in Him the Gentiles enjoy “*the riches of the of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col 1:26-27).

The word that was delivered to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia was against the backdrop of this circumstance. Even the believers in Jerusalem had not seen the ramifications of this prior to this occasion. That is why some of them sought to impose the ceremonial law upon the Gentiles, rather than emphasizing **the blessing** that had been promised to Abraham and his seed (Gen 12:2; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Also, until the Lord clarified this matter through James, and later through Paul, early believers did not see it clearly – namely that it was “*the blessing of Abraham*” (Gen 28:4) that was realized in Christ, not the inclusion of the Gentiles under the regulations of the First

“Judeo-Christian.” Having been incorporated into politically-correct speech, this term is defined as follows: “Judeo-Christian: having historical roots in both Judaism and Christianity.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER A further explanation is: “A term used to describe the body of concepts and values which are thought to be held in common by Judaism and Christianity . . . historians use the term Judeo-Christian to refer to the influence of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament on Protestant thought and values . . .” WIKIPEDIA

This is not a Scriptural view of the situation. The moral, or ethical principles revealed in Moses and the Prophets are not Jewish. They are Divine, and were given to the Jews. But they were not confined to them. They were required of all men prior to the giving of the Law (Gen 4:11-12; 9:6; 18:20; 20:3). During the administration of the Old Covenant, they were also required to the heathen (Isa 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:11; 23:1; Dan 4:32; 5:22-23; Nah 1:1; Zech 9:1). It promotes inaccurate understanding when men refer to the Law, or the Ten Commandments, as “*Jewish*.” Because it was given through Moses, it is referred to as “*the law of Moses*” (Mal 4:4; John 1:17). However, in the most precise sense, it is “*the law of God*” (Josh 24:26; Neh 8:8; Rom 7:25), or “*the law of the Lord*” (Psa 1:2; Amos 2:4). **When used, the expression “*the law of the Jews*” refers to the ceremonial law, not the tables of the covenant.**

The Scriptures do not approach ethics from the standpoint of the Jews and the Christians. Nor does it postulate that the Jews and the Christians hold the same moral values and worship the same God. That is not how these things are presented by revealed truth. **When men associate ethics – matters dealing with good and bad, and moral duty – with the Jews and the Christians, they have failed to accentuate the God who alone defines morality.** They have

unwittingly cast the issue of morality into the caldron of human opinion.

It is quite true that Paul once said, “*Is He the God of the Jews only? is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the*

Prophets. Whether by outright profession, or simply by practice, those writings (Genesis through Malachi) are imagined to have little to do with life in Christ. They are seen as pertaining to



Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom 3:29-30). This expression, however is not saying that the Jews and the Gentiles have the same moral values or spiritual principles. It is rather affirming that God justified them in the same manner – by faith. In order to do this, He had to show a new thing to the Gentiles, enabling them to find what they were not seeking (Isa 65:1; Rom 10:20). Further, He also justified the Jews by faith, which contradicted the folly of them seeking to obtain righteousness by their own works (Rom 9:31-32).

This unfortunate environment (ignorance of the relationship of Jews and Gentiles) has also produced a gross neglect of the writings of Moses and the

another time, and intended to be limited to the Jews. **The effect of this misconception has yielded a distortion of God, His purpose, Christ Jesus, salvation, and the nature of life in Him.** It has caused division in the body of God, blinded men’s eyes, and caused the simple to embrace doctrines that contradict the truth of God.

Had the early church not addressed this matter as they did, they would have put a yoke upon themselves that transcended anything they could have imagined. Yet, with the clear record of their insight, religious men have still stumbled into all manner of error. They have done it because a different mind-set is being promoted – one that does not have Christ at its center, heaven in its eye, of God’s Law in their heart.

IF YOU DO THIS, YOU WILL DO WELL

“²⁹ That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication:

from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.”

The brevity that characterizes these prohibitions is noteworthy. It confirms abstinence itself was the point,

not **how** it was carried out. The Ten commandments were characterized by this kind of transience. Like the directions that are given here, they were brief and to the point (Ex 20:3-17). **For those who can receive it, there is a point at which extended explanations tend to obscure what is being said.** This accounts for the relative impotence of the “how-to” books and methodologies that have flooded the American churches. With all of the professed expertise, explanations,

blood” (Acts 15:20).

⇨ **RELIGIOUS POLLUTION:** *“That ye abstain from meats offered to idols.”* **A proper concept of God Almighty is absolutely essential, for eternal life is knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent** (John 17:3). If an essential aspect of the New Covenant is, *“they shall all know Me”* (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11), the understanding of God cannot remain

When the hearts of men are good and honest, they are in Christ, and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in them – in that context, teaching like that of our text can be followed with confidence and effectiveness.

and detailed procedures, sin is not diminishing in the churches. Marriage seminars ad infinitum have not diminished the growing number of divorces. Child-rearing techniques have not produced a generation of godly young people. And why is this so? Because there is too much of men in this type of teaching, and too little of God. God is not honoring these methodologies with Divine power, because they have not come from Him.

When the hearts of men are good and honest, they are in Christ, and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in them – in that context, teaching like that of our text can be followed with confidence and effectiveness. However, if this is **not** true of the people, or they are addressed as though it **is** true, the human wisdom that is presented will overshadow the Word itself – and the Word is the means that is used by Spirit in dealing with the hearts of men (Eph 6:17). It must not be in the background!

THE PROHIBITIONS

“That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication. . .”

The determination that was made verbally, is the one that was written down: *“they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from*

deficient, as though there were competing gods. The truth of the matter is that repeated willing exposure to something that was presented to another god tends to produce uncomely circumstances. Thus Paul reasoned with the Corinthians concerning the technicalities of being free to eat all meats: *“Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake: for ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness’”*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 10:25-26). This was such a sensitive matter, that it even involved eating with an unbeliever: *“If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience’ sake. But if anyone says to you, ‘This was offered to idols,’ do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience’ sake: for ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness’”*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 10:28). **Although the believer was personally aware that an idol was nothing, and that he was receiving the meat in thanksgiving to God, yet the open acknowledgment that the meat was sacrificed to an idol altered the circumstance.** The impression would be left that the believer was acknowledging the idol in eating the meat (1 Cor 10:29-33), and such an impression must not be left!

I gather from this that the instruction to the Gentiles was not intended to provoke them to **ask** whether or not the meat was offered to idols. They were simply to eat the meat giving thanks to God for it. If they **knew** it was offered to a false God, they were to avoid it, for it would detract from giving glory to God (1 Cor 10:33).

⇨ **DISDAIN FOR LIFE:** *“and from blood, and from things strangled. . .”* Life comes from God (Acts 17:26). Although life is encapsulated in the word *“breath”* (Acts 17:26), physiologically *“the life of the flesh is in the blood”* (Lev 17:11). Add to this the fact that redemption and atonement are associated with blood (Ex 30:10; Lev 17:11; Rev 5:9). **In tutoring Israel under the Law, God taught them to maintain an absolute respect for blood.** Nothing must be allowed to diminish that respect, or cause the people to look upon it as though it was common.

⇨ **MORAL POLLUTION:** *“. . . and from fornication. . .”* Although *“all unrighteousness is sin,”* fornication is among those sins that particularly live out self-love, as well as a disdain for others. Therefore, the child of God is told *“Flee fornication,”* for *“Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body”* (1 Cor 6:18). The body is to be a vehicle for the glory of God, not fleshly gratification. In Christ, the body has been purchased (1 Cor 6:19), and is considered to be a *“member of Christ”* (1 Cor 6:15). In fact, we have been bought with a price, and do not belong to ourselves. Thus the Spirit reasons, *“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Cor 6:20). All of this teaching is inherent in the words *“abstain from fornication.”* When the Gentiles take that admonition seriously, they will, through the Spirit, come to reason in this manner.

It is important to note that the

apostles and elders did not go beyond the boundaries established by God's Word. Often, when professed Christian teachers direct people on how to live, details are provided that are not contained in Scripture. Of course, the strength and selling point of their systems are those details. Although they may profess they are founded on Scripture, they are not the Word of God itself. **In this letter, the prohibitions were obviously based upon what the Lord had said.**

- ⇨ Abstain from meats offered to idols – Ex 34:15; Psa 106:28.
- ⇨ Fornication – Ex 24:14; Lev 18:20-23; 20:13-16; Deut 23:17; 27:20-23;
- ⇨ Abstaining from blood – Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:26; Deut 15:23.
- ⇨ Things strangled – Lev 17:15; 22:8; Deut 14:21.

YE SHALL DO WELL.

“ . . . from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.” Other versions read, “it shall be well with you,”^{ASV} “you will be doing the right thing,”^{CJB} “it shall be well with you,”^{ERV} “you will prosper,”^{WILLIAMS} and “you will make good progress.”^{PHILLIPS}

The phrase “do well” means more than simply doing “the right thing,” as some versions read. Nor, indeed, does doing well speak of a manner of life in which one simply continues to keep the rules. The phrase used in this letter to the churches suggests growth and advancement in Christ – spiritual progression. Some versions pick up on this implication: “you will prosper,”^{WILLIAMS} and “you will make good progress.”^{PHILLIPS}

This by no means suggests that spiritual life allows for breaking the rules. Such a notion is too foolish to require any further explanation.

Of itself, there is no lasting value in rule-keeping. Jesus indicated this when He said, “Will any man of you who has a servant plowing or tending sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, Come at once and take your place at the table? Will he not instead tell him, Get my supper ready

and gird yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; then afterward you yourself shall eat and drink? Is he grateful and does he praise the servant because he did what he was ordered to do? Even so on your part, when you have done everything that was assigned and commanded you, say, We are unworthy servants [possessing no merit, for we have not gone beyond our obligation]; we have [merely] done what was our duty to do” (Lk 17:7-10).

This is such a different way of thinking, that Christians in our country might even object to what Jesus plainly declared. There are entire programs, that identify themselves with Christ, that teach people to be highly pleased with their conduct because they have managed to do what they were told. Thus a person who was in bondage to strong drink is praised because he has not taken a drink for a period of time. This kind of mentality is built into the very fabric of these programs. I was raised in a religious culture in which people were praised and awarded because they regularly attended the assembly – something that is required of every believer (Heb 10:25). Perspectives like this fail to consider spiritual growth. To those who advocate them, growing in Christ is being able to go a longer time without falling unto sin. **But this is total nonsense, for it violates the words of the Lord and teaches men to attach worth to abstinence instead of attainment.**



Spiritual growth involves the addition of spiritual qualities, not the subduing of ungodly ones (1 Pet 1:5-8). In Christ we “have escaped from the corruption that is in the world through lust,” **in order that** we might appropriate what is in the kingdom of God through grace (1 Pet 1:4). **Where abstinence from sin is not matched by the apprehension of the truth and its associated benefits, no advancement has been made.** Transformation does not consist of dropping old habits, but of being “changed into the same image” (2 Cor 3:18).

This whole matter is being greatly obscured by the modern thrust on recovery, abstinence, and self-discipline. It is an extremely serious situation, for it is impeding growth in Christ Jesus. The Savior has taught us that the absence of fruit precedes being removed from the Vine, which is Christ Himself. “Every branch in Me that **beareth not fruit** He taketh away; and every branch that **beareth fruit**, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth **more fruit**. . . . If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. . . . Herein is My Father glorified, **that ye bear much fruit**; so shall ye be My disciples . . . Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and **bring forth fruit**, and that your **fruit should remain**: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:2,6,8,16).

Fruit is not the absence of blight or some other plant disease. Even so, spiritual fruit is not the absence of sin, or overcoming a bad habit. From the personal perspective, refraining from sin may appear to be a gigantic accomplishment, and worthy of all praise. But that is not at all the case. **Not sinning is the ground level, not the structure.** It is only to the degree that we do not sin that we can add spiritual qualities to our lives. It is only to the degree that we are not giving ourselves to the flesh that we can give ourselves to the Spirit.

Flesh and spirit cannot mingle. Sin and righteousness cannot merge. Carnality and holiness cannot combine. This is why Jesus said, “No man can

serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt 6:24). This is why Paul commanded the people to rid themselves of all filthiness and flesh and spirit, in order that they might perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 6:17-7:1).

Advancement in spiritual life postulates a corresponding lack of involvement in sin and distraction. Thus it is written, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:1-2). The person who imagines that they can fix their eyes on Jesus (for that is what looking to Him means), while they indulge in sin or continue to carry distracting weights, has not thought correctly.

The Purpose of the Letters

The letters delivered to the Gentile believers were intended to assist them in ridding themselves of things that take away from spiritual life. **Unholy involvements require God given capabilities – the heart, the mind, the body.** They require thinking, purposing, devotion, and willingness. All of these are to be given to God, and when they are not, **one's capacity for God is reduced.** What is given to the flesh cannot be given to God, for we cannot serve two masters.

On the other hand, refraining from the matters that have been specified must be matched by giving themselves to the things God has provided "for life ad

godliness" (2 Pet 1:3). All of that is wrapped in the words, "ye shall do well."

FARE YE WELL

"Fare ye well." Other versions read, "Farewell," ^{NKJV} "May you be happy," ^{BBE} "Shalom," ^{CJB} "Be ye steadfast in the Lord," ^{MRD} "So fare well," ^{PNT} "be strong," ^{YLT} "Now we say good-bye," ^{LIVING} "Goodbye," ^{ISV} and "Farewell [be strong]!" ^{AMPLIFIED}

The Greek word translated "fare ye well" is **Ἐρωσθε**. As used here, its lexical meaning is, "to be strong, to thrive, prosper; hence, the second person (singular) imperative is the usual formula in closing a letter, **ἔρωσο, farewell,**" ^{THAYER}

This final word had particular reference to the statement, "from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall **do well.**" The idea is that they would be strong and consistent in the fulfilling of the exhortation, for their growth in Christ depended on their success in that endeavor. **The reason for this circumstance is that indulging in forbidden activity is not simply wrong. It takes something from the transgressor.**

In order to sin, the person has to let go of something, refocus his attention away from Christ, and allow his own interests to supercede those of the One who has purchased him.

Some of the versions do a great injustice to the text by representing it as a kind of cultural saying – i.e. "Good-bye," ^{LIVING} and "be happy." ^{BBE} Such representations are wholly inappropriate.

⇒ **THE AARONIC BLESSING.** "Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num 6:23-27).

⇒ **THE BLESSING OF MELCHISEDEC.** "And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:19).

⇒ **A DAVIDIC BLESSING.** "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel" (Psa 20:1-4).

⇒ **A PSALMIC BLESSING.** "The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion" (Psa 134:3).

⇒ **THE COMMENDATION OF PAUL.** "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

The idea conveyed in this text is that the brethren in Jerusalem not only saw the necessity of delivering a protective word to the Gentiles. They also fervently desired that they do well in carrying out that word. In this, the real servants of God are distinguished from those who are little more than hirelings.

The reason is that a Jewish "Farewell" differed from that of any other nation. This was a nation that had been Divinely cultured. By Divine decree and influence, their entire lives revolved around their association with God. Nothing was excluded. Some examples will suffice to establish this point.

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They possess a genuine interest in the people of God, desiring their maturity and stability. A person who does not possess this care cannot minister to the people of God.

A Crucial Perspective

There is another perspective here, and it has to do with conducting oneself wisely. **When the people have demonstrated their commitment to the Lord, it is not wise to continue to labor and pray as though this was not the case.** When people have left all to follow Jesus, it is not wise to continue to admonish them to forsake all, or to pray that God will lead them into a deeper level of commitment to Him. If people have an obvious commitment to holiness, and are

clearly in the process of separating themselves from the world, that is not the time to speak to them of forming a wider gap between themselves and the world. **It is far better to ask the Lord to bless the people in their manifested endeavors to please Him.** People are to be encouraged to do well, or “fare well” in their efforts.

There is a good reason for proceeding in this manner. When people are living by faith, a certain culturing of the soul is taking place. Such a life is duly noted by the Lord of glory, for His eyes are “upon the righteous” (Psa 34:15). Holy angels are dispatched to minister to those who are the “heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit is leading

them to mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13-14), and to cause them to abound in joy (Rom 15:13). Jesus is manifesting Himself to them, because they love Him and are keeping His word (John 14:21,23). Such people are to be urged to “**continue in God’s goodness**” (Rom 11:22), to “**continue in the faith**” (Col 1:23), and to “**let brotherly love continue**” (Heb 13:1).

This is the spirit in which this letter was written to the Gentiles, expressing the desire of the Jerusalem brethren to put no greater burden on the Gentile believers. This approach does require the wisdom that is from above, but that **is** available to all of the saints (James 1:25).

THEY REJOICED FOR CONSOLATION

“³⁰ **So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:** ³¹ **Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.**”

The decision has been made concerning the inquiry from the church in Antioch. Letters have been written, and men have been chosen to accompany the entourage from Antioch.

WHEN THEY WERE DISMISSED

“So when they were dismissed. . .” Other versions read, “were sent off,” NKJV “sent away,” NASB “being let go,” DARBY “when they were departed,” GENEVA “sent on their way,” GWN “the party left,” NJB “the messengers went at once,” NLT “having been let go,” YLT “went at once,” LIVING “having been solemnly sent,” WEYMOUTH and “when they had been dispatched.”

MONTGOMERY

The idea here is not that the meeting had concluded and every man went his own way. Neither is the text simply saying that the company left Jerusalem and headed for Antioch. **Rather, these men left as representatives of the Jerusalem church.** They left to bring the answer to the inquiry that was sent to Jerusalem by the brethren in Antioch. God had answered the matter through James, and had done so after all those present had heard the facts in the case – which facts consisted of what the Lord had done among the Gentiles.

THEY GATHERED THE MULTITUDE TOGETHER

“. . . they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together . . .” Other versions read, “having gathered the congregation

together,” NASB “they gathered the church together,” NIV “having got the people together,” BBE “they gathered the group together,” CJB “After gathering the assembly,” CSB “assembled all the people,” MRD “after gathering the entire group together,” NET “they summoned the whole community,” NJB and “they called a general meeting of the believers.” NLT

Note that they gathered **all** of the people together, not just the leaders or elders. The entire church convened to hear the word that was sent from Jerusalem. Similarly, the whole church had also convened in Jerusalem. **If you have ever been part of a conventional church, can you remember a single time when the entire church came together to hear a word?** I have personally ministered to congregations who could not manage to do this on the Lord’s Day. Some places stand a slight chance of doing this on Christmas or Easter, or perhaps for some general church outing. Candidly, I cannot conceive of this event happening in the average church.

But it did take place in the Antioch church, and there was a reason for it. **Things relating to salvation were taken seriously.** When teaching was introduced that was different, yet claimed to be directly related to

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salvation, a satisfactory and authoritative answer was sought on the issue. They came together because they were accustomed to meeting together. They did not forsake the assembling of themselves together – and this was several years after that work was commenced under the ministry of Barnabas and Saul.

THEY DELIVERED THE EPISTLE

“ . . . they delivered the epistle...” Other versions read, “They delivered the letter,”^{NKJV} “they gave them the letter,”^{BEBE} and “handed them the letter.”^{MONTGOMERY}

The letter was delivered, as we will see, to be read by some one in the Antioch assembly. This was a comm on practice among the early churches. Paul charged the Colossian brethren to read his epistle to them, and then to see to it that it was “read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye read the epistle from Laodicea”(Col 4:16). He also poke of the Ephesians reading his letter to them (Eph 3:4). **That is, these letters were not mere reference manuals, like much of the churches treat the epistles.**

Let me again underscore that the entire assembly came together for this reading. **The truth of God applies to the whole body.** I cannot conceive of the young people being excused from this gathering on the supposition that it would be over their head. **Anyone who is old enough to believe and be baptized is old enough to listen to what is being said in the assembly.** Those who had little ones no doubt had them there also, for that was the manner of the God-cultured Jews (Deut 29:10-11; 31:12; Josh 8:35; 2 Chron 20:13; Ezra 10:1) – and things got started in Antioch in a synagogue (Acts 13:14).

THEY REJOICED WITH CONSOLATION

“Which when they had read,

they rejoiced for the consolation.” Other versions read, “they rejoiced over its encouragement,”^{NKJV} “they rejoiced because of its encouragement,”^{NASB} “they were glad over its encouraging message,”^{NIV} “they rejoiced at the exhortation,”^{NRSV} “were delighted with the encouragement it gave them,”^{NJB} “there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read it,”^{LIVING} “they were happy. It encouraged them,”^{RE} “they were delighted with the exhortation,”^{NAB} “were delighted with the comfort it brought them,”^{WEYMOUTH} “they were pleased with the encouragement it brought them,”^{ISV} and “the people rejoiced at the consolation and encouragement [it brought them]”^{AMPLIFIED}

through it (1 Pet 2:2).

⇒ They took heed unto the Word, and the day dawned, and the Day Star rose in their hearts – that is, they were able to see the truth of what was said (2 Pet 1:19). That is why they delighted in it.

This incident confirms the troubling effects of false teaching – even when it is delivered by seemingly sincere, yet uninformed, people. Those who taught the necessity of being circumcised after the manner or Moses brought a spiritual tempest upon the church in Antioch – like the storm that arose on Galilee when the disciples were going to

This incident confirms the troubling effects of false teaching – even when it is delivered by seemingly sincere, yet uninformed, people. Those who taught the necessity of being circumcised after the manner or Moses brought a spiritual tempest upon the church in Antioch.

The response of these brethren to the letters read to them confirms several things.

- ⇒ They delighted in the law of God after the inward man (Rom 7:11).
- ⇒ With their minds they themselves served the law of God (Rom 7:25).
- ⇒ They had received the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10-11).
- ⇒ The law had been put into their hearts (Heb 10:16a).
- ⇒ The Law had been written in their minds (Heb 10:16b).
- ⇒ They did not refuse Him who was speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25).
- ⇒ They desired the sincere milk of the Word, and were thus able to grow

the other side. They no doubt caused doubts and fears to arise. See, these were **real** converts, and the thought that they may not have done everything required to be initially saved was troubling to them. Yet, they were not gullible like some in Corinth, accepting what erroneous teachers delivered to them (2 Cor 11:4). The appointed objective “of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Tim 1:5). **The possession of those benefits will protect the soul against the intrusion of error.**

This account confirms the wonderful reality that the secret to profiting from the Word of God is to receive it, mixing it with faith (Heb 4:2). That is what the brethren in Antioch did when they heard the letters from Jerusalem read to them. They say the truth of them, and it relieved them of the burden cause by false teaching.

CONCLUSION

We have been given the record of how the early church handled a thorny

problem – wrongly instructing Gentile converts. The intrusive teachers came

down from Judea, and were associated with the church in Jerusalem. They no

doubt came with noble intentions, but their teaching was wrong. **Good intentions do not diminish the adverse impact of faulty doctrine.**

The teaching in question was, *“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”* (Acts 15:1). As soon as the teaching was heard, Paul and Barnabas sensed that it was not true, and had *“no small dissension and disputation”* with the ones bringing the doctrine. Following this disputation, the matter had not been settled. The brethren in Antioch, however, were not willing to let the matter go. Something had been taught that pertained to salvation, and it had to be settled. That is a subject concerning which God has provided no margin for error. Salvation comes from God, and He is the One who determines the terms of its acceptance.

At this point we see the value of informed and mature believers – spiritual leaders. Knowing that such existed in Jerusalem, they send some brethren with Paul and Barnabas to inquire concerning this matter. They did not hold a vote among the brethren concerning the issue, with a majority vote determining what would be taught.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem and being received, it was discovered that several in that body of believers held to the same doctrine – namely that circumcision was required to be saved. These men, formerly from among the Pharisees, stepped forward and affirmed their position, adding that the Gentiles were also required *“to keep the law of Moses”* (15:5). **Up to this time, this had not apparently been an issue. However, with the influx of Gentiles, the variance now surfaced.**

I am persuaded if there was an environment of spiritual maturity and eagerness to obtain the truth in the church, we would find far less erroneous views surfacing. What took place in Antioch with the teachers from Judaea was not their normal experience.

However, when the church busies itself with resolving personal, domestic, and social issues, there will not be much talk about matters pertaining to

the identity of the people with God – and that is the issue of salvation. When a problem-solving mentality grips the church, sound doctrine begins to fade away. This is because the purpose of salvation is not to rectify all of the problems associated with living in this world. The overriding objective of salvation of God is to prepare people for the passing of the heavens and the earth, the day of judgment, and eternity with the Lord. Where these things are not seen and practiced, the door is open to false teachers.

Allow me to underscore that the problem that was raised in Antioch, and then in Jerusalem, did not pertain to church order, domestic ideals, or social involvements. The type of difficulty the church confronted, together with their response to it, indicated the thrust of that fellowship. Also, the sincerity of their hearts is seen in their agreement concerning sending men to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

The necessity of disputing against questionable teaching should also be noted. The perpetrators must be able to stand behind their teaching, and others must be called in when necessary. However, there is one complicating factor. If there are no mature brethren in the congregation, or those devoted enough to the Lord to refuse to accept something that has not been duly substantiated, error will have its own way with the people.

Allow me to once again rehearse the events associated with the resolution of this problem.

- ⇒ The people in Antioch were devoted enough to the Lord to draw the attention of people who thought they knew the truth (15:1).
- ⇒ When questionable teaching was introduced, Paul and Barnabas immediately contended with those delivering it (15:2a).
- ⇒ The brethren determined to send some of their own number with Paul and Barnabas to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem *“about this question”* (15:2b).

- ⇒ On their way to Jerusalem they declared the conversion of the Gentiles in Phenice and Samaria, causing *“great joy among the brethren”* (15:3).
- ⇒ Having arrived in Jerusalem, and being received by the church, the apostles, and elders, Paul and Barnabas *“declared all things that God had done with them”* (15:4).
- ⇒ At this time certain believers of the sect of the Pharisees said *“That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses”* (Acts 15:5).
- ⇒ The apostles and elders then came together to *“consider the matter”* (15:6).
- ⇒ There was *“much disputing”* about this issue (15:7a).
- ⇒ After the disputation, Peter got up and testified of how the Lord had called and used him in delivering the Gospel to the Gentiles, and how they had believed (15:7).
 - He reported that God gave them the Holy Spirit, just as He did the disciples (15:8).
 - He said God put no difference between the Jew and Gentile, purifying their hearts by faith (15:9).
 - It declared it unreasonable to place a yoke upon the Gentiles that the Jews themselves were not able to bear (15:10).
 - He affirmed that the Jews would be saved by the grace of God, just as the Gentiles were (15:11).
- ⇒ This silenced the multitude (15:12a).
- ⇒ Paul and Barnabas then rehearsed *“what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them”* (15:12).
- ⇒ This again silenced the multitude, and they *“held their peace”* (15:13a).

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- ⇒ James then delivered a response to the people (15:13b).
- He said that God had visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (15:14).
- He declared that this was in agreement with the prophets, who spoke of God building again the tabernacle of David in order that the Gentiles might seek the Lord (15:15-17).
- He affirmed that what God is doing has been known to Him from the beginning of the world (15:18).
- His sentence was that the brethren not trouble the Gentiles who had “turned to God”(15:19).

- He determination was that letters be sent to the Gentiles declaring critical matters concerning abstinence (15:20-21).
- ⇒ The saying of James pleased “*the apostles and elders, with the whole church*”(15:22).
- ⇒ “*Chief men*” were chosen from Jerusalem, namely Judas and Silas, to accompany the brethren back to Antioch (15:22).
- ⇒ The required letters were written, affirming that the men who had taught that circumcision was necessary had, indeed, come from their congregation. However they had received no authority from the leaders to speak as they did (15:23-14).
- ⇒ The letters affirmed that everyone

had agreed to say these things, and that their instructions were from the Holy Spirit (15:25-29a).

- ⇒ They said that if the Gentiles fulfilled these instructions, they would be doing well (15:29b).
- ⇒ The letters were delivered to the brethren in Antioch (15:30).
- ⇒ The letters were read, and the brethren “*rejoiced with consolation*” (15:31).

There is a marvelous example of everything being worked together for good. Note the absence of anything that continued to divide the people. Observe how there was total agreement, and how that agreement required some to alter their thinking, which they willingly did. Behold how the brethren were profited by what as done.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 12/7/08. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Sixty-seventh lesson will cover verses 32 through 41 of the fifteenth chapter: “THE WORD SPREADS, and PAUL AND BARNABAS ARE DIVIDED.” Judas and Silas, themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren in Antioch, remaining with them for a short time. When they were let go in peace, Silas remained, the Lord positioning him to work with Paul. After remaining in Antioch for some time, Paul and Barnabas were divided, not being able to agree concerning John Mark going with them to the work. Paul then chose Silas, and they continued in the work of strengthening the churches in Syria and Cilicia. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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91.7 FM
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MONDAY THRU FRIDAY AT 4:00 P.M.
Clarifying the nature and content of the Gospel



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Monday thru Friday

The purpose of this program is to clarify the nature and content of the Gospel of Christ. Our target is the body of Christ, and our aim is to strengthen their faith and enhance their hope.

Acquiescing with the judgment of James, a letter is prepared and sent to the brethren in Antioch – by Given O. Blakely

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WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

BROTHER BLAKEY'S ON-LINE COMMENTARIES

COMMENTARY on Nehemiah: <http://wotruth.com/nehindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>

COMMENTARY on Hosea: <http://wotruth.com/hoseaindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Philippians: <http://wotruth.com/philippiansindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on First Thessalonians: <http://wotruth.com/1sthessindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Thessalonians: <http://wotruth.com/2ndthessindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Hebrews: <http://wotruth.com/hebindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on First Peter: <http://wotruth.com/1stpetindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on First John: <http://wotruth.com/1stjohnindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Revelation: <http://wotruth.com/revelationindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Mark: <http://wotruth.com/Mark.htm>

COMMENTARY on Titus: <http://wotruth.com/Titus.htm>

COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>

PARTICIPATING BROTHERS AND SISTERS SPEAKING/LEADING/MINISTERING IN THE ASSEMBLY

The Word of Truth Fellowship, Joplin, MO
DURING OCTOBER 2008

A DESCRIPTION OF THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES DURING OUR GATHERINGS

"Openings and Introductions" = 7-10 minute exposition of truth to promote spiritual focus; "Calling" = 7-10 minute exposition of truth designed to provoke disciplined thought; "Message" = 45 minute exposition of the things of God as revealed in Scripture; "Exhortation" = 5-8 minute challenge to act upon the truth we have heard; "Table Meditation" = 8-12 minute exposition of matters relating to Christ's role in salvation; "Lead Scripture shower" = Leading of the quoting/reading of Scripture without comment; "Lead prayer session" = Presentation of three matters for prayer that are taken from the Word of God; "Lead Intercessory Prayer" = A time of focused prayers for personal needs.

1. *Eva Blakely* (AM Opening Word).
2. *Blakely, Given O.* (PM Message, PM Message).
3. *Blakely, Jonathan* (AM Opening Word, AM Exhortation, PM Introduction, PM Exhortation).
4. *Blakely, June* (Teach AM Class).
5. *Blakely, Mattie* (Lead AM Singing, Lead PM Singing).
6. *Blakely, Michael* (Play piano, AM Message, PM Table Meditation).
7. *Blakely, Michele* (Play Piano, Lead PM Singing).
8. *Cobb, Anita* (Lead AM Singing).
9. *Cobb, Matthew* (AM Calling, PM Table Meditation, PM Introduction).
10. *Cobb, Nicole* (Lead AM Singing, AM Calling).
11. *Cobb, Robert* (Teach AM Class, AM Opening Word, AM Exhortation, PM Table Meditation, PM Message, PM Table Meditation).
12. *Hill, John* (Lead Intercessory Prayer).
13. *Hutchcraft, Aaron* (AM Table Meditation, Teach AM Class, AM Opening Word, AM Message, PM Exhortation, Lead PM Singing).
14. *Hutchcraft, Barbara* (Lead Scripture Shower, Closing Scripture & Prayer, PM Introduction).
15. *Hutchcraft, Debbie* (Lead AM Scripture Shower).
16. *Hutchcraft, Gene* (AM Exhortation, AM Message).
17. *Hutchcraft, Judah* (Closing Scripture & Prayer, Introduction to PM Message, Read PM Sermon Text).
18. *Murphy, Mariah* (Lead Scripture Shower, Read PM Sermon Text).
19. *Murphy, Micaela* (Read PM Sermon Text).
20. *Parker, Melissa* (Lead AM Singing).
21. *Scalf, Daniel* (Closing Scripture & Prayer).
22. *Sims, Annie* (Closing Scripture & Prayer, Read AM Sermon Text).
23. *Sims, Baylie* (Read AM Sermon Text, Lead Scripture Shower, Read Am Sermon Text).
24. *Sims, Ricky* (AM Message, AM Exhortation, Teach AM Class, AM Table Meditation).
25. *Sims, Tasha* (PM Introduction).
26. *Stuhlman, Laura* (PM Introduction).
27. *Williams, Jeremy* (AM Table Meditation, AM Table Meditation, PM Message).
28. *Williams, Logan* (Play AM/PM Lord's Table Interlude, Read Am Sermon Text, Lead PM Singing).
29. *Williams, Sydney* (Read PM Sermon Text)
30. *Preparing Lord's Supper* (Various sisters).



God's Everlasting Kingdom

POST YOUR COMMENTS ON AMAZON'S WEBPAGE

LOG ON TO AMAZON.COM AND SEARCH FOR "GIVEN O. BLAKELY"

