

“Built Up in the Truth”
(Acts 15:30-35)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw the early church striving to obtain unity.
 - a. The teaching of the Judaizers had upset the Gentile church: the believers were left wondering whether there was more to be done to be saved, whether the Jerusalem church held to a different teaching, whether there would be a split between the Jews and Gentiles.
 - b. But the issue was resolved: the Judaizers had their day in court, but lost; their position was refuted; and the Gospel was upheld.
2. The church now having become of one mind, and having greater clarity and conviction regarding the Gospel, a letter was composed to send to the Gentiles:
 - a. First they assured the Gentile churches that they had not sent these men:
 - (i) They didn't agree with them – the Gentiles didn't need to receive the Old Covenant sign of the covenant or observe the Ceremonial Laws.
 - (ii) Now that the New Covenant has been realized in Christ, the shadows had passed away and God's worship had become more spiritual.
 - (iii) Now to be faithful, they must only trust in Christ, turn from their sins and receive the New Covenant sign of baptism.
 - b. However, since they were living around Jews, they urged them to be sensitive:
 - (i) They needed to keep away from doing things that would offend, stumble or provoke them.
 - (ii) They were not to eat meat sacrificed to idols; blood, or meat with the blood still in it; and they were abstain from all uncleanness, including sexual uncleanness.
 - (iii) Of course they were to keep God's moral law – that law never changes.
 - (iv) But with regard to the Ceremonial Law, they needed to be careful that:
 - (a) They didn't unnecessarily stumble unbelieving Jews,
 - (b) Or offend their Jewish brethren.
3. Finally, we saw that they commissioned Paul and Barnabas, along with two other men, Judas and Silas, to deliver this letter to them and testify to its truth.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we see them fulfill this commission and return to Antioch:
 - a. When they arrived, they called everyone together and read the letter.
 - b. The believers received it and rejoiced in its encouragements.
 - c. And then Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Judas and others continued to work diligently to build the brethren up in the truth.

2. What we're going to focus on in our passage are two things:
 - a. First, the diligence on the part of these ministers to bring God's truth to His people.
 - b. Second, the eagerness on the part of the congregation to receive that truth.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, the diligence on the part of these ministers to bring God's truth to His people: "So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter" (v. 30).
 1. Notice that Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas all immediately submitted to the Jerusalem leadership and departed for Antioch.
 - a. When the apostles and elders sent them, they went.
 - (i) This says something of their willingness to submit to their brethren.
 - (ii) Paul himself was commissioned as an apostle by Jesus, but here he submitted to the brethren.
 - (iii) Peter too was an apostle, but had before submitted to these same brethren when they asked him about his going to the Gentiles (Acts 11).
 - (iv) Even though they were men of authority, they submitted to one another.
 - b. We need to remember what biblical submission is: not submitting to one another's opinions, but to the Lord as He reveals His will through others.
 - (i) These men wouldn't have submitted to anything wicked, even if it did come from those who held office in the church.
 - (ii) Luther wouldn't submit to the leaders in the church of his day when they told him that he must deny the Gospel and embrace the church's teaching.
 - (iii) But since the leaders at Jerusalem were sending them to confirm their brethren in the truth of the Gospel, they whole-heartedly agreed and went, eager to submit and serve.
 - (iv) This is what we should do as well in the work the Lord calls us to, whether in the church or in society – if we know it is His will, we should do it eagerly, zealously, diligently.
 - (v) Remember, the Lord "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14).
 - (vi) We can only do them zealously if we know they are His works.
 2. When they arrived, they further showed this diligence by immediately getting to the business of their commission.
 - a. The first thing they did was gather the believers together to read the letter (v. 31).
 - (i) To the Gentiles, so they would know where they stood with respect to circumcision and the Mosaic Law.
 - (ii) To the Jews, who were also interested in the outcome.
 - (iii) They wanted first to confirm them in the truth.
 - b. But they did more: Judas and Silas also ministered to them.
 - (i) These men didn't come just to testify to the truth of the outcome of the Council, they came to minister and do what they could to build up the saints.

- (ii) They were also prophets, gifted with the ability to explain and apply God's Word (v. 32).
- (iii) And so they used those gifts to build the brethren up in truth, first by preaching a lengthy message, then by staying there a while longer to strengthen them further.
- (iv) Paul and Barnabas also continued to teach and preach the Word of the Lord, along with many others (v. 35).
- (v) I hope we can all see from this the importance of God's Word to the early church.
 - (i) This was what Paul and Barnabas delivered to them.
 - (ii) This is what Judas and Silas testified to, as well as preached and taught.
 - (iii) This is what Paul and Barnabas continued to preach and teach along with many others.
 - (iv) The Word is necessary for our well-being, for our nourishment, for our growth in grace.
 - (v) It is a means of grace, without which our spirituality will be stunted.
 - (vi) Some churches today never seem open the Word in their worship services: they base their "devotionals" on other things, such as pop psychology or current events.
 - (vii) Very few ministers today read the Word or expound and apply it.
 - (viii) This is one of the reasons the church is so weak.
 - (ix) Another is that the Word is preached inaccurately, or accurately, but not heard: Many don't submit to it and do what it says.
 - (x) But hearing the Word and submission to it are both important to the church's spiritual health and well-being, which is why these gifted men diligently preached to and taught the flock at Antioch.
 - (xi) And so we see first the diligence of these ministers to bring God's Word to His people.

B. Second, the eagerness on the part of the congregation to receive that truth: "When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement" (v. 31).

- 1. These ministers were diligent to give, but the congregation was also eager to receive.
 - a. They received the letter these men brought.
 - (i) Not only because it came from the center of Christianity: Jerusalem.
 - (ii) Not only because it was commissioned by such noted leaders of the church.
 - (iii) But because it contained God's truth, which they rejoiced in because of its encouragement:
 - (a) Trusting in Christ was enough: they didn't need to keep the Ceremonial Law.
 - (b) There was nothing they had to add to their salvation: Christ had done it all.
 - (c) Now they could get down to the business of worshiping and serving Him.
 - (d) Now they didn't receive it just because it was encouraging:
 - (1) Sometimes God's Word doesn't seem encouraging because of the way we've been living.
 - (2) But understanding that there is always forgiveness and mercy for those who will repent, there is always encouragement in the Word.

- b. They also received the ministry of Judas and Silas.
 - (i) They accepted their testimony regarding the letter and the Council's decision.
 - (ii) They also received the lengthy sermons they preached and rejoiced in this encouragement as well.
 - (a) They knew it was for their good.
 - (b) They knew they needed it to be built up and established in Christ.
 - (c) The fact that Judas and Silas remained there for a while and then were sent away in peace also testifies to the fact the brethren appreciated their ministry.
- c. And even after this, they continued to receive the regular ministry of Paul and Barnabas, and their other ministers, as they were constantly building them up in the faith.

2. This reminds us of at least three things:

- a. First, that the Word is necessary to our growth in grace.
 - (i) As we've already seen and understand: the Word is our spiritual bread – not just the reading of the Word, but especially its preaching.
 - (ii) We often forget why the Lord appointed preaching in His church:
 - (a) Its content is to strengthen, encourage and confirm us in His Word.
 - (b) But it is to be preached with the authority of His commission to stir us up even more powerfully than merely reading it: Christ has commanded this.
 - (c) The Lord wants our hearts/affections moved by it.
- b. Second, this reminds us that the Lord's people will receive His Word when it is preached.
 - (i) Because it is God's Word: because He has commissioned His ministers to speak to us and expects us to listen.
 - (ii) And we will receive it even if it turns out to be a bit longer than we expect, or doesn't feel as encouraging as we might have expected, because we know everything it says to us is good and for our good.
 - (iii) Very often our hearts resist the Word because of our indwelling sin.
 - (iv) But knowing that the ministry of the Word is one of the ways that sin is weakened and killed, we will let the Word do its work.
- c. Finally, this reminds us that it takes a little while to become established in the truth.
 - (i) Our discipleship won't be completed overnight: in some respects it will take a lifetime.
 - (ii) But we will persevere by God's grace until we are established because of God's Spirit working in us.
 - (iii) It won't be quick, nor will it be easy, but God promises that He will finish that work so that we will be better equipped to serve Him.
 - (iv) May the Lord grant us hearts eagerly to receive His Word that we might be built up and established in His truth. Amen.