

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XXXVII. Wisely Communicating A Sensitive Decision

(Acts 15:22-35)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," *Bible Know. Com., N. T.*, p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 15:22-35 records how the Early Church apostles and elders wisely communicated a sensitive decision to the Church at Antioch of Syria, and we study this passage for our insight and application:

II. Wisely Communicating A Sensitive Decision, Acts 15:22-35.

- A. The great amount of disputation over the sensitive issue of whether Gentile believers needed to be circumcised in order to be saved that marked the Early Church's first Church Council (cf. Acts 15:5-7a) left the members of the council convinced that they needed to communicate to the believers at Antioch the **certainty** of the **truth** of the decision they had made in order to settle all anxieties and doubts in the believers at Antioch.
- B. Thus, the wise steps that these leaders took to communicate the sensitive, landmark decision as recorded in Acts 15:22-35 example how we can communicate sensitive, landmark decisions to fellow concerned believers:
 - 1. First, the apostles and elders brought the whole body of believers in the Jerusalem Church in the decision regarding the Gospel issue that there be complete unity on the matter, Acts 15:22a; *Ibid.*, p. 396.
 - 2. Second, the apostles, elders and whole body of believers decided to send select men of their own company to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas to provide added verification of the decision produced at the Jerusalem council, Acts 15:22b. This verification was significant in view of the issue and people involved:
 - a. One of these men was Judas who was called Barsabas (Acts 15:22 NIV), possibly a brother of the Acts 1:23 Joseph who had been a Palestinian Jew who had followed Christ from the Baptism of John. (*Ibid.*)
 - b. The other man was Silas, a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37) who was a Hellenistic Jew, *Ibid.*
 - c. Both men together could represent both the Hebrews (in Judas) and the Gentiles (in Silas) of which the Church at Antioch was composed (cf. Acts 11:19-21), and both men would unitedly testify as to the delicate issue of whether the believers at Antioch of Syria needed to be circumcised and keep the Law!
 - d. Also, both men were influential leaders in the Church, good representatives to Antioch, Acts 15:22b.
 - 3. Third, the apostles, elders and body of believers put their decision in writing that they all agreed embodied the decision of the Jerusalem council, and then they had Judas and Silas with Paul and Barnabas take that document with them to have it read at Antioch to verify the Jerusalem council's decision, Acts 15:23.
 - 4. Fourth, this document was addressed to believers not only in Antioch in the region of Syria, but also to believers in the nearby region of Cilicia as there were possibly believers from both regions either in the Antioch Church or who were affected by their contacts with that Church, Acts 15:23; *Ibid.*, p. 397.
 - 5. Fifth, the document asserted that those who had taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the Law had no authority from the apostles and elders to teach such troubling beliefs, Acts 15:24.
 - 6. Sixth, the document added that the Jerusalem Church, apostles, and elders were sending the chosen men Judas and Silas with their beloved Paul and Barnabas, men who had hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus, what would support the testimony of and unity of all the parties involved, Acts 15:25-26.
 - 7. Seventh, the document asserted that the Holy Spirit with the Jerusalem council had decided not to burden the Antioch believers with circumcision or with the keeping of the Law, but to ask the Gentiles to avoid the especially repugnant practices to Jewish believers of ingesting meat offered to idols, of ingesting blood, of eating meat of animals killed by strangulation, and of sexual immorality, Acts 15:27-29.
- C. The result was very edifying to the believers at Antioch, Acts 15:30-35: They rejoiced in the conciliatory nature of the news (v. 30-31), Judas and Silas further confirmed the decision of the Jerusalem Council with the Church (v. 32-33) until the Church at Antioch released them to continue their ministries elsewhere (v. 34).
- D. Paul and Barnabas, their ministries validated by the Jerusalem council, continued to minister at Antioch, v. 35.

Lesson: For the sake of the believers at the Antioch Church, the apostles and elders with the whole Church at Jerusalem sought to verify in every way the certainty of the decision they had made on the true Gospel of salvation.

Application: May we likewise seek to verify in every way the certainty of decisions Church leaders make on sensitive theological issues faced by believers in the Church.