

Acts 15:13-35 — Saved By Grace, Fellowship By Works

March 8, 2026

After a two-week break from the Book of Acts, for our studies in 1 Corinthians, we are back to the Book of Acts this morning. As for Pastor Jordan and his class on 1 Corinthians, I know he passed and is waiting for his final grade. For that, we are grateful.

We have a lot to cover this morning, but it is a lot of good stuff. Since we were away from the Book of Acts, we need to catch up on the story of Acts, then pick up where we left off. Let's go!

Background

The Division

What sets the Christian faith apart from every other religion is that the Bible tells us we are made right with God completely by what Jesus did for us, not what we do to save ourselves. All other religions are about an exchange. If you do these five things, or you do these seven things, then God will accept you. This is why women in the ancient world threw their newborn children into the fire to worship the God of Molech. They were desperate to do something so God would accept them. This is still very much alive today with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Mormonism, and many others. You do this for God, God will do this for you. Don't fail, or you are ruined.

Christianity alone is unique. Jesus did it all for us. He lived the perfect life we couldn't live. He died in our place for our sins. He offers to make us right with God only by our trusting in him to do it all. That is it. Many people struggle with being saved by grace alone, faith alone, in Jesus alone. They think this message

is too good to be true, so they try to add something to their simple faith in Jesus. The problem is that Jesus plus anything ruins everything.

In the Book of Acts, Paul and Barnabas were telling Gentiles they could be saved by trusting in Jesus alone. This left many of the Jews upset. They said, “Jesus was a Jew. Don’t people also need to become a Jew and adopt all the Old Testament laws, holidays, food laws, clothing styles, and even be circumcized to become a Christian?” They proposed that you were made right with God by Jesus plus Judaism. Some were quite zealous about the Jesus-plus-Judaism option. As we saw in our earlier studies, on their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas traveled through Cyprus and the region of Galatia, planting churches. A group of Jewish Christians, who preached the Jesus-plus-Judaism plan, retraced their steps, telling everyone that Paul and Barnabas were wrong. We are not made right with God by Jesus alone, but we need Jesus plus Judaism. These guys ended up in Antioch of Syria in a head-to-head confrontation with Paul and Barnabas. Those stubborn Jews wouldn’t listen. This led to the topic being brought to the apostles in Jerusalem for a final decision. This is a big issue.

You can get lots of things wrong in Christianity and still be saved. You can have different opinions about the end-times and how they will unfold. You can’t get wrong the question of how we are saved. Is it Jesus alone, or Jesus plus Judaism? That was a big one.

The Discussion

Three-weeks ago, we looked at how this went down in Jerusalem. The good news is that the apostles sided with Paul and Barnabas. We are saved by trusting in Jesus alone. They summarized it this way.

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” Acts 15:11 (ESV)

If you are a Gentile, the only way you can be made right with God is by Jesus alone. If you are a Jew, the only way you can be made right with God is by Jesus alone, not by following Jewish culture and tradition. The only way anyone is made right with God is by trusting in Jesus alone.

Peter, Paul and Barnabas, plus James, gave their reasons for why they came to this conclusion. We covered Peter’s reasons plus Paul and Barnabas’ reasons three weeks ago. Let’s briefly review them, then we will pick up with James’ reasons, which will begin new material for this morning. Let’s start with Peter.

In the past, salvation was by grace alone, with Cornelius. In Acts 15:7, Peter said that this had already been decided ten years earlier. God supernaturally led Peter to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. God also worked supernaturally in Cornelius’ life to call for Peter. Peter shared the good news of Jesus with Cornelius and his household. All of them trusted in Jesus and were saved by Jesus on the spot. None of those Gentiles need to become Jews. They didn’t need to be circumcised and follow Jewish food laws or Jewish holidays. All they needed was to trust in Jesus alone to be saved.

Gentiles were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Someone might say, Cornelius, his friends, and family believed, but how do we know God accepted their faith, and they didn't need to do something more? How do we know they didn't also need to become a Jew? In Acts 15:8, Peter reminds us that the moment they believed, they were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came on all of those Gentiles. They began speaking in tongues, just as it happened to Jewish Christians on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. God gave the speaking of tongues as a supernatural sign. It was his stamp of approval on their faith, visibly showing the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, the same way he showed it in the Jewish Christians' lives. All this was without Judaism, just by faith in Jesus alone.

God purified the Gentiles' hearts through faith alone. In Acts 15:9, Peter says God also purified their hearts through faith. They were forgiven of their sins and made into different people with the shame and regret of their past taken away, all by faith in Jesus alone, not by doing Jewish stuff, following Jewish food laws, and social separation laws.

The law never saved anyone. In Acts 15:10, Paul said, "Why are you putting God to the test and putting a yoke on the disciples that our forefathers, nor we, could bear." In over 1,000 years of Jewish history, not one person was made right by obeying the Jewish law. All it did was show people their sin. It showed them how messed up they were. If Jewish law never helped us, it only frustrated us. Why would you require it of Gentiles? It will only frustrate them.

Peter's arguments were so clear and convincing that Acts 15:12 tells us that after he finished speaking, "all the multitude fell silent." When nobody argues with you after a speech like that, you know your logic was good.

Then Paul and Barnabas shared additional evidence for why we can know that we are saved by Jesus alone, not by Jesus plus being a Jew.

God accompanied the apostles' message with miracles. Paul and Barnabas made the point that when they traveled through the region of Galatia, telling people they could be saved by trusting Jesus alone, God accompanied that message with miracles. They didn't ask for miracles. God just did them. As we saw in previous weeks, a man who was lame from birth was healed and could walk. Why did God accompany their message with miracles? It was to show everyone that the message of salvation by Jesus alone had God's divine stamp of approval. The Judaizers, who went through Galatia saying we are saved by Jesus plus Judaism, did God accompany their message with miraculous signs? No! There was zip! God does not endorse a lie.

This brings us to where we left off three weeks ago. Peter gave his reasoning for why we are saved by Jesus alone. Paul and Barnabas gave their reasoning. Now, James gives his reasoning.

This James was Jesus' half-brother. Mary was the same mother, but Joseph was James' father. He was not miraculously conceived by God the Father, as Jesus was. James, along with Peter, was one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. His reasons for why we are saved by Jesus alone were especially potent against the Judaizers.

The prophets promised Gentile salvation outside of Judaism. This covers vs. 13 to 18. Some of this is difficult to understand, but I will do my best and keep things at a high level.

After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, . . . Acts 15:13–15 (ESV)

He says Simeon, that was Peter’s name in Hebrew. He told you what God did with Cornelius to call Gentiles to himself, but God desires that people from all nations be saved. Have you forgotten that the Old Testament prophets predicted this? The point he wanted to prove from prophecy was that the prophets predicted that Gentiles would be made right with God apart from Judaism. To do that, he loosely quotes Amos 9:11-12, not from the Hebrew but from the Greek translation of the Hebrew, the Septuagint.

“ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’ Acts 15:16–18 (ESV)

This verse is a little complicated. I will keep it simple. There are three parts of it. We will start in the middle.

...the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord...

The remnant of mankind means “the rest of mankind,” the Gentiles, not the Jews. All of those who seek the Lord will be able to come to him. Amos clearly says, “all the Gentiles who are called by my name.” James’ point was that Amos told us Gentiles who seek the Lord can come to the Lord. They don’t have to become Jews. They don’t need an operation to be circumcised. They don’t

need to start eating kosher pickles and using kosher salt. They don't need Jewish culture. God said he would call them to myself directly. God's plan is that the Gentiles would be saved by coming directly to Jesus outside of Judaism.

This left a question with the Jewish Christians. What about us? We were God's chosen people. God is the one who gave us the Old Testament laws. Circumcision was God's idea, not our idea. God gave us the food and separation laws. They were his idea, not ours. If nobody needs Judaism to be saved. Has God forgotten about us? Did God abandon his chosen people?

James said, "No, you are not forgotten." Look what he said just before this middle section.

After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it...

God promised that he would rebuild the tent of David that had fallen. He would restore it. When the Jewish synagogues were flooded with Gentiles seeking Jesus, the Jews were worried they were about to lose their national identity. James reminded them that it would not happen. God was not done with them. They were still God's chosen people. But just like the Gentiles, they were saved by Jesus alone, not by their Judaism.

This is the same problem addressed in the Book of Romans. The Jews were cast out of Rome by the emperor Claudius. Gentiles took over the church in Rome. It lost its Jewish flavor. When Claudius' edict of expulsion expired, Jewish Christians returned to Rome to find a church that had abandoned their culture. They were in a panic. Was God done with them since Jesus saved people

outside of Judaism? Paul addresses this question in Romans. Here is a little snapshot of what he says.

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!... God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew... Romans 11:1–2 (ESV)

Now that everyone is saved by Jesus alone, is God done with the Jewish people? No, he isn't. They are still God's chosen people. He has a good plan for them. He promises to restore them and use them. They are saved by faith in Jesus alone, not Jewish laws and tradition, just as Gentiles are saved by faith in Jesus alone.

What is the special role God has for the Jewish people? In the Old Testament, they were to be a light to the Gentile world, to lead them to God. They failed at that one. When Jesus came, they were to continue on the mission of being a light to the nations. It was working much better with Jesus. In the early church, who carried the Gospel message to the world? Jewish Christians. Who carried the gospel message to the Samaritans? Jewish Christians. Who carried the Gospel message to Galatia, Cyprus, and around the world? Jewish Christian. The Jews are still God's chosen people. Their role is what it always was: to be a light to the nations. It is still to be a light to the nations about Jesus.

The third point in these verses is these words.

...who makes these things known from of old.

This has always been God's plan. God hasn't changed his plan.

The Decision

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,... Acts 15:19 (ESV)

James says his judgment is that they don't trouble the Gentiles who come to Jesus. The Greek word for *trouble* means to throw something in the path that would trip someone up or slow down progress. Gentiles were coming to Jesus. The Jews needed to stop throwing rocks of Jewish tradition in their path to trip them up and slow them down. James says, "Stop giving them a hard time and let them come to Jesus."

The Danger of Grace

This is incredibly good news. We are saved by Jesus alone, not by Judaism,... but there is danger to this. Can you see the Gentiles running around saying, "All we need is Jesus!" Some would make fun of the Jews, others would look down on the Jews who were so closely tied to their culture and history. The Gentiles expressing their freedoms would create friction in the church between the Jews and Gentiles.

The decision of the early church — that we are saved by Jesus alone — was a doctrinal issue. But they still had to address a fellowship issue. It is one thing to say we are saved by Jesus alone. It is another thing to invite your Jewish Christian friend over to your home for dinner and serve him porkchops, then tell him he'd better get over his Jewish tradition and like it. All that would do is offend him. It would hurt him.

James was very wise. While he knows the Gentiles who trust in Jesus are free to live their lives any way they want to live, he also knew they needed to be careful about taking this principle and running with it in a way that would offend the Jewish Christians around them. The Gentiles needed to restrict their

freedoms for the sake of fellowship with the Jewish Christians, who were still closely attached to their culture and heritage. I am free to do many things, but to avoid offending people and coming across as unloving to them, I need to be willing to restrict my freedoms out of love. This is the same thing Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 9. Out of love for others and the progress of the gospel, I need to be willing to limit my liberties.

James asks the Gentiles to abstain from four things. These were not things that saved people. The only way anyone is saved is by Jesus alone. These are relational issues, fellowship issues, to keep the Gentiles from running wild with their freedoms, offending the more traditional Jews, and creating disunity in the church.

...**but** should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” Acts 15:20–21 (ESV)

He gave Gentile Christians four things to abstain from. What was the reason? “For Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him.” There were plenty of Jewish Christians around who still held to Old Testament laws. We ask you to restrict your freedom to avoid offending them. Don’t tear up the unity in the church with your freedom. Don’t hinder Jewish evangelism with your freedom. This was about limiting their liberty out of love for other people and for evangelism, the same thing Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 9.

Why abstain from food polluted by idols?

This was a food regulation. Mr. Gentile might invite his Jewish neighbor over for dinner and serve an excellent potroast. His Jewish friends loved the

food. They liked it so much that Mrs. Jew wanted the recipe. Where did you get a potroast like this? Mr. Gentiles told them there was a great meat market behind the temple of Diana that sold sacrificial leftovers for terrific prices. All of a sudden, their Jewish guests went from loving the meal to having a stomachache. Another scenario might be inviting a baby Christian over for dinner who has just come out of pagan worship. They have bad associations with that kind of meat from their former life. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 8.

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” 1 Corinthians 8:4 (ESV)

Idols are not real. There is only one God in the universe. The idol isn't a God.

However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 1 Corinthians 8:7 (ESV)

There are people out there who, through their former association with idols, eat that meat as if it were really offered to an idol as an act of worship to the idol. If you serve a baby Christian this meat, their conscience would be wounded. It is unloving toward them.

But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 1 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)

Make sure that exercising your freedom in Christ does not become a stumbling block to those who are weak in Christ or new in Christ. If what you do offends someone, don't do it!

Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 1 Corinthians 8:12 (ESV)

Paul says that if exercising our freedom wounds someone else's conscience, we are not just sinning against them, but also sinning against Jesus. That is strong! We are to limit our liberties out of love for others.

Some will say, "Well, they need to spiritually mature. They need to realize their consciences shouldn't be offended by these things. All we need is Jesus." Paul says the opposite. If you are a mature Christian who understands your freedom, you will show your maturity by being willing to restrict your freedom out of love for another believer instead of being a source of trouble to them. That is what showing spiritual maturity looks like!

Paul says the same thing in Romans.

For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. Romans 14:15 (ESV)

If you are offending people by what you eat or what you do, and you don't care about that because all you want to do is exercise your freedom, that means you are not a very loving person. How dare you destroy the conscience of someone for whom Jesus died!

It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. Romans 14:21 (ESV)

He expands this and says this is not just about meat. It can also be about drinking alcoholic beverages. Is it wrong to drink alcohol? No. It is wrong to get drunk. But there are people who are not comfortable with alcohol. Maybe someone in their family was an alcoholic. Maybe drinking alcohol brings back all kinds of bad memories for them. They get seriously stressed around alcohol. Even though we are free to drink, the mature Christian will gladly limit their liberty

to drink out of love for other people. They will not insist on their right. They will gladly restrict their right to drink alcohol so they would never do anything hurtful that would cause stress in a relationship between them and anyone else. Again, willingness to limit my liberty out of love for other people is what spiritual maturity looks like.

Why abstain from fornication?

... and from sexual immorality...

To understand this, we need to understand Gentile worship. It was sex saturated. There were prostitute priestesses. The whole thing was just one messy slutfest. It was like Internet porn, a never-ending stream of sexual sin. There were all kinds of depraved sexual sins in gentile worship. All the different letters of the sexual alphabet were on display. LGBTQ+ In worship of the goddess Cybele, the priests were castrated men dressed as women. They were transgender. There was also homosexual worship. You name it, the pagan world had it. There was nothing new under the sun.

On the opposite side, you had the Jews. They had a high standard for sexual purity. You can read about that in Leviticus 18. It was one man, one woman for life. No bestiality, homosexuality, or sexual expression outside of marriage.

I should be clear, fornication is not just a fellowship issue between Jews and Gentiles. It is also a moral issue. They wanted to be clear to new Gentile Christians coming from a sex-saturated world that sexual sin wouldn't just destroy fellowship between the Jews and the Gentiles, but sexual sin destroys you.

The Greek term used for fornication is the word *porneia*. We get the word pornography from it. It is a junk-drawer term for any sexual expression outside of the marriage covenant. Yes, this is a moral issue for Christians, but it is also a major fellowship issue between formerly sexually promiscuous Gentiles and the very conservative Jews. Look what Paul says about sexual sin.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." 1 Corinthians 6:15–16 (ESV)

We are united with Jesus as Christians. Shall we then take our bodies and unite them with a prostitute? Should we sleep around outside of marriage? Absolutely not! When we are sexually intimate with someone, we join ourselves to them. This is why sex is to be reserved for our spouse, a spouse who knows and loves Jesus. Sex unites a man and a woman into one. Sex is not some kind of bodily desire that needs to be satisfied, like a craving for cookies. Sex is relational superglue. It bonds two people together, knitting them into one. It weaves their souls together. This is why Paul goes on to say these words.

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:18–20 (ESV)

Run from sexual sin. Do everything you can to get away from it. Sexual sin is different from other sins. It is not outside of you. It is inside of you. It is sinning against your own body. Our body is not ours to do with as we please. Jesus died for us. He saved us at an incredibly high price. We are to honor God with our

bodies. We do that with sexual purity until our wedding night, and we are to consistently pursue sexual intimacy with our spouse after our wedding night.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 (ESV)

God's will is that you abstain from sexual immorality. That is the word *porneia* again. It is any sexual expression outside of marriage. Instead of running around being led by our glandular desires, God's desire is that we learn to control those desires with self-discipline, and not live to satisfy our lusts like those who do not know God.

Request one, don't eat meat sacrificed to idols. It is not technically wrong, but it stresses people out; don't do it. Request two: Stay away from any form of sexual sin. That was the world you lived in. Sexual sin will ruin your relationship with Jewish Christians, but it will also ruin you. It is not just a fellowship issue. It is a moral issue. On to number three.

Why abstain from animals that were strangled?

That sounds funny. Why did he say that? It was a fellowship issue for the Jews. The Jews believed the life of an animal was in the blood. The Jewish law was very strict about the blood of an animal. Since the blood was sacred, it was to be drained out of an animal before you ate the animal. Some of you may remember this passage from 1 Samuel when we studied it as a church.

Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.' " So every one of the

people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there. 1 Samuel 14:33–34 (ESV)

Why abstain from blood?

Request four, avoid eating blood. For Gentiles, in some of their worship, they drank animal blood. For the Jews, the blood was sacred and was to be drained on the ground. Drinking blood would freak the Jewish people out. Don't do it.

The law of liberty.

Let me spend a few minutes explaining something that will be very helpful. In the Old Testament, God's people had many laws to follow. When it comes to the New Testament, we don't have a pile of laws to follow. There is only one law to follow. Sometimes it is called the royal law. Sometimes it is called the law of Christ. Sometimes it is called the new commandment. It is all the same thing. Let me show you.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. James 2:8 (ESV)

Here it is called the royal law. What is it? Love your neighbor as yourself. If what you are doing is unloving to someone else, don't do it. Treat them like you want to be treated. If you are angry at someone, would you like them to cuss at you, to yell at you, to berate you, or call you a jerk? If not, don't do it to them.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. John 13:34 (ESV)

Here it is called the new commandment. It is the same thing. Love people as I have loved you. What did Jesus do? He died for us. He gave his very life in sacrifice for us. Did Jesus torture us? Did Jesus berate us? Did Jesus exercise

his freedom and offend us? No. Treat other people the way you want to be treated, especially in conflict.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

Here, the law of Christ is examined in a different way. Carry one another's burdens. When someone needs help, stop what you are doing and help them. If someone is weak, offer to carry something when you see them leaving the grocery store. When people are in financial need, help them.

Guys, remember when you were dating your wife, trying to win her heart? Out of love, you would gladly sacrifice your rights and your preferences for her. You went to the movies, and you wanted to watch an action flick. She wanted to watch a Hallmark movie. You gladly limited your liberty and watched the hallmark movie with her! You didn't complain about it. You did it out of love for her. She loved going shopping. You can't stand shopping. Out of love for her, you gladly sacrificed your preferences and went with her to the clothing store.

Jesus said, "I give you one law." Love your neighbor as yourself. Give people the kind of love, care, and treatment that you would like to receive yourself. The more like Jesus we become, the less we will insist on our rights and the more joyfully we will give up our rights out of love for Jesus and other people.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

Since we are free from following a pile of laws, we use our newfound freedom to serve and love other people.

Let's get back to Acts 15 and finish it up.

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, Acts 15:22 (ESV)

Notice that everyone in Jerusalem agreed on something. What was it? Not just to send a letter back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, but to send people with them. Why do you think they did that? Can you imagine what it would have been like when Paul and Barnabas showed up in Antioch and claimed the church in Jerusalem agreed with them? People would not believe them. They would question them. Rather than just take the easy way out, they chose to send Judas and Silas with them. We don't know much about Judas. Silas will accompany Paul on his next missionary journey. They weren't boring people. They were important people. It says they were leading men from among the brothers. The Greek word is chief men, commanding men. They sent two important people with Paul and Barnabas. That way, when people questioned them and the letter, two leaders from the church in Jerusalem were there to explain it in person. Do you know why they made this kind of sacrifice? This was an important issue. They didn't want to drop the ball. They wanted to do everything they could to create unity in the church between Jews and Gentiles.

with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles... Acts 15:23 (ESV)

What is special about this letter? The brothers in Jerusalem, the leading men of the Christian faith, the apostles and elders, write to the Gentiles, and they call the Gentiles brothers in the faith. They were not looking down on them. They looked at them as equals. There was no division in their mind. They may be Gentiles, but they were their equals.

...to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, Acts 15:23-24 (ESV)

By the way, these Judaizers who came claiming that you needed to be circumcised to be saved, just so you know, we never authorized them or sent them. They claimed our authority but didn't have our authority.

We are sorry they caused you trouble with their words. The Greek word for *trouble* is very strong. It means to deeply upset someone, to create panic or fear, to be horrified. It was used to describe the disciples' reaction when they saw Jesus walking on water and thought they saw a ghost. We are so sorry these people came to you. All they did was upset you. They put you in a panic.

He also says they unsettled your minds. The Greek word for *unsettled* is also pretty intense. It means to plunder or steal. It applied to robbers or raiders. All these guys did was come into town and dismantle your souls and leave you spiritually bankrupt.

...it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 15:25-26 (ESV)

We love Paul and Barnabas. They risked their lives to tell people about Jesus. So it is clear that Paul and Barnabas are telling the truth; we sent two of our top men with them to reinforce the truth about Jesus.

We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." Acts 15:27-29 (ESV)

We sent Judas and Silas, who will say the same thing as this letter. Then he repeats the recommended list of things for them to abstain. Not for salvation but for fellowship, for unity. As Gentiles, be willing to limit your liberty out of love.

The Development

So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. Acts 15:30 (ESV)

I picture many of the people in the church of Antioch wondering how things went down in Jerusalem. Would they need to go under the knife? Would they need special food laws? Would they need special clothing and holidays? When they arrived, it says they gathered the congregation. The Greek word for “gathered” means that everybody came to this church meeting. It was well attended. Nobody missed this one.

And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Acts 15:31 (ESV)

When they read the letter that said we are saved by Jesus alone, the place broke out in cheering like a touchdown had been scored in a football game. How many times do you see a church cheering and celebrating after a church meeting?

Look at why they celebrated. This was encouraging. God’s grace brings encouragement. It brings comfort. It brings a sense of relief. Jesus did it all.

And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. Acts 15:32 (ESV)

The guest preachers stepped to the pulpit and gave encouraging sermons on why we are saved by Jesus alone. That is it.

And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. Acts 15:33 (ESV)

I love this. They didn't immediately leave town. They hung around town building relationships. These two Jewish Christian leaders spent time at the homes of Gentile Christians in Antioch, getting to know them and loving them. They didn't just preach a message of unity and love through Jesus across cultural divides, then leave; they lived it before they went home.

We will skip verse 34 because the King James has it, but the oldest and best Greek manuscripts do not, so a scribe probably added it later.

But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. Acts 15:35 (ESV)

Paul and Barnabas went right back to preaching and teaching about Jesus and how we are saved by him alone. We have great freedom in Jesus, but that doesn't mean we should exercise all of our freedoms. Out of love for other people, and for the progress of the gospel, so we do not put unnecessary stumbling blocks to unity and fellowship in the lives of other people. We gladly relinquish our liberties without grumbling. That is what spiritual maturity looks like. The only commandment given to us in the New Testament is that we love others, as we love ourselves.



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