

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for August 30, 2015

The Implementation by Letter
Acts 15:22-35

Acts 15 gives the account of the argument about whether Gentile converts to Christ were required to follow the Old Testament Law. Peter and James supported Paul and Barnabas in the belief that Gentiles were not under the Law of Moses (15:6-21). What remained was to communicate this teaching to the church where the debate began in Antioch, which was done by way of a letter.

1. The companions with the letter (15:22)

Judas had the same surname as Joseph, a candidate to become the twelfth apostle in Acts 1:23-26, and probably was a relative. Unlike Judas, Silas had a Greek name and was a Hellenistic Jew. The Jerusalem church saw fit to send the letter to the church in Antioch with both Hebrew Christians and Greek Christians, for the sake of the unity of the entire church. A letter is only as good as those entrusted to deliver its contents.

While Judas is mentioned only here, Silas would play a large role in the future ministry, joining with Paul as his primary companion on the second missionary journey (15:40).

2. The content of the letter (15:23-29)

The word “brethren” served to connect the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch. Antioch was the capital of the region of Syria and Cilicia.

The letter makes it clear that those who visited the church in Antioch from Judea (15:1) in no way represented the apostles or the Jerusalem elders, which spoke clearly in support of Paul and Barnabas in the controversy.

Christians can become disturbed in their mind and unsettled in their soul when unnecessary demands are placed upon them.

The key repeated phrase “it seemed good” was a phrase used in official Greek documents and was used here to communicate the unity of the church. We can see the work of the Holy Spirit through the unity of the church, and the letter gave evidence of His leadership (cf. Ephesians 4:3).

The four restrictions are repeated from Acts 15:20, but in a different order. Fornication is listed last in the Greek text for the purpose of emphasis. The four restrictions were given for the sake of the unbelieving Jews, so that they would be in the best position to receive the gospel without taking undo offense.

3. The communication of the letter (15:30-35)

The congregation at Antioch rejoiced upon reading the letter in spite of the restrictions that it contained. It is a testimony to the maturity of a congregation when it is willing to adjust its practice for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

Encouragement came from both the letter and from the messengers. Ministry that is from the Holy Spirit brings encouragement, rather than burden.

Not only do the best and oldest manuscripts not contain Acts 15:34 but including it contradicts 15:33, which speaks of Silas leaving. Verse 34 was added much later as an attempt to place Silas in Antioch when Paul selects him for the second missionary journey (15:40).

Many others joined Paul and Barnabas in their ministry at Antioch. Any thriving ministry is dependent upon many others doing the work of both edifying the church and evangelizing the world.

We have the letters of the New Testament provided to us not just to read but to share with others. May we be just as faithful with what God has entrusted to us as Judas and Silas were.