

(Acts) Free in Jesus

by Brian Brodersen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of faith and freedom, rather than being bound by legalism and the devil's schemes.

Duration: 53:40

Scripture: Acts 15:9-10, Acts 15:19-21, Acts 15:28-30, Acts 15:33

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Faithfulness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of staying grounded in the word of God. He describes how when people stray from the word, confusion and setbacks occur, but when they return to it, joy and progress are restored. The speaker shares a personal story of a church on the mission field that was infiltrated by someone claiming to teach deeper spiritual truths, but was actually promoting legalism. He warns that the enemy is crafty and will attack in different ways, but encourages listeners to hold fast to what they know and trust in the Lord to be victorious in the battle.

Transcript

Let's turn to the 15th chapter of the book of Acts, Acts chapter 15, as we continue our study through the Acts of the Apostles. Here we are, chapter 15 this evening, as we left off in our story, and it's a great story, isn't it? It's an exciting story going through the book of Acts here, but we left the Apostles in Antioch. They have returned from that great missionary adventure that they'd been on for a couple of years, the spreading of the gospel, the planting of the churches, and they've come back to Antioch and they've given this glowing report of all the wonderful things that God has been doing with them.

And now there's a time of just sort of settling back in and regrouping and no doubt, you know, making plans for the next time that God would send them out. But they they just, you know, sort of moved back into the things that they were previously doing, teaching and ministering and and, of course, spreading the gospel right in the local area as well. And so as we pick up in chapter 15, we find that as they're there in that, you know, sort of tranquil atmosphere spiritually, that there's some stirring that occurs.

And and once again, the the battle intensifies. And, you know, what you see through the book of Acts as well as through, well, all the way through the Bible, really, you don't have to limit it to the book of Acts, but you see it all the way through the Bible and you see it all the way through church history. And you see it all the way through your life that this Christian life is one battle after another.

It's just a continual conflict with ebbs and flows. You know, sometimes things subside a bit and and we go through times of relative calm and peace, but then it's not long before everything flares up again. And that's really just the nature of what we're involved in.

It's a constant battle. And if we don't remember that, if we fail to see things in those terms, we're going to be discouraged, we're going to be depressed, we're going to be frustrated, we're going to be wondering, Lord, what's happening? But we've got to remember that we're in a battle and the battle will not end until we're at home in heaven. That's when it ends.

But until then, it's a fight to the finish. And so, you know, as we followed these guys all the way through the history, there's one battle after another. But you remember, they went on to the mission field and there in Cyprus, they met the false prophet, Bar-Jesus, and there was the conflict there.

They went over to Perga and into Pamphylia. And as they would go from place to place, they would meet with both blessing and opposition. And that was the story all the way through.

So they come back to Antioch and here they are. They're just rejoicing in all that God has done and they're enjoying, you know, the great fellowship. And I sort of look at Antioch as, you know, it was a real established center of Christian life at this time.

And so, you know, it's sort of like being here. Probably it was the Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa of its day sort of a thing, you know, and where there was a good, solid, established church. There was good, solid leadership.

There was great Bible teaching and a vision to get the gospel out, all kinds of exciting things. And yet the devil never sleeps and is always looking for an angle. And so as we come to chapter 15, we see that once again, he's at work and he's taking a different approach.

But nevertheless, he's behind the scenes wanting to disrupt what God is doing. And here's the thing that we need to realize that the devil works through all different kinds of means. He has all different types of strategies.

On the one case, as we've already mentioned, he's got this man, Bar Jesus, the sorcerer who's standing up and he's opposing Barnabas and Paul. Just blatant opposition. And then he's got as they travel from these places, you know, he stirs up the Jews and they become envious.

And so they stir up the Gentiles and they start to persecute the apostles and drive them from place to place. And then the mob becomes influenced by them and they take Paul and they drag him out of the city and they stone him. And these are all the different types of tactics that the enemy uses.

But now back to another tactic, a different one, but one that has been used already, but one that he just is going to try to get his foot in the door any way he can. And so now he's going to try to get in through the introduction of false teaching. And that is certainly one way that the enemy tries to work himself into the church, into a fellowship, into the lives of individual believers.

He tries to deceive us. He tries to get us caught up in wrong teaching, the wrong belief system, so that we become bound up in things. And then, you know, once we're bound up, we become ineffective.

We're not able to really do anything of significance for the Lord. And that's what happens here. And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

So here's this fellowship and these people that have been walking with the Lord and growing and seeing these great advances of the kingdom of God. But now these men come down. They come from Jerusalem.

That's, you know, sort of the headquarters. That's where all of the apostles are, the people who knew Jesus personally. And of course, Jerusalem, that's the capital city of Judaism.

It's the capital of Christianity. It's the future capital of the kingdom of God upon the earth. And so when these men come down from Jerusalem immediately, there's going to be a sense that, boy, you know, these guys, I'm sure they know what they're talking about, because after all, they're from Jerusalem and they came down dropping names.

No doubt they came down talking about James and Peter and John and all the guys there in Jerusalem, you know, close personal friends using those kinds of things. But then coming in and beginning to teach them and say, you know, you can't really be saved unless you're circumcised. So what they were introducing to these Gentile believers, for that's what they were predominantly in Antioch, was the idea that in order to really be a Christian, you had to first be a Jew.

You see, because these Jews could not handle the idea that God was going to accept Gentiles on the same basis that he accepted them, they couldn't believe that a Gentile could just have direct access to God. They in their pride, they thought, no, they've got to they've got to join with us because we're the chosen people and they've got to become one of the chosen people, then they can be saved. And so that's the kind of thing that they were bringing as they came to the church in Antioch.

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question. So these guys came down, they began to insinuate that the people weren't really saved unless they became Jews and Paul and Barnabas resisted them, opposed them, stood against them, contended with them, but they planted a seed of doubt and they planted confusion in the minds of the people. And so at this point.

It's become so confusing that the apostles determine they're going to have to go to Jerusalem and get the word straight from these guys there, because these people are so unsettled, they've been so rocked in their position that they weren't going to take Paul or Barnabas's word for it at this point. Now, up until this point, Paul and Barnabas, they were, you know, leading men there within the fellowship and they were recognized as God's men and apostolic men, but now through the influence of these false teachers, the the others in Antioch, they're they're not even certain any longer about Paul and Barnabas's authority. And so there was this contentious thing that developed and Paul and Barnabas realized that they needed to go to Jerusalem and settle this matter once and for all.

So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria describing the conversion of the Gentiles. And they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all things that God had done with them.

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying it is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses. So some of the Pharisees were behind this whole thing. You know, remember, they were sort of the the leading figures, religiously speaking, in the nation prior to the introduction of the gospel and the new covenant.

And even though some of them had joined. It seems that they were still harboring bitterness, they were still upset that they had sort of lost their position of preeminence, and so they're trying to get that position back there. They're trying to get an angle on this thing because they were, of course, the experts in the law.

So they're wanting to bring the people, in a sense, back under their authority. They've got to keep the law of Moses, they're saying. Now, they were really seeking to.

Bring the people into religious bondage. And. Like I was saying a few moments ago, you know, if the devil can't get you one way, he'll get you any way he can.

And if he can't get you caught up in the flesh, in the sense of, you know, get you back out living carnally, you know, involved in sexual immorality or involved in, you know, the kinds of things that are contrary to the life of God, if he can't tempt you and pull you back into that sort of thing, then he'll take a completely opposite approach. He'll try to get you bound up in religion. He'll try to get you bound up in rules and regulations and legalism and pride and judgmentalism and all of those kinds of things.

You know, for him, it doesn't really matter if he can knock you out of the game and make you ineffective. Either way is fine with him. And so he's taking, as I've already pointed out, he's taking a bit of a different approach here, but his goal is the same, to render the believers ineffective, to get them caught up in legalism, to get them all preoccupied with themselves and with ritual and, you know, things that don't matter.

And he still does those kinds of things today. And we see it sometimes, you know, on a larger scale within a congregation, there are churches that are steeped in legalism. And boy, there's just a sense of bondage about everything that's done, then there are those those other, you know, kind of going to the other extreme as well, where everybody's so loose and free and, you know, we don't want to be bound at all to anything.

And, you know, the pendulum sort of swings over to the other direction and people are loose morally and not really concerned to live holy lives and things like that. But the devil's always working behind the scenes to, you know, try to trap us in one way or another. When I was a young Christian and, you know, the Lord pulled me right out of the fire, right out of the world, the flesh, that whole thing.

And, you know, when I got saved, there wasn't any thought in my mind about going back to any of that. I was so thankful to be out of it. I wasn't really, you know, as far as temptation went, there wasn't a whole lot of temptation to go back in that direction.

And the enemy took another approach, and I remember as I was, you know, seeking to grow in my relationship with the Lord and, you know, some other influences started to come in a little bit. And pretty soon this legalism began to creep in. I started listening to other voices and and reading materials and, you know, listening to this person's perspective on things.

And, you know, I started thinking, yeah, you know, man, I need to be more holy. I need to read more and pray more and witness more and and we all need to do that. And pretty soon, you know, judging everybody according to this new standard that was being set through some of the things that people were saying to me and some of the books I was reading at the time and things like that.

And I found myself. After a period of time, just losing all the joy that I had in the Lord and just the beauty of that relationship that I had with him and the thankful heart for my salvation and the excitement about just telling people about what he'd done for me, I began to get so steeped in all these rules and regulations and, you know, this heavy, deeper life thing that pretty soon the joy was completely gone from my Christian life. And now the Christian life was heavy, man, it was a burden.

And I don't know, you know, if you could really handle it. I'm of a special elite group, you know, I don't know if you could cut make the cut. And a group of friends of mine and I, we we actually developed a holy club and we were on a mission to, you know, straighten the body of Christ out about their their misconception about grace.

And, you know, we get together and talk about how they cheapened the grace of God and and people were living carnally and we were here to set a new standard. And and, you know, it's just a real heavy thing. And I remember back in those days, boy, you know, if you could get people to squirm in their seats, you were really under the inspiration of the spirit.

You know, if you could get them feeling really guilty and miserable about themselves. Then you were you were really anointed, we were thinking, and this went on for a period of time. And boy, thank God he woke me up one day and and began to show me the fallacy of some of my thinking and and began to bring me out of that.

But looking back on those days, I just remember how. All of the just the excitement and the joy of my Christian life, it just was sucked out of me and I was brought into this bondage, I was brought into this legalism. And now prayer was no longer a joy and a privilege.

It was a duty. And I had to pray into the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning. And now evangelism was no longer a privilege.

It was my great responsibility. But not just to tell people the gospel in the sense that, you know, telling them Jesus loved them or something like that. No, I had to tell them that God hated them because they were sinners and he wanted to pour his wrath on them.

And, you know, it was a pretty demented mentality, really. But by his grace, the Lord, like I said, he he began to do some things in my life to to wake me up and to show me that I'd taken a wrong turn somewhere. But it was down the road of legalism.

And it's it's it's not a road you want to go down. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. The Lord wants to liberate us.

He wants us to live a life of just, you know, a joyous relationship with him. It's a relationship. It's not based on, you know, keeping a list of rules.

So if I, you know, if I fall short, I live in utter condemnation or if I think I'm doing well, I live in arrogance, thinking I'm better than everybody else. That's not what he's called us to. He's called us to to live in a

beautiful relationship with him.

And that's what was being jeopardized here. It was that precious relationship. The book of Galatians, Paul deals with all of this stuff pretty extensively because the Galatians, they bought into this legalism.

They took it hook, line and sinker and they pretty much just, you know, rejected what Paul had taught them foundationally. They embraced this new idea of the law and they completely lost the presence of the and the power of the spirit in their lives. And Paul asked them questions.

He says, you know, he that works miracles among you. Did he do it by the hearing of grace or by the keeping of the law, he's reminding them that when they knew nothing about the law, the spirit of God was working powerfully, mightily among them, and he says to them at one point, he says, having begun in the spirit, are you going to be made perfect by the flesh? Having been saved and just received the grace of God as a gift, are you now going to go on to perfection by taking a list of rules and regulations and starting to live by those things? And he said, oh, you foolish Galatians.

He said, I'm concerned for you. I'm afraid that I've labored in vain among you because he saw him going into this legalistic mode, which really just quenches the spirit and brings death. You see, legalism is death.

The letter kills the apostle, Paul would say it's death, that's not what God has intended for us, he's intended for us to live in the flow of his spirit. And so that's what they're contending over here. They realize that this could be the downfall of the the new Gentile church.

If they embrace these things, this could be the end of that great work that God is doing. And so. When the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter, verse six, and when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them, men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us that by my mouth, the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. So Peter's speaking up now and he's challenging these guys. Now, here's an interesting thing.

When you read the epistle to the Galatians and to read it along with Chapter 15, there's a real parallel here. You find that Peter, who right now is speaking up on behalf of Grace and defending the position of Paul and Barnabas, Peter, when he was visiting Antioch and probably sometime prior to this, he got swept up into the whole Jewish thing himself. And Paul tells the story there in Galatians of how Peter got caught up in the whole legalistic thing.

And Paul tells us that when Peter came to Antioch, Paul said, I had to rebuke him to his face because he was to be blamed. He said, for before certain brethren came down from James in Jerusalem, Peter was right there among the Gentiles, just enjoying fellowship with them, eating with them and had just embraced them as brethren. But when these men came from Jerusalem, Peter was intimidated.

He became frightened, and so he compromised and he withdrew himself from the Gentiles. He segregated himself. He he didn't want to be counted among them.

He withdrew back into his his Jewishness, into his Jewish culture. Not only did Peter do that, but Paul goes on to say that even Barnabas was led away with their hypocrisy. Even Barnabas, the great man that he was, even he was swept up in this.

There was such power or pressure to conform that was put upon them. They didn't want to be seen as somebody who was breaking ranks with their Jewish culture. But Paul says when he saw this going on, he stood up in the midst of everybody and he said to Peter, he said, Peter, you're wrong.

He said, this is wrong what you're doing, and then he went on to challenge Peter and Peter evidently received the rebuke because what Peter is now presenting to the council there in Jerusalem, the very people that he was intimidated by previously, probably because that event probably occurred before this. Now, Peter standing up and saying to them essentially the same things Paul said to him when he was caught up in the hypocrisy and the legalism in Antioch. So he says to them, God, who knows the heart, acknowledge them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

And he made no distinction between us and them purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, listen to what he says. Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? Now, see, Peter, and I think what's important right here is to realize.

Peter shows the seriousness of this issue. He says, why do you tempt God? In other words, what they were doing is they were actually undermining the work of God. And the reason I point this out is because sometimes I think we miss.

Out on realizing that that's what goes on when we get caught up in these religious kinds of sins, you know, there are religious sins, the Pharisees were masters at. Religion, but they were great hypocrites as well, they were sinners. Because they played at religion, they played all the all these little games, all these little rules and things that they had set up for people to live by, and then they would find clever ways to sort of, you know, get around the rule.

These things go on in churches today as well. But what we need to realize is that that sin that's undermining God, that's, as I pointed out initially, that's another manifestation of the devil's infiltration into the church. As I'm saying, he doesn't just come in through the blatantly carnal, perverse, evil kinds of things.

He doesn't merely attack the church from the outside with persecution and things of that nature. Sometimes he comes in under the guise of a deeper spirituality. He comes in in a religious.

Fashion and he brings people into bondage and he seeks to to kill the work of God through that. So they were testing God, they were challenging God, they were really. Undermining what God was doing, but all the while in their pride, they had deceived themselves into thinking that they were really doing God a favor, because after all, God gave the law.

And now Paul's out there telling these people they don't have to abide by it. We've got to help God out. They were unwilling to accept the fact that that means of of God dealing with people that passed because they had, you know, embraced it to the extent that it became such a part of their identity.

They couldn't imagine, you know, how they could live without it. But in doing so, they were undermining God's work. Years ago, I was visiting some friends on the mission field and a good friend of mine who's still there on the mission field, he he had been pastoring this little church that we started in a small town in southern Hungary for a few years.

And it was one of these places where, you know, it was just a battle from day one. We started off, you know, with an incredibly wonderful reception by the people. And within just a few months, there were

hundreds of people coming to hear the word of God.

But it wasn't long before the church was infiltrated by some, you know, same sort of thing we're talking about here, some legalist and they split the church. And it's had sort of a history of going like that. But this one guy, he comes along and the Lord raises him up for leadership.

And he's there faithfully for three or four years, just plugging away, teaching these people, loving them, ministering to them. And as he's there, just, you know, giving his heart and soul to the thing there one day shows up on his doorstep. Another missionary guy comes and says, you know, I've been sent by such and such a church and I'm here to help you and boy, I just love the Lord and I love what God's doing here and I want to be part of this.

And so, you know, he welcomed the help. Great. We need help here on the mission field.

And so this person came into the church and, you know, he was there for a while and, you know, it wasn't too long before he started gathering the people around himself, you know, in small groups. And he said, I want to take you into the deeper things. I want to teach you about the deeper things of God.

And and, you know, he would begin to insinuate that, you know, your pastor here, he's a good man, but he doesn't quite understand the real depths of a relationship with the Lord. And, you know, so he started taking him into the deeper life. And it was nothing but a bunch of legalism, it was nothing but a bunch of bondage.

And I'll never forget visiting them. And, you know, I went to my friend and he told me about this missionary that had come and he told me about some of the problems that were going on. But he himself was kind of deceived, not to the extent that he was embracing what he was teaching, but he was thinking, well, maybe this guy really is, you know, maybe he's really spiritual and I'm just not.

And maybe I should just leave and he should take over the thing. And, you know, as I had my encounter with the person, you know, immediately the Lord gave me wisdom that this guy's a wolf, he's trying to draw people away after himself and he's doing it under the guise of this deeper spirituality. Well, to make a long story short, we just dealt with him.

We kicked him off the mission field and cleared up that problem. But, you know, but and I don't even know if you're getting what I'm saying. It's almost like you have to be there, but it's a it's a subtle.

Deceitful kind of wickedness that comes in the guise of religion, and, you know, you're going to be a better Christian, you're going to be more holy than everybody else, you're going to be God's man or woman, and it's a deception. It's a it's another means of ripping people off, and so we've got to be on our guard against these things, and so Peter here, as I'm saying, he is really leveling with these guys and challenging them by the fact that they're they're tempting God, he says, and they're trying to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear the Peter just, you know, gets right to the point. He says, look, we've never been able to keep the law ourselves.

What do we want to try to lay it on these guys for? Peter admitted the truth about the law that most of the rest of them evidently didn't want to really admit. And then he in verse 11, here's his his statement. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved in the same manner as they.

That's the gospel right there through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're saved. We're saved by grace through faith.

How do we get saved? We get saved by believing that Jesus, the son of God, that he came into the world, that he died for our sins, that he rose again from the dead. That's how we get saved.

We believe that with our heart, with our soul, and when we believe that we're saved. And you can't get any more saved than that, that's as saved as you'll ever be right there. Now, once you're saved, you begin to grow, but you grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, not in the law of God.

Some people say, well, you know, well, what is the place of the law? Well, Paul tells us in Galatians clearly that the law was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. It was the whole purpose of the law, the purpose of the law. God intended the law.

He gave it to Israel, not to the nations at large, not to the Gentiles. He gave it to Israel so that they would understand the law. And in understanding the law, they realized that they couldn't be justified by the law and they would cry out to God for mercy and he could introduce the Savior at that point.

That's the purpose of the law, to bring a person to the realization that they can't save themselves because they can't live up to the law. So the law leads us to Christ. And then when the law leads us to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us, takes up residence in us, and the Holy Spirit then begins to live the life of God through us.

And of course, God's given us his word and many of the principles in the Old Testament are reiterated to us in the New Testament as ways by which we are to live. But. The difference is I live this way because I'm saved, I do not live this way in order to get saved.

You see, that's where people always get confused and make the mistake works are the evidence of my salvation, not the means by which I attain salvation. I attain salvation by faith, by putting my faith in Jesus and what he did and just simply saying that's it, Jesus did it all as the hymn says, Jesus did it all all to him. I owe.

You see, the Pharisees, even these who had come into the church, they still didn't want to really take it that far. They would have sung. Jesus did most of it to most to him, I owe most everything, but.

They the law, they wanted to add the law in there, and in doing so, basically what they were doing is saying that I want to make a contribution to my salvation. But further behind that is the message that I don't want to believe that I'm so bad that there's nothing I can do to obtain God's favor, I don't want to believe that that was the underlying pride. That drove them to kept to keep insisting on some role for the law in their salvation.

They didn't want to believe the truth about themselves. But we realize that. Apart from the grace of God, we've got nothing to offer God, we've got nothing that he will receive from us, we are completely bankrupt spiritually.

Literally. The moment I realized that, that's when I become a happy person, because Jesus said happy are the poor in spirit. Happy are those who recognize their spiritual bankruptcy and say, God, I can't save myself.

Will you save me? That's where it happens. And that's what Peter said here. So all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, Now, James, remember, James, the son of Zebedee, was executed by Herod. We already read that. So this James.

Is James the brother of Jesus? He was the brother of Jesus, of course, the son of Joseph and Mary. And. During the.

The time that Jesus was here on Earth. And during his public ministry, James, his brother, did not. Believe in his messiahship.

But Jesus appeared to James after he was resurrected and James then believed, Paul tells us that in first Corinthians 15, that he tells us specifically that Jesus appeared to James. So James, the brother of our Lord, he becomes. A leading figure in the church in Jerusalem, if not the leader of the church, I mean, he appears to be in the role of being sort of the head of the church in Jerusalem.

Remember, in Antioch, when Peter was being hypocritical, it was out of fear for James that he was compromising out of fear of what James might think about him. And and here we see as James begins to chime in on the situation, we see that James held a very prominent role in the church in Jerusalem. So he speaks up now and he says, men and brethren, listen to me, Simon.

He's speaking of Peter using his Jewish name. Simon has declared how that God at first visited the Gentiles to take out of 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 rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins. I will set it up so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord.

Even all the Gentiles who are called by my name says the Lord who does all these things. So James is saying, you know what Peter is saying, he's right. And even the prophets say the same thing.

So he quotes from the prophet here, Amos, and he says in verse 18, known to God from eternity are all his works. So, of course, God had always planned to save the Gentiles. You see, this was the problem.

The Jews forgot that God was the God of everybody, that all of humanity was connected back to God, ultimately through Adam. And yet God, throughout the Old Testament period, through the prophets, he would declare that there was a time coming when the Gentiles would be gathered in, when all the people would be brought into a relationship with him. And so James states that here in verse 18, he says, 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.

For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. Now, the things that James suggests here are interesting. And it seems that James could be drawing from the various ordinances that God had laid down through Moses in the 18th chapter of Leviticus.

These were things that were more ceremonial and pertained specifically to the Jews. And so what James is seeking to do is prevent there from being a breach between the Gentiles and the Jews. So he's saying to the Gentiles, look, you don't have to keep the law, but you need to be sensitive to these kinds of things, because if you're doing these things, then the Jews will naturally withdraw from you.

And the fellowship that God wants to create between the two peoples will be broken. So he calls them to be sensitive to Jewish sensitivities, basically. Now, there is the mention of sexual immorality here, but.

It's probably a reference again back to Leviticus 18, where it had more to do with sexual immorality in the general sense, but where it had more to do with certain laws that God was giving to the people regarding marrying their close relatives. And that's probably the best way to understand this, because, you know, if you understand it, it's sexual immorality just in a general sense. Of course, that's something that we're to stay away from.

But the point that he's wanting to make is that he wants to keep the Jew and the Gentile from breaking fellowship. But he realizes that the law is not the solution. We can't slap the law on the Gentiles, but what the Gentiles need to do is be sensitive to these cultural taboos among the Jews.

So that they can maintain the fellowship, and so I think the sexual immorality here is probably, again, a reference back to Leviticus and some of the some of the prohibitions on marriage within the family, because the context is for Moses has had throughout many generations, those who preach him in every city being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. And so. It pleased the apostles and elders when James concluded, they said, great, sounds good, the whole church, everybody was happy.

And so they chose to send men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas, who was also named Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brethren. And they wrote this letter to them, the apostles, the elders and the brethren to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Greetings, since we have heard that some went out from us or some who went out from us have troubled you with words unsettling your souls, saying you must be circumcised and keep the law to whom we gave no such commandment.

You see, here's I think it's an important thing to clarify. James was not teaching this, Peter was not teaching this, the apostles in Jerusalem had not sent these people down with the message that the Gentiles needed to keep the law, they were being deceptive.

And so here they clear things up. We did not send them and tell them to do this. They were misrepresenting us.

So they go on to say it seemed good to us being assembled with one accord to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul. Remember back in Antioch, they're sort of wondering now, who do we listen to? These people say they're coming right from Peter and James and them. And and now Barnabas and Paul, we love them, but maybe they're wrong.

But here notice in the letter how they seek to restore the confidence of the people in Barnabas and Paul, they refer to them as as our beloved men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth, for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon, you know, greater burden than these necessary things that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from sexual

immorality. If you keep yourself from these, you will do well.

Farewell. 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.

See, this was something that really rocked them. As they noted in the letter, troubling words that have unsettled your soul. And, you know, that's how the enemy works.

You're going along in your Christian life, you're just having a wonderful time enjoying your salvation, being thankful for God's love for you. And, you know, somebody comes along and says something like, hey, how were you baptized anyway? How was I baptized? Oh, I don't know. I was just baptized.

Well, what did they say when they baptized you? Well, I I don't remember. Did they say I baptize you in Jesus name only? I don't know. Well, hey, brother, you're not really baptized and you're not really saved.

And all of a sudden your soul is unsettled. You thought you were saved. You thought that God loved you, but you were wrong because you got baptized the wrong way.

Or, you know, there are all kinds of different things that that people will come up with. And these are all ways of the enemy just getting in there and trying to unsettle our souls. And like I said in the beginning, it's a battle.

Sometimes it doesn't even have to be a person, sometimes just a thought will come to your mind. And there you are, and maybe you're even in church and you're worshiping God and all of a sudden, perhaps some perverse image comes into your mind and then immediately a voice says, look, you're not a Christian. Christians don't think things like that.

And suddenly your soul is unsettled. You think, oh, no, I must not be saved. How can I think that? And that's that's the way the evil one works.

But that's why it's so important to have the word of God. And the encouragement that comes through his word so that when we get unsettled at times because of these fiery darts that come either just, you know, from the invisible realm into our minds or maybe they come through a person. Someone comes along and lays a big trip on you.

About any number of things, whether it be your baptism or, you know, whether it be authority of the Bible or the deity of Christ or any one of these things that we can fall back on the word of God and take our strength and our comfort from that and continue to press on. And so that's what happened. They received great encouragement from the letter that was sent to them.

They were back on solid ground and they were able to continue to progress and to advance the kingdom as they had been doing. But here was sort of a diversion. You know, this took some time.

It wasn't just a quick plane ride from Antioch to Jerusalem. I mean, these guys had to travel there quite a distance. So several months passed and there was probably during that time just a lot of turmoil in the souls of the people.

And, you know, to some extent, the work probably slowed down quite a bit. People are all of a sudden living in confusion. But then the word of God comes back to them and everything is restored once again, the joy is restored, the vision is restored and progress can once again be made.

But again, it just, you know, going back to our original comments, it's the nature of what we're doing. It's a battle and there's advances and there's setbacks. We gain ground, we lose ground, we have victory, we have defeat sometimes, but we've got to just keep going.

We've got to keep fighting. We've got to keep pressing, keep trusting the Lord and knowing that in the end, victory is coming. Now, Judas and Silas themselves being prophets also exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.

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. Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also.

So after this unsettled period, now the church in Antioch is back on course, everything's back to normal. The teaching of the word is proceeding and the vision is expanding and the work is continuing to advance. But not without its difficulties.

And so as we are advancing, as we are moving toward heaven, as we are seeking to see the kingdom of God furthered in our lives and through us, we're in a battle. Remember that. And the enemy is crafty, he's clever.

And he knows. Our weaknesses, he studies us to see where we're vulnerable and he might attack one way for a while, and if we don't succumb there, he might come a completely different way, take a totally different approach than what he's done. But as we just hold fast to what we know, as we cling to the Lord, as we trust the Lord, as we just say, you know, by the grace of God, I'm going to keep going.

We're going to be victorious. And so I think part of the victory is just knowing that we're in a battle, but we're going to win. You know, if we if we don't realize that, if we're if we're not seeing it in that light, then the enemy is going to have a lot more of an ability to slow us down to affect us negatively if we're not understanding what's going on.

But if we're seeing it for what it is and we just say, OK, this is one of those times we just have to bear down and push through it. God will get us through it. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you that we have a relationship with you that's based on grace. Lord, that it's not contingent upon. Our ability to keep a long list of rules, but Lord, it's all about what you did on the cross and us just embracing that.

Us. Lord, enjoying that and living in the reality of it. So, Lord, guard us from the ploys, the tactics of the devil, whether it be the temptation to.

Go out and live after the flesh. Or the more subtle drawing into some sort of bondage, some sort of legalistic approach to the Christian life. Lord, keep us freed from those things.

Help us, Lord, to recognize. That we're in a battle. And help us, Lord, to stand firm in you.

And thank you, Lord, that you do bring deliverance, that you do comfort us when our souls become unsettled at times. And, Lord, we look to you to give us the strength to persevere. To keep on going.

To keep on loving you and serving you and seeking to spread your kingdom as we go. So help us, Lord, to be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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