



Keeping Unity

Acts 15:13-35

1. Discernment (verses 13-18)
2. Wisdom (verses 19-22)
3. Unity (verse 22)
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For almost two years now, churches in our country have faced a barrage of very divisive issues. The **COVID** pandemic has brought much division in the church. I have spoken to many pastors who have sought to navigate this difficult time with as much wisdom as grace as they could muster, leading as best as they could, only to have people leave the church on both sides of this issue alone. On the one hand, people left because the church was too strict with its mask recommendations. On the other hand, people left because the church was too lenient with its response. This has all happened in the same church under the same policies! It has exposed the church, as not being united on the gospel, as we once thought we were. Sadly, today, many churches are now more united on their masking stance, than on the gospel.

Also, the **racial conflict** in our country has brought much division in the church. Several high profile cases have brought this to the surface: George Floyd; Breonna Taylor; Marcus Arbery. Many have abandoned the core principle of justice in our land of being innocent until proven guilty! Instead, mobs have been formed, demanding guilty verdicts before the evidence has been heard! As churches have sought to deal with the racial unrest, there has been much division. Some churches have forsaken the gospel in an attempt to solve the racial division in our country. Others have taken the opposite approach: remaining silent to the injustices of our nation, as if all is well. I have heard of pastors simply mentioning the word, "justice" only to have great uprising in their churches. It's like the topic is too toxic even to handle for many today. Even in our church, I have been labeled as "going liberal" due to my views on the issue.

Further, the **political divide** in our nation has entered the church as well. President Trump was super-polarizing, not merely in the world, but in the church as well. And then came the elections. There is a strong divide in the church about the extent of voter fraud and whether we can even trust the elections in our country anymore. There is a strong divide about the events of January 6, 2021. Seemingly, there is divide about everything in our government today. How appropriate that our U. S. Senate has 50 Republicans and 50 Democrats! What a good picture of our divide! The media has fanned the flame. On the one side, all you hear of is far left liberalism. On the other side, all you hear of is far right conservatism. Each side denouncing the other for casting forth their opinions as facts. This divide has entered the church.

As a church, we need wisdom! We need wisdom in navigating these issues, that have the power to split our churches in half!

Well, this morning, as we come to our passage in Acts 15, we see a church in need of wisdom. We see a church threatened to split in two. The church was being threatened to have a Jewish church and a Gentile church. The Jewish church would be comprised of Jews who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and continued to submit themselves to the Mosaic law and live within to the Jewish culture of the day. The Gentile church would be comprised of those who believed in the grace of God that has come to them in Jesus apart from the law.

The stakes were high in the early church. Today, when churches face divisions, believers simply pick up and go to another church. That was not possible in the early church. There was one church. To split the church would forever fracture the church. I'm thankful to God that in the end, this division never took place, because of the great wisdom of James during "The Jerusalem Council."

For the past few weeks at Rock Valley Bible Church, we have been looking at "The Jerusalem Council." This council came about because of the unprecedented numbers of Gentiles who were coming to faith in Jesus. This council was gathered to decide what is required of these Gentiles who were trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

On the one hand, you had the Jews, who were so ingrained in their religion, that "they found it difficult to believe that anyone could really be acceptable to God apart from the ancient Jewish order."^[1] which mean that they advocated circumcising the Gentiles, and bringing them into submission to the cultural mandates of the law of Moses (Acts 15:5).

On the other hand, you others, like Barnabas and Paul, who held that the Gentiles were saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from the works of the law!

These two sides simply couldn't agree in Antioch. they had "no small dissension and debate" with each other (Acts 15:2). So, Paul and Barnabas and some others were sent to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to resolve the matter.

At this council, they began with "much debate" (Acts 15:7) back and forth they argued!

"The Gentiles need to be circumcised!"

"No, the Gentiles are saved by grace, apart from the law!"

"No, but the sign of circumcision has always been the sign of faith!"

"But Gentiles today are receiving the Holy Spirit apart from circumcision!"

...

At some point, **Peter** stood up and gave his speech (verse 7). He argued from his experience with the Gentiles. God called him to go and preach to the Gentiles (at the home of Cornelius). and they believed the gospel! and God poured out his Spirit upon the people, apart from their circumcision. He concluded in verse 11, "But we (Jews) believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." After this, "all the assembly fell silent" (Acts 15:12).

Then **Paul and Barnabas** related their experiences among the Gentiles on their missionary journey (see Acts 13-14). Their message confirmed what Peter said. They were sent out by grace of God (Acts 14:26). When believers came to faith, they urged them to continue on in the grace of God (Acts 14:43), not in the works of the law. When they spoke to the believers, they spoke to them of the word of God's grace (Acts 14:3).

Finally, **James** spoke. (This is what we will see in our text, which begins in verse 13).

With the words of James, the debate ended. On the one hand, this can be expected, because of the respect that he had by those in Jerusalem. James was the half-brother of Jesus, who came to faith after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:7). Few understood Jesus as well as he did, he grew up with him, and saw how he lived. he heard what he said. and he trusted in Jesus.

James had risen in prominence in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17), so much so that Paul would even call him a "pillar" of the church (in Galatians 2:9). So, it is to be expected that his word to the council would be accepted and followed.

But there's another reason why his words ended the debate: because his words were filled with wisdom. James addressed this very difficult issue in the church, which threatened to divide the church in two. And James dealt with this issue with firmness. yet he was very tactful and graceful in his consideration of the parties involved.

You might even say it this way: his wisdom saved the unity of the church. Thus, the title of my message this morning: "Keeping Unity" because, this is what we see James doing in his speech. Doing so took great wisdom.

This is to be expected, because James was a wise man. He wrote the book of James in the New Testament. which could easily be summarized as "The Epistle of Wisdom." the "Proverbs" of the New Testament, if you will. So, let's hear the wisdom of James.

Acts 15:13

After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me."

From such a respected man, the entire assembly would have been all ears to hear what this wise man was about to say. He continues on with the following words:

Acts 15:14-21

Simeon 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."

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 is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

These words contain the recommendation that James made. that was eventually received by the entire council. It then became the direction of the church. In the words of James, we first see his ...

1. Discernment (verses 13-18)

Unity requires discernment.

James begins by summarizing Peter's speech.

Acts 15:14

Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.

It's interesting to see exactly how James puts it. First of all, he uses Peter's Hebrew name, Simeon. This brings Peter back to his Hebrew roots, before he ever followed Jesus. This is what makes his pro-Gentile speech so stunning! Peter was a Hebrew of Hebrews, but it was through him that God brought the gospel to the Gentiles. and Peter was all in with affirming the Gentiles as members of the New Covenant. and, more importantly, so was God.

It was God who “visited the Gentiles” (verse 14). It was God who “[took] from them a people for his name” (verse 14). What is stunning about these words is that the Jews were the people of God, called by his name! Of Israel, God says, ...

Isaiah 43:1, 4-5, 7

Fear not, [O Israel] for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine. ...
you are precious in my eyes.
and honored, and I love you.
Fear not, for I am with you, ...
everyone who is called by my name.”

Of all the nations of the earth, it was the Jews who were called by God. it was the Jews who were called “by his name.” And yet here, James says that the Gentiles are now taken by God to be a people for his name! James, then turns to the Scripture, arguing that this is exactly what the Old Testament prophesied:

Acts 15:15-18

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.’

This quote comes from Amos 9, where God is promising the restoration of the people of Israel after a time of judgment. after the “tent of David” has been destroyed. In those days, God promised, “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.”

Now, there is much difficulty and theological debate about these words. Why does the quote of James not quite agree with the Hebrew text? What are we to do with the differences? When exactly was God promising to do this? What is “the tent of David”? What does it mean for the Lord to rebuild the tent? How does this passage really help end the debate in Jerusalem?

Here’s my take (from best that I can tell): I think it works like much of Old Testament prophecy. There was a fulfillment during the days of Jesus, yet there awaits a future fulfillment for Israel as well. This is how the prophesy of Joel 2 was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2). It was partially fulfilled on that day. But there waited a future day when it will be completely fulfilled (i.e. when the sun is darkened and the moon turns to blood). This will come at the Day of the Lord. This is how, I believe, is the best way to understand James’ quotation of Amos 9 in our passage this morning. It was partially fulfilled in the days of Jesus, yet will have it’s complete fulfillment with Israel when the full Messianic kingdom is established!

In the days of Jesus, he was the Messianic king that came out of the line of David. He was struck down and “ruined” in his crucifixion. But, he was “rebuilt” and “restored” in his resurrection. In this way, James quotes from Amos 9, he is saying that the death and resurrection of Jesus was in fulfillment of this passage. God is now building a new thing, the church, which includes the Jews and Gentiles.

The purpose of this “rebuilding” comes in verse 17 and 18, “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.” This is the key phrase that James was emphasizing: “All the Gentiles who are called by my name.” Indeed, this is what James pointed out in verse 14 when he referred to Peter’s speech: “Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.”

Amos prophesies of a time when the Gentiles will come to faith! and God would take for himself “a people for his name.” James connects the dots. His argument was that this is the time! God is bringing Gentiles to himself!

Although James only mentioned Peter, this was the testimony of Paul and Barnabas as well. They saw Gentiles come to faith on their missionary journey, in Paphos (Acts 13:7), and in Antioch (Acts 13:48), and in Iconium (Acts 14:1). Seemingly, everywhere they went God was doing a great work among the Gentiles (Acts 15:13).

Yet, I trust that you see the way that James came to his conclusion. It wasn’t the experience of Peter that ultimately swayed his reasoning. Nor was it the experience of Barnabas and Paul. It was the testimony of the Scripture. He rightly understood from Amos 9, that God was doing a work in their day, of calling a people for his name! This is James’ discernment. He took what was happening in his day, and let the Scripture interpret his understanding of what was taking place.

There’s huge application here for us. We all need discernment. We need to be able to take the events of the day, and filter them through the truth of Scripture, so that we might know how to respond.

This could be on the national level. When the government presses upon us restrictions that we do not like, how does Scripture teach us to respond? (Romans 13; Proverbs 21:1; 1 Peter 2:17). Discernment will give you the ability to take the events of the day and respond rightly, in accordance with the Scriptures.

This could be on the personal level, when you are dealing with a foolish person at work, or when you clash with a difficult person at church, or when you are having conflict with your spouse, or when you have a rebellious child. Discernment will give you the ability to understand what the Scriptures teach about these situations and respond accordingly. Discernment will also help you when you are facing some sort of

dilemma or huge decision, the Scripture will be your guide, not your own reason or experience.

Think about the discernment of James. He was a leader in the church in Jerusalem, one whom God inspired to write a book of the New Testament. When he was seeking wisdom as to how to respond to this debate, between those who believed that circumcision was necessary for salvation, and between those who said that salvation is by grace through faith alone, James went to the Scriptures for wisdom! He went to Amos, chapter 9. This is what we ought to do as well. We should seek our guidance from the Scriptures! And it really begs the question: do you know the Scriptures?

When James quotes from Amos 9, he quoted from memory, with little preparation. He knew the book of Amos, well enough to pull from its last chapter, and apply it to his circumstances. Do you know the Scriptures like this? Do you know Amos 9? Do you know the stories of the Bible? Do you know the teaching of the apostle Paul? Do you remember what Jesus taught? Can you quote from the Psalms? Are you ready to quote them at a moment's notice to give guidance to your life? That's why it's important for you to be reading the Bible for yourself.

In verse 19, we finally get to the recommendation of James. In this recommendation, we see James' ...

2. Wisdom (verses 19-22)

Unity needs wisdom.

Listen to what he concluded:

Acts 15:19-21

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 is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

The recommendation of James is two-fold. First, "We should not trouble the Gentiles." Second, "We should write to them." Then he gives a reason for his recommendation, "Because Moses is read every Sabbath." In this response, James shows much wisdom.

Let's look at his first recommendation, "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God" (verse 19). At this point, James reveals his thoughts. He is not on the side of those who say that the Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. "No," James says, "we should not trouble the Gentiles who turn to God." That is, "We should not command them to be circumcised. We should not order them to submit to the law of Moses. They are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. They do not need to become Jews in order to be followers of Jesus. God doesn't save us on the basis of the law, nor does he require us to live on the basis of that law." In other words, "I agree with Peter and Paul and Barnabas."

Notice, however, that this doesn't mean that the Gentiles are to continue to live in their sinful ways. He describes these Gentiles as those "who turn to God." That is, they have repented of their sin. They have confessed their sin. They have reoriented their lives in a godward direction. This is true of everyone whom God saves. When God saves a person by his grace, it's not so that they can continue to live as they always did, but notwin a forgiven state. No, when God saves a person, he changes them. He transforms them. He gives them new desires, and a new direction in life. Gone are the old desires to live in sin. They want to walk in God's ways! They want to please the Lord! (Of course, there is a battle going on with our flesh, that wants the old ways. it's the constant struggle of any Christian.)

So, when considering these Gentiles, he affirmed that salvation was by grace alone, apart from the law. Circumcision is only a matter of ceremony! They have "turned to God." They are walking in his ways. They just don't need to be circumcised.

But James didn't stop there. He continued on with a second recommendation, "[we] 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."

Now, that's strange. James has just affirmed here that we should not "trouble" the Gentiles by requiring them to be circumcised, because salvation comes by faith in Jesus, apart from the works of the law. But then, he lays down four things for the Gentiles to avoid: (1) The things polluted by idols; (2) Sexual immorality; (3) What has been strangled; and (4) From blood. At first glance, it appears as if James is bringing people back into the law, the very place from which Peter and Paul and Barnabas all agree that the Gentiles are free from.

But this is precisely where James shows his wisdom. He fully understands that salvation is by grace. He also understands the issue at hand: unity in the church. In other words, the big question is this: How can the Jews and the Gentiles dwell together in unity in one church? How can they do so, considering especially the wide chasm of cultural differences between them?

Before turning to the Lord, the Gentiles were fully engaged in their idolatrous culture. which was so stenchful to the Jews. So James says, for the sake of unity, drop your idolatrous practices! Don't eat the things polluted by idols! Abstain from sexual immorality. Don't eat animals that have been strangled. Don't drink the blood of animals. Each of these things had connection with the idol worship, from which the Gentiles had turned from when they turned to God. James simply said, "Make the complete break with your former life!"

Each and every one of these practices were quite normal for the Gentiles of the day. The market for the meat that they would eat was at the temple. All the meat would have been offered up first to their gods. The close association with the idols of the day would have been appalling for the Jews. James tells the Gentiles in Antioch, stay away from the things sacrificed to idols.

Regarding sexual immorality, the pagan world was a sexualized world, dare I say, even more sexualized than our world? In our world, the sex is seen and watched. Yet, in the pagan world, it was experienced, often. Sexual immorality was often a part of their worship ad they intermingled sex acts with their worship. James says, "Stay away!"

Furthermore, when the animals were slaughtered at the temple, they were times when the animal was strangled, rather than slaughtered. This kept the blood in the animal. Eating of the meat was to eat the blood. And when the animals were slaughtered, the blood of the animals was kept for drink. This was an abomination to the Jews. In Leviticus 17, the LORD declared how life is in the blood. It was not to be eaten! Hear the warning, "If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people" (Leviticus 17:10). James says, "Stay away!"

The reason why was for the sake of unity. James says in verse 21, "For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." In other words, the law of God is read constantly in the synagogues. and it would be a high offense to the Jews for a Gentile convert to blatantly engage himself with the religious life of the temple. "So, for their sake, stay away."

Now, I don't think that this would come as much of a surprise for the Gentiles. They knew the Jewish culture. They knew that the Jews never visited (or went near) the pagan temples. They knew of the offense that this would be for the Jews. Further, I do not think that this would be too difficult for the Gentiles to follow. They had "turned to God" (verse 19). They had turned away from these things in the temple. Indeed, it would be no trouble for them to follow James' recommendation (verse 19).

Well, there's the wisdom of James. He perfectly balanced the ritualistic burden of the law, which the Gentiles didn't need to follow, with the need to keep the Gentiles from morally offending the Jews.

Oh, that God would give us the wisdom we need to bring people together. This is what James was doing in his day, he was bringing together parties that did not see eye to eye, on how to include the Gentiles into the church. With his counsel, James brought unity to the church. This is my third point.

3. Unity (verse 22)

The wisdom of James kept the unity of the church.

Acts 15:22

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,

The wisdom of James brought unity to the entire council! The apostles thought that his recommendation was good! The elders thought that his recommendation was good! The "whole church" thought that his recommendation was good.

I'm amazed at what James did. He brought a healthy compromise, which didn't jeopardize the gospel. Those who were demanding circumcision were satisfied. Those who were demanding freedom in the gospel were satisfied! And the church was united!

What a great application for us. We live in a divided time! We are divided politically. We are divided over racial matters. We are divided over COVID. What we need today is the wisdom of James. You need the wisdom of James.

As you deal with these divisions in your family, you need the wisdom of James. As you deal with the divisions at your work, you need the wisdom of James. As you deal with the divisions here at church, you need the wisdom of James. All of these spheres are different. All of the parameters are different! In your family, you need to keep your relationships healthy and close and tender and loving, despite any divisions you might have with your relatives who see things differently than you do. At your work, you need to keep the respect of your coworkers, while you may be able to maintain a healthy distance from those who view the world differently than you do. At our church, we need to keep the gospel central in all things, not the political or racial or COVID differences of our day. And for all of this, you need wisdom.

I love the promise of James, the same James who displayed his wisdom at the council. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5).

Perhaps this is what James did before he spoke. He offered to God a prayer for wisdom. And God gave wisdom to him. And God preserved the unity of the church. Indeed, we find out (down in verse 28) that the Holy Spirit, himself, had come to give wisdom in the situation. If ever you are going to have the wisdom to deal with conflicts and differences in your own life, you need God's help! and he's there for the asking.

My final two points should go pretty fast, as they are simply a carrying out of James' recommendation that was received so well by the church. In verses 23-29, we see the care of the leaders in bringing this letter to Antioch. This is my fourth point.

4. Care (verses 23-29)

If you want to keep unity, you need to have some care with others.

Acts 15:22-29

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, 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. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

A delicate issue requires a delicate care. They wrote a carefully worded letter. And sent it with some people who could clarify the heart behind the letter.

Have you ever written a text or an email or a letter or a left a voice mail that misunderstood? I know that I have. It happens so easily! That's the danger that the leaders in Jerusalem were trying to avoid! Not only did they craft the letter with care. They also delivered it with those who could verify the contents and clarify the heart behind the letter.

That's why it is so important to have personal conversations, face to face. You can communicate face to face in ways that it's impossible to communicate through the written word.

In our day and age, we have many ways to communicate. We can communicate using texts, emails, phone calls, and in-person. By far, in person meetings are the most profitable when sensitive communications are being conducted. Sadly, over the years, I have seen many people fight back and forth using texts and emails. It's never profitable to do so. Whenever I receive an angry text or email, I always consider strongly following up with a phone call or a person-to-person communication, because I know that this is more effective if I am ever to communicate clearly.

That's what the church did. They sent these men to have face-to-face conversations with the people. This showed great care. Further, the heart of the letter demonstrated great care! Look at verse 23, which is how the letter opens.

Acts 15:23

The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.

Did you notice how those in Jerusalem addressed the believers in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia? They addressed them as “brothers.” “The brothers who are of the Gentiles.” That is, part of the family of believers! They weren't “half-brothers” on the outside because of their refusal to be circumcised. They were fully in the family of God, as a people for God's name! Further, they used the same title that the apostles and elders took to themselves (“brothers”). “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles” (Verse 23). Those in Jerusalem didn't pull any cards of superiority. They placed themselves on the same level as the Gentiles. What humility! What kindness! What care for the brothers.

In verse 24, they express sorrow and regret that this issue ever came up at all!

Acts 15:24

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, ...

In other words, “We are sorry that you have been troubled about those preaching circumcision. We are sorry that you have been unsettled, giving you cause to doubt your salvation because of some ritual you didn't do. Certainly, you were confused by what they told you. We are sorry. But we had no part in this, and we would never do such a thing. But we want to do everything we can to make it right with you.”

So, they sent Barnabas and Paul (verse 25), choice brothers, who have sacrificed greatly for the name of Jesus (verse 26). They also sent Judas and Silas (verse 27). We know little of these men, except that they would have been respected by the churches, whose agreement with Paul and Barnabas would have confirmed the message and heart of the leaders in Jerusalem. They ended their letter with their heart not to burden the Gentiles, but to smooth the way as much as possible. Yet, they did mention these four things,

Acts 15:28-29

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. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

What a letter! It shows great care in showing how to wisely lead in unity. Finally, we see ...

5. Ministry (verses 30-35)

Acts 15:30-31

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.

The letter was received well! The Gentiles were all the willing to keep away from their temple activities!

And then, the four who brought the letter continued to minister to the congregation. First off, Judas and Silas, ...

Acts 15:32-33

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.^[2]

Judas and Silas remained to minister their gift of prophesy among the brothers, strengthening them with their “many words” (verse 32). Only after they spent “some time,” with the brothers in Antioch did they return to Jerusalem (verse 33).

This all shows patience. Judas and Silas didn't merely deliver the letter as a duty. They took their time. They had patience. They showed their genuine love by staying around with the church, until it was appropriate for them to leave. The same is true with Paul and Barnabas

Acts 15:35

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

What a happy ending to a potentially divisive event! The gospel prevailed! God was faithful and had brought the church together in unity! The church had survived the rough waters! And had come out unified.

My prayer for us at Rock Valley Bible Church is that we might experience the same. My prayer for the church in America is that the church might realize full unity in the gospel! Not in political parties. Not in racial identities. Not in COVID policies!

May God give us all the wisdom to keep the unity of the church!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 23, 2022 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] George and Donald Sweeting, *The Acts of God: Reflections from the Book of Acts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 127.

[2] Note that the ESV drops verse 34 for textual reasons. "But it seemed good to Silas to remain there." It changes nothing of the interpretation of the text.