

Fighting for the True Gospeli

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[0 : 0 0] Very good. Not bad on the acapella. Well done. It's good to hear how we sing without the music. Thank you. Well, let's turn now to God's Word and we're in the book of Acts. Acts chapter 15.

And you'll find this on page 923 if you're using one of the Vistad Mibles. Acts chapter 15. A few weeks ago we were finishing chapter 14 on Paul's first missionary journey.

And he was sent from Antioch and he's now returned to Antioch, end of chapter 14. And so the events here in chapter 15 are whilst Paul and Barnabas are still there in Antioch.

So let's begin chapter 15 verse 1. But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers.

Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

[1 : 2 2] So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders. And they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, it is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

[2 : 5 4] But we believe that we will be saved through grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will. And all the assembly fell silent.

And they listened to Barnabas and Paul and they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they had finished speaking, James replied, Brothers, listen to me.

Simeon, that is, he's referring to Peter. Peter has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name.

And with this, the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written. After this, I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen.

I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it. That the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord. And all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.

[4 : 07] Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood.

For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him. For he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues. Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They sent Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers. And they sent them with the following letter.

The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. Greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than 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.

[5 : 59] If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. So, when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch.

And having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.

And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also.

Amen. May the Lord bless to us his word tonight. Well, it'll be good to have that chapter in Acts open.

Chapter 15, page 923. And we'll spend a few moments now just thinking about this together. Acts chapter 15.

[7 : 10] I wonder what goes through your head when I mention the words entry requirements.

Entry requirements. I was chatting with a friend this week about golf. I think he was probably inspired by the Open Championship last week in Port Rush.

And he's decided to take up the game. It's got nothing to do with the fact that he's Northern Irish. And that was probably what swung up for him, the fact that the Open was in Northern Ireland. And he's the sort of guy that can get Northern Ireland into any conversation.

So he's now taking up the game of golf. He's ordered his clubs. He's going to get lessons. But looking at golf membership, well, that was quite a sobering experience.

The requirements for entry are pretty steep for a golf club. So, 1,000 pounds, sort of average joining fee. And then there's a yearly rate on top of that, about 700 or 800 pounds.

[8 : 09] I guess it depends on what kind of club you want to play in. But it's really quite expensive. But it's not just golf clubs, is it, that have entry requirements. Entrance to university. You've got to meet the requirements.

Membership of a football club. For a long time, I had my heart set on the first team at Manchester United. But this may surprise you.

I failed to meet the requirements. I just about managed to make it into the Falcon Boys Under 8 B team. But if we want to be part of a club or an institution, we need to meet the requirements.

But what about the most significant, the most enduring group of people there has ever been or ever will be? What are the entry requirements for the people of God?

What does it take to be a Christian? It's a fundamental question, isn't it? What are the requirements for entry into God's eternal family?

[9 : 16] And you see, without this chapter, without the events of Acts chapter 15, you and I may not be here. If the early church had not got clear on this question of what it is to be one of God's people, then you and I may not be here.

You see, this is a crucial moment in the life of the early church. And it's a crucial moment in terms of the spread of the gospel to the nations. Because what is at stake here are the entry requirements for the Christian church.

A failure to take a stand at this point, a failure to fight for the truth of the gospel here, at this particular juncture, and things would have turned out very differently indeed.

Indeed. It's at this moment, after Paul and Barnabas have returned to Antioch, after their first missionary journey, after all they've recounted of what the Lord has done, look at chapter 14, just a few verses before.

Chapter 14, verse 27. And it's at this moment, a moment as Paul reflects on that first missionary journey, a missionary journey of great encouragement, seeing many coming to faith, but also real opposition.

[10 : 49] It's at this moment that a crisis erupts. And it's not a crisis from outside. This isn't an external threat like the one Paul had experienced on his missionary journey.

No. This time, the crisis, the crisis that erupts, it comes from within the professing church. And it's a very significant problem.

You see, it's an attack on the very essence of the gospel itself, the very message of the gospel. It's what is under attack here.

And in recording this for us, Luke not only helps us to get clarity on the gospel, what it is and what it is not, but he also helps us to discern which battles we are to fight and the absolute necessity of doing so.

It's so important, isn't it? It's really important that we know, as the church today, we know which battles we must fight, that we know which battles really are about the essentials of the faith and those that are not.

[12 : 00] If we commit ourselves to the former, to the essential battles, then we preserve the gospel for the next generation. But commit ourselves to the latter, to those battles that are not essential, well, we waste our time, we lose focus, and we fail to do what we must do, which is to get on with proclaiming the gospel itself.

So this really is a crucial chapter. We get the essence of the gospel itself, what it is and what it is not, and also what battles you and I must be prepared to fight as the church today.

So let's notice, then, as we look at this chapter, three things which Luke tells us about fighting for the true gospel within the church. So first, then, verses 1 to 5, here's the first thing Luke tells us.

Know when the truth of the gospel is at stake. Know when the truth of the gospel is at stake, verses 1 to 5. We see there in verse 1 the issue that kicks off the whole thing.

Look at what it says. Some men came down from Judea, and they were teaching the brothers. Here's what they were teaching. Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

[13 : 25] Now, pretty quickly, the situation escalates. Paul and Barnabas, we see there, verse 2, they take issue with these men, and they had no small dissension and debate with them.

I think that's an understatement. In other words, things got heated pretty quickly and very serious. There was a big debate. This was not a polite chat over a coffee, was it?

And before long, the whole matter is referred to the Jerusalem church. Look at the end of verse 2. Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go to Jerusalem, to the apostles, to the elders, about this very question.

So clearly, Paul and Barnabas and all the others there in Antioch, they felt that this was an issue they couldn't just let go.

This was not an issue they could let lie. This was an issue that they had to take a stand on. It was an issue that they knew they had to fight over. To them, this was the issue that went to the very heart of the faith, to the very truth of the gospel itself.

[14 : 33] And they were clear, weren't they? They were crystal clear. And we need to be too, we need to be equally clear on which issues really are gospel issues, which issues we must tackle, be willing to fight for, willing to endure, perhaps endure great costs.

And this issue here in chapter 15 truly was a gospel issue. Just look again at verse 1. These men were teaching the brothers.

Look down again to verse 24. This is where you get the letter at the conclusion of the council. Look how they describe what was going on. Verse 24. You see, it was their words, their teaching that was causing problems.

It was unsettling the believers, the Gentile believers. They were attacking. They weren't attacking the messengers themselves. We've seen plenty of Adonacs, haven't we?

We've seen Paul himself being attacked. This wasn't the issue here. Rather, it was the message itself. It was this content of the teaching that was under attack. And what was the issue?

[15 : 55] Look again at verse 1. Here's what they were teaching. Here's the essence of their message. Unless you're circumcised, you cannot be saved. Unless you do as we instruct, they say, you cannot be saved.

Now, pretty clearly, this is a gospel issue, isn't it? In their own words, salvation itself is at stake. How people are saved is the battleground here in this fight.

The qualifications for entry, they are what is at issue here. The requirements for being part of God's eternal family.

How do you become a Christian? Here's how you're saved. That's what they're saying. And pretty clearly, this is a battle that must be fought. This was a no-brainer for the Apostle Paul.

Obviously, this was something that had to be taken on. So here's the issue. Here's the question that these men from verse 1 are raising. Here's the issue. Can Gentile believers, of which there is a rapidly growing number by this point in Acts, can Gentile believers be saved simply by believing in Jesus?

[17 : 12] Or is something more required? That's the issue. Can these Gentile believers, can they be saved by believing in Jesus? Or is something else, something extra required?

Do they need to believe in Jesus and also become Jewish? Is it Christ plus circumcision? How is it they're wrestling with?

How is it that people from new people groups become integrated into the family of God? Do they need to adopt all the Jewish culture? What are the essentials of membership?

It's a pretty fundamental question, isn't it? And we'll see in a moment how the early church resolved this question. But before we look at that, we need to be clear ourselves on what the core issues are, what we must be prepared to take a stand on.

And looking at the church today, what are the real gospel issues today? What teachings challenge the very essence of salvation of what it is to be a Christian?

[18 : 24] But also, what requirements are we placing before people who we consider, before we consider them to be genuine believers? Before we gladly admit someone into membership here, is what we require simply belief and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Or is it that plus something else? Do you need to start to adopt some of our ways of talking? Some of our ways of dressing and doing life?

And that sort of thing really comes to the fore, doesn't it? When we see a real surge in a particular people group coming to faith. We've seen ourselves, hasn't we, with the Iranians.

When people come from a very different culture to ours, when they come and they profess faith, what do we demand of them? Faith in Christ alone or something more?

Do we require that they become exactly like us, using the precise language that we would use to articulate the faith? Ensure that they adopt our particular brand of Christian culture?

[19 : 30] We do need to be careful, don't we? That we don't slip into gospel plus. The gospel plus my particular understanding of baptism.

Or the gospel plus the Book of Mormon. Or whatever it might be. We need to be careful, aren't we? We must be careful we don't add something to the essence of the gospel itself.

And another issue, and this is probably more prevalent, I would think, is not so much the gospel plus message, but rather the gospel minus message. The issue here in Antioch, it was a gospel plus message.

Gospel plus circumcision. But today, I think, we're far more likely to bump into gospel minus sorts of messages.

A gospel that is stripped of real and full repentance. You see, repentance and faith, they are inseparably linked.

[20 : 35] You see it again and again in the Book of Acts. Indeed, it is what the Lord Jesus himself instructed his disciples to proclaim before his ascension. Listen to these words from the end of the Book of Luke.

This is Jesus. After opening their minds, that is his disciples, after opening their minds to understand the scriptures, he said to them, Thus, it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.

And that is exactly what we read about the apostles doing through the Book of Acts. Peter, in chapter 2, he says to all those listening to him, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And again, in chapter 3, Peter says, Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out. In chapter 11, the Jerusalem church, in response to the news of the gospel going to the Gentiles, they say, Then to the Gentiles also, God has granted repentance that leads to faith, that leads to life.

You can't have salvation without repentance. That's pretty clear as you read through the Book of Acts. But I think you're far more likely to hear a message today that downplays repentance.

[22 : 08] Yes, life and forgiveness will be offered. Salvation will be offered. But there is no repentance. There's little said about sin and about judgment that will one day come.

You see, the gospel, salvation itself, requires that we turn away from sin, not accommodate it or ignore it. So a church, a preacher that proclaims a gospel which affirms your lifestyle, even a sinful one, and makes no appeal whatsoever of you to repent of it, that is a gospel minus message.

If someone comes into our church and proclaims such a message from the pulpit, I trust somebody would drag them off. You can't remove repentance from the gospel. That's not a gospel at all.

And so you and I, we need to be clear, don't we? We need to be clear about the gospel itself and about false gospels, whether it's a gospel plus or a gospel minus.

See, some issues, they are gospel issues. They are salvation issues. And we need to be clear on that. We need to know when the gospel itself is at stake.

[23 : 29] And the apostle Paul was clear, wasn't he? He knew immediately that there was an issue here. And so, the matter is referred to the Jerusalem church. So let's look on then to what happens there in Jerusalem.

Let's see the decision that they come to. So here's our second key point, verses 6 to 21. Luke is telling us that we need to be clear on what the gospel is and isn't and be prepared to endure division.

So look here at verse 6. We see the apostles and the elders, they were gathered together to consider this very matter. And the question before them, as we've seen, was essentially, what requirements, if any, do we place before the Gentiles?

Is salvation for any who believe in Jesus Christ or is it for those who do that and also become Jewish? That's the essence of the question.

And their answer, the executive summary, it's there in verse 19. It's articulated by James and it's adopted by all those present. Look at what he says there in verse 19.

[24 : 42] Here's the summary of it. Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God. In other words, the Jerusalem Council speaks with real clarity.

These men of verse 1, these men who are preaching this message of Christ plus circumcision, those who are troubling the Gentile believers about circumcision, they are wrong.

That's the decision. The apostles and elders in Jerusalem, they were not afraid, were they, to make a distinction. They were prepared to say to those men of verse 1, that gospel is not the true gospel.

They were prepared to endure division. they were prepared to stand for the true gospel. And that gospel is salvation by grace through Christ alone, by faith alone for anyone who repents and believes.

Look at verse 11. Peter is speaking here and look what he says. We believe that we, that is Jewish believers, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ just as they will, just as the Gentiles will.

[26 : 07] Peter's quite clear there, isn't he? That's the essence of the gospel. You don't need to become a Jew to be saved, but you do need to be saved by grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus.

It is through grace. It's something totally unmerited. You can't earn it. It's something that's given to you and you take hold of it through faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

That is the essence of the gospel and they're clear, aren't they? The council are clear. No other requirements. We should not trouble the Gentiles who turn to God.

No requirements of circumcision. That is the clear decision of the council. But two questions we need to answer about this section.

Two things to clear up first. How did the Jerusalem council get to this point? How did they reach this decision? Look at how they describe it in the letter they write.

[27 : 06] Look at verse 28. They say, for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. They are saying, aren't they, that they are at one with the Holy Spirit.

How can they be sure? How can they say that? How do they know that they are at one with the Holy Spirit on this matter? That's the first question. Second, what do we make of verse 20?

James has just said in verse 19 that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God. But then verse 20, but we should write to them to abstain from these certain things.

aren't they just making the same mistake as the verse 1 men? Aren't they just advocating a gospel plus message after all? That's the second question.

How did the council reach the decision and then what do we make of verse 20? So first, the first question, how did the Jerusalem council reach this decision? How could they be confident in the Spirit's leading?

[28 : 08] Well, two things we see from the speeches of Peter, Paul, and James. So, they've been debating for some time. We get that in verse 7.

And after the debates concluded, Peter stands up, and then Paul stands up, and then James. So, the three concluding speeches. And two particular things we see here. First, is the Spirit's work, and second, the Scripture's witness.

That's how they can be sure that they are being led and not one with the Holy Spirit. So first, the Spirit's work. Look with me at Peter's speech there from verse 7.

He addresses the council, and he reminds them of what has happened in recent history. He points to the clear work of the Spirit in real events and in real conversions from the Gentiles.

The things he's talking about here, you can read about in Acts chapter 10. As Peter went to Cornelius' house, the Gentile, and how the Spirit bore witness to his conversion.

[29 : 18] He says, you know, you all know that God made a choice. Verse 7. God made a choice from my very mouth that the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

You were all there when that happened. You also know what happened when I did that. You know what happened when I went to Cornelius' house. God himself bore witness by giving the Gentiles the very same gift of the Holy Spirit that he's given to us.

He has made no distinction. He has cleansed their hearts, verse 9, not by circumcision but by faith.

So we're not to place any additional burden on them. We believe, verse 11, that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will.

So Peter's argument is look at what's happened in history. Look at how the Spirit has been at work confirming this decision to go to the Gentiles.

[30 : 22] He's given them the very same gift of the Spirit that he's given to us. We are saved in the same way through grace by faith. And then Paul and Barnabas also provide evidence from the Spirit's work amongst the Gentiles.

Verse 12. All the assembly fell silent and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

You can read about that in the previous chapters. Clear evidence of God at work in the lives of the Gentiles. They really are genuine believers.

They've been given the very same gift of the Holy Spirit that we have. They have received the full gospel. They really are saved. They haven't received a deficient gospel.

There is nothing lacking. And the implication therefore is they don't need anything else. They don't need to be circumcised in order to be saved.

[31 : 28] So that's the first thing. They point to the Spirit's work. That is how they can be sure that these Gentiles really are genuine believers. They really have met the entry requirements.

They look in history at the work of the Spirit. But in addition to this, in addition to the Spirit's work, the council could be confident of their decision because, secondly, of the Scripture's witness.

Look with me at the final speech as James now takes to the floor. End of verse 13 and following. And his argument is simply that the Scriptures agree with what we've witnessed.

and what Paul and Peter and Barnabas have said. The Scriptures accord with what we've seen. And quoting from the prophet Amos, James demonstrates how the Scriptures themselves point to the Gentile inclusion in the people of God.

See, Amos anticipates a day when God will restore his Davidic kingdom. And it won't just be ethnic Jews. It will be all the Gentiles, verse 17, who are called by his name.

[32 : 39] In other words, it has always been God's plan to save Gentiles as well as the Jews. This is his eternal plan and purpose. The Scriptures witness to it.

So that is how the council is so sure. That is how they can write in that letter the Holy Spirit and us are at one. They look to the Spirit's work in history and they look to the Scripture's witness.

That is how they can be so clear about this question. So they look at these two things, the Spirit's work and the Scripture's witness and the clear conclusion they come to is that salvation is for any Gentile included who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. So that's the first question. Second question, what about verse 20? What do we make of that? Aren't they just advocating a gospel plus message after all?

So the Jerusalem church we've seen has come to the conclusion that verse 19 these Gentile believers don't need to worry themselves about circumcision. It is not necessary for salvation.

[33 : 56] They're being clear aren't they? On the entry requirements for membership into God's family. Grace alone. But they go on to say you do need to abstain from the following things verse 20 the pollution of idols, sexual immorality, meat from strangled animals and from blood.

What is that all about? Why these four things? Why anything at all? What else going on?

Are they cherry picking little bits of the Old Testament law and saying you must keep this and this and this? Is that what they're saying? Well no I don't think so.

It doesn't make sense. Why would they do that? But rather these four things they mention they are all features of they describe the very essence of the sort of pagan worship that was going on all around those Christians there in Antioch and in the Gentile world.

these four things were core elements in pagan worship. And these activities which were major parts of the life of a pagan they were no longer appropriate for the believer.

[35 : 12] You must leave such things behind. That is the message coming to the Gentiles from the Jerusalem church. You must turn from idolatry and all the pagan temple activity and live in obedience to the word of the Lord.

Don't keep living as you did bowing down before pagan gods and taking part in all that worship there in the temple. That is what they're saying. And that is not gospel plus.

This is not a requirement for entry into the family but it is about the life you are to lead once you are in. This is not a salvation issue.

This is not about requirements of entry. Rather it's about how you are to live once you are part of the family. You can't claim is what they're saying.

You can't claim to be a Christian and continue going along to the local pagan temple and carry on as if nothing has changed. You can't go and bow down to the gods you used to.

[36 : 21] You can't go and take part in all the sexual immorality. You can't go and eat the food you've just seen sacrificed before that false god. You can't do that. You can't carry on as though nothing has changed.

The Jerusalem church says no you cannot keep living in that way. You are to flee idolatry. You are to turn away from that old way of life.

That was the message to the Gentile believers then. It wasn't gospel plus. It was very clear on the requirements of entry into the family but once you're part of the family you must abstain from those things.

And we likewise today we are to flee idolatry. We are to lead lives of obedience to the Lord. And that is not gospel plus.

God will be to God. It won't look quite the same as it did then. There are not pagan temples on every corner are there but we are still, we are to break with our old way of life that tied us to the gods of this age.

[37 : 32] We are to seek to live lives of obedience to all that God has revealed and commanded for his people. It never was the case that obedience to the law could get you entry into the family.

That was never the case. But once you were part of the family by grace this is how you were to live. This is how you were to honor the Lord. It's all about obedience that we owe to the Savior who died for us.

It's not earning anything. It's just the life we are to live now we're part of his family. And so that will mean for us today rejecting the lifestyles promoted and celebrated by the gods that are all around us.

The gods of sex and money and power. We are not free to live whatever way we choose just because it might feel good.

We are to abstain from sex outside of marriage between man and woman. We are to abstain from drunkenness. We are not to pursue wealth for the sake of wealth.

[38 : 45] We are not to elevate career to the ultimate goal of our lives. We are no longer to live in the way that we did before we became Christians.

Remember what we saw earlier. Integral to coming to faith is repentance. It's a turning away from an old way of life. You see in Christ we have become new creations.

Everything has been turned on its head. We live now with eternity as our destiny with Christ as our king. How can we not change what we dedicate our lives to and turn away from when we know that we belong to him?

Leave your idolatry behind. That is the message for the church then but also today. the church then was and the church today must be clear on what the gospel is and what it is not.

Clear on what is required for membership and it's by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone. That is entry into the kingdom but also clear on what is expected of those who are now part of the family.

[40 : 03] Clear in what it is to live a Christian life. The church then were clear on those two things weren't they? And they were willing in order to ensure those two things there were clarity they were willing to endure division for the sake of the true gospel.

These men from verse one they weren't strangers. Look at how they're described. They were I think it's in verse five some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees.

They're described as believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. These were folk from amongst the professing church. Not an easy thing to disagree and to do so in such a public way.

But they knew that bigger issues were at stake and so they were prepared to fight for the gospel. So the church they were clear on what was the gospel what wasn't what it is to be a Christian and they were willing to endure division.

But let's notice finally as we conclude the impact of this stand verses 22 to 35 here's the third thing that Luke wants us to know and he's saying that remember remember that fighting for the truth brings joy for all eternity to real gospel people.

[41 : 37] Fighting for the faith brings real joy to real gospel people. So once the decision has been made it is then communicated to the church and so you see there from verse 22 Paul and Barnabas along with Judas and Silas they are the couriers they bring the letter they bring this decision of the Jerusalem council to the church in Antioch and it is a decision of clarity we've seen that they are saying this circumcision party they've been troubling you they are wrong don't listen to them you don't need Christ plus circumcision salvation comes through faith in Christ alone but listen to this you can't keep living as you once did they say you do need to abstain from idolatry and to live as a Christian not a pagan that's the clarity of their decision and look at the impact that this clear decision has amongst those Gentile believers look at what this decision leads to verse 31 and when they had read it they rejoiced because of its encouragements you see the willingness of

Paul and all the church in Jerusalem the willingness of the church to take a stand the willingness of the church to be clear in the gospel and to be prepared to endure the division that would come that leads to real joy for God's real gospel people that's the result joy and I've known that myself I've seen it from both sides I've been in churches where there was no willingness to be clear on the gospel no willingness to take a stand no willingness to endure division and being part of a church like that does not lead to joy it resulted in frustration and fudge inevitably it will lead to the death of a church but on the other hand I've been in churches where there was a willingness to be clear on the gospel a willingness to take a stand a willingness to endure division and the results joy

I don't mean dancing around and happiness but deep rooted contentment and joy joy because there was clarity and because there was a willingness to be faithful to the one true gospel so in terms of application would you pray pray that this church that its leaders that each one of us would be those who are prepared to fight for the gospel because what's at stake is yours and mine eternal joy and the eternal destinies of people who walk through our doors that's what is at stake if we're not clear on the gospel if we're cloudy about what it is then people are going to go away cloudy and unclear so pray for discernment pray for courage pray for clarity for all of us and especially those who lead us you see the very gospel itself salvation itself is the issue at stake here so if you're here and you're not a

Christian you need to know that entry into God's family is by grace alone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ there is no other requirement but you also need to know that faith entails repentance you do need to leave old ways behind and you need to lead your life once you become a Christian to live your life as a Christian and that leads to joy real true joy and if you are a Christian here tonight well let's be clear on the gospel and let's be prepared to stand for the gospel for our joy and for the joy the eternal joy of those we share that gospel with that is the message of Acts 15 so let me pray before we finish let me pray our father god we thank you for the clarity of your gospel and we thank you that you place no other requirements other than turning to you in repentance and faith and receiving your free gift of grace so lord help us to rejoice in the wonderful clarity of your gospel and help us to be willing together to be those who fight who are willing to stand for the one true gospel help us lord to that end for we ask it in Jesus name amen