

Lessons from the First Church Council
Making, Delivering, and Receiving Authoritative Decisions
Acts 15:19-35
Halifax: 28 October 2012

Introduction

In our sermon series from the Acts of the Apostles,

- we have come to chapter 15 where we have the record of the first church council.
 - We have seen several Presbytery meetings already—at Jerusalem and at Antioch—but here we have Presbyteries gathering to deliberate a matter that affected them all. It is a council of the whole church.

- Already, we have looked closely at what the matter was that was before them...
 - It was the question of whether it was necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses if they were to be saved.
 - Certain men, which we call Judaizers, had gone to the Gentiles who had turned to Christ and were troubling them with this requirement.
 - We have seen that such a requirement is abhorrent to the gospel.
 - Though God required His people to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant,
 - He never required this as a condition for salvation!
 - That would have been a yoke that no one could bear!
 - They were required to do these things, but only as a vehicle by which they expressed their faith in the Lord who saves.
 - We cannot be justified by our own works—no one can be because we are all sinners—our works are always tarnished by sin.
 - The only solid place to rest is upon Christ alone.

- Last week, we saw how members of the church court presented clear arguments against the false teaching of the Judaizers.
 - Peter argued that God had used Him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, and that they had received the Holy Spirit without the works of the law.
 - It was God’s doing and could not be denied.
 - Paul and Barnabas argued that they had preached the gospel of justification by faith apart from the works of the law to the Gentiles,
 - and that the Lord had confirmed their word through many miracles among the Gentiles to whom they were preaching.
 - And finally James stepped forward and showed that the Lord had declared through His prophets that the Gentiles would become God’s people as Gentiles—that is, without first becoming Jews.

Luke presents these arguments as the chief arguments that prepared the way for the council to make its decision that the Gentiles do not need to be circumcised.

- In the portion we are looking at today,
 - we see how the council formulated this decision...
 - how they delivered this decision...
 - and how the Gentiles received this decision.

In all three cases, we have an example that is worthy to be followed.

- We have seen before how in Acts we are often presented with an almost ideal model of how things are to be done.
- And here we have such an example about how authoritative decisions are to be handled...
 - It has relevance to every believer at some point...
 - If you wield any kind of authority, you need to learn how to formulate and deliver authoritative decisions in a godly way...
 - Some of you are fathers, some are husbands, some are elders, some are in authority over others at work—and you have authority to make decisions that are binding on others,
 - but you must be careful about how you formulate and deliver those decisions.
 - You must remember that you have a Master in heaven to whom you must answer.
 - But even if you do not have such authority,
 - Every one of you is also under authority *somewhere*, and you must all learn how to receive authoritative decisions in a godly way.
 - This does not mean that you will always agree with such decisions.
 - There are times when it might even be your duty to refuse to comply with a decision by one with God-given authority because their decision is unbiblical...
 - But in every case, you are to show respect to those whom God has placed over you and to submit to them as much as you can.
 - As members of this church, you have all taken vows to defend the peace, purity, and prosperity of this congregation as long as you are a member of it...
 - And part of that involves to submitting to the decisions of the Synod and the Presbytery and the Session.

TRANS> We have before us in our text today an excellent example to follow.

- So let us turn to look at our first heading:

I. How to formulate an authoritative decision

- A. First, make sure it is biblical

1. We have already seen how the apostles and elders formulated their decision based upon what God had revealed through experience and scripture.
 - a. God had made it clear that He did not require the Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses to be saved.
 - He had received the Gentiles without circumcision and had authorized Paul and Barnabas to preach justification by faith apart from the works of the Law.
 - He had also shown in the prophets that when Messiah came, the Gentiles would become His people as Gentiles.
 - b. The Council was careful to consider this revelation from God in making their decision.
 - This is an example that all who are in authority ought to follow.
 - Just think of the great harm that would have been done to the Gentiles and to the cause of the gospel if the Council had not considered what God said...
 - If they had commanded them to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses.
 - They would have confused the gospel and caused everyone—both Jews and Gentiles—to be unsure of their salvation.
 - They would have destroyed Christian joy and muddled the faith of those who might have otherwise rested upon Christ alone with all the assurance that comes when we have Him as our Saviour.
2. Being biblical must always be a primary concern in making decisions as an authority.
 - a. Remember, all authority is from the Lord.
 - He has not given anyone authority to command others to do things that are contrary to His will.
 - Even Jesus said that He commanded nothing but what the Father had commanded Him.
 - No authority is greater than that of Jesus.
 - b. The only way to tell if what you command is in agreement with the will of God is to see that it is biblical.
 - You must be sure that what you command is biblical—
 - for example, it would be wrong for a church court to tell the members of the congregation to bow down to an image.
 - In the same way, it would be wrong for a father to tell his children that they are skipping church to go to the park.
 - You must also be sure that what you command is something you are authorized to command.

- Understand, of course, that God's appointed authorities are authorized to command certain things that are not stated in the Bible...
- For example, the elders are authorized to set the time for the worship service...
- But they are not authorized to command you where to go on your vacation.

TRANS> So in formulating authoritative commands, you must first be sure that those commands are in agreement with scripture...and that we are authorized to command them...

- But that is not all that is involved in properly formulating an authoritative decision.
 - You must also...

B. Keep it pastoral

1. That means that you are to act as a shepherd...

- a. You are to consider what is in the best interests of those who are under your care.
 - Your purpose is not to grind them down with heavy responsibilities, but to lay upon them what is good for them.
 - We cannot change God's standards,
 - but a man can suddenly take a notion that he wants his family to fast and pray three times a week starting Monday.
 - His zeal is exemplary, but his wisdom is not so exemplary—
 - And the reason is because he has not considered where his family is and what they can bear.
 - A legal father is an adversarial father.
 - He is so full of regulations that those under his care soon end up exasperated and decide they might as well rebel because they constantly fail anyway.
 - It is true that wise pastors and fathers often have to stretch people in an encouraging way to do more than they are doing,
 - showing those under their care that they can do more than they think they can...
 - Many err in not expecting enough from those under their care.
- b. What matters most is that love that is truly looking out for the best interests of the sheep is there—
 - Not love for the standard—but love for the sheep...
 - Not love for ease—but love for the sheep and what is best for them.

2. The very language that James uses in presenting his recommendation to the council shows that he cares for the Gentiles...

- a. In verse 19, he says,

- **Acts 15:19: “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those among the Gentiles who are turning to God.”**
- He does not simply say, “The word does not require it,”
 - but rather, “I judge that we should not trouble them.”
- His conclusion is based on the word, but it is for the sheep.
 - He is thinking about the difficulty that would come to them if they were forced to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.
 - He is thinking about them as a loving pastor!
- This principle, of course, should not be applied in a compromising way...
 - For example, as in those church courts today that judge that fornication and sodomy are acceptable because it is hard for people to contain themselves...
 - That is not thinking of the best interests of the flock!
 - That is not pastoral love!
 - It is never in the best interests of the flock to tolerate what God clearly forbids.
 - That is like a shepherd who lets the sheep wander off into a pack of wolves because that is what they “kept wanting” to do...
 - and he just did not have the heart to keep saying no!
- b. Note well that James (and council which follows him) recognizes that the Gentiles do need to be restrained.
 - In verse 20, James adds:
 - **Acts 15:20: that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.**
 - There is a great deal of confusion about these requirements.
 - But I believe the best interpretation is the one that recognises that all four of these were matters that occurred at the feasts of the Gentiles.
 - In other words, this is not a check list, but a description of what characterised a pagan feast before idols—
 - It is a description that everyone would recognise—
 - *things polluted by idols* is better translated *the pollutions of idols*—the defilement that comes from contact with idol worship.
 - *sexual immorality*, was of course a regular part of the idol feasts...
 - *and things strangled and blood* refer to the manner in which idolatrous sacrifices were made...
 - The priests would strangle them so as to keep the air and blood in the carcass.

- James and the council are not imposing dietary regulations on the Gentiles—else pork and shrimp would have been mentioned.
 - They are rather forbidding the Gentile Christians to participate in the idolatrous feasts of their culture.
- Now from a distance, we may look at this and say,
 - “Well of course! Why would they need to be told *that*?”
 - But you need to understand that these idolatrous feast days were a regular part of Gentile culture!
 - It would be like not showing up to go to mass on Christmas Eve when that is what you had done since birth.
 - To not show up to the feast would be far more offensive than getting baptized and talking about Jesus!
 - Not showing up to the feasts is precisely what many of the Gentiles were martyred for by the Romans.
 - There was a tremendous pressure on the Gentiles to go to these feasts and that is why the Council deems it necessary to forbid it.
 - That is why Paul tells the Corinthians to flee from idolatry in I Cor 10:14.
 - And then in verse 21, he says,
 - **1 Cor 10:21: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons.**
 - He goes on to advice that there is no real harm in eating meat that had been offered to idols...
 - The problem is in participating in a feast to idols!
 - That is what the council is forbidding.
- c. My brothers and sisters, this is pastoral oversight at its best!
 - Not detached, not indifferent, not impersonal...
 - But engaged, full of love and concern, and personally involved.
 - Those who are in authority as fathers and elders are to keep watch over the souls of those under their care!
 - As Doug Wilson says of fathers,
 - Gracious fathers lead their sons through the minefield of sin.
 - Indulgent fathers watch their sons wander off into the minefield.
 - Legal fathers chase them there.
 - Gracious pastors who love those under their care is what we need.
 - That is the mind of Christ...
 - He did not throw out the moral law,
 - but He met its demands and now He sanctifies us so that we are enabled to conform to it.

TRANS> So in formulating decisions—yes—be biblical—by all means be biblical, but also be pastoral.

- And one more thing...

C. Endeavour to make as unifying a decision as possible

1. Consider all who are affected by the decision—

- You want do what will bring everyone together as much as possible, but without compromising what is biblical.

2. In the situation that was before the council, there were three parties involved...

- There were the Judaizers who were clearly in the wrong,
 - and there were the Gentiles who were being wrongly counselled by the Judaizers
 - and there were Paul and Barnabas who were ministering to the Gentiles.
- The counsel might have brought charges against the Judaizers, but they do not.
 - The hope is that by making the pronouncement they made, the Judaizers will be corrected.
 - No doubt, many of them were—but no doubt, many were not.
 - There are always those who go away from such meetings grumbling, even though they don't say anything at the time.

- Part of the reason, I believe, for making the prohibition about participating in idol feasts,

- was to encourage the Judaizers that the legitimate issues they had raised about the Gentiles were being addressed.
 - The council was not indifferent to their concerns.
- You can be sure that in arguing about the need for the Gentiles to be under the law of Moses,
 - the problem of Gentile idolatry would have been raised.
 - And the court says to the Judaizers...
 - You are right—that *is* a problem and we are quite prepared to address it—and they did.
 - Too often, when a party is wrong about part of what they are saying, no effort is made to receive what is legitimately raised.
 - There is a sense in which hearing their issues and acting on the legitimate ones was beneficial for the whole body.

3. The goal of the council was to be biblical, to be pastoral, but also be bringing the church together as much as possible.

- Unity should always be our desire.

- Sometimes, the way things are done, you almost get the impression that rather than trying to draw brothers together, courts are looking at ways to tear them apart!
- Our goal should always be to bring everyone together in the unity of Jesus Christ as our head...
 - That means that we do not reject what He says for the sake of unity as is so often done today...
 - but it also means that we avoid driving in unnecessary wedges between brothers in places where we can agree.
- Fathers, you need to be careful in settling disputes among your children to do all you can to try to draw in the ones who are in the wrong.
 - Your goal is not to walk away from a dispute with a winner and a loser,
 - but with reconciliation between brothers.
 - Don't lose sight of that in the heat of the moment!

TRANS> So there you have the elements of a well-formulated decision.

- But a well formulated decision can lose its effectiveness if it is poorly communicated.
 - So now I want you to consider the second lesson we are taught from the example of the council at Jerusalem...

II. How to deliver (communicate) an authoritative decision

A. First of all, we find that the decision is put in writing.

1. You see that the Council agrees to draw up a letter.
 - James has it in his original motion...
 - in verse 20, he says “that we write to them...”
 - And of course, that is what they did (v. 23)... they wrote to them...
 - and Luke has given us a copy of the letter.
 - This is a very good idea because it is often the case that after a meeting everyone starts to interpret the decision with his own slant on it.
 - This is not even always deliberate—though sometimes it is...
 - Detractors come along after the fact and put their own twist on it and in the end, nobody quite knows what was decided.
 - But by providing a written document, the Gentiles who were the most affected by the Council's decisions can always refer back to the letter if anyone comes along to trouble them about circumcision again.
2. Note as well the clear and careful wording that is used in the letter...
 - a. In the opening (v. 23), they identify themselves as the apostles and the elders and the brethren,
 - reminding them that this is the action of an official church court.

- They can receive it with confidence as from a duly constituted court of the church.
- b. They address it to “the brethren who are Gentiles” in the places where the issue had been raised.
- c. Their pastoral concern comes through in the letter:
 - They say (v. 24): **Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”**
 - They are writing to them out of pastoral concern and care for their souls.
 - You can imagine how the Judaizers may very well have treated the Gentiles when they had tried to force them to be circumcised.
- d. In verse 24, the Council also makes it clear that they never did send the Judaizers to command such a thing (v. 24)
 - **to whom we gave no such commandment**
- e. They communicate that they are of one mind and totally support the gospel of free grace that Paul and Barnabas have been preaching...
 - v. 25-27 says: **it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth.**
 - In the council’s opinion, Paul and Barnabas can be fully trusted.
- f. And then finally they give them a clearly worded statement of their decision and encourage them to comply with it for their own good...
 - **v. 28-29: For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.**

TRANS> If only church courts in our day would be so careful and so clear in their communications!

- So often when whatever was decided is looked at in years to come (or even in a year) it is very difficult to know that is really being said.
 - It is worth the time it takes to be clear.
- 3. Now of course I am not saying here that every time a decision is made by an authority, it should be written down!
 - I think that should be the case in church courts, but of course it does not always need to be done in the home.
 - But the principle is that fathers should be clear in their communications.
 - Don’t leave everyone wondering what you were getting at.
 - Take the time to think is through and to speak in language that everyone can understand.
 - And yes—in many cases, put it in writing.

- That will force you to think through what you are saying and it will also give you a record so that you and your family can look back at it...
- not to be used to berate them, but to be used to help them remember what was decided.
- Great ideas can be lost by forgetfulness.

TRANS> So the point is, just make sure that the decision is communicated in such a way that it can be both understood and remembered.

- Next...

B. Deliver it in person

1. The Council made use of a carefully-chosen commission to deliver the letter.
 - Judas and Silas were well respected and well known leaders of the church in Jerusalem—as it says in verse 22:
 - **leading men among the brethren.**
 - They sent them for a couple of reasons...
 - First, to confirm the report by word of mouth so that no one could say that Paul and Barnabas had forged the letter—
 - after all, it was their ministry that the Judaizers had objected to.
 - Judas and Silas were there as official witnesses from the assembly.
 - Second, they were there to present the letter.
 - This made it much more personal—again expressing the love and care of the church in Jerusalem for the Gentiles...
 - And these men would also be there to answer any questions.
 - It was just a very nice extra touch to have it delivered by them.
 - It was a lot of extra effort, but it was important!
2. Fathers, you need to think about how you communicate authoritative decisions to your family...
 - Suppose you are accustomed to going skiing all winter, but are forced to declare your decision that due financial pressures, there will be no ski trips this year.
 - It would be far better to communicate this in person rather than sending them an email from work.
 - Show them your disappointment, be there to talk to them, to comfort them, to explain it to them.
 - It can make a big difference *how* you communicate such things.
 - Don't just drop it on them in some cold impersonal way.

TRANS> And there is one more thing here that is involved in the proper communication of an authoritative decision...

- C. Deliver it in a way that shows that you expect it to be obeyed.
1. You see that in the letter they do not say,
 - “Now we have this suggestion for you, what do you think?”
 - But they rather say (v. 28)
 - **Acts 15:28: For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:**
 - Their language is clear...
 - They are *laying these things upon them!*
 - The Gentiles are not to participate in idolatrous feasts—period!
 2. We live in a time in which authority is generally looked on with disfavour.
 - This calls for wisdom...
 - On the one hand, church courts need to be sensitive to this and be careful about coming across as offensively authoritarian...
 - We need to work with people and understand that many have never had true shepherds to care for them—and they are afraid of authority.
 - But at the same time, courts need to be mindful of the fact that the people need to be taught to obey those who rule over them in the Lord.
 - This is not an option—it is the commandment of the Lord.
 - Hebrews 13:17 says:
 - **Heb 13:17: Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.**
 - It is a humbling thing, but the Lord has placed men in the church to represent Him who are to be obeyed.
 - This makes those who are in authority uncomfortable, and it also makes those under authority uncomfortable.
 - Those in authority do not want to have the authority and those under the authority don’t want to be under it.
 - There are many people I know who do not want to join a church because they do not want to have to answer to anyone.
 - But the problem is that the Lord Himself has established an earthly government by elders and that means that those who refuse this government refuse the government of Christ.
 - It is a real problem in our day!
 - So what is the best thing that true shepherds can do to help?
 - They must endeavour to be the kind of men who exhibit such wisdom and such care that those under their authority want to obey them.

- That is a tall order.
 - Grace is needed!
 - Pray for those who have this responsibility!
- 3. And yes, understand that we are all to submit to the church courts that God has placed over us—the session, the presbytery, and the synod.
 - And wives, you are to submit to your own husbands as unto the Lord...
 - And children, you are to submit to your parents in the Lord.
 - And fathers and husbands, that means that there are times when you must speak as one who expects to be obeyed!
 - This is especially so when you are speaking that which is clearly commanded by the Lord.
 - Yes, be gracious and pastoral and winsome in every way, but also speak with firm authority...
 - Not, “Will you do this?” but “This is what you are to do.”
 - But don’t misunderstand me here!
 - Most of the time it is better to lead others without commands.
 - For example, to approach our children and ask them to think about how they are behaving rather than commanding them how to behave.
 - The more mature they are, the more this can be done.
 - When they are little, they must learn to obey without complaining and arguing.
 - You should not have to say to your toddler, “do you want to wear your blue coat or your red coat?”
 - but he should respond to—“go and put your coat on.”
 - If you can’t do that, you need to work at it until you can.
 - But when they get older, you need to lead them into making responsible choices for themselves.

TRANS> So now we have seen how authoritative decisions are to be formulated and delivered.

- Now I want to show you...

III. How to receive an authoritative decision

- The Gentiles give us a very fine example here of how decisions from church courts are to be received...
- A. First, learn to actively look to your leaders for help.
 - As we have just seen, those whom God has placed over you are to be obeyed.
 - 1. The respect of the Gentiles is shown by the fact that when the question about circumcision arose,
 - *they* went to ask the church court to render a verdict.

- They respected the apostles and the elders of the whole church, and they wanted to refer the matter to them.
 - We saw this back in verse 2-3 when the controversy first broke out
 - **Acts 15:2: Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they [the church at Antioch] determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church...** and so on.
2. This is a great example—wives and children...
- Do you complain that your father does not lead you?
 - Then why don't you try going to him and asking him for help?
 - Church members, do you wish the elders gave you more attention?
 - They why don't you go to them and ask them to help you with whatever is troubling you?
 - This is one of the best ways to show respect to those the Lord has placed over you.

TRANS> But of course it is not enough just to ask for help...

B. It is also important that you welcome the counsel that they give you...

1. I suppose it was easy enough for them to receive the counsel that was given to them because it was what they wanted to hear...
 - but it is still exemplary that they rejoiced as soon as the decision of the court was declared to them...
 - Look at verse 31:
 - **31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.**
 - If they had been like some in our day, they would have felt that the church at Jerusalem had no business meddling with their affairs...
 - We live in a day when everyone wants to have his own church and to answer only to himself.
 - This has come about in part because of serious heresy that has brought division in the church.
 - We need to weep over this.
 - And we need to guard ourselves against a desire to form a separate denomination every time we have a disagreement.
 - The difference needs to be serious before we divide.
 - We are supposed to have larger church bodies speaking into our affairs, and we are supposed to receive their decisions with gladness whenever we can.
 - That is what the Gentiles did.
 - They were glad to be governed by the larger church.

- The decision of the court carried weight with them...
 - It freed them up from any doubt about whether the Judaizers were right in insisting that they be circumcised.
2. And remember as well that there was the admonition about abstaining from idolatry.
- That is something they might have grumbled about!
 - How will I tell Aunt Bernice and Uncle Gaius that I won't be at their daughter's wedding feast?
 - What will my mother do when I tell her I won't be attending the feast at the winter solstice this year with all my brothers and sisters?
 - But instead of resenting this command,
 - They were glad to be told!
 - They were glad to be given clear and certain direction from that was based on God's Word.
 - Now they need not trouble themselves about these matters—to go or not to go—they had clear instruction from the Lord.
 - Do you see the point?
 - Submission to those in authority frees you from the burden of having to make a decision.
 - Does your family want you to spend Christmas with them when it falls on the Lord's Day instead of going to worship?
 - Well, that is not an option for you.
 - Rejoice that you don't have to decide—just ask the elders and rejoice in what they tell you.
 - You probably don't need to ask them because you already know the answer—so just rejoice and submit.
 - God has spoken to you through them.
 - Be glad that He has not left you in the darkness.

C. And finally, you need to honour those who are in authority over you.

1. Honor them by gladly receiving ministry from them.
- I want you to notice the way the Gentiles showed honour to the commission that the council sent to them.
 - They did not ignore them or stick them off in a corner!
 - Judas and Silas had come all the way from Jerusalem for their encouragement—so they availed themselves of their ministry!
 - Look at verse 32:
 - **Acts 15:31: Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.**

- You see that their ministry was received because it says that they were strengthened by them with many words...
 - They were eager to receive the word from these men!
 - If they had been cold and indifferent, these men might have gone away without this ministry—
 - but they were excited to have them among them.
 - I know what a difference it makes to me as a minister when you are eager and engaged.
 - You literally draw forth the word from me as a minister of the word.
 - Children, are you bored at family worship?
 - Let me give you some good advice!
 - Become eager to receive the word—listen with interest to what your father is saying—ask him questions—try to understand how the word applies to you.
 - If he has been sluggish, see if that doesn't bring him to life!
 - God calls you to honour him and that is one way to do it.
2. Secondly, honour them by treating them as you would treat Christ if He were to come and minister to you (for they are His representatives.)
- Note that the Gentiles honoured Judas and Silas by providing for them.
 - **Acts 15:33: And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.**
 - Remember, the church at Jerusalem was in poverty.
 - Judas and Silas were not independently wealthy.
 - If they stayed there for a long time ministering among the churches, that means that the churches were taking good care of them—providing for them.
 - Also, when it says that they “sent them back” this probably indicates that they provided for their return journey.
 - And note also—they sent them back with greetings...
 - Again, a mark of courtesy and respect.
 - They did what John later commends in his third epistle:
 - **3 John 5-7: Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, ⁶ who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, ⁷ because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.”**
 - We need to remember that we are to treat others as we would treat Christ if He were to come among us.
 - We are to treat our brothers in a manner that is “worthy of God.”

- If we do, John says we will do well.
 - You will be blessed if you learn to live this way.
3. You see further that they treated Paul and Barnabas in a similar manner.
- **Acts 15:35: Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.**
 - Being hungry for the word, they were provided with the word from many excellent sources...
 - They honoured the Lord by honouring those He sent to them...
 - And so the Lord honoured them.

Conclusion

Praise the Lord for this fine example!

- Here was a church that knew how to receive ministry from the Lord through the authorities that He had established...
 - And here was a church court that knew how to minister!
- These blessings are already ours in Christ...
 - He is the head of all ministry and He will never fail us as we yearn for Him and look to Him to minister to us through His servants...
 - And He is also our representative in receiving ministry from the Father...
 - As our head, He has received every spiritual blessing for us and in him we have a share in all of God's bounty.
 - My brothers and sisters, we are heirs of righteousness and eternal life!
- In Him, you are the minister God calls you to be...
 - And in Him, you are the receiver that God calls you to be!
 - Thanks be to our Lord.