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**A0911 – March 15, 2009 – Acts 15:22-35 – The Hermeneutics Of
Dispensationalism**

Today we want to continue in Acts 15, we'll work our way through the report on the Council of Jerusalem up to the second missionary expedition of Paul in Acts 15:35. To do so lets remind ourselves of the greatness of chapter 15.

Acts 15 is one of the great transitional chapters in the Book of Acts. It's the first time the early believers realize officially that God is doing a new thing in creating a new entity, the Church. We know that the Book of Acts is a book of transition. Failure to recognize this is at the heart of the many fallacious doctrines that plague the church today; people grab a verse here or a verse there and develop doctrines that are completely out of line with the rest of Scripture. You cannot dive into the Book of Acts and start jerking verses out of their historical and transitional context and make them the norm for all time. Acts is a book of transition; it begins with emphasis upon the kingdom, exactly the same emphasis as the OT, exactly the emphasis of the synoptic Gospels. And as you go through the Acts period gradually the kingdom re-offer diminishes and the realization of the Church increases. So there is a transition from dealing with Israel as a nation to dealing with the Church as a non-nation. The kingdom offer decreases, the church increases. We're not saying the Church gradually formed, as if it existed a little bit, then a little bit more and so on, it's rather that the realization of the Church gradually increased. The Church began on the Day of Pentecost, but as Paul tells us later in Ephesians the Church was a mystery, they didn't know what the Church was yet, it was not revealed in the OT. There are no OT prophecies that predict the Church, none, not a single passage. Gradually, remember Paul says in 1 Cor 13, "we know in part and we prophecy in part," that is bit by bit, we got this new revelation piece by piece as to what was going on with this new entity, the Church, and that's what's happening in Acts. They were

learning in the period of Acts about the Church and Acts 15 is a breakthrough in their learning.

One breakthrough, a titanic breakthrough, is that they learn that Gentiles are not under the Law of Moses. Just imagine the offense of this if you were a Jew and your people had been under the Law of Moses for a thousand years and anytime a Gentile attached themselves to the nation Israel they were under the 613 Laws of Moses, and then suddenly someone trots out that it's no longer that way. Well, that disturbed people. Yet that is precisely what the representatives at the council decided in Acts 15. We should not trouble the Gentiles with the Law of Moses that neither we nor our fathers could bear. So a tremendous breakthrough occurs in Acts 15 which you should know is the subject of Paul's first epistle, Galatians. How is a man justified? Whether Jew or Gentile, a man is justified by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone apart from the Law, not by works.

A third thing Acts 15 does is give us a model for the great ecumenical councils of the early Church. The first one, the Council of Jerusalem, AD49, reveals how they solved doctrinal differences. Today the church has so apostatized, we are so far from the truth that we can't even solve a difference over the color of carpet, let alone over a doctrine. Yet the early church was able to maintain unity over the very controversial issue of the relation of Gentiles to the Law of Moses. They actually believed doctrinal differences could be solved and the way they solved them was on the basis of several principles. *First*, they recognized that not all believers were leaders. They did not follow the congregational method of government. They recognized a small group of leaders who were equipped to lead. Not all men are equipped to lead. Leadership requires training and discipline in order to be qualified to lead. And the apostles and elders were the leaders in v 6 who made the decisions. The *second* thing is that there are only two ways to solve problems: you can follow human view point, which starts with the resources of finite autonomous man or you can start with the word of God. Starting with man you have two options: the ultra right where every man does what is right in his own eyes, this is the anarchist solution where there is no law to harness man's evil inclination. Does that solve problems? People think that will work until one day when what you do is right in your eyes but in my eyes it's wrong and then we have a big fight and someone gets killed. And that's the kind of chaos and instability that results from social anarchy. The other

approach starting with man is the ultra left where no man is allowed to do anything without Big Brother authorizing it. This is the option of totalitarianism, where you legislate, legislate, legislate and there's no freedom. It's all law and the government will control man's evil inclination through more law. Will this work? Will this solve the evil problem? Of course it won't work because who's making the law? Where's the law coming from? Men who have an evil inclination, so the problem isn't solved. The Christian position in decision making rejects both of these tendencies of finite autonomous man. The Christian position is that I have a small group of leaders who base their decisions not on the word of finite man but on the infinite word of God. So there are principles of godly decision making. One of those principles we see in vv 6-7 is that the leadership consider all the views, they just get it all out on the table, there's no hiding here, there's no narrow agenda one person has that controls the discussion, they just get it all out on the table so they can consider all the options. Does this line up with the word of God or not? Another principle is that in v 7, after the options have been discussed and the solution is rising to the surface the credible witness Peter stands to give a solution. The principle of credible witness, someone who is well-respected in the organization, takes the lead. And the thing we observe in Peter's solution is the recognition of divine precedence. What has God already done with the Gentiles at Caesarea? Did God require them to be circumcised before giving them the Holy Spirit? Did God require me to give them the Law of Moses and say, now you better follow this Law and if you don't you won't really grow in the Christian life? Obviously that was not required ten years ago so why are you trying to require it now? Therefore, we are all saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. So the principle of the credible witness. The final principle we've learned we saw with James. James quotes the OT precedent and this is to seal the deal so to speak. And so we see that they solve their problem based on the word of God and not on the basis of human ideas.

And out of this comes unity. I want you to pay strong attention to the fact that after this was all said and done there was unity. Today people are always charging that the word of God divides, that doctrine divides, and on one level you'd be right, it does cut the human race into two sides, believers and unbelievers, but once the discussion is limited to believers what is the word of God to produce? Unity. A radical idea in our day, all the believers together because they agree on a tremendous amount of doctrine. And so we

see that the word of God did not divide the Church at the Jerusalem Council, it united the Church. And therefore the ecumenism of our day which reduces all our beliefs down to two things we can agree on and then we hold hands together and put on a big smile, is a false ecumenism. True ecumenism is we open up the word of God and we resolve the differences on the basis of literal hermeneutics, and with that we want to remind ourselves of the literal hermeneutic used by James in his summary of the council. Now, when I use that word I do not mean a new brand of toilet paper. Hermeneutics is an important word you need to be familiar with because you use them all the time, you may be good at it, you may be bad at it, but you do use it, everyone does. It is the rules of interpreting literature. The problem we had last week was discovering what rules James was using in vv 16-18 when James cited the OT prophet Amos in support of Peter, in support of Paul, in support of Barnabas. What did he mean by doing that? Did he mean to say, as the amillennialist says, that Amos was fulfilled in the Church? The amillennialist says this is a clear case where the NT authors depart from the literal sense of Amos by spiritually applying it to the church. And therefore we should not expect some future glorious kingdom on earth, and therefore what is wrong with you premillennialists, when are you going to get on board with the Scriptures?

How did we answer this charge? Well, we answer this through a discussion of hermeneutics. Now, hermeneutics we said is a set of rules or principles for interpreting literature. I like to think of it as a rule book. I used to play competitive soccer and we had certain referees. Some of them we liked and some of them we didn't like. The one's we didn't like were the one's nobody likes, when they don't govern the game by the rules, they let Joe Blow off the hook for no apparent reason other than he's favoring one team over another. And we say it's not fair. Now in the language game it's the same way, some people are like bad referees, they either don't know the rules or they don't enforce the rules and this is bad for everybody. This is bad when it comes to the Constitution and this is bad when it comes to the Bible. But the point is that there are rules for interpreting literature and we use them every day. So the first thing we have to consider is language itself. If there are rules for language we must first ask "Where does language come from?" And then when we answer that we will have established our basic philosophy of language and how we interpret language, the rules.

I just returned from a pastor's conference where the main subject was Hermeneutics which was our subject last week so I want to fill you in on what's happening in evangelicalism, especially since my convictions were confirmed and I disowned the movement about a year ago. At the conference one of my mentors, Charlie Clough, was telling me about a book called *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks* which is an evangelical book infecting evangelicalism with pagan linguistic theories. He was astonished to find that pagan views of language he was exposed to at MIT in the 1960's had been adopted by evangelicals and applied rigorously to the Bible. This is what's going on. We adopt a pagan view of language and then we read the bible with this new view of language and see what we come up with. And here are some of the things evangelicals are coming up with: The genealogies of Christ in Matt 1 and Luke 3 are in doubt, there are unquestionably many embellishments; Jesus' mother Mary never asked the angel Gabriel how she would conceive a Son as Luke 1:34 says she did. Try this one on: "Circumstances of Jesus' baptism are questionable, whether He ever heard the voice from heaven and saw the dove descending on Him." Remember, these are evangelicals, not liberals. Now do you see why I refuse to be called an evangelical? Here's another one, "Jesus was incapable of delivering the Sermon on the Mount, the commissioning of the Twelve, the parables of Matthew 13 and Mark 4, and the Olivet Discourse as the Synoptists said He did." And this shredding of the Gospels goes on and on. Here's a few more: the details surrounding the resurrection are muddy. Jesus did not deliver the Great Commission of Matt 28:18-20.

So we have to ask, "How in the world did they get there? What went wrong?" Well, what went wrong was they bought into a pagan view of language. What is the pagan view of language today? We could go into Vanhoozer or Wittgenstein but ultimately it can be traced back to Immanuel Kant. Kant said when it comes to the question of knowing that you have a dichotomy; the *noumenal* and the *phenomenal*. Now the phenomenal is what you experience by sensation when you go out and observe some empirical evidence; there are certain biochemical processes that go on in your mind. The problem for Kant was that we cannot really know if our biochemical processes correspond to the empirical evidence. For example, the problem of David Hume, "How do we know a law of cause-effect actually exists outside of your mind?" Kant, like Hume, said knowledge by means of sensation is impossible. Whatever we know is simply the organization our minds place on the stream of sensations

so that we can live as though causality exists. But we can't really know if it does exist.

The noumenal is where God, religion, etc... is. This is the realm of what is "really there." The difference with this realm, Kant said, was that though we know it is there we have no empirical evidence of it. It's just an inner sensation. We have no knowledge of it whatsoever; it's purely a projection, sheer speculation. Now, whether you consciously realize it or not what we have here is the greatest possible rejection of the triune God of Scripture possible. What Kant has done is said that man's mind is what gives structure to our environment and not God; that man legislates what is and not God, which man defines what reality is and not God. It is a total and complete reversal, the creature has become the Creator.

Now, if that is the case, and God, though He may exist, is up here and we are totally cut off from Him, we can't know anything about Him and then you come to the Bible, which is traditionally the revelation of God, how is Kant's view of God and language going to affect how you view the Bible? Well, God is cut off from us, there is a total barrier and therefore no communication can cross that barrier. Therefore anything that is said about God is purely a human projection of what God might be like. So if you read your Bible what are you reading according to Kantian philosophy? A human projection of what God might be like. You have absolutely no certainty about what He actually is like. This is why evangelicals are coming along and they've got this pagan view of language and they come to Matthew and they say, "Oh, Matthew had sensations and Matthew's sensations are subjective and he's writing his book purely out of his sensations, so in the name of academia I say, "Matthew was wrong about that." That's the game that's being played and we come along and chop the Bible into pieces, all in the name of scholarship.

Now, hopefully you see why Immanuel Kant was one of the most Satanic people that ever walked the face of the earth. What he says here is the exact reverse of Christianity. Man replaces God. And yet there is not one in 1,000 Christians who isn't trapped in Kant's Christ. They have all bought into the fallacy of the religion/science dichotomy. I'm willing to bet \$100 you cannot find five people outside this church who do not have this dichotomy as

fundamental in their thinking. Go ahead, I challenge you, call your Christian friends.

And so, of course, people come to the Bible, “How do you know?” and all that baloney. But once you’ve bought into this, God is up here, can you know anything about Him? No, you’re cut off from Him and therefore human language is down here, it’s subjective, I can’t know anything about God. Result: a very low view of language, a very low view of inspiration, a very low view of the Bible.

All right, well if that’s not our view of language, what is? Where do we get a philosophy of language? Well, we get it from God’s revelation. We don’t buy into this dichotomy, it’s a false dichotomy. So let’s look at a few points to the Doctrine of Language briefly and then we’ll get into the hermeneutics of Acts 15.

The first thing about language is that it eternally exists in the Triune Godhead. We call this Intra-Trinity Language? Did God the Father speak to God the Son from all eternity? Of course He did, John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Intra-Trinitarian dialogue forever and ever. That is the first and the most powerful thing you can ever say about language. It is not created, it is eternal, it is a part of who God is (also cf 1 John 1:1-3 and John 17:24).

The second thing you say about language is what? That God created the universe via language. We call this Creation Language. Just read Gen 1. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. When God creates He uses speech to do it. He doesn’t need a hammer and a nail to create, all He has to do is say it into existence. So His voice generates the cosmos, it brings forth all things out of no things. We call that *ex nihilo* creation.

The third thing we say about language arises from a question. And that question is, man has language, but how did man learn to speak? How did that process get started? Dr Arthur Custance, a Canadian anthropologist and physiologist observed in his life of study the strange enigma of feral children. At various times children have been discovered who were raised in the wild having no human contact and somehow they survived. And when found by human beings the interesting thing is they do not know any human language,

they didn't speak a word. And so what we learn from this is that for human language to get started there has to be a prior speaker. The problem for the evolutionary hypothesis is "How do you explain how language got started since you have no prior speaker?" All you have is protoplasm. The obvious answer from the Scriptures is that there was a prior speaker. God. And God taught Adam His first vocabulary. God got the language game started with Adam. Hey Adam, this is what I made on day one, it's called light, and this over here, this is water, you drink that. And this over here is land, the sun, and so forth." And by the way, there's a structure there, a syntactical arrangement of words that was going on in addition to vocabulary. It wasn't just a vocab list, there was a grammatical structure and when God spoke to Adam it activated his syntax machine. Adam was designed for language because He was designed by God's language. This is how language got started and therefore the Bible has an answer that perfectly coincides with all of our observations of feral children. Because once we found these children and they were around human speakers they learned to speak. The problem before was no one had activated their syntax machine. Now maybe you see, parents, how important you are, when you speak, the way you discuss a subject is structuring the way your child will think, it's setting up the categories in his thought. This is why the OT in Deuteronomy the Lord says, "speak of these things in your home, when you lie down and when you rise up," what He's saying isn't that you always have to be quoting a Bible verse or something, it means whenever you discuss any area of life, whether it's art, government, education, science, geography, whatever, discuss it in terms of the word of God. Don't let those discussions be controlled by your fleshly heart. That's how idolatry gets started, let your discussion be shaped by the word of God because that discipline builds categories of worship in your mentality, it sets you up for true multi-faceted worship, worship in every area of life because we're thinking God's thoughts after Him, the essence of worship. So it's crucial parents what you say and how you say it in the home, it's a part of instilling biblical categories of thought, categories that are essential to understanding the gospel.

One of the things we've bypassed, one thing very important is the difference between man and animal in the area of language. When was the last time you went up to your dog and said "Sit," and he said, "I think you should just shove it." Now maybe he just sat there and looked at you wild eyed. But animals do not talk. Animals do communicate, we're not talking about that,

animals do communicate with advanced signal patterns and recognition, we can do that too, but they don't make a verbal, propositional statement, that's what we're saying. And that's a difference. What is it that makes that difference between man and animal? The difference is that man is made in the image of God, man is unique and one of our uniquenesses is that we are designed with a linguistic structure inside our being. We're built for language. I think of my children, you watch these little suckers learn language, it starts out just syllabic, ma-ma, da-da, bu-bu, and soon they're learning words. But did you ever notice something? Most people think children learn language by mimicking. They hear mommy say something and they repeat it. What phenomena have you all observed a child do that negates that idea? Sometimes Robin will leave and Kaleb will come over and say, "Daddy, where mommy go'ed?" And of course we correct them. But right there something very significant happened. Anybody catch what happened? Did Kaleb learn "go'ed" from mimicking? He never heard "go'ed." What he had heard was that to make something past tense you usually add -ed. And so rather than saying "mommy went" he just tacked -ed on the end and made up a new word. That manifests a fantastic thing in all human beings; that we have a syntax machine in us that gives us the ability to make new words and express new meaning. We were built for language. And the first purpose of language is that we would have a relationship with God. The liberal says we can't even have a discussion with God; that language is finite and limited and it has all kinds of problems. Yes, we know there are limitations to human language, that's been shown, but do those limitations apply to God's language? That's the way the liberal theologian argues, and that's the way the new evangelical is arguing. But the limitations of language do not apply to God. God has a perfect language system. We admit we can get ourselves in semantic paradoxes, the Cretan paradox and so forth, but our position is that God doesn't get stuck in those and when He speaks to us in human language that is sufficient to carry an idea from His mind to ours because we're made in His image. All men have this and therefore all men can learn language and be in a relationship with God through language because God made us for that and started the discussion.

The fourth thing about language is that man extends language; we have the capacity to make new words and build a vocabulary. What was Adam doing in chapter 2 when God brought the animals to him? God said, "Hey Adam, I want you to name these animals. I named the light, I named the sun, and I

named the moon, now you go ahead, what do you call that animal?" God didn't tell him what to call them; he gave Adam the artistic license, under His supervision, to name parts of creation. And so we can extend language, that's a function of man having dominion, we're categorizing, we're building categories for human thought. We don't think enough about how fantastic it is that we can do that. But if we couldn't do that we couldn't really discuss anything, could we? Those categories have to be there in your head and my head so when I say dog you know what dog is. So man can extend language.

The fifth thing we say about language relates to the Fall. When sin entered it affects us in a total way. Nevertheless, God limited the effects of the Fall such that man's language, which is a finite analog to God's language, and man as a receiver of God's language, is sufficient to convey true information from the mind of God. And therefore, against Kant, man's mind is not the source of language. If it were we would have nothing more than human projections about what nature and God might be like, we would be caught in absolute subjectivity and relativity. But as it is, man is made in the image of God, even after the Fall and therefore can understand the revelation of the God whose image he bears.

Now having put the biblical philosophy of language against the pagan philosophy of language and concluded that man can understand with absolute certainty language from God then let's talk about hermeneutics. In other words, how do we know what God has said? So we talk about hermeneutics. We've talked about it before; we'll talk about it again. Why? Because it's crucial. Its ground level stuff. There are other things on the ground level. For example, the text itself. What is the text? We have to know what our text is. Another ground level issue is the original languages. Do I have access to the original languages or not. English Bible study is great but it has this limitation on the ground level. So three things on the ground level; 1) the text, 2) the original languages and 3) hermeneutics. Hermeneutics are the what? The rules of interpreting literature. What are the rules? What's our hermeneutic? It's the grammatical-historical approach, also called literal. This was the approach of the OT Jews, it was the approach of Christ and the Apostles, it was the approach of the School of Antioch in the early centuries of the Church and it's our approach today. We follow the grammar and the history. A consideration of these two factors alone is the only method that effectively removes biases. Therefore theology, literary type and tradition,

while important, are not considered on the base level. What is grammar? Grammar is word studies and syntax. So for word studies you need lexicons contemporary to the ancient text. For syntax you need to understand the relationship of the parts of the sentence to one another. Second we consider the historical background. What was the historical context? Now, we think that by means of consistent application of grammatical-historical hermeneutics we can avoid bias and obtain objective, certain meaning where the thought in your mind coincides with the thoughts of God's mind. So the acquisition of truth from the mind of God occurs via the grammatical-historical approach.

If absolute truth can be known then why are there so many differing opinions as to what Scripture says. It is a very simple answer: *inconsistency in applying the grammatical-historical approach or the deliberate injection of something additional to grammar and history* such as the Kantian view of pre-understanding or one's theology as a guide for helping you interpret the text and so forth.

The second thing, once we have grammatical and historical rules is exegesis. Exegesis is not on the base level; exegesis sits a level above hermeneutics. What is exegesis? Literally it just means "to lead out, "to draw out," we draw out from the text what is there; we don't read into the text. Allegory as a method of interpretation that reads into the text an idea that is not there. That's why we reject allegory as a method of interpretation. We're not interested in something from outside the text that you bring to the text as a rule or principle to support your theology. We're interested in what is in the text. So, we have hermeneutics on the base level, that's the rules, then we have exegesis on the next level, that's the application of the rules, and finally we have theology, the organization of the results as applied to every area of life; art, music, government, education, science, agriculture, etc...

All right, now in our text, Acts 15:16-18 James quotes the OT in support of Peter. So we have to go back to hermeneutics. What are the rules for interpreting how the NT authors quote the OT? To decipher this we have to go back to the 1st century to discover how the Jews quoted OT Scripture. I'll show you what I showed you last week about the four ways, but I also want to show you what was said this week at my conference about this because the question was answered in a similar way. So on the one hand you have Arnold

Fruchtenbaum, he says there are four ways the NT authors quote the OT and this is traced back to the first century, and then you have Robert Thomas and he says there are two ways the NT authors quote the OT. There are other people of course, who disagree, but they all violate grammatical-historical rules so they have to be rejected outright. So we have four categories or two categories. It's not really an either or position because Thomas' two categories as we'll see are the same as Fruchtenbaum's four, with less specificity. So let's see. Arnold says, and I've taught you, the first category is Literal Prophecy + Literal Fulfillment. Thomas just calls this Literal. They both mean that the OT verse cited is a prophecy and that in the NT the author is saying it was fulfilled literally, to the letter. Then Arnold says when this is not the case then you have three options, it could be a Literal Prophecy + Application or Literal + Typology or a Summary. Notice literal, they're all literal OT passages. Thomas has Literal, then he has one category to fit all three of these others in, he calls it ISPA, *Inspired Sensus Plenior Application*, which means the NT authors under divine inspiration assigned a fuller meaning by way of application to a new situation. They did not do away with the literal meaning or suggest it was fulfilled in a non-literal way; it was just that under divine inspiration they assigned a fuller meaning to the OT text that was not there in the OT, very important, not a hidden or second meaning, but an application of an OT text to a new circumstance; *Inspired Sensus Plenior Application* or ISPA. So he only has two categories, he is not as specific on the ISPA passages as Arnold is, but they're saying the same thing. Arnold just divides it into three different ways. Thomas says each one has to be evaluated on its own merits in its own context, but the scope is the same and I think they both are essentially the same thing. I like the way Arnold does it because it does correspond to the 1st century method used by the Jews; they call it Pardes if you wanted to know, P for pshat, R for remez, D for drash and S for sod. That's easy because I can teach that, you can learn that and when you read the NT you can categorize the quotations as you work your way through. We, by the way, cannot quote the OT this way because we are not inspired by the Spirit of God, the NT authors were.

What did we say about this quote from Amos 9:11-12 by James? Is this a literal fulfillment of Amos? No, the tabernacle of David was not restored, the Jewish people were not restored to their kingdom, they did not get their land or any of that which is what Amos is talking about. That prophecy is a literal prophecy that still awaits future fulfillment. But James quotes it because of

one point of similarity, that is, he makes an application of it. Both Amos 9 and Acts 15 discuss Gentile Salvation, and therefore this is a Literal Prophecy + Application in Fruchtenbaum's scheme or an ISPA in Thomas' scheme. I've discussed Acts 15 with both of them personally and they both agree. The theological rationale of James's is that Gentiles in the Millennial Kingdom will seek the Lord. But if Gentiles will seek the Lord in the Millennial Kingdom then to enter the kingdom Gentiles must be saved before the Kingdom. So the very fact Amos predicts Gentiles in the Millennial Kingdom proves that Gentiles must be saved prior to that kingdom. Therefore, since Peter and six other Jewish witnesses saw the Gentiles at Cornelius' house saved apart from circumcision when the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they spoke in tongues, this is Gentile salvation before the Millennium apart from the Law of Moses. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Now in vv 22-35 this conclusion is sent back by way of report to Antioch. There's very little to say here so I'll just comment as we read through. Verse 22, **Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,** Notice the **whole church** is involved, there is a level of congregational involvement on certain decisions, they did not enter into the debate at the council but once the doctrinal differences were decided the congregation's input on the matter of sending along two Jerusalem representatives was included. Things were not done in a smoky backroom. And so two men are chosen to return with **Paul and Barnabas**, they are **Judas called Barsabbas**, and secondly, **Silas, leading men among the brethren.** Now what's the point of this? Well the point of this gives us another principle for resolving doctrinal differences. To see what it is, imagine Paul and Barnabas go back to Antioch without representatives from Jerusalem. They could say, "Oh yes, we were right, they were wrong. Here's the letter." But how would they know if the letter was legitimate and they were telling the truth. See, obviously Paul and Barnabas were sinners like you and I, that's the obvious thing. As great as they may have been as leaders of the church they still had sin natures. And so what did the Church do to resolve any kind of objections? They sent two Jerusalem witnesses along to confirm the report. And thus we have the principle of honest reporting. These people weren't ignorant of people's agenda's, they were very aware of media

distortions because they believed all men had sin natures and for good reasons or evil might distort the report, so the principle of honest reporting is a divine principle in solving disputes, you bring along eye witnesses from the other side to confirm the report. V 23, **and they sent this letter by them, “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. 24 “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, that’s the group from v 1, 25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, that’s the authorized group, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Why’s that thrown in there? To show that they heard about Barnabus and Paul’s first missionary journey, they heard about the stoning, they saw Paul’s scars. **27 “Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.** There’s the confirmation from Jerusalem, we send our own men so you have no doubt. That maintains unity. **28 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”** Remember these were things they concluded the Gentiles needed to concede, these were Jewish sensitivities that had to do with diet and close marriages, they were taught in every synagogue on every Sabbath and so they had built up in the collective conscience of every Jew as wrong and therefore needed to be respected so that unity could be maintained and Jew and Gentile could have dinner and communion together, because in the early first century they didn’t just have a cracker and grape juice, they had a full meal and then the unleavened bread and wine. And there was no way the average Jewish believer was going to sit down and have a ham sandwich with a Gentile believer, not at this time, so these sensitivities needed to be respected. Verse 30, **So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch;** that’s Syrian Antioch, up here, **and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. 32 Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.** And that just shows you how important Bible teaching is. These men did not prepare a

thirty minute lesson, they went on literally for hours and hours. We'll find in Acts 19 Paul often teaches through the entire night, so just get ready to see how much Bible teaching these people took in compared to us, they were not a society that revolved around when the football game started, they were interested in the word of God and so when the teacher went over 45 minutes they didn't start moaning in the pews and complaining to the pastor, they were **encouraged and strengthened** by it. They had a positive mental attitude to the word of God. You can never get too much of the word of God. Verse 33, **After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out. 34 [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]** But verse 34 you'll recognize has parentheses around it. That's because it's not in the original text. Remember one of the things I said was on the base level with hermeneutics was determining your text. Well, this is not in the original text. We think a scribe added this to explain v 40, later on "Paul chose Silas..." but if Silas really stayed then why does v 33 say he left? The truth of the matter is he went back with Judas to Jerusalem and then later Paul went down and got him from Jerusalem. Verse 35, **But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.** Preaching the word, teaching the word, preaching the word, teaching the word, you cannot get enough of the word of God and so the continual ministry of these men was to devote themselves to the teaching and preaching of the word of God.

So what we have seen is a very important discussion in Acts 15 for our day, the first ecumenical council where certain dispensational realizations have occurred. But to answer this text 2,000 years later we face certain obstacles. Obstacles of Kant's pagan view of language, obstacles of non-grammatical-historical approaches to interpreting the Bible, obstacles of inconsistently applying the literal approach and difficulties of dealing with how NT authors quoted the OT. But when all is said and done absolute truth on these matters can and is known through diligent study of the word of truth.

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