

Main Idea: When the gospel shapes the way we deal with our problems, it shows up in four evidences, as we see in Acts 15:22-35.

- I. The proper ambition (22)
  - A. They put personal feelings aside.
  - B. They resolved to do what would please God.
- II. The proper attitude (23)
  - A. We must see ourselves as brothers.
  - B. We must see ourselves as fellow believers.
- III. The proper aim (24-29)
  - A. We must identify the cause of the problem (24-27).
    1. Some people misrepresented the truth (24).
    2. The others desired to make the truth known (25-27).
  - B. We must identify the God-honoring solution (28-29).
    1. They affirmed that salvation is by faith alone.
    2. They affirmed that true faith is never alone.
- IV. The proper action (30-35)
  - A. The Jews demonstrated love for their Gentile brothers (30-32).
  - B. The Gentile brothers returned the love (33).
  - C. The church continued to do its mission (35).
    1. They preached the Word.
    2. They prepared to launch the next phase of outreach.

Make It Personal: When the gospel is shaping my life...

1. I will put on humility in all situations.
2. I will deal with problems biblically.
3. I will strive for the glory of God and the good of His church.

The gospel changes everything. It certainly changes eternal destinies, for whenever a sinner believes the good news about Jesus Christ, that sinner is rescued from the wrath of God and given the sure promise of living with God in a new heaven and earth. But the gospel also has the power to change the way we live on this present earth, specifically how we deal with our problems, as we'll see today in Acts 15.

*Scripture Reading: Acts 15:22-35*

I've entitled today's message, "*When the Gospel Shapes the Way We Deal with Our Problems.*" We all have problems, but the gospel has the power to shape the way we deal with them.

Early missionaries to the Marshall Islands in the central Pacific received their mail once a year when the sailing boat made its rounds of the South Pacific. On one occasion the boat was one day ahead of schedule, and the missionaries were off on a neighboring island. The captain left the mail with the Marshallese people while he attended to matters of getting stores of water and provisions. At last the Marshallese were in possession of what the missionaries spoke about so often and apparently cherished so much. The people examined the mail to find out what was so attractive about it. They concluded that it must be good to eat, and so they proceeded to tear all the letters into tiny bits and cook them. However, they didn't taste very good, and the Marshallese were still puzzled about the

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series at WBC in 2002.

missionaries' strange interest in mail when they returned to find their year's correspondence made into mush.<sup>2</sup>

A misunderstanding can cause a great deal of frustration, for sure. Cultural differences can create huge barriers between people. Those barriers don't drop automatically when people profess faith in Christ.

As we open our Bibles today, we're looking at a controversy that nearly divided the early church, and it had to do with *backgrounds*. We're also going to see what the church did to prevent the division. There's much we can learn from this. The principles will apply to our 2020 world where strained relationships are a reality, with racial tensions, and political tensions, in families, schools, in the marketplace, in churches.

At the beginning of Acts 15 some Jewish men traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch and started teaching the Gentile believers, "Unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved." They didn't discuss. They demanded. And their demand had the power to split the church in two. What they were saying, in essence, was this. Believing in Jesus isn't enough for salvation. If you Gentiles want to become Christians you must first become like us—good, law-keeping Jews.

Is that true? Must a person add something to what Christ has done to enter God's family? The Antioch church sent a delegation to Jerusalem to see what the church leadership there had to say about that issue.

As we saw last time, the debate was intense at what has become known as the "Jerusalem Council." Some believers who belonged to the Pharisee party went first and demanded, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." The apostles and elders went into executive session to discern God's will. After much discussion Peter spoke, reminding everyone how God saved the first Gentile, Cornelius. He did it *by grace* and not by works. In fact, the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius, though he wasn't circumcised.

Then Barnabas and Paul shared stories of how God saved Gentiles in their ministry and performed miracles and wonders to verify that they, too, had received the Holy Spirit.

Finally James<sup>3</sup>, the half-brother of Jesus, spoke up.<sup>4</sup> It was make-up or break-up time. Humanly speaking, the future of the church rested in the hands of James that day.

"I agree with Simon," he said. "And so do the Old Testament Scriptures. We shouldn't make it difficult for the Gentiles to be saved." And the decision was settled.

But the church wasn't out of the woods yet. It's one thing to make policy decisions behind closed doors. It's another thing to implement the policy. Today we'll see how the Lord directed His church in applying the decision to the volatile situation at hand.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Eugene A. Nida's [Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions](#), pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> About twenty years ago CNN reported the discovery of an ossuary in Israel. This limestone burial box, which is 20 inches long and 11 inches wide, dates to A.D. 63. Guess whose bones it contained? The box has an Aramaic inscription on it that reads, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Andre Lemaire, an expert in ancient writing, identified the box in Jerusalem last spring. If legitimate, this may provide the oldest, extra-biblical archaeological record of Jesus to date. Writing about his findings in the new issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Lemaire, who teaches at the Sorbonne in Paris, called it "very probable" that the box belonged to Jesus' brother James. Since then there's been much debate, and even a trial as to whether it's legitimate. Regardless of the outcome, that's our man.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus says that James was stoned by the high priest Ananus in AD 61 (*Ant.* 20.9)

There's so much we can learn from Acts 15. Acts 15 clarifies the message we must preach. But Acts 15 also shows us a God-honoring way to work through differences, and why we *must* work through them. Christ died for a *people*. He died to make us *one*. The Jerusalem church was motivated to maintain the unity of the church, and so must we be.

So what should we do when we have problems that threaten our unity? The truth is, the gospel, which tells us how to go to heaven, also shows us how to live until we get there. When the gospel is shaping our approach to problems, it shows up in four evidences, as we see in Acts 15:22-35.

### I. The proper ambition (22)

Verse 22 tells what happened next, "Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers."

I'm convinced that the leadership of the Jerusalem church knew that their decision wouldn't please everyone. In fact, the course of action they proposed might infuriate some, especially those who so dogmatically said, "The Gentiles *must* be circumcised." But they knew their God-given task wasn't to make everyone happy in the church. And so they did two things...

**A. They put personal feelings aside.** I'm sure James had his opinions. As a devout *Jewish* Christian he'd never eaten pork in his life and probably wasn't about to start now. Peter certainly had his opinions. The Lord told him (in Acts 10:13) it was okay to eat pork and my hunch is he tasted his share of non-kosher food while having table fellowship with the Gentiles in Antioch. And of course, Barnabas and Paul had their opinions, too, as did every other person in the church.

We all have opinions and preferences. And sometimes we'll differ. That's inevitable due to our different backgrounds, experiences, and tastes. That's why the matter of ambition is so key. What are we going to do when our opinions differ? If we want to continue to experience unity, we must do what the Jerusalem church members did.

First, they put personal feelings aside. What I think, or like, or want, isn't most important right now. In fact, I'm choosing to put that aside in order to pursue what matters more.

**B. They resolved to do what would please God.** Remember, all the people making this decision had been circumcised and most of them (if not nearly all) sought to obey the law of Moses. That was their background. But they were willing to think outside the box of their own experiences and seek the mind of God. That's why they came up with the solution we're about to see.

Let's be frank. Some people just tolerate differences, and end up with a sort of pseudo-unity. Others run from them, which is why many marriages break up. It's also why a "generational gap" often develops between parents (grandparents) and the younger generation. Sadly, it's also why many churches today are fragmenting over differences in so-called worship styles, and degrees of political involvement, and approaches to handling COVID-19.

Beloved, when the gospel is shaping how we deal with these differences, we will constantly be checking our ambition. We must put our personal feelings aside and

resolve to discover and do one primary thing. *Please God*. “Just two choices on the shelf, pleasing God or pleasing self,” as the little rhyme says.

## II. The proper attitude (23)

Verse 23—“With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.”

*I will build my church*, said Jesus. How does He do it? He uses means. He works through the actions of His people. In Acts we see Him working through preaching, and miracle-working, and feeding widows, and suffering persecution joyfully.

And writing letters. Have you thought recently about how vital letter writing was to the advancement of the gospel in the first century, and since? The New Testament is full of letters (20 or 21 of the 27 books are letters, depending on how we view Hebrews; Jesus wrote 7 letters in the Revelation). Why letters? Letters can be read and re-read, pondered, and shared.

The solution chosen by the Jerusalem church for addressing the problem at hand was to send a letter to the Gentile believers in Antioch. Two local leaders would personally deliver the letter. One was Judas, also called Barsabbas, whom some suggest was the brother of the Joseph mentioned in Acts 1:23. The other was Silas, a prophet (32), who in addition to being a leader in Jerusalem possessed Roman citizenship (16:37).

And the tone of this letter is filled with... *Attitude*, as in, the proper attitude. When dealing with differences God’s way, attitude is vital. We must see ourselves as God sees us. And how is that?

**A. We must see ourselves as brothers.** I’m struck by how this letter begins, with its humility. In NIV, “The apostles and elders, your brothers.”

This is certainly not a “let’s chat” sort of letter. There’s business at hand, and it comes from “the apostles and elders,” for God has given such leaders to His church, along with responsibility and authority to lead, as all should recognize. But while authority should be recognized, it must never be flaunted.

“Your brothers,” the letter continues. In the ESV, “The brothers, both the apostles and elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles...” The Jerusalem believers made it clear from the outset they didn’t agree with the haughty spirit of the men who stirred up trouble in verse 1. We are *brothers*, they underscored.

My friends, when we find ourselves in tension, we must remember this. If the other person belongs to Christ, that person is a close family member, and I must see him that way. We are *brothers*.

A friend once reminded me that my wife is my *sister* as well as my wife, that is, she is my sister in Christ. And she will be forever and ever. We are children of the same Father, purchased by the blood of the same Savior, indwelt by the same Spirit. This is true for all of us in this room who have been born again. We will be forever and ever brothers and sisters in the family of God.

And that changes everything about how we view wearing masks, and music styles, and any other difference of preference that might separate us.

There’s a second vital perspective that the Jerusalem church exhibited in this letter.

**B. We must see ourselves as fellow believers.** The NIV says, “To the Gentile *believers* in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.” While not stated here in the ESV, the term is certainly stated elsewhere enough to be implied. We believe in Jesus. You believe in

Jesus. So we are fellow *believers* in Jesus. Simple truth. Powerful implications. With that kind of attitude you're well on your way to dealing with differences God's way.

Attitude is so critical. When I forget who I am, who *we* are together, I tend to become critical and insensitive and ungrateful, even of those who are close to me and may even be trying to help them.

Winston Churchill told of a British family that went to a lake for a picnic. While there their five-year old son fell into the water. He couldn't swim and neither could his parents. As the child bobbed up and down everybody on shore began to panic. Someone walking by saw the situation and sprung into action. At great risk to himself he dove in fully clothed and was able to rescue the boy before he went under for the third time. He pulled the child to the shore and presented him safe and sound to his mother.

But instead of thanking the stranger for his great kindness, the mother snapped at the rescuer, "Where's Johnny's cap?" Apparently, in all the commotion the boy's hat had been lost in the lake, and that's what the mother noticed. Instead of rejoicing in her son's deliverance, she chose to focus on something that really didn't matter.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of rejoicing in our mutual deliverance, we instead focus on something that really doesn't matter in the scheme of eternity. That's what happens when we forget who we are, that we are brothers and fellow believers.

That's what the critics in verse 1 did. Instead of seeing what the Gentiles in Antioch were (believers in Jesus), they saw only what they weren't (law-keeping Jews).

When the gospel is shaping the way we deal with our problems, it shows up in four evidences. First, the proper ambition. Second, the proper attitude.

### III. The proper aim (24-29)

As you look at the letter, you'll notice a twofold intent. Or to personalize it, if we're going to deal with differences God's way, we must make it our aim to do two things.

**A. We must identify the cause of the problem (24-27).** In Acts 15 the cause was this, as the letter plainly states...

*1. Some people misrepresented the truth (24).* "We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said." The term *disturbed* (ESV troubled) means "to deeply upset," "to perplex," or even "to cause fear." It's the term used in John 14:1 to describe how the disciples felt when Jesus told them He was going to die and leave them.

That's what the Judaizers did. By misrepresenting God's Word, they came to Antioch and shook their Gentile brothers and sisters to the core. In order to repair the damage done by the Judaizers, the Jerusalem church leaders made it clear, "We didn't authorize them to do that."

Apparently, they did send them. Galatians 2:12 refers to certain men who "came from James" to Antioch, seemingly referring to the very men mentioned in Acts 15:1. But once they arrived, these men started, we might say, free-wheeling. Yes, though James may have sent them, Acts 15 makes it clear he and the other Jerusalem church leaders didn't authorize the message they preached.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As told by Kent Hughes, *Acts*, pp. 196-7.

<sup>6</sup> The KJV of verse 24 makes a clearer distinction between sending the men but not authorizing their message, "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words,

It was critical that the Gentile believers in Antioch hear it from the source. “We don’t approve of the message you’ve heard. We do accept you.” The letter makes it clear that this whole problem originated because some people misrepresented the truth.<sup>7</sup>

What’s more, the letter shows that...

2. *The others desired to make the truth known (25-27)*. “So we all agreed [ESV “it seemed good to us, having come to one accord”] to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—<sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.”

Don’t miss the unanimous support in this decision. “We *all* agreed to do this,” the letter states. Only gospel thinking could enable people with strong opinions to “come to one accord,” as the ESV puts it. And be sure of this, these Jewish brothers had strong opinions when it came to customs. But they lay down their guns because the gospel was more important.

Because this was so important, they did something else. They didn’t want just to send a letter—words on a page can be misunderstood. So they sent a team to represent them and clarify any further questions that might arise, “to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing (27).”

If we’re going to deal with differences, this is the kind of aim-driven-action it will take, starting first of all with identifying the cause of the problem. How did this misunderstanding begin in the first place? What are the facts? Then...

**B. We must identify the God-honoring solution (28-29)**. As did the Jerusalem church: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: <sup>29</sup> You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.”

Here’s the solution the Council delivered, one that came from the Holy Spirit through the human instruments He used). A twofold affirmation.

1. *They affirmed that salvation is by faith alone*. They would add no “burden” to the Gentiles. In other words, “You don’t need to be circumcised to be saved.” You don’t need to do *anything* to be saved except what you have already done. You have accepted the Savior. You have placed your faith in Jesus the Messiah. For that reason, and that reason *alone*, God accepts you, and so do we.

It’s very simple, dear friends. “For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God so that no one can boast (Eph 2:8-9).” Jesus Christ came to do a work for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He came to save us, and He did so by living a perfect life, dying as a substitute, and then rising again. Now God accepts sinners who receive His Son. There is no other way.

So many people try to complicate what is very simple. They say, “It’s okay to believe in Jesus, but surely more is needed.” Perhaps right now you are waiting for lightning bolts when what you need to do is *believe*. Perhaps you lack assurance of your

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subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment.”

<sup>7</sup> Wow. That’s something we’re all prone to do, to present a case to make our position look good by misrepresenting the truth.

salvation because you refuse to *believe*. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today, my friend. A person is saved by faith alone.

But know this too. Life doesn't end the moment a person gets saved. The Jerusalem church knew that, and so secondly...

2. *They affirmed that true faith is never alone.* That's where the "requirements" fit in. Listen again to what they wrote in verse 28, "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:" And then in verse 29 they elaborate on 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."

You say, "Hold on. Why does the letter include these stipulations in verse 29?"

That's not an easy question to answer. Some feel that this part of the letter was a weakness if not an error.<sup>8</sup> I can understand the uneasiness. Remember, the reason the Council met in the first place was because some people were teaching Jesus *plus* requirements. And what conclusion does the letter give? The letter changes the requirements, but it's still Jesus *plus* requirements. It sounds the same, but is it? No.

How do we know? For starters, I'm confident Paul would never have accepted this letter if its intent was to communicate that salvation is by faith *plus* works. That's why he made the trip to Jerusalem in the first place. Acts 16:4 indicates he later delivered the decision of the Jerusalem Council from town to town throughout Asia Minor. Paul would fight tooth and nail anyone who tried to add works to the gospel of grace (see Galatians 1). But did he "fight" here? No. Why not? Because these "requirements" aren't about the basis of salvation, but the evidence of it.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I still don't get it. The Jerusalem church said it didn't want to *burden* the Gentile believers, but then it gave them some 'requirements.' Isn't that what the false teachers in verse 1 did?" No. The false teachers denied that salvation is by faith alone. The Jerusalem Council affirmed that salvation is by faith alone, but that true faith is never alone. There is a difference.

Part of the confusion has to do with the word itself—"requirements." That's the English word the ESV and NIV use, which could be misleading. The KJV says "necessary things," as does the NKJV, and the ASV. The NRSV says "these essentials."

The Greek term is *epanagkes* which means "necessary" or "pertaining to being necessary and indispensable to the occurrence of some event." We see the word in Acts 13:46 where Paul and Barnabas told the unbelieving Jews in Pisidian Antioch, "We *had* to speak the word of God to you first." That is, "It was *necessary* that we preach the Word to you first."

Granted, it is a strong word. It's not referring to a suggestion, but something that is vital. Yet don't miss this. In Acts 15 the term doesn't refer to some standard the Gentiles had to keep to become part of the people of God, but rather highlights a vital step they must take because they were now the people of God.

Or to put it another way, the four "requirements" in Acts 15 aren't about our salvation but about our *mission*. Look again at the four things the letter prohibits. "You are to abstain from *food* sacrificed to idols, from *blood*, from the *meat* of strangled animals and from sexual *immorality*." Why prohibit these things? It's because these practices were

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<sup>8</sup> See James Boice, p. 266.

highly offensive to first century Jews, and apparently (from what James said in 15:21) even unsaved Gentiles knew these practices offended Jews.<sup>9</sup>

Keep in mind the early church, which met in homes, did a lot of eating together. In many cities, congregations were comprised of some who were Jewish by birth and others who were Gentile by birth. Can you imagine what would happen at a church potluck if a Gentile Christian showed up with a pork tenderloin roast at the same time his brand new Jewish Christian brother arrived? Talk about potential for a church split!

But worse than that, if a saved Gentile did what verse 29 is prohibiting, not only would he offend his Jewish brothers, but he also would infuriate the unsaved Jews in the community and make it practically impossible to witness to them. It's true. If he did these things, he would destroy the church's credibility with the unbelieving Jewish community, and make it very difficult for even his Jewish brothers to witness to them.

And isn't that why we're here, and what we want most? To share Christ with our neighbors, Jew and Gentile alike, and see them believe in our Savior too?

Know this. There are things that we *could* do that we *shouldn't* do because of our love for God, our brothers, and our unsaved neighbors. And we who are truly God's people won't *want* to do them because though we are saved by faith alone, we know that true faith is never alone.

That's the issue in verse 29.<sup>10</sup> Yes, in Christ we're free, so free that we now choose to lay down our rights so we can serve others.

Perhaps an illustration will help us. Suppose when you were a young person your parents died and left you all alone. You were destitute, with no one to care for you, and you ended up in an orphanage.

Time passed, and you lost hope that you'd ever be in a family again. Then one day a gracious young man came to your room in the orphanage with this news, "There's a wonderful family in a far away country that has heard of your plight and they want to adopt you. The loving father is a great king, and he has chosen to make you a part of his royal family."

And so you leave with the man who personally escorts you to the airport, to the foreign country, and upon landing you meet your new father. He throws his arms around you and holds you close, and says, "Welcome home, my son." And he gives you a new last name, *his* name, for you are now his son, and he invites you into his car and takes you to your new home in this wonderful new country.

When you arrive at the house, you're surprised to meet a sour-faced man who proudly informs you that he's the firstborn son. He stands between you and the front door, looks you over and says, not hiding his jealous suspicion very well, "Not so fast. You may be here, but you're not in the family yet. You must prove your worth by taking steps to look like a real son, I mean, *like me*. See how I cut my hair? Do the same. See the clothing style I'm wearing? Do the same. We do things differently in this household than what you're used to. If you want to become one of us, you must become *like* us first."

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<sup>9</sup> In actuality, God prohibited people to eat blood before the Law was given in Genesis 9:4. The command was repeated in the Mosaic law (Lev 17:11-14). Eating the meat of strangled animals was also forbidden because when an animal is killed by strangulation, some of the blood remains in the body, making it unkosher for Jews.

<sup>10</sup> Freedom in Christ never gives me the right to sin, nor the right to offend my brother (MacArthur, 71).



At this point your father (who'd gone inside momentarily but returned when he heard his oldest son lecturing you) intervenes. He looks deep into your eyes and says, "No. You are my child because I chose to love you, not because you are worthy. What I've done for you is something you could never earn. And I don't expect you to try. You are my son just as much as your new older brother is. I love you the same."

Then your father winks at you, comes close, and whispers, "He's got more to learn than he realizes. He doesn't know what grace is all about. That's part of the reason I've adopted you."

At this point the young man who rescued you from the orphanage takes you to your new bedroom. Before leaving he says to you, "He means it, you know. He's a wonderful father."

"Yes, he seems to be," you reply. "But I'm worried now that he'll change his mind. Maybe he'll stop loving me if I don't do what the oldest son said."

"Not a chance," is his reply. "Let me share something with you. He's my father, too. You see, I was about your age when he adopted me. He meant every word of what he told you. And that's why I delight so much in pleasing him. I love to see him smile. It's why I volunteered to travel and bring you here."

Hearing that made you smile, too. "What about the oldest son?" you ask. "Should I do what he said?"

"You mean take steps to earn our father's favor?" your brother returned. The look in his eye answered your question, but he continued, "There's nothing we could ever do to earn the privilege of belonging to this family. We're here because our father is so gracious."

"Then I don't need to change?" you respond. He laughed. "Hold on, my new brother. Yes, there are changes that need to happen in your life, as in mine. The oldest son is right when he says we do things differently in this household, but he doesn't determine what those things are. Our father does."

"But what does please our father?" you ask.

"So many questions, my brother! But that's good," he responds. "Just ask father. He will tell you everything you need to know, if you ask him. He loves to talk with his children. And I've learned that one of things that pleases our father most is when we treat others the way he treated us, not because we have to, but because we want to be like him."

"Is that what father meant when he mentioned the word 'grace' to me?" you ask.

"Yes," your brother replies. "Let's think of ways to show our older brother that we love him too, no matter what. I've found very few things that please our father more than that."

This brings us to the final evidence in Acts 15. When the gospel shapes the way we deal with our problems, there will be the proper ambition, attitude, aim, and...

#### IV. The proper action (30-35)

This is what we see in verses 30-35. The letter puts in motion three actions.

**A. The Jews demonstrated love for their Gentile brothers (30-32).** "The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. <sup>31</sup> The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. <sup>32</sup>

Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.”

Notice the Jewish brothers took the initiative. They sent the letter. They sent the messengers. They gathered the church together. They encouraged their Gentile brothers. In short, they demonstrated love for their Gentile brothers. Action #2...

**B. The Gentile brothers returned the love (33).** Verse 31 says upon hearing the letter they were “glad.” Verse 33 shows how they showed their appreciation, “After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.”

There’s a beautiful compromise here. The Jewish brothers gave up insisting the Gentiles be circumcised. The Gentiles willingly accepted a change in diet. As a result the church remained *one*. What a lovely outcome! What began as a bone of contention ended with a blessing of peace. Why? Because both sides submitted to the Word of God and the Spirit of God, humbled themselves, and chose to prefer one another.

As a result, a third action occurred...

**C. The church continued to do its mission (35).** “But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.”

If you think about it, the early church couldn’t move ahead until this internal problem was solved. You can’t jump from Acts 14 to Acts 16 without going through Acts 15. If we don’t deal with problems inside the church, we can’t fulfill our mission outside the church. But once the internal matters are settled, it’s full steam ahead.

1. *They preached the Word.* And...

2. *They prepared to launch the next phase of outreach.* As we’ll see in Acts 16.

It would have been so easy for the Jewish Christians in Acts 15 to say, “Our differences are too big. Let’s just separate. We’ll still be friends but you start *your* Gentile church, and we’ll keep our Jewish church.”

But they didn’t, praise God! They knew that Jesus died to make His people *one* (Eph 2:14), that Jesus prayed that His people would be *one* (John 17:23), that the church is *one* body (Eph 4:4), that when the Holy Spirit came He baptized into existence *one* body (1 Cor 12:13). We are one.

That being true, the *gospel* being true, we need to live like it. How? We’ve learned today the difference the gospel makes when we’re dealing with differences. When the gospel is shaping us, there’s the evidence of proper ambition, attitude, aim, and action. Now it’s time to make it personal.

Make It Personal: When the gospel is shaping my life...three resolves.

1. *I will put on humility in all situations.* “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” is our calling. To walk humbly with God.

2. *I will deal with problems biblically.*

3. *I will strive for the glory of God and the good of His church.*

Closing Song: #387 “O to Be Like Thee!”