

“A HEALTHY CHURCH”

Acts 15:22-35

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INTRODUCTION

I. A CHURCH IN UNITY (22-29)

This unity was true for the local church of Jerusalem and also for the local church of Antioch—and both of them together. They did not consider themselves separate!

A. Having Leadership in _____ with members (22-23)

1. A vote was taken here: “It seemed good”=decided, decided by vote (22, 25, 28).
2. Note the congregational participation in the vote.
3. Men were chosen: Judas Barsabbas (cf. 1:23—Josph Barsabbas) and Silas (Silvanus)
 - The sending of these two men with the two men from Antioch expresses “personal assurance of the good will and spiritual unity of the saints at Jerusalem in relation to believers in Antioch.”
 - The two men likely represent the two groups in the church—the Hebrews and the Hellenists.
 - These men had gained prominence in Jerusalem—“chief (leading) men among the brethren.” They sent **their very best** (like Paul and Barnabas from Antioch).
 - The men carried a letter as their “credentials” (v. 23)
4. The letter sent (23)—note “brethren: apostles and elders→”brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch (the city) and Syria and Cilicia (double Province administered under one Roman precept).
 - Note they primarily address the persons with the complaint—Gentiles who were told they could not be saved apart from keeping the Law and circumcision
 - Note the **cordial greeting**: lit. “rejoice.
 - Rackham notes that the letter “**is a masterpiece of tact and delicacy**”
 - Though this letter is addressed to these persons, the council’s decision is also intended for Gentile believers everywhere as we see in 16:4—the various cities, and 15:41 where we specifically see Paul traveling “through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches; sharing the decree was a part of that strengthening.

B. Abhorring _____(24)

1. They acknowledge that their church was at fault for the division:
 - Note they only “heard” about it.
 - “Certain went out from us”—we did not commission them

- These “troubled you”—the word is very strong with the idea of causing mental uncertainty, bringing acute emotional distress, making the heart palpitate.
 - They did this with words—teaching that they could not be saved apart from keeping the Jewish Law (15:1).
 - They attempted to “subvert the souls” of the believers in Antioch; the verb means “to pack up baggage, plunder, ravage.” It involves “reversing what has been done; tearing down what has been built; canceling what has been agreed upon.”
2. They deny any knowledge of or approval of the activity of these divisive teachers: “We gave no such commandment.”
- C. Being of _____ (25) [“Note the second use of “seemed good”=decided, voted.]
1. They made the **decision** only after becoming “of one accord”=“of one mind.” **Only harmony in Christ due to solid Biblical teaching and the Holy spirit’s guidance can bring this**—see other references in Acts: 1:14; 4:24; 5:12; 8:6; 19:29.
- D. Building up the leaders of both groups (25-27)
1. Antioch’s messengers: Barnabas and Paul
- Note Barnabas first here from viewpoint of Jerusalem
 - Note they are “our **beloved**.”
 - Compare Gal. 2:9 where Paul says he was given “the right hand of fellowship by the pillars—James, Peter, and John.
 - Note they are men who have “hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 26)—literally “they have delivered over their souls”! They are wholly given to the gospel cause—**regardless of hazards and difficulties!**
 - Note in 14:26 the same verb says that the new churches had been “delivered over” to God’s grace by Paul and Barnabas—grace protects from trials!
2. Jerusalem’s messengers: Judas and Silas (27)
- As **two witnesses** and official representatives of Jerusalem.
 - They will **verbally confirm** the contents of the letter.
- E. Following the Guidance of the _____ (28) [note **3rd** use of “seemed good”, decided.]
1. The decision was jointly reached by the **church** and by **the Holy Spirit**.
- This is a unique expression found only here; it shows how careful they were to follow the leading of the Spirit.
 - The two men—who also happen to be prophets, men “inspired by the Spirit”—communicate this decree and explain it. It is very possible that they were also active in framing the decree.

- Bruce notes that the acknowledgment here of the Holy Spirit’s authority “is eloquent of the practical realization of His presence in the early Church” (see 5:3, 9; 13:2; 16:6-7).
 - If there were no direct prophetic utterances, then “this is the way in which the Spirit usually works in the church. There need not be miraculous displays to indicate his direction. Spirit-filled people can detect his presence through the harmony which prevails when men are responsive to his will” (Kent, 128). As Robertson states, the evidence of the Cornelius incident and of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas clearly shows the mind of the Spirit (p. 237).
2. It was decided “to lay no greater burden than these necessary things.”
- “No greater” shows that it was not too much to expect and not that hard to follow. Robertson shows that “in comparison with the freedom won this ‘burden’ is light and not to be regarded as a compromise”. Any saved Gentile should be glad to cooperate with this. The “burden” reminds us of Peter’s words in v. 10, and shows a connection of the letter with the Council proceedings.
 - The “necessity” was **not in regard to salvation**, but only in reference to fellowship between Jews and Gentiles.

****The wording of this decree was masterfully done so as to protect the independent authority of the Church of Antioch, while at the same time *conveying the urgent nature of their compliance with Jerusalem* so as not to offend the authority of the mother church, the apostles, and to jeopardize the unity of the entire Church. There were any number of words of **command** that James could have chosen; but he instead used **strong words of opinion which are more than mere advice**, “**respecting certain salutary restraints.**”**

- F. Maintaining a _____ (29): not being offensive to Jews in:
1. Meats sacrificed to idols
 2. Blood
 3. Things strangled
 4. Fornication
 5. Observing these they “will do well”—prosper both personally and as a church living in harmony—and also “do right”.

Harrison summarizes the **major accomplishments** of the Jerusalem Council:

- 1) *The Gospel of divine grace was reaffirmed.*
- 2) *The Unity of the Church was safeguarded.*
- 3) *The Evangelization of the Gentiles could proceed without hindrance. Most of Paul’s churches were founded after the Council, and they were Gentile churches.*

- 4) *The Gentile churches which had already been established were given encouragement (cf. 16:4-5).*
- 5) *The future of the Church as a whole was guaranteed. In a few years its Jewish-Christian wing was destined to fade into virtual oblivion because of persecution and the Jewish War against Rome (A.D. 66-70) or to shrivel because of heretical tendencies (Ebionitism). But before all this happened, Christianity among the Gentiles had grown strong. [Harrison, p. 239]*

But in this passage we see more than a Healthy Church in Unity, we also see a Healthy Church Growing.

II. A GROWING CHURCH (30-35)

The letter was delivered (v. 30), and as the result they had:

- A. _____ (31) (“they burst into exultant joy”)
- B. _____, consolation and exhortation (31, 32a)
 1. From the letter
 2. From the 2 men who were also prophets (in addition to messengers and elders)
- C. _____—“confirmed them”; to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief.
- D. _____—refers both to the **peace between the groups** and **words** such as “go in peace,” or “peace be with you.”
- E. _____ and _____ by Paul and Barnabas—usual order of names
 - Note that “many others” were also teaching and preaching.
 - “The Word of the Lord” was the content of such teaching and preaching.

CONCLUSION

We also must be **A CHURCH IN UNITY** and **A GROWING CHURCH**.

Unity in:

Leadership in agreement with members, Hating divisiveness, Being of One mind, Being Led by the Spirit, Maintaining a testimony

Growth in:

Joy, Encouragement, Being Strengthened in beliefs and standards, Peace inwardly and among us, and Promoting and Practicing Solid Biblical Teaching and Preaching.

MAY GOD HELP US TO BE THIS KIND OF CHURCH!

Make this your church; Do not stand on the sidelines! Be committed and Stay Committed!