



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Leadership in a Letter

JUNE 7-9, 2017

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Acts 15:22-29 *“Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, 23) and they sent this letter by them, ‘The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. 24) Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, 25) it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26) men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27) Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28) For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: 29) that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.’” (NASB)*

“HE [PAUL] WORKED PRIMARILY IN THE KEY CITIES AND CHALLENGED THE BELIEVERS TO TAKE THE MESSAGE OUT TO THE MORE REMOTE AREAS.” WARREN WIERSBE

Is this a top-down leadership in the church or is everyone involved? Who chose Judas and Silas? Why is this letter first to “Antioch,” then “Syria and Cilicia?” Was the main issue, “circumcision,” mentioned? Had the Pharisaical believers seemed to represent the church in Jerusalem? What level of harm had been caused by insisting on circumcision for

salvation? How was the leadership of Paul and Barnabas commended in this letter? Whom did this letter correct? Was this “burden” greater or less than the previous one?

FOCUS ON FUTURE SATELLITE BIBLE STUDIES:

- JUNE 14-16: ACTS 15:30-35 LEADERSHIP STRENGTHENED IN THE MISSION CHURCH
- JUNE 21-23: ACTS 15:36-41 THE FIRST DIVISION AMONG CHURCH LEADERS

Paul had emphasized capital cities according to Acts 1:8 and his commission in Acts 9:15. The strategy of going to capitals and winning leaders had been so effective that the Gentile church was suddenly vastly outnumbering the original Jewish congregations. Then some of the Jewish believers who were former Pharisees from the Jerusalem church had come to Antioch with a new means of Jewish superiority over the Gentiles. They taught, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). This addition of works to the Gospel was dramatically opposed by Paul and Barnabas, so they chose to consult with the church in Jerusalem to resolve the issue and settle the conflict. After much discussion and questioning, Peter had reminded them of Cornelius and his company and how God had “made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (15:9). The missionary work of Barnabas and Paul again revealed Gentile salvation by grace alone. Finally, James had shown how the Scriptures also proved that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

“THE CHURCH NOT ONLY TOOK A WISE DECISION BUT TOOK THE WISEST MEANS OF PUTTING THAT DECISION INTO ACTION.” WILLIAM BARCLAY

I. STRATEGIC HARM VILIFIED ACTS 15:22-24

Antioch had been the first church with probably an equal or even greater amount of Gentiles than Jews and it had

BIBLE STUDIES

WEDNESDAY @ 7:30AM –BIBLE STUDY – FREDERICKSBURG – BOB EVANS ON RT. 3 & 12:00 NOON – OAKTON – BOB EVANS – 10443 WHITE GRANITE DR.

THURSDAY @ 7:00AM –BIBLE STUDY – CHESTER – SHONEY’S AT RT. 10 (IRON BRIDGE ROAD) & 301(12531 JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY)

FRIDAY @ 7:00 AM –BIBLE STUDY – NORFOLK – GOLDEN CORRAL, 6103 N. MILITARY HWY, NEAR THE NORFOLK AIRPORT

Virginia

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become the lighthouse of Gentile Christianity. It was not only where they had first been called “*Christians*,” it was also the sending church for the first missionary team. Just as the Gospel had spread from the capitals to the nations, so the false teaching of the Judaizers had disturbed the church in this capital and thereby those in the nations of Syria and Cilicia. The leadership of Apostles and elders had brought the entire Jerusalem church into agreement. They not only confirm their decision by writing a letter, but also by sending two of their best to verify the resolution to the conflict and the decision of the council. As the false teachers had come from the Jerusalem church, now the leaders within the church are sent to overcome their error by revealing that these Judaizers had never been sent and their doctrine was destructive.

“ANASKEUAZO (UNSETTLING) APPEARS ONLY HERE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. IN EXTRABIBLICAL GREEK IS WAS USED TO SPEAK OF GOING BANKRUPT OR OF A MILITARY FORCE PLUNDERING A TOWN.” JOHN MACARTHUR

II. SACRIFICING LEADERS VERIFIED ACTS 15:25-27

During the great “*dissension and dispute*” (15:1), these Pharisees would most likely have attacked Paul and Barnabas who were challenging their teaching. Yet this letter is designed to come to their defense. After entertaining every possible argument for requiring the law and circumcision upon the Gentiles, “*having become of one mind*” or coming to unanimous agreement, they had chosen to send and thus to pay the way for their own men “*with our beloved Barnabas and Paul*.” We would expect that Barnabas would be given such a title by his home church for all the love and sacrifice he had bestowed upon them and thus the order of the names. But this word is also plural, so here the Jerusalem church now calls their former persecutor “*beloved*.” Such speaks volumes of the change in character that the Jerusalem church so powerfully spotlights in Paul, who, according

to the book of Galatians, is the primary (and at one point singular) defender of God’s grace to the Gentiles. Not only is their character highlighted by the Jerusalem church, their character has been proven by their willingness to sacrifice their life for Christ. Paul was stoned and Barnabas was in danger of the same, yet they boldly returned to the cities of their persecutors to strengthen the churches. Also, their truthfulness is proven by that fact that Judas and Silas will “*report the same things*” in regard to this important decision. This is a three-fold verification by the Jerusalem church.

“IT WAS A COURAGEOUS DECISION, FOR IT WAS BOUND TO BRING DISFAVOR OF UNBELIEVING JEWS UPON THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ESPECIALLY THE MOTHER CHURCH AT JERUSALEM. THE TASK OF THAT CHURCH IN BEARING A FAITHFUL WITNESS TO THE NATION WOULD NOW BE MORE DIFFICULT THAN EVER, BUT IT WAS WILLING TO SHOULDER THE BURDEN FOR THE SAKE OF MAKING THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE GENTILES EASIER.”
EVERETT HARRISON

III. SOLUTION FOR UNITY CERTIFIED ACTS 15:28-29

This letter makes it clear that the decision of the Jerusalem Council was supervised by the Holy Spirit. The “*burden*” now given to the Gentiles is “*light*” and “*easy*” in comparison to that of the Pharisees. There are four things the Gentile believers were to avoid to fellowship with Jews and all of them point to their former habits in their idolatry: “*things sacrificed to idols*” (this referred to sacrifices given in pagan temples and the meat later sold in the market for a better price); “*from blood and from things strangled*” (again refers to idolatrous practices and diet); “*and from fornication*” (relations with a temple prostitute was common practice with idolatry). All of these would be very offensive to the Jewish believers.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) Are you depending on your good works to get you to heaven or salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone?
- 2) Do you clearly expose what is wrong and boldly verify what is right for the cause of Christ and His kingdom?
- 3) Are you a Spirit filled believer in that you stand for the Gospel and yet and abstain from what is offensive to others?