

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 15

LEGALISM VERSUS GRACE

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER 15

We have been saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8) and are living in the dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:2). Through Jesus Christ, we have been given an abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness (Romans 5:17), but it is possible for us to frustrate that grace. Romans 11:5-6 says, "Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work."

We must continually be on guard against legalism infiltrating the freedom found in the grace of God. The automatic byproduct of God's grace is works. But often, legalism creeps in, and works become the focus of our Christian walk rather than grace. This is when we begin serving God out of human effort rather than the grace of God. We must always endeavor to remain in the grace of God.

LEGALISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Since the inception of the local church, legalism has tried to rob believers of the freedom of living by God's grace. The church in Jerusalem is no exception. Since the day of Pentecost, the law has been creeping into the church and criticism has been building against the move of God among the Gentiles.

Legalism versus grace has always been the issue with man. From Adam and his leaves to Cain and his crops, we have fought this battle as long as Satan has been the god of this world.

Until this time, legalism has been brewing under the surface and has even been addressed in part. But in this chapter, it all comes to a head in the Jerusalem church. The church at Antioch has been free to teach and operate in grace and faith. Jealousy in Jerusalem brings this issue to the forefront at the first church council meeting recorded in Acts. Jerusalem has been sliding into the law for many years and is critical of the move of God in Gentile areas of the world (Acts chapter 11).

Many of the legalistic leaders in Jerusalem are truly born again. These are priests who have been saved under the ministry of the disciples (6:7; 13:5). They have not made a smooth transition into the church age and are trying to make a major issue of the law of Moses. These people are called legalists. They do not understand the proper agreement of grace, faith, and works, and are demanding all male Gentile converts be circumcised, and all converts observe the Mosaic law for spirituality.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE POLICY OF GRACE (1-29)

While in Antioch, some from Judea have been teaching that circumcision is a requirement of salvation. Paul and Barnabas disagree vehemently with this teaching. The disagreement is so great, the church at Antioch decides to send Paul and Barnabas to discuss the issue with the apostles and elders in the church at Jerusalem.

They are warmly welcomed by the Jerusalem church, but still there is a sect of believers who are teaching that Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.

To resolve the issue, the apostles and elders meet together. Peter argues against putting the yoke of legalism on the Gentile converts and also testifies of the signs and wonders God has performed among the Gentiles. James, a respected leader, then argues that a letter should be written to the Gentile converts to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from eating meat of strangled animals, from consuming blood, and from sexual immorality, again proposing to impose legalism (aside from sexual immorality) upon the Gentile converts.

The apostles, elders, and the entire church in Jerusalem choose delegates to travel with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to read the letter stating the requirements for the Gentile converts. It does not include circumcision, but still muddles the message of grace.

DISSENSION AND DEBATE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

And certain men which came down from Judea (to Antioch) taught the brethren (Gentile believers), and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Just as the gospel has been taken to the ends of the world, now the legalistic Jews are also taking the law of Moses to the foreign field. Legalism always persecutes grace (Galatians 2:4; 4:29). We are never born again by observing the law or any system of works (Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9), nor are we spiritual because we observe works (Galatians 2:20-21). The purpose of the law is to teach that we are all sinners and need a Savior (Romans 3:20; 5:20; Galatians 3:19). Paul and Barnabas began to resist this teaching to protect the congregation at Antioch. In religious circles, grace must be fought for (Galatians 5:1).

Act 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Paul does not try to “pray and love” the legalists out of Antioch or their false doctrine. Love must stand up to legalism (Galatians 2:11-21; 5:12). On this occasion, when Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem, Titus is with them and will be used by Paul as proof of God’s grace

(Galatians 2:1). Because Paul is so strong, scriptural, and anointed, he cannot be challenged by the legalistic leaders at Jerusalem. Instead of directly confronting Paul, they retreated and decided on a new tactic. After Paul has taught and is no longer present, they have come in and persuaded the people to follow the law. They discredit Paul after he leaves so he would not be there to defend himself.

PAUL AND BARNABAS SENT TO JERUSALEM BY THE CHURCH

Act 15:3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

And being brought (propempo: sent, accompany, bring on a journey) on their way by the church (at Antioch), they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

Phenice and Samaria are mainly Gentile areas. They are rejoicing as Paul and Barnabas come through telling of their many meetings and conversions in the cities of the Gentile countries. The Gentiles in the cities rejoice when they hear of revivals.

Act 15:4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received (apodecheomai: received gladly) of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

The congregation and church leadership receive Paul and Barnabas gladly. They have not yet been affected by the legalistic group within the church. The lump of leaven in the church at Jerusalem has not yet infected the whole loaf. This will not occur until later chapters when the Holy Spirit will warn Paul to no longer preach in Jerusalem.

The stories that were told to the church at Jerusalem were the missionary trips of chapters 13 and 14: the Gentiles receiving the new birth, the infilling of the Holy Spirit, divine healing, miracles, and the establishment of churches and pastors. These types of results cannot be disputed by people who love the grace of God.

PHARISEES REQUIRE CIRCUMCISION

Act 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Act 15:6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Within their hearts, the church leadership knew the answer to this question and knew that Jesus Himself had told of the conversion of the Gentiles (1:8). They also knew of Jesus' battles with the religious, legalistic Jewish leaders. The battle Jesus had gone through is the same battle this early church is now facing.

PETER TESTIFIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AMONG THE GENTILES

Act 15:7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

This is the last time we will hear from Peter in the book of Acts. After this, Peter bounds in and out of legalism and grace. The Pharisees become stronger in the Jerusalem church, and Peter will fight to keep his head above water. He later writes two books and explains how Paul is far more advanced in the Word and understanding of God's grace (2 Peter 3:15-16).

The Jerusalem church is confused like most churches today. They believe in faith for salvation, but they also believe the Christian way of life is a series of do's and don'ts. This same argument continues today: human good versus divine good. Peter recalls for them his house top vision and the revival among the Gentiles in Caesarea (chapter 10).

Act 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

God gave the Gentiles the gift of salvation and the Holy Spirit without a teaching on the law of Moses. They received the same experience as those in the upper room in Jerusalem.

Act 15:9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Peter is saying that God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile when He gives the Holy Spirit. These men are making an issue of something God is not making an issue of. So these legalists are now being found to fight God.

Act 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke (the law) upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers (Old Testament believers) nor we (New Testament believers) were able to bear?

Tempting God is blasphemy. Legalism is also blasphemy (13:45), a yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1). It weighs a person down and causes them to slow their pace until they come to a complete standstill. Legalism seeks to attach itself to a believer, especially a disciple. Eventually the entire life is crippled. If the Jews raised under the law could not keep it, why are they trying to put the Gentiles under it (Galatians 6:13)?

Act 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we (Jews) shall be saved, even as they (Gentiles).

It is like Peter is saying, "We Jews, who think we are so smart, should take lessons from these Gentiles. Let's observe how they are saved and become spiritual, and follow their example. If we could not get the law to work for us, why are we trying to put the law on someone who is successful without it? We are failures trying to instruct successes.

PAUL AND BARNABAS TESTIFY

Act 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and **wonders** God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience (the floor) to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by (through) them.

The multitude keeps silent because they are hearing the truth from Peter and had no answer. In the silence, Paul and Barnabas tell of the missionary journey from which they have just returned. They tell of the salvations, infillings, church plantings, signs, and miracles which have come to the Gentiles. This all had occurred without the preaching of the law. It also had happened to a group of people who have never known the law.

15:12 wonders, *teras* (ter-as); Compare "teratology," the science that deals with unexplainable phenomena. *Teras* denotes extraordinary occurrences, supernatural prodigies, omens, portents, unusual manifestations, miraculous incidents portending the future rather than the past, and acts that are so unusual they cause the observer to marvel or be in awe. *Teras* is always in the plural, associated with *semeion* (signs). Signs and wonders are a perfect balance for touching man's intellect, emotions, and will.

JAMES SPEAKS

James, the pastor of the Jerusalem church, carries a lot of authority with the legalistic Jews who are listening. His words have some effect, but a compromise with legalism will later destroy the Jerusalem church and neutralize the effect of the knowledge gained at this juncture.

Act 15:13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

Act 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

Simeon (Peter) hath declared how God at the first (after Pentecost) did visit the Gentiles (Cornelius' house), to take (receive) out of them a people for his name.

Just as the 120 had been a select group used by Jesus to begin the revival at Jerusalem, the house of Cornelius has also been selected by the same God to bring revival among the Gentiles.

Act 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

And to this agree (sumphoneo: to be harmonious, to concur) the words of the prophets; as it is written,

James will quote from Amos 9:11-12. This Old Testament prophet foretold of the church arising out of the Gentile nations.

Act 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

Although the time foretold by Amos was after the second advent, the double meaning also refers to the church age. "After this" is a reference to the day of Pentecost as well as the second advent. Peter also used this when he told of Joel's prophecy (2:17).

The church age is a type of the millennium. Jesus will restore the tabernacle of David, which is open worship of the Lord to all nations. The temple was destroyed in the Babylonian captivity and Roman invasion and will not be physically rebuilt until the second advent. However, it is spiritually rebuilt in our hearts during the church age, a tabernacle built by Jesus. He is the author and finisher of our faith and the one who said, "I will build my church."

The treasure today is in earthen vessels. The church is invisible today, but just as we will have a resurrection body -- a physical temple instead of a tent (2 Peter 1:13) -- the millennial reign of Jesus will take place and a physical temple will be built.

Act 15:17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

That the residue (remnant) of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things (brings all these things to pass).

The residue of men is born again Jews on the earth. Until Jesus returns, they will always be in the minority when compared to Gentile believers.

Act 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

The Greek says, "Known from eternity past are all His works."

Act 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

Wherefore my sentence (judgment) is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

James now draws his conclusion: legalism always seeks to trouble grace. James is wise to include this phrase in his decision. The statement James makes is also his conclusion, his opinion on the matter. This will become important in the course of events to come (verse 28).

JAMES' COMPROMISE WITH LEGALISM

Act 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

This is a compromise made by James. It shows his weakness toward the legalistic Hebrews in his church. After such a strong introduction and condemnation of legalism, he declares a compromise. This “inch” will become a “mile” in the days to come, and legalism will completely dominate the church. The leaven will destroy the whole lump.

The items mentioned by James are standard procedure for idol worshipers. Although these are offensive to the Jews, they do not need to be mentioned. Gentiles have been saved and become spiritual without these regulations. Paul will take this letter to the churches of Galatia (16:4) but will never mention the different points in any sermon or discuss this letter except with the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 4:1-3, 9-11).

James's comments on food and drinks offered to idols are taught in Romans 14. In that passage he tells of expediency and personal conviction. This attempt by James is to draw a compromise between legalism and grace. The two cannot coexist.

There are four things mentioned in this recommendation, only one of which is scriptural. “Pollutions of idols” is actually meat offered to idols (verse 29). This command, along with food strangled and drinking of blood, is not addressed anywhere in the Word as an issue with Gentiles. Only the command to abstain from fornication is scriptural, found in the Old Testament and the New. Legalism elevates its own set of standards to a place equal with the Word of God. With legalism, it is difficult to tell where the Word ends and religion begins.

FIVE ATTRIBUTES OF LEGALISM

1. Legalism makes mountains out of molehills. Non-issues become major.
2. Legalism is localized. What offends one group in one place is all that is important or presented.
3. Legalism elevates its own set of standards to a place equal with the Word.
4. Legalism desires to bring others into bondage and control their lives.
5. Legalism will use the Holy Spirit for authenticity and validity (verse 28), making anyone who questions them feel they are arguing with God.

This legalism in the Jerusalem church slowly chokes out faith. Finally, the faith of the church is made a shipwreck.

We are to “grow in the grace and knowledge.” These two work together. What sustains faith is the knowledge of God’s grace (Romans 4:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Galatians 2:1-11 tells us another side of this same meeting. Before the church-wide conference, Paul, Barnabas, and Titus had met with church leadership and the Judaizers in a private meeting (verse two). Peter and Paul were both vindicated before the leadership and told to preach freely, Peter to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. But before the end of the meeting, another issue was introduced, “only they would that we should remember the poor” (verse 10).

The same thing done to the church at Antioch was done to Paul: legalism trying to exercise control over grace. Legalistic people are jealous of grace. Although Paul graciously agrees to do this, it was unnecessary. It had nothing to do with the issue at hand. Paul will never preach about any of these issues after this conference. He will address this subject and meeting in the Thessalonian epistle, but will only mention the one scriptural sin of fornication (1 Thessalonians 4:1-3, 9-11).

Act 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

Most cities in Gentile countries have a Jewish synagogue where many local Jews attend meetings each Sabbath. James is telling the Gentile converts they should refrain from these things so they will not offend their Jewish brothers.

NEW GUIDELINES SENT WITH PAUL AND BARNABAS TO ANTIOCH

Act 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

Not only do Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch, Jerusalem sends representatives back with them to give the new guidelines. The leaders in Jerusalem want to be in control. Not only does James want to give the edict to the Gentile believers, he wants his own men to be there to read it. Again we see legalism making a mountain out of a molehill.

Although Paul and Barnabas do not say anything, they are probably glad to be getting out of Jerusalem. They have come to resolve a major issue on legalism and have had to settle for a compromise.

Here not only do we see legalism and church doctrines, but also in church politics. Judas (Barsabas) and Silas are both prophets (verse 32) who have risen up in the Jerusalem church since the last mention of leadership (chapter 6). They have been raised up in a legalistic church and are expected to have some influence. However, they are about to be exposed to grace, and Silas will be more influenced by the church at Antioch than the church will be influenced by him. Silas, also called Silvanus (his Roman name, 2 Corinthians 1:19), will go on to accompany

Paul on his second missionary journey (verse 40). Later he will work with Peter and carry his first epistle to the churches of Asia minor.

LETTER ADDRESSED TO GENTILES IN ANTIOCH, SYRIA, AND CILICIA

Act 15:23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of (ek: out from) the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

The letter addresses the Gentiles as coming “out from” the nations and also as fellow brothers with the Jews in Jerusalem. This is the recognition of being a member of the family of God, no matter what the nationality of the converts. The Gentiles are addressed in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia because this is where the Gentile churches have been established.

Act 15:24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain (legalistic Jews) which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting (unsettling) your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom (legalistic Jews) we gave no such commandment:

Legalism cuts to the foundation of the Christian life. Our entire life is built upon simple faith; faith in Jesus for salvation and faith in His Word for daily living. The law, when taught as a means of salvation and/or spirituality, undermines or subverts the entire Christian way of life. James tells the Gentile believers that the message which has been preached by the legalistic Jews from Jerusalem did not come from him or any church leader.

Act 15:25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

It is good that James gives such praise and acceptance to Paul and Barnabas. It is the leadership of the Jerusalem church giving their stamp of approval to them before the Gentile believers. (Unfortunately, the legalistic Jewish believers would later attack Paul’s calling, character, and reputation).

Act 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

James also acknowledges that the tribulations faced on missionary journeys are for the furtherance of the gospel.

Act 15:27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

Judas and Silas stand with Barnabas and Paul to show the unity between the two churches.

Act 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

This is where the letter leaves reality. The Holy Spirit did not inspire these “necessary things.” Even though the church leadership and congregation all agree on the guidelines, they do not come from God. When a person puts the Holy Spirit’s name on an issue, it is to add validity. So to argue with the decision is to argue with God. However, these things will not be mentioned again in the book of Acts, and Paul will later teach abstinence from food presented to idols as a personal heart issue (Romans 14), not a dictate of the Holy Spirit.

Act 15:29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

Meat offered to idols was then brought to the front of the temple where the finest restaurants were located, and this is the meat being referred to. The word has nothing to say about eating meat offered to idols; it is just meat. Where the meat has been a few minutes prior to being served has nothing to do with spirituality. Meat is not spiritual and should not be used as a spiritual issue. Again, the only scriptural thing mentioned in this letter is fornication.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE MINISTRY OF GRACE (30-35)

Judas and Silas, the delegates from Jerusalem, strengthen and encourage the faith of the believers at Antioch and are sent home by the Antioch church with a blessing of peace. Paul and Barnabas remain in Antioch teaching and preaching, along with many others.

READING OF THE LETTER TO THE GENTILES

Act 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

The letter was read out loud.

Act 15:31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

Which when they (Judas and Silas) had read, they (the congregation) rejoiced for the consolation (comfort).

Act 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

The saints in Antioch have been unsettled by the teaching of the legalistic Jews. Judas and Silas, being prophets, use their spiritual offices and gifts to bring encouragement and stability back to

the believers. The saints now know that Paul and Barnabas have taught them correctly from the beginning.

Act 15:33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

And after they (Judas and Silas) had tarried there a space (while), they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

During their time in Antioch, both Judas and Silas experienced church services centered on grace and liberty. Even though they come from a church claiming to believe in grace and freedom, they now see what a church truly operating in grace can be like.

Act 15:34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

Judas returns to Jerusalem, but Silas is so pleased with the church at Antioch, he stays on and makes Antioch his ministry base. Although this verse is not found in many of the earliest manuscripts, it is still true that Silas remained in Antioch (verse 40).

PAUL AND BARNABAS CONTINUE TEACHING AND PREACHING

Act 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Paul and Barnabas continue to work with the church leadership and teach what God wants. The issue of the letter from Jerusalem is not mentioned again in Acts, and is probably not a major point of exposition in the church. The foundation of grace continues in Antioch, and missionary activity is a priority.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE DEEDS OF GRACE (36-39)

Paul speaks with Barnabas about returning to the areas they had first preached to see how the new believers are doing. Before they go, Paul and Barnabas have a major disagreement over taking Mark on the next missionary journey, and they separate from one another as a result. Barnabas travels to Cyprus with Mark and Paul chooses Silas to travel with him to Syria and Cilicia.

PAUL AND BARNABAS AGREE TO RETURN TO GALATIA

Act 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

Paul wants to return to Galatia and visit those who are born again. He also wants to see how the churches that had been established on the first missionary journey are doing. Barnabas is in favor of the journey.

DISPUTE OVER JOHN MARK

Act 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

And Barnabas determined (boulomai: had intended) to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Evidently Barnabas has been waiting for Paul to bring up this subject because he wants to return to Galatia. He also has been keeping up with Mark and knows Mark has recovered from his mistake and wants another chance to prove himself in the ministry. When Barnabas brings up the issue of Mark, Paul probably feels that Barnabas had been planning this for some time. Paul resents this intrusion and will not want to take Mark with them on their journey.

Act 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

Paul resists the idea, and the resistance becomes a full-blown argument. Paul does not feel Mark is worthy to work in the ministry, and Barnabas is determined to give his cousin another chance.

Paul later repents of his attitude toward Mark and calls him useful for the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). Mark will also later accompany Peter to Rome (1 Peter 5:13).

PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATE

Act 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

Paul and Barnabas have a shouting match between themselves. It is so loud that many in the area probably hear them. Hopefully the people listening realized that ministers are human, giving them an opportunity to walk in forgiveness toward both Paul and Barnabas.

Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus -- the first part of the previous missionary journey -- where Mark had been a success. This would be familiar territory to Mark and not a reminder of his failure.

When Paul and Barnabas separate, it is forever. They “parted asunder.” This is strong language showing they did not minister together again. Paul’s mistake is being legalistic concerning Mark. Mark does deserve another chance, and Barnabas made the right choice. The circumstances of their separation is not good, but both Paul and Barnabas continue on in the ministry. This mistake of Paul’s will later become larger, and bring him into a great act of legalism in Jerusalem.

PAUL CHOOSES SILAS

Act 15:40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Silas is still in Antioch and ready to do missionary work. Paul has apparently grown close to Silas during the previous months and recognizes his love for the Lord and ministry calling. The church members at Antioch are champions in grace and love. They do not choose sides in the argument, but commend both Paul and Barnabas to the grace of God as they leave with new ministry partners. This argument does not split the church.

Act 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Syria and Cilicia are the other two Gentile areas where prospering churches have been established (verse 23). (The letter from Jerusalem is written to them as well).