

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 50

I. Exposition of Chapter Fifteen (Continued).

A. Verse 18 – **“Known to God from eternity are all His works.”** - This is simply saying that this fact of Gentiles coming into salvation was a work God planned from eternity.

B. Verses 19-20 – **“Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.”**

1. James comes to the conclusion that the Gentiles should not be mandated to keep the law. He mentions four things, however, that they should abstain from:

a. **“...things polluted by idols...”** – When we understand that these Gentiles were coming out of paganism and the worship of idols, we can understand why this needed to be emphasized to them. Idolatry was ingrained into their culture and thinking. This was addressed by the Apostle Paul as well (**I Corinthians 8-10**).

b. **“...from sexual immorality...”** – This was often combined with pagan idolatry and, of course has always been considered sin. This was common among the Gentiles and was a continuing problem in the church. (cf. **I Corinthians 5:11; II Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5**).

c. **“...from things strangled...”** – This was a common way of killing animals in the ancient world but did not allow for the proper drainage of blood which was forbidden to be eaten by God (**Leviticus 17:14**).

d. **“...and from blood.”** – Probably a continuation of the one above but some propose that it could be referring to murder.

2. Regarding the last two, Warren Wiersbe writes:

“Keep in mind that the early church did a great deal of eating together and practicing of hospitality. Most churches met in homes, and some assemblies held a “love feast” in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34). It was probably not much different from our own potluck dinners. If the Gentile believers ate food that the Jewish believers considered ‘unclean,’ this would cause division in the church. Paul dealt clearly with this whole problem in Romans 14–15.”¹

3. Dr. Stanley Horton makes a very important point concerning these food restrictions:

“There was precedent for these last two requests because long before Moses’ time, long before the Law was given, God told Noah not to eat blood because it represented a creature’s life (Gen. 9:4). Therefore, as descendants of Noah, Gentiles could be asked to keep these strictures without bringing them under the law of Moses. The same restriction in Moses’ law treated blood as a type that pointed ahead to the blood of Christ and showed its importance.”²

C. Verse 21 – **“For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”** – This is James explaining why the above food restrictions are necessary to give. Paul deals with this issue in **Romans 14:13-23**. Dr. Thomas Constable explains it well:

“The reason for these restrictions was this: In the weekly synagogue Scripture readings, teachers of the Mosaic Law had stressed Jewish scruples regarding these matters for generations. Consequently the Jews regarded them as extremely important. If Gentile Christians disregarded the convictions of these Jews, they would only alienate those they hoped to bring to faith in Jesus Christ or to growth in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 8:13).”³

D. Verse 22 – **“Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.”**

1. The discussion amongst them led to a unified conclusion. Not only the apostles and elders, but it states that the conclusion pleased **“...the whole church...”**. It seems apparent that the Holy Spirit was working powerfully in their midst when we consider the fact that this council began with **“...much**

¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 464.

²Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 269-270.

³Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 311.

dispute...” (verse 7).

2. For the return trip back to Antioch Syria, the Jerusalem leadership sent two representatives with Paul and Barnabas for the sake of showing unity and for the sake of clarity in communication. One of the men was named Judas, who’s surname was Barsabas and the other was Silas. We don’t hear anything else about Judas from this day forward but Silas is found elsewhere in Scripture.

E. **Verses 23-29 – The Letter to Gentile Believers** – Much of this letter includes things already recorded. Note the phrase “...it seemed good to us...” (verse 25) and “...For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (verse 28).

F. **Verses 30-31 – “So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.”** – We can certainly understand how this news encouraged the Gentile believers. At the beginning of the letter, it states that the believers were “troubled” and experienced an “unsettling” in their souls (verse 24). The meaning of the word “troubled” is “to cause acute emotional distress or turbulence—‘to cause great mental distress.’”⁴ The word “unsettling” means; “to cause someone distress and worry.”⁵

G. **Verse 32 – “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.”**

1. “Prophets” - “one who proclaims inspired utterances on behalf of God.”⁶ Stanley Horton comments concerning this:

“Judas and Silas then did more than confirm the facts of the letter. As prophets, they were speakers for God, used by the Holy Spirit in the gift of prophecy for the strengthening, encouragement, and comfort of the believers (cf. 1 Cor. 14:3). Through their words they supported and established the church at Antioch. That is, they gave them solid encouragement to forget the arguments of the Judaizers and to maintain their faith in Christ and in the gospel they had received, the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone—apart from the works of the Law...”⁷

H. **Verses 33-34 - “And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.”** – They stayed for what was probably a short time and then Judas returned to Jerusalem but Silas apparently stayed. Some scholars question whether or not verse 34 was included in the original and that it’s possible it was added to explain Paul’s choice to take Silas as Barnabas’ replacement on his second missionary journey (cf. verse 40).

I. **Verse 35 – “Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.”** – Paul and Barnabas stayed for a time along with some other teachers and preachers. One thing is for sure, Antioch was a “Word Church.” They had an abundance of the Word of God being ministered in order to reach the lost and make strong followers of Christ. “Teaching” is defined as “to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting.”⁸ This is the same Greek word used by Jesus to commission the apostles to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19-20). The word “preaching” means; “to tell the good news, to announce the gospel.”⁹ This refers to preaching the Gospel (Good News) to the lost. Jesus did the same:

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” – Matthew 4:23

⁴Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 314.

⁵Ibid., 313.

⁶Ibid., 542.

⁷Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 272.

⁸Louw and Nida, 412.

⁹Ibid., 411.

