

# **A Practical Study of ACTS:**

## **Take It To Them!**

### **“Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”**

#### **Study Number Eleven – Acts 15:1-41**

In Acts 15 we have probably the greatest argument for what we’ve been discussing. And that is, we’re in TRANSITION.

On the anvil of God’s sovereign purpose is being hammered out the steel of doctrine.

We don’t find a consistent theme of doctrine in the book of Acts. It’s a historical book. It’s a time of transition.

In our study we’ll see it clearer than ever before.

We’re moving from LAW to GRACE.

We’re moving from ISRAEL to the CHURCH.

From the sacrifices of the little LAMB offered by the priest, to the sacrifice of the LAMB OF GOD Jesus Christ Himself.

And all of this helps us realize that these people are not where we are. They don’t know and understand the Gospel.

Now this chapter could be called “The Jerusalem Council.”

We could call it “General Assembly.”

There’s a lot of press going around Jerusalem about who’s going to win this one. And it’s certainly the case.

We have the LEGALISTS and the GENTILES—opposing sides in this.

This chapter is encouraging because even the people in the Bible have fights. We have a great fight in the front of the chapter and another one in the back of it.

Paul and Barnabas are on the same side in the front of it. In the back of it they’re against each other. So we’re going to enjoy studying and seeing what happens.

Let’s get into it.

**v. 1 And some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved.”**

“And some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved.’”

Now remember, don’t get confused. They go UP SOUTH and

DOWN NORTH in the Bible. And it says “down from Judea.” We know Judea is the area of Jerusalem. And really they’ve made a 300 mile trip north so they’ve come down north again so just get that in mind.

And they come in and the first thing they do is they start “teaching the brethren,” and this is what they teach—the summary of it:

1. “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved.”

Anything that we add after salvation by grace through faith, we are putting something on that is manmade. Anything that occurs after the “Unless” in the statement is manmade.

We cannot be saved UNLESS we join the church.

We cannot be saved UNLESS we are baptized.

We cannot be saved UNLESS we give our money.

UNLESS we love our neighbor.

UNLESS we speak in tongues.

UNLESS, UNLESS, UNLESS. And on and on we go adding things one after the other.

These Jewish brothers are saying, “Now look, the blessings of

the Abrahamic covenant came to us through circumcision so therefore all the male Gentile Christians are going to have to go through this ordinance in order to be saved.”

Now what does that do to a group of young Christians who are all excited about the Lord and they're just starting to grow in the Lord? Well, it goes over like a ham sandwich in a synagogue. These guys are really upset.

We always find that the people who are teaching error feast on the young Christians. They can't go out and get their own so they have to go find the young Christians to pick on. Get them confused, get them upset and get them disturbed.

These poor Gentile Christians. Here these fellas from down south come north. And when they get up there they get them all upset and tell them they aren't saved unless this happens.

So there's a major, major problem in Antioch right now. Paul describes it in Ephesians as he's writing to the Ephesian saints some time later.

### Ephesians 4:14, 15

So that you be no longer children, tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine by the craftiness and deceitful scheming and trickery of men. But speak the truth in love...

Now look at verse 2.

**v. 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had not a little dissension and debate with them, it was determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.**

“And when Paul and Barnabas had not a little dissension and debate with them, it was determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.”

Now this is “up to Jerusalem.” They have to go down south to Jerusalem.

They’re saying, “This is so bad and this is such a big problem, we’re going to need to send them down there and get this thing settled because our salvation is at stake. If we need some more theology and if we need some more help, y’all get down there and get this thing figured out.”

What happens is as soon as these guys come on the scene and they start questioning the salvation of the Gentile believers, Paul and Barnabas say, “Now just a minute buddy. You know you don’t really know what you’re talking about. We’ve seen the evidences of the Spirit of God in these people’s lives. They are Christians!”

And so the dissension was just really intense. And so the believers separate them and say, “We’re sending you to Jerusalem to get this thing settled.”

Paul is one of those kinds of people you drop them anywhere and he'll start a ministry. Any time he's going to take a trip, he also has to plan on a few side trips to see a few people that are on the way so he can save some time.

After all, he wants to bless some of the folks. So he sits down with a map and thinks well, 300 miles south of Jerusalem. We can whip through Phoenicia and stop at Tyre and Sidon and talk to the Gentile Christians there. And then we'll just slip over to Samaria and talk to the brothers over there and we'll only be 200 miles down to Phoenicia and 75 miles over to Samaria. It'll only be about 25-35 miles north of Jerusalem. We'll drop in and we'll just have a great time and feast on the hospitality of the brothers and sisters and share the ministry with them! He just plans it that way.

So they drop down 200 miles to Phoenicia here. See that in verse 3?

**v. 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the turning of the Gentiles, and were giving great joy to all the brethren.**

“Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the turning of the Gentiles, and were giving great joy to all the brethren.”

Phoenicia is the province on the coast that has the city of Tyre and Sidon. Modern day Beirut is in that same province. And then they went on over toward the east and continued south to Samaria and stopped there:

“describing in detail the turning of the Gentiles, and were giving great joy to all the brethren.”

**v. 4 And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God did with them.**

“And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God did with them.”

As soon as they get to town, they give the results of their ministry to the brothers.

But now we have the convening of the Jerusalem Council. When we look at the minutes and the agenda of the Council meeting, first of all we have a statement of the legalists. And all the press cameras are running, everybody's waiting to see what the legalists are going to say. Here it comes.

And it happens to be some of Paul's old buddies. These fellas are Pharisees and Paul was too. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. And they're believers, but after hearing this

wonderful report from Paul and Barnabas about all these Gentiles becoming Christians, listen to these guys throwing cold water on them.

**v. 5 But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying that “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and to be commanding them to keep the Law of Moses.”**

“But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying that ‘It is necessary for them to be circumcised and to be commanding them to keep the Law of Moses.’”

Now isn't that the way it works? We start out with one condition but we're not sure we have enough so we have to add another condition. And pretty soon we don't know whether we're saved or lost—whether we're up or down—because we don't know whether we've done enough, given enough, sacrificed enough, gone to church enough.

When we put it on that kind of basis, we're just between a rock and a hard place. We never know if we've done enough. This scratches a lot of people where they itch because there are an awful lot of people on the top side of this globe that don't know they're saved simply because they're living in this kind of bondage.

These fellas now added to circumcision the keeping of the Law. So now there are TWO CONDITIONS for the Gentiles to



get in.

Now is there any problem with that today? The 2,000 years of history of the church is splattered with legalistic teaching. If we have a problem with that, there's a whole book in the New Testament called the book of Galatians that talks about Christian liberty. It's our series "You Were Running Well." There are 12 lessons on the Christian's relationship to the Law.

It is so interesting that when people get involved with the Law, the Law does for the believer exactly what the Law is supposed to do for the unbeliever.

The Law does one thing. It convinces us that we're a sinner. We have a nature inside us that when we dump some Law on that nature, we immediately say "I will too."

"Go 55! No, I think I'll go 65!"

"Now thou shalt not spit on the floor!" And we have a great urge to spit on the floor, right in the spot where the sign is!

Dump the Law on our old nature and it will. That's what Paul says in Romans 7:

Romans 7:19

The good I would I do not, and that which I would not I find I'm always doing.

It jumps out and it's the height of futility and the evil one knows that. That's why he dumps Law on all kinds of Christians. Because it gets us to feeling guilty. That's what the Law was meant to do. It's to bring us to Christ guilty, lost in our sin, realizing that Jesus Christ paid the price for our broken Law. And we're freed from the Law when we come to know Christ. But a lot of people never understand that.

Joe Aldrich wrote a book called *Secrets to Inner Beauty*. He was the pastor of Mariners Church in Newport Beach, California for a number of years and then president of Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon. And as he came into this church he dealt head-on with the problem of legalistic brethren and sisters in the church who believed that we manifested our spirituality by the keeping of the Law. And this is what he says:

(Secrets to Inner Beauty by Joe Aldrich)

Legalism is perhaps the greatest enemy of beauty and grace; and our churches are full of it. Legalism, like a frontal lobotomy, cuts the nerve of creativity, vitality and beauty and leaves its victims alive but not living, breathing but not beautiful. We are all legalists by nature. It seems so much easier to draw up lists and bury ourselves behind self-imposed limits than to understand our freedom in Christ. The legalist is a prisoner of other people's expectations. He usually has little impact upon the non-Christian world because he creates many artificial and unbiblical 'barriers.' He excuses his lack of

effectiveness by blaming it on the ‘apostasy’ or the ‘last days.’

Here are a few symptoms of legalistic brethren:

1. They have a decided preference for the old wineskins. Anything new has got to be liberal.
2. They have an attitude of suspicion towards anyone who disagrees with his prescribed lifestyle.
3. They have guilt by association. The one who mixes regularly with non-Christians is often viewed as compromising his Christianity.
4. A strong need for uniformity. All Christians must eat, drink, think and believe the same.
5. He views the non-Christian as the enemy rather than the victim of the enemy.
6. He judges the spiritual life of the Christian on the basis of the things he doesn't do. He generally has a negative focus.
7. Often has difficulty developing significant relationships because his attitude of legalism makes intimacy difficult.
8. He has a tendency to major on the minors.
9. An appeal to the letter of the law rather than the spirit of it.

(source unknown)

When pastor Robert Girard. went to a church that was very much saturated with this kind of teaching, he wrote the book called *Brethren, Hang Loose or What's Happening in My Church*. And this is what he says when he got to the church:

(Brethren, Hang Loose or What's Happening to My Church by Robert C. Girard)

Spirituality was being equated with rules and man-made standards. A woman's spirituality was judged by the length of her skirts or how much make-up she did or didn't wear. A man was "spiritual" if he didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't play cards, or shoot pool, didn't go to movies, didn't say "darn," paid his tithe, was endlessly busy on church committees. His life didn't really have to produce anything of witness in the outside world or love within the Body of believers. He could indulge in all sorts of sins of attitude and desire, and as long as he refused to "taste, touch or handle" the specified "no-no's", he could hob-nob with the spiritually elite in the church.  
(source unknown)

That's what we're saying. The church is saturated with that.

God does not want a performance. He wants a relationship.

And out of a meaningful relationship, He will change us into what we are to become. God wants to come into our life in the Person of Christ and motivate us out of love to become

Christlike and demonstrate an authentic, genuine godliness.

### Galatians 5:1-2

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

#### **v. 6 Both the apostles and the elders came together to see about this word.**

“Both the apostles and the elders came together to see about this word.”

These fellas stand up and they give their charge. Now the “apostles and the elders” realize they have a real first-class controversy on their hands.

So they’re coming together now for the debate. It’s time for the open forum. We have the legalists on the one side and the Gentile believers and free grace on the other side. And they’re lining up for the open forum debate. See it in verse 7?

#### **v. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter having stood up, said to them, “Men, brethren, you are knowing that from days of old God made a choice among you, that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the good news and believe.**

“And after there had been much debate,”—finally.

Who is on center stage? Goodbye Peter. This is his farewell address.

“Peter having stood up, said to them, ‘Men, brethren, you are knowing that from days of old God made a choice among you, that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the good news and believe.’”

Now the thing that is so incredible about this is that Peter represents the legalist of all the legalists. He’s grown up in legalism.

He is the one recounting the sheet on the roof in our first study who said, “Not so Lord. I will not eat anything unclean nor have I.” And he had to go through the painful process of reminding the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius that it was wrong for a Jew to go into the house of a Gentile.

So he has a tremendous legalistic background. And it’s altogether significant that the Spirit of God would choose the two top legalists to speak to the issue of salvation by grace!

Peter is the first to speak. And in verse 7 the first words are “hearing” and “believing.” That’s how it all happens.

“And after there had been much debate” he stands up and begins his talk.

**v. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, having given them the Holy Spirit, even as also to us.**

“And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, having given them the Holy Spirit, even as also to us.”

“When I preach the Gospel, the Holy Spirit came into them. When they receive Christ as Savior and believed in Him—just like He did for us!”

**v. 9 And He was making no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.**

“And He was making no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by...”—keeping of the Law. Is that what the text says? What does it say?

“by faith.”

Faith alone.

It's almost like saying:

“Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jonah, flesh and blood never revealed that unto you!”

“You have really grown. Have you grown that much? Have you thrown aside some of your old presuppositions and wineskins

because the Word of God has convicted you to change your position? And to come into line with Biblical truth?”

That’s a hard thing on pride, isn’t it? Peter has to accept the fact that he was wrong and he was resisting God’s program. And now as he stands up in the Council at the crucial time to give his final address. It’s a great message for salvation by faith and faith alone.

**v. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?**

“Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

That’s a tremendous confession. As soon as we begin to become a legalist we also become a hypocrite. Because we can’t keep the Law. Nobody ever has, nobody ever will, nobody will ever be saved by it. Only Jesus Christ could do that and He qualifies to die for our broken Law because He lived it perfectly.

And so Peter’s honest! He said, “Why are y’all putting a yoke of bondage on their neck?”

What’s he thinking about? He’s probably thinking of the word that Jesus used.



## Matthew 11:28-30

Come unto me all ye who weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

“Why do y’all want to do this to them? You’re putting something on them that neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

**v. 11 But we are believing that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”**

“But we are believing we are believing that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

Thank you Peter!

## Ephesians 2:8, 9

For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

**v. 12 Then all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were**

**relating what signs and wonders God did through them among the Gentiles.**

“Then all the multitude kept silent,”

They’re overwhelmed. Nobody wants to say anything. They’re thinking. The wheels are turning. The legalists are saying, “Hey, he’s got a great point.”

And on the agenda the next speakers are Barnabas and Paul.

“and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God did through them among the Gentiles.”

See the word “Gentiles”—the last word down there? Write “Titus” out beside that.

The reason we want to put Titus there is Paul and Barnabas brought a test case to the Council.

So what Paul and Barnabas do at the Council, although it’s not recorded here—it is in Galatians 2—they bring Titus who is an uncircumcised Gentile who’s become a Christian to give his testimony.

Now why doesn’t Luke mention Titus? Probably because he’s Luke’s brother. He leaves Titus out. And he leaves his own name out for the most part in the book.

Titus stands as a test case, in fact, of Gentile salvation. We can verify that in chapter 2 of the book of Galatians.

**v. 13 And after they stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Men, brethren, listen to me.**

“And after they stopped speaking, James answered, saying, ‘Men, brethren, listen to me.’”

Okay what’s the sequence? Open forum of debate. Then Peter speaks. Then Barnabas and Paul tell us what’s been happening out in the field with the Gentiles.

Now James is coming in to wrap it up. Who is James? He is the supreme of the legalists.

James is the half-brother of the Lord. Mary and Joseph had children after the virgin birth of Christ. Their first child was named James. He wrote the epistle of James.

The reason we mention he’s the legalist of the legalists, in just a few minutes we’re going to tie Galatians 2 into this Council up in Antioch.

After this is all over and settled, Peter takes a trip to Antioch. It’s recorded in Galatians 2. When he gets to Antioch, he is reveling in the Gentile Christians. He’s sitting around eating with them, playing dominoes, just having a great time loving the Gentiles!

But Galatians 2:12 tells us that some from James came from the party of the circumcision to Antioch. Peter went over and started eating at the kosher table. He withdrew from these Gentile believers. That tells us the clout of James and his stand on legalism.

Now James quotes from five different prophets, just little phrases here, to vindicate what Peter's already said. In essence, that's his speech. Look at it.

“Men, brethren, listen to me.”

**v. 14 Simeon explained how God first concerned Himself about winning a people from among the Gentiles for His name.**

“Simeon explained how God first concerned Himself about winning a people from among the Gentiles for His name.”

That's what Peter started with.

**v. 15 And with this the words of the Prophets are agreeing, just as it has been written:**

“And with this the words of the Prophets are agreeing, just as it has been written:”

And here he goes, he quotes from:

Amos,

Deuteronomy,

Isaiah,

Jeremiah, and

Daniel.

He quotes little phrases from them.

**v. 16 ‘After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen. And I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,**

““After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen. And I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,”

**v. 17 in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name has been called,**

“in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name has been called,”

**v. 18 says the Lord, who is making these things known from of old.’**

“says the Lord, who is making these things known from of

old.””

Now he's quoted from the prophets. He's going to tell us what the decision ought to be. And he has a right to say it because he's one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem.

**v. 19 Therefore it is my judgment that we are not to be troubling those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,**

“Therefore it is my judgment that we are not to be troubling those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,”

**v. 20 but that we write to them that they be abstaining from the pollutions of the idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.**

“but [this is what I suggest] that we write to them that they be abstaining from the pollutions of the idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.”

**v. 21 For Moses from ancient generations is having in every city those who are preaching him, since he is being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”**

“For Moses from ancient generations is having in every city those who are preaching him, since he is being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

They're saying, "James! Wait a minute! You just went legalistic on us!"

That's the big problem with people who are living under grace. They think that grace along with liberty goes license.

"You can flat do whatever you want! After all, you're living under grace! Go ahead and sin up a storm and dial 1 John 1:9: 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'"

We sometimes get a real careless attitude toward sin among believers in Christ. There's one thing that we always have to remember. With a RELATIONSHIP also comes a RESPONSIBILITY. We become a sensitive person, not only to the Holy Spirit, but to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

James is telling us what we do with the weaker brother from Romans 14 and 15. Now what's that mean?

Alright, we're going out to dinner, to a really nice place. We're taking our brother and sister in Christ with us. We don't have a feeling in the world about drinking wine with dinner. So, not thinking of our friends, we order a bottle of wine and then we ask them if they want some and they say, "No!"

Now what are we going to do? Are we going to go ahead and enjoy our wine at dinner? Or are we going to say, "Oh I'm sorry that I've offended you. Waiter, take this away"?

We have a responsibility to be sensitive to the convictions of our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is not legalism.

Paul says, “If meat offends my brother I would not eat meat. I just wouldn’t.” (ref. 1 Corinthians 8:13)

James is saying, “We are Jewish Christians! The Law is being read in the synagogue everywhere! And it seems to my judgment that for you Gentile Christians to get along with us and for us to really be happy, there’s just a few things we’d like to make you aware of:”

1. This meat offered to idols.

What is that? The Gentiles always take their meat into the idols and lay it down there for the night and then the next morning they go down and take it to the local meat market and all the Gentile women would line up to buy their steaks.

Imagine what it’d be like for a Gentile Christian to have bought the meat at the market and then as they’re sitting at the table telling them they really got a good buy on these steaks over at the idol market. The Jew goes up in smoke! He doesn’t eat meat that’s offered to idols! He’d go crazy!

2. And “fornication”—the Gentiles didn’t think twice about sex outside the bounds of marriage. It was part of their whole worship, as we’re going to see in Acts 19.

Sexual intercourse was just part of it with the goddess of



fertility. But now the Law says thou shalt not commit adultery. Sex outside the bounds of marriage is not right in God's purpose and plan. We have a responsibility now to change our sexual habits coming into the body of Christ.

3. things which are “strangled,” and
4. for “blood.”

With relationship goes responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**v. 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church, having selected men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas the one called Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,**

“Then it seemed good”

See that little phrase right there? That's in verse 22, 25 and 28.

What does that tell us? That tells us we're on the way to finding the will of the Lord in our life.

It's only a feeling that a believer can tell us.

Colossians 3:15

And the peace of God will act as an umpire in your heart.

It'll just seem good! We'll know it's right! We're at peace! This is the solution to the problem! And we just know it! It's the right thing! It all falls together. It's perfect and we're at peace!

Three times that phrase is used. And remember that in our own life in discerning the will of God. It just seems good.

“Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church, having selected men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas the one called Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,”

Now what they have decided to do here is after the decision has been made, they're going to choose a delegation. They're going to send two of their men along with Paul and Barnabas, back to Antioch with the decree that they're getting ready right here to encompass these four things. To send them up there to straighten out this problem.

Verse 23—here comes the decree.

**v. 23 writing through their hand [as follows]: “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.**

“writing through their hand [as follows]:”—this is their declaration of independence now—“The apostles and the

brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch”—notice the love to the brethren in Antioch—“and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.”

**v. 24 In view of the fact that we heard that some of our number disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, to whom we gave no instruction,**

“In view of the fact that we heard that some of our number disturbed you with their words, unsettling”

There are the two words that happen when error’s being taught:

“disturbed” and

“unsettled.”

“your souls, to whom we gave no instruction,”

**v. 25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to send men who were selected from our number to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,**

“it seemed good to us, having become of one mind,”

And boy does the Lord ever want that!

“to send men who were selected from our number to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,”

Colson in his book, *Who Speaks for God?*, talks about that oneness as a new believer:

(Who Speaks for God?: Confronting the World with Real Christianity by Charles W. Colson)

I sometimes dream of a church healed in love, no longer divided into armed camps, but caring passionately about winning others to Christ *and* striving for the righteousness of God's justice. We have not yet seen what that kind of whole church will do for the needs of this fragmented world.  
(source unknown)

“having become of one mind”—it seemed good to do this—  
“with our beloved [brother] Paul and Barnabas.”

**v. 26 men who have given over their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

“men who have given over their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And we can put Philippians 3:7-14 there. That's where Paul says: “I count it everything but loss for Christ...”

**v. 27 Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, and they themselves will report the same things by word of mouth.**

“Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, and they themselves will report the same things by word of mouth.”

We’ve sent the people and the press release. Here we go.

**v. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these things which are necessary,**

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these things which are necessary,

**v. 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; from which if you are keeping yourselves free, you will do well. Farewell.”**

“that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; from which if you are keeping yourselves free, you will do well. Farewell.”

**v. 30 So, when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered together the whole assembly, they delivered the letter.**

“So, when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch;”—there they go again—“and having gathered together the whole assembly, they delivered the letter.”

**v. 31 And when they read it, they burst into ecstatic joy because of its encouragement.**

“And when they read it,”—what happened?—“they burst into ecstatic joy because of its encouragement.”

Why?

“We’re saved! Hey, we’re in the family! We’re on our way to heaven!”

Are they excited? We think a charismatic assembly gets excited, imagine what this is like when everybody all of a sudden becomes fully aware that they’re saved for the first time. Praise the Lord and everybody believes it!

It became not only “ecstatic joy” but a basis of great “encouragement”—“because of its encouragement.”

It was Ruth Harms Calkin who said this about joy:

(Lord, You Love to Say Yes by Ruth Harms Calkin)

Joy!

My favorite word.

Circumstances may determine my happiness,

But, Lord, You determine my joy.

Joy is sweetly honest.

No wonder the minister said:

“You can’t hide joy if you have it—

You can't fake it if you don't."  
Who can manufacture it, Lord?  
Joy is Your creation.  
Who may have it?  
Anyone who asks.  
Thank You, Lord  
For joy!  
(source unknown)

And they have "joy because of [the] encouragement."

Larry Crabb in his book *Encouragement: The Key to Caring* say this:

(Encouragement: The Key to Caring by Lawrence J. Crabb)

A simply worded definition of encouragement might be this: ENCOURAGEMENT IS THE KIND OF EXPRESSION THAT HELPS SOMEONE WANT TO BE A BETTER CHRISTIAN, EVEN WHEN LIFE IS [REALLY] ROUGH.

ENCOURAGEMENT IS NOT A TECHNIQUE TO BE MASTERED; IT IS A SENSITIVITY TO PEOPLE AND A CONFIDENCE IN GOD THAT MUST BE NOURISHED AND DEMONSTRATED.

(source unknown)

Now what happens? As soon as they get through making the big announcement and reading the decree, then we're going to have a whole week of Bible conference.

Judas and Silas are going to be preachers and teachers.

**v. 32 And both Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, through much discourse exhorted and encouraged (strengthened) the brethren.**

“And both Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, through much discourse exhorted and encouraged (or strengthened) the brethren.”

Their ministry was:

EXHORTATION and

ENCOURAGEMENT.

**v. 33 And after they spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who sent them out.**

“And after they spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who sent them out.”

Who's in the audience? Barnabas and Paul. He listens to these fellas preach and he really likes what he's hearing.

Then it says they left, sent them out. Where'd they go? Well they went back to Jerusalem to the people that sent them out.



**v. 34 [omitted in better manuscripts] But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.**

“[omitted in better manuscripts] But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.”

Now notice in honesty we have put a bracket in verse 34? Here’s why.

It says “[omitted in better manuscripts].”

The manuscripts that are closer to the original don’t have a verse 34 in it. Now why is there a verse 34 in the later manuscripts?

A scribe came along and he read that and he thought, “Isn’t that horrible for Silas to have to make a 300 mile trip south to Jerusalem and then turn right around and come all the way 300 miles back north just as soon as Paul needs Silas to go on a journey.”

They didn’t have any trouble getting their miles in so 600 miles is no big deal. The text says they went back to those who sent them. So they went back to Jerusalem. And verse 35 gives us that impression.

**v. 35 But Paul and Barnabas were continuing their stay in Antioch with many others also, teaching and proclaiming the good news, the word of the Lord.**

“But Paul and Barnabas were continuing their stay in Antioch with many others also,”

Who’s that? That’s when Peter comes to town.

“teaching and proclaiming the good news, the word of the Lord.”

Now do we become so spiritual sometimes we never have a problem with something that we had a problem with early in our Christian life? And do we think that we can even get up and make a great speech like: “Freedom from the Law, oh happy condition! Totally saved by grace!” And then fall backwards?

Peter makes this great speech at the Council then he comes up north and lays an egg. When he walks in he enjoys it initially, but legalism takes over when the brothers of James come in and he goes over and eats at the kosher table.

Paul has to really scorn him publicly and demonstrate to him that he is not walking correctly. The text in Galatians 2 says it was so serious that even Barnabas was carried away with this group who were separating themselves from the Gentiles.

Now has Peter had a problem with that in his life? Standing up for things when the chips are down? Why of course! The night before the crucifixion: He said, “Jesus who?” to the little girl. Then he literally swore that he didn’t even know Him to her!

And now, even in his old age, he's backing off without any courage from some guys who are actually intimidating him. Coming in as he enjoys his freedom, legalism takes over.

Paul confronts him. And we can write Galatians 2:11 there, down to the end of the chapter. That describes what happens at 35.

**v. 36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Now let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, seeing how they are getting along.”**

“And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Now let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, seeing how they are getting along.’”

What happened is old Barnabas heard Paul in the shower with Willie Nelson singing “On the Road Again.” Time to get back out there! Time to get going again!

“We need to go back to Cyprus, to Paphos and Salamis and see those brothers over there. And then we need to whip across up there to Pamphylia, to Perga and Antioch Pisidia. And then let's go on up to Iconium and then let's just whip over to Lyrstra and see if they're still throwing rocks over there. And we'll drop down to Derbe and see and see the brothers there and we'll whip around and come back. And we'll encourage

and strengthen them. You know, see how everybody's getting along!"

Oh, great idea!

**v. 37 Now Barnabas was desiring that they take along with them also John, the one called Mark.**

“Now Barnabas was desiring that they take along with them also John, the one called Mark.”

What happened? Remember in our last study on the journey? They've gone through Cyprus. Barnabas and John Mark are cousins. Cyprus is their home. They got through that, they got on the boat, went the 175 miles up to Pamphylia and John gets a call to go home. He just doesn't want to go any further so he turns around and comes 175 miles back to Paphos on the edge of Cyprus, then 200 miles straight across to Caesarea. Fifty miles over land, home to momma and Mary in the city of Jerusalem.

When Paul and Barnabas came back to town for the Jerusalem Council, John was probably sitting in the audience. And when John heard the reports of Paul being stoned in Lystra, and he heard the reports of all those people who received Christ in Antioch of Pisidia, and the fantastic things that happened in Iconium and in Derbe, he thought “I really blew it. I really missed it.”

And tears just streamed down his cheeks as he told the Lord

he was really wrong and he really failed in leaving. He most likely got together with Barnabas right there in Jerusalem and said, “Can I go back with you to Antioch?”

Now, we know Paul. He’s choleric. And when we have a relationship that’s ruptured, we just don’t say diddly to them! And not a word passed between the two of them. The whole trip north he’s just enduring to get along with them!

“Leave them in Antioch! We aren’t going to have him a part of our deal!”

And so all of a sudden he says, “Let’s take him along.”

**v. 38 But Paul was insisting that they should not take him along, this one who went away from them from Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.**

“But Paul was insisting that they should not take him along, this one who went away from them from Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.”

Paul immediately says, “No way! Over my dead body! He’s a loser! He can’t take it! He’ll get out there again to Paphos and he’ll turn around and won’t even make it to Pamphylia before he’s heading back to Jerusalem! No, I don’t want him! He can’t go along with us.”

**v. 39 Now a sharp disagreement arose, so that they separated from one another, and Barnabas having taken Mark with him, set sail for Cyprus.**

“Now a sharp disagreement arose, so that they separated from one another, and Barnabas having taken Mark with him, set sail for Cyprus.”

Well immediately we ask, who’s ready? And the answer is, both of them.

Paul’s looking at it strictly from the job description and the work. He didn’t produce—he doesn’t get to go.

Barnabas is always a people person. He’s the one who’s always encouraging. Remember he’s the one that recommended Saul of Tarsus. He was a people person. He still is.

Thank God that there are the Barnabases in the lives of the John Marks, that we’d have an awful lot more casualties in the ministry. People who will really believe in us.

It’s an amazing thing how easy it is to write off people. And have an excuse for not being involved in their lives by saying, “You always are” or “You never.” An attitude of non-acceptance always intensifies the hurt rather than helps in the healing.

Now that’s not the end of the story with Paul and John Mark. Paul does get it together. And when he’s in prison in 2

Timothy 4 he says:

## 2 Timothy 4:11

Bring John Mark with you because he's profitable to me for the ministry.

We don't hear anymore now. They leave. They go down to Seleucia 16 miles and they start that first journey going over to Cyprus. That's home to them—for both of them. And that's where they go to carry on the ministry.

First Corinthians 9:6 is the last reference that Paul makes of Barnabas. He pays tribute to him by saying he is a like-minded minister of Christ.

All Paul is saying is, "If any man puts his hand to the plow and turns back, he's not worthy of the kingdom of God." (ref. Luke 9:62)

Now what do we do in situations like that? Do we just write it off and go to the house? Wash our hands? Or is it our responsibility to stay in there?

Lee Iacocca in his book talks about the first crisis in his life with Ford Motor Company:

(Iacocca, an Autobiography by Lee Iacocca)

After a few good years in Chester, I suffered an

unexpected setback. There was a mild recession in the early 1950's, and Ford decided to cut back drastically. One third of the sales force was fired—including some of my best buddies. I guess I was lucky to escape with only a demotion, but I certainly didn't feel lucky. For a while I was pretty miserable. That was when I started thinking about the food business.

But if you really believe in what you're doing, you've got to persevere even when you run into obstacles. When I finished sulking, I doubled my efforts and worked even harder. In a few months I had my old job back. Setbacks are a natural part of life, and you've got to be careful how you respond to them. If I had sulked too long, I probably would have got myself fired.

(source unknown)

One writer says it's never easy:

To apologize,  
To begin over,  
To be unselfish,  
To take advice,  
To admit error,  
To face a sneer,  
To be charitable,  
To keep on trying,  
To be considerate,  
To avoid mistakes,  
To profit by mistakes,  
To forgive and forget,



To think and then act,  
To keep out of the rut,  
To make the best of little,  
To subdue an unruly temper,  
To maintain a high standard,  
To shoulder a deserved blame,  
To recognize the silver lining—  
To endure success,  
...BUT [on the other hand] IT ALWAYS PAYS!  
(source unknown)

And for the apostle Paul, he says, “No! I don’t want to do that!”

Josh McDowell in his book *The Secret of Loving* says this:

(The Secret of Loving by Josh McDowell)

There is a phrase I want you to remember. It is simply this: It is more rewarding to resolve a conflict than to dissolve a relationship.

(source unknown)

Of course the easiest thing in the world is to walk away and to say no and to lose our temper and get angry. That’s what they did.

Joseph Stowell wrote a book called *Tongue in Check*, talking about anger. And this is what he says:

(Tongue in Check by Joseph M. Stowell)

Patience—if it is a virtue, then anger is a vice. Anger is what takes over when patience has run out. The story is told of the teacher who patiently put boots on 32 children. After the last boot went on the 32nd student the child said, “These aren’t my boots.” The teacher, now out of patience, ripped the boots off. The child continued, “They are my sister’s; she let me wear them today.”

Impatience is the prelude to an angry spirit which often vents itself in angry words. Angry words are the noxious smoke from the fire in our hearts. Henry Ward Beecher said it well when he quipped, “Speak when you are angry and you’ll make the best speech you’ll ever regret.”

(source unknown)

Paul probably has made the best speech that he’ll ever regret.

But there’s something else that’s far more serious. That’s what happens when we deal with somebody in an attitude of non-acceptance. There’s a great gap between our expectations on the one side for the person and the reality. And we’re always putting them down. We just cannot accept them because of that.

The closer our expectations are to reality, the happier we’re going to be. But this too often is the case.

Ron Lee Davis has written two great little books, *A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World* and *Gold in the Making*. He told

a story of what happens when we don't accept somebody.

(Gold In the Making by Ron Lee Davis

The phone rang in a beautiful suburban home in Boston. The lady of the house answered the phone, heard a pause, then a young man's voice saying, "Hi, Mom." Her son was calling from a phone booth in California. The war in Vietnam was almost over, and he had been sent home from duty in Southeast Asia.

"Son!" she said delightedly. "When are you coming home?!"

"I want to come home right away, Mom. But I wanted to know if it's okay to bring a friend from the service home with me."

"Oh, that's fine, son. We'd love to have one of your friends stay with us for a few days."

"Well, Mom, I think I'd better tell you a little bit about him, first. He may need some extra help. He was badly wounded in Vietnam. He doesn't have a right leg. He doesn't have a right arm. He doesn't have a right eye, and his face is terribly disfigured."

"Well, son," the mother replied, with some hesitancy, "I guess that would be all right—for a few days."

"No, Mom....You still don't quite understand. My friend has nowhere else to go. I want him to live with us. I want him to be part of our family."

There were a few moments of strained silence, and then she said, "Well...I don't think so, son. I'm sorry, but...you'd better just come alone."

A few hours later, the same phone rang in that Boston home. It was a police sergeant, calling from California. “Ma’am, we have a young man here. Seems he’s just back from Vietnam, and he only has one leg, only one arm—and, Ma’am, his identification shows that he’s your son. I’m very sorry to have to tell you that your son has just taken his own life.” (source unknown)

How many of the John Marks are there that have no encouragement, no one who loves them?

**v. 40 But Paul having chosen Silas, went forth, having been commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.**

“But Paul having chosen Silas, went forth, having been commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.”

Paul decided he liked what he heard at the Bible conference and so he sent word to Jerusalem and had Silas come back north. Silas teamed up with him and they went north rather than duplicate the other men in their ministry.

Literally both of the men went home to lick their wounds because Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus and Paul went north to Syria and then cut over to Tarsus, his home town.

And there he was “commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.”

**v. 41 And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening (and encouraging) the churches.**

“And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening (encouraging) the churches.”

And that’s the beginning of **MISSIONARY JOURNEY NUMBER TWO** that we’ll look at in our next study.

Now having looked at this passage, what are some of the lessons that come out of it? We have several as we close.

**Lesson #1:** All additions to the simple message of the gospel are man-made.

**Lesson #2:** We are freed from the Law and its demands when we come to know Jesus Christ.

The Law is done with us when it brings us to Jesus.

**Lesson #3:** When error is taught, it unsettles and disturbs young believers.

**Lesson #4:** It is the Lord’s greatest desire that we be of one mind.

**Lesson #5:** **EXHORTATION** and **ENCOURAGEMENT** ought to be bound together in our ministry to others.

Lesson #6: The conflict between Paul and Barnabas results in two teams going out to minister.

That's the only good thing we can say that comes out of it.

Lesson #7: An attitude of non-acceptance intensifies the hurt rather than helps to heal.

Tim Hansel describes his own salvation before he had his horrible accident with his back:

When I became a Christian at Stanford, I had strong, neat, crisp images of what my future was going to be like. I was going to be physically strong, for Christ's sake. I was going to be intellectually acute (B.A., M.A. from Stanford). I was going to be emotionally bombproof—and spiritually profound. I wanted and intended to be the very best that I could be—to honor the Kingdom. But as you have seen, it didn't quite turn out that way. My life, my story, turned out differently than my original script.

We may desire to bring to the Lord a perfect work. We would like to point, when our work is done, to the beautiful ripened grain, and bound-up sheaves, and yet the Lord frustrates our plans, [He] shatters our purposes, [He] lets us see the wreck of all our hopes, [He] breaks the beautiful structure we thought we were building and catches us up in his arms and whispers to us, "It's not your work I wanted, [it's] you."

(source unknown)

And that's what He wants. He wants a relationship with us. He accepts us totally and He's ready to bring healing into our life. Just come and show Him where it hurts and He'll gather us into His arms, He'll bring healing. Don't resist Him.

Father, we pray that as we see the ramifications of this great Council meeting, we would be overwhelmed with Your unconditional constraining love to us that reaches out in our ugliness and our sin and draws us into Your arms and makes us whole—makes us whiter than snow. Thank You that You never had a problem with non-acceptance. You're reaching out all the time. We're the ones that are running away. We're the ones that are trying to do it on our own. If there's a prodigal here who has turned away from You, enable them to be reconciled to You this very night, experience the joyous redemption that can be theirs through the blood of Christ in receiving the Savior. And for those of us who know You, if the Spirit of God is convicting us about a relationship that isn't right, enable us by Your Spirit to be humble enough to go and reconcile rather than pay the price of dissolving a relationship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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# A Practical Study of ACTS:

## Take It To Them!

### “Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

#### STUDY NUMBER ELEVEN – ACTS 15:1-41

#### NOTES

v. 1 And some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved.”

v. 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had not a little dissension and debate with them, it was determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

v. 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the turning of the Gentiles, and were giving great joy to all the brethren.

v. 4 And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God did with them.

v. 5 But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying that “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and to be commanding them to keep the Law of Moses.”

v. 6 Both the apostles and the elders came together to see about this word.

v. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter having stood up, said to them, “Men, brethren, you are knowing that from days of old God made a choice among you, that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the good news and believe.

v. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, having given them the Holy Spirit, even as also to us.

v. 9 And He was making no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

v. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?



## NOTES

v. 11 But we are believing that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

v. 12 Then all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God did through them among the Gentiles.

v. 13 And after they stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Men, brethren, listen to me.

v. 14 Simeon explained how God first concerned Himself about winning a people from among the Gentiles for His name.

v. 15 And with this the words of the Prophets are agreeing, just as it has been written:

v. 16 ‘After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen. And I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,

v. 17 in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name has been called,

v. 18 says the Lord, who is making these things known from of old.’

v. 19 Therefore it is my judgment that we are not to be troubling those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

v. 20 but that we write to them that they be abstaining from the pollutions of the idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

v. 21 For Moses from ancient generations is having in every city those who are preaching him, since he is being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

v. 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church, having selected men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas the one called Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

v. 23 writing through their hand [as follows]: “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

v. 24 In view of the fact that we heard that some of our number disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, to whom we gave no instruction,

v. 25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to send men who were selected from our number to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

v. 26 men who have given over their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## NOTES

v. 27 Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, and they themselves will report the same things by word of mouth.

v. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these things which are necessary,

v. 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; from which if you are keeping yourselves free, you will do well. Farewell.”

v. 30 So, when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered together the whole assembly, they delivered the letter.

v. 31 And when they read it, they burst into ecstatic joy because of its encouragement.

v. 32 And both Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, through much discourse exhorted and encouraged (strengthened) the brethren.

v. 33 And after they spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who sent them out.

v. 34 [omitted in better manuscripts] But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.

v. 35 But Paul and Barnabas were continuing their stay in Antioch with many others also, teaching and proclaiming the good news, the word of the Lord.

v. 36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Now let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, seeing how they are getting along.”

v. 37 Now Barnabas was desiring that they take along with them also John, the one called Mark.

v. 38 But Paul was insisting that they should not take him along, this one who went away from them from Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

v. 39 Now a sharp disagreement arose, so that they separated from one another, and Barnabas having taken Mark with him, set sail for Cyprus.

v. 40 But Paul having chosen Silas, went forth, having been commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

v. 41 And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening (encouraging) the churches.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Read Acts 13:1-14:28 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

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2. State the major issue to be handled at the Jerusalem Council, according to verses 1 & 2.

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3. Summarize Peter's address in verses 7-11.

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4. How does James feel about the matter in verses 19-21?

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5. What was the response of the Christians at Antioch to the decision of the council, according to verse 31?

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6. What does Paul want to do, according to verse 36?

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7. What causes the sharp division between Paul and Barnabas, according to verses 37 & 38?

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8. What do Paul and Barnabas do in verses 39 & 40?

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9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

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10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

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## LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: All additions to the simple message of the gospel are man-made.

LESSON #2: We are freed from the Law and its demands when we come to know Jesus Christ.

LESSON #3: When error is taught, it unsettles and disturbs young believers.

LESSON #4: It is the Lord's greatest desire that we be of one mind.

LESSON #5: Exhortation and encouragement ought to be bound together in our ministry to others.

LESSON #6: The conflict between Paul and Barnabas results in two teams going out to minister.

LESSON #7: An attitude of non-acceptance intensifies the hurt rather than helps to heal.