

And certain men came down from Judea (to the church in Antioch) and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." They were saying basically that in order to be saved, you had to become a Jew. And this was a very strong feeling in the early church. It was a stronger feeling among the Jews. The Jews felt that salvation was only for the Jews. They did not believe that a Gentile could be saved. If a Gentile wanted to be saved, he had to proselytize and become a Jew in order to be saved. In the process of proselytizing you had to submit to the rite of circumcision. You had to be baptized and you had to then obey the law of Moses. And they felt that was necessary in order to be saved. Now many of the Jews in Jerusalem were accepting Jesus Christ, but they still held to the belief that only Jews could be saved. And actually when Peter went to the Gentiles with the gospel, Peter was called on the carpet. They said, we heard that you went to the house of a Gentile and that you ate with them! And Peter had to say, well look, it wasn't my idea. The Lord gave me a vision. The Lord told me to go and I was just obedient to what the Lord told me to do.

But the walls were beginning to come down. Now many Gentiles are receiving Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas went on the first missionary journey. And they had tremendous success in seeing the conversion of many Gentiles. For the most part they received a lot of resistance from the Jews. And the Jews put up all kinds of difficulty for them. And so they said since you deem yourself unworthy of God's grace, we're going to go to the Gentiles. They ministered the gospel to the Gentiles and had tremendous success. Now the church in Antioch was basically a Gentile church. But there were the brethren who came from Jerusalem.

It's interesting that Paul writes about this very experience in the second chapter to the Galatians. You might want to turn there because it gives us some insight on this whole incident that isn't given to us in the Book of Acts. Paul says here in Galatians chapter two, *Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. [2] And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. [3] Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. [4] And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),* So Paul declares concerning these people that came from the church in Jerusalem that they came out to just sort of, out of curiosity to spy out the liberty that the Gentile believers had. And their purpose was to bring them into the bondage of the law.

But Paul said, *[5] to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. [6] But from those who seemed to be something--whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man* (He's talking about the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. You know that it's interesting how that so often in men that have been used by God sort of get elevated and lifted up. They begin to really think that they are something. But I love Paul, he says you know these guys seem to be something whatever I don't know. They didn't do anything for me.)-*for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. [7] But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter [8] (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), [9] and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars (I like that), perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. [10] They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.*

[11] Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; [12] for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. [13] And the rest of the Jews also played the

hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

And so Peter makes mention of this going up to Jerusalem to settle the issue that was creating a division within the church. The issue of what relationship the Gentile believers would have to the law of Moses. Or is it necessary to become a Jew in order to be saved? Is salvation through faith alone? Or are works necessary? Must you add works to your faith in order to be saved?

²*Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute (big argument) with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them (Titus we know) should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.* ³*So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.* So on their way they stopped by the different fellowships. It is interesting how the church was growing. There were fellowships there in Phoenicia. There were fellowships now throughout Samaria. And they stopped through the churches. They were just sharing the wonderful work of God among the Gentile believers. How that the Gentile world was receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁴*And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.* Now as Paul said to the Galatians, they had a private meeting with the leadership. With James and John and Peter, they had this private meeting and then they went into an open, public meeting to discuss the issues.

⁵*But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed (They had come to a belief in Jesus Christ.) rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."* So those who had the Pharisaic background were insisting the Gentile must adhere to the law of Moses and to the ritual. The ritual of circumcision.

⁶*Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.* ⁷*And when there had been much dispute, (a lot of argument over it) Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.*

⁸*So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us,* So Peter is recounting the fact and of course, it is recorded back in the tenth chapter, how that the Lord sent him to the Gentiles. That he was the instrument through which the door was opened to the Gentiles to receive the gospel. And we remember that as he was at the house of Cornelius, while he was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon them, when they believed the gospel that Peter preached. Paul later wrote to the Galatians and he said, receive you the Spirit by the hearing of faith, or by the works of the law. The obvious answer was that they had received the Spirit through the hearing of faith. They heard of this wonderful gift of God and they received by the faith the gift of God. Not by the works of the law. The Holy Spirit was not given to them because they had done certain works, because they had achieved a certain degree of holiness or righteousness. But it was just God's gift, bestowed upon them when they heard by faith and believed by faith the word that was preached.

So God, knowing the heart. Now here Peter declares the omniscience of God. He knows the heart of men. As David said in Psalm 139, Thou has searched me and Thou have known me. Thou knowest my downittings, my uprisings. You understand my thought afar off. That doesn't mean that God is way up in heaven and I'm way down here and from that distance He knows my thoughts. In the Greek language or in the Hebrew rather, it is, You know my thoughts in their origin. In other words, God knows my thoughts before I know them. He knows my thoughts before I ever think them. God knows what I'm going to think. And that's interesting to me how that God knows my thoughts from their origin. He knows my thoughts before I think them. Now, a little later in this same discussion, James is going to say, known unto Him are all things from the beginning. Interesting how that doctrine is woven right in to their common discussion. The doctrine of the omniscience of God. He knows the heart. But James goes one step further. God has known all things from the beginning. So the omniscience of God, brought out in these discussions.

⁹*and made no distinction between us and them,* (Peter declares that God has put no difference between us and them. That is us, Jews, and them, the Gentiles.) *purifying their hearts by faith.* Now the Jews were saved by faith. The Gentiles were saved by faith. The Jews were not saved by the works of the law. When you get into the Book of Romans, Paul spends a lot of time on this subject. How that we are justified through our faith in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law. For by the works of the law shall no flesh justified in His sight. And then Paul goes back even to Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, showing that Abraham was declared justified by God because of his faith. Abraham believed God. And God accounted it, that is his belief, God accounted it as righteousness.

Now Paul points out that that was declared before God ever spoke to Abraham about circumcision. He was declared righteous through his faith before this rite of circumcision was ever initiated. And before the law was ever given. So that justification is by faith apart from works of the law. And this is one of Paul's major themes as he preached the grace of God and justification through faith.

So Peter is acknowledging, God is purifying our hearts through faith and He is purifying their hearts through faith. He has put no difference between us. We all must come to Jesus Christ believing and trusting in Him for our salvation.

So Peter said, ¹⁰*Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?* Peter is very honest here. He is acknowledging that this law as it was being taught by the Pharisees was unbearable. Now it should be noted that Jesus was in continual dispute with the Pharisees over the issue of the law. For they were constantly accusing Jesus of violating their law. Now Jesus did not violate the law. He did violate the tradition that grew up around the law. They had developed a lot of traditions in their endeavor to interpret the law. Especially the law concerning the Sabbath Day, which declared that you are not to bear any burden on the Sabbath Day. So what constitutes bearing a burden? And so they started, you know, looking at everything. Is that bearing a burden? If you have a wooden leg, are you bearing a burden if you attach it to you on the Sabbath Day and you walk with your wooden leg? Does that constitute bearing a burden? If you have false teeth, if you put them in on the Sabbath Day, does that constitute a burden? They actually were discussing these very things. The discussions are right there in their Talmud. As they were seeking to determine what is bearing a burden. Now one of their conclusions was that healing on the Sabbath Day is a work. So that it was to them unlawful to heal anybody on the Sabbath Day.

If a person had a severe accident and they were bleeding to death. You could apply a tourniquet and stop the flow of blood, but you could not dress the wound. Nor could you put any ointment on the wound on the Sabbath Day because that would perhaps start the healing process. You could do what was necessary to save their life but you couldn't do anything towards the healing on the Sabbath Day. You had to wait for the next day to dress it and take care of it. Now Jesus was healing people on the Sabbath Day. And this is the issue that actually culminated in their determining that we are going to put Him to death. He is violating the law. He is healing on the Sabbath Day! And this constituted a real sharp criticism of Jesus by the Jews because he was violating their traditional interpretations of the law. Now Peter is talking about all of these sixty seven volumes of interpretations as they sought to interpret what God really meant when He said, you shall not. What does it constitute, you know, a violation or infraction against this law? So Peter said, look, why do we tempt God by putting on their neck a yoke of bondage? That is, trying to keep the whole ceremonial law. Why put it on them because neither we nor our fathers have been able to handle this? We haven't been able to bear it. It's been too heavy for us. Man seeking to be justified by his works and by the works of the law.

Now Paul later writes of an interesting paradox concerning the Gentiles. Who by their faith in Jesus Christ attained the righteousness of God because God imputes righteousness to those who believe not to those that work, but to those that believe, God imputes their faith for righteousness. Now he said what shall we say that the Gentiles have attained the righteousness of God? Why, because they sought it by faith, yet the Jews who sought it by the law never did attain it. Why? Because you cannot attain the righteousness of God through the law. By the law is the knowledge of sin. The law can only point a finger at you and declare your guilt. The law cannot absolve you from your guilt. It cannot save you from your guilt. It can only condemn you. But by faith in Jesus Christ we have attained the righteousness of God. And now in Christ there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus. This is the very issue that was splitting the early church. This is the issue that

still today is being faced by the church as there are so many who will add to the faith the necessity of doing certain works and they will put upon the people a yoke of bondage. And they will declare that it is necessary to submit to certain rituals in order to be saved. Rituals do not save. Ordinances do not save. You are saved by your faith in Jesus Christ. You are trusting in Him apart from works.

Now a genuine faith will lead to works. If I truly believe then my faith in Jesus and my submitting to Jesus as my Lord will bring an obedience in my heart unto Him and a desire to work for Him. A desire to serve Him. But it isn't of obligation nor is it to earn my salvation. It is because I am saved that I want to do things for the Lord. It is because I love Him that I desire to please Him. So I go far beyond the law as far as my service to God. If you are doing it by the law then you are just seeking to get by. What is the minimum I can do to get by? But when your motivation is love, then there is no looking at the time clock. There is no looking at how many hours in the week.

I have a little problem with the forty hour week concept with men in the ministry. Now if you are working for General Motors, that's fine. Punch out. But if you are serving the Lord, I don't think there is any such thing as well, it's five o'clock I don't take any more calls. Tell them to call tomorrow. No, no, there's no clocks. It's just when Christ, who is my life. You don't think in terms of eight hours per day or whatever. You just are there to serve the Lord whenever the call or whenever the need arises, regardless of how many hours you've already put in this week. I'm talking to the pastors that are on staff here, right now.

Peter went on to say, ¹¹*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.*" In other words, he acknowledged they were saved by faith and they were saved through the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And that's just how the Jews are saved. For there is no difference, Paul said, that is between the Jew and Gentile. All of us have sinned. All of us have come short of the glory of God and all of us must come to Jesus Christ believing in His atoning sacrifice for our sin, in order to be saved. God in His grace, recognizes our faith and trust in His Son and He imputes that faith for righteousness.

¹²*Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.* They shared their first missionary journey. And how God worked such wonderful miracles among the Gentile people. And how many of the Gentiles came to a faith in Jesus Christ.

¹³*And after they had become silent, James (who was the brother of Jesus and one of the early leaders in the church) answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴Simon (Simon or Simeon, the same name for Peter) has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.* Interesting phrase. God visited the Gentiles to take out a people for His name. There is an interesting Scripture in Luke where Jesus says that Jerusalem will be trodden under the foot of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. But then Paul in Romans eleven, speaks about the fullness of the Gentiles, coming in. In other words, God who knows all things and God who is sovereign in all things, had prophesied in the Scripture that the Gentiles were to receive the gospel. They were to be saved. But there seems to be a certain number, that God knowing all things, would know of Gentiles, who would believe. And blindness has happened to Israel in part until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Then God will deal with the Jewish race again. But this fullness of the Gentiles, an interesting phrase. Here you have the same idea. To visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And God today is still gathering from the Gentiles a people for His name. But I am personally convinced that we are almost to the full quota. That it is just about time that the fullness of the Gentiles is just about complete. That God will then take His church while He visits the world with judgment and as He deals with the Jewish nation for one more seven year cycle. And then Jesus will return with His church and will establish God's kingdom upon the earth. And our prayers will be answered, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Altar calls are always interesting to me. As I see people going forward, I often wonder is the last of the Gentiles being fulfilled at the altar call tonight? That is will we get through this entire altar call as the Gentiles are coming to Jesus Christ? Is the final complement accomplished tonight? One of the these nights it will be! It will be glorious. Billy Graham is going to have a great TV outreach. They anticipate that he will be speaking to more people, the gospel of Jesus Christ, tonight, than has ever happened in the history of Christianity. They

linked the whole world with satellite TV. The whole world. It sort of reminds you of the Scripture that says, and the gospel shall be preached to all nations and then the end comes. That's happening tonight. The gospel is being preached tonight to all nations. That's kind of exciting! In Revelation, chapter fourteen, John saw an angel flying through the midst of heaven, bearing the everlasting gospel. I wonder if John saw a satellite. Oh how wonderful it is that we are living in this age of technology where we can and tonight this message is being broadcast all over North America by our satellite from fifty thousand miles out there in space. It is sort of interesting to realize that this message is being transmitted to that satellite that is being beamed all over the United States. It's amazing! It's amazing! So God is taking out from among the Gentiles, a people for His name.

James says ¹⁵*And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:* ¹⁶*'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up;* (Now this is not yet complete. This is when Jesus comes again. The kingdom of God and as the descendants of David, the promised Messiah, He's going to set up God's kingdom. The tabernacle of David, which has fallen, and I build again the ruins. I will set it up); ¹⁷*So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'* So the gospel is to be brought to the Gentiles.

¹⁸*Known to God from eternity are all His works.* God in Isaiah sort of declared. I am God. There is no God like Me. I declare the end from the beginning. And to me one of the strongest apologetics as far as proving that the Bible is God's word is this prophetic aspect in the Bible. How God showed them things that are going to come long before they ever came. These marvelous prophecies in the Scriptures that proved just what James declared here. Known to God from eternity are all His works.

¹⁹*Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,* ²⁰*but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols,* James said, my suggestion is. Now he is not speaking as the *Pontifex Maximus*. He is not speaking as the authority of the church. He is suggesting now that this is the way they resolve this dispute and this problem that has risen in the church as far as what relationship the Gentile believers would have to the Mosaic Law. Is it necessary that they keep the ritual? But that we write to them that they abstain from the pollution of idols.

Now in those days most of the meat that the pagans ate they would take it to the temples of their gods and they would offer the sacrifices and a part of the meat was burnt on the altars to their gods. A part of it was kept by the priest and the rest of it they kept for themselves. But their meat had been offered to idols. Quite often the meat that you would buy in the market place, was meat that had been offered first to idols. And so the suggestion is that they should abstain from the pollution of idols. That is from eating meat that has been offered to idols. Now, the idea is the breaking down between this barrier or between Jew and Gentile in order that you might eat together. He is suggesting that they sort of keep a little bit of Kosher in their meat and in their preparation of their meat. That you thoroughly bleed the meat. That you keep from blood which again was a part of the Kosher killing of the animals. Thoroughly bleeding of it and so if you do this then the Jews can eat together with you. If you don't do this then there could be a problem if you're eating because of the Jew and his conscience about these things. So that you keep from blood. Now and things sacrificed to idols. Paul later writing to the Gentile church on this issue, said, when you buy meat at the butcher shop, don't ask the butcher if the meat was offered to an idol. Don't ask him. Just buy it. Take it home and eat it. But don't ask any questions. Because if you ask and he says, oh yes, then you know you might have trouble with your conscience when you eat it. When you are invited to eat dinner with friends, again for conscience sake don't ask them about the meat. Just eat what is set before you, asking no questions. So, it sort of, for conscience sake. So just don't ask, because it really doesn't make that much difference. But conscience can sometimes bother you so just eat what's set before you, asking no questions. And when you buy your meat at the market, don't ask if it has been sacrificed to idols.

So write to them that they should abstain from the pollution of idols and *from sexual immorality*, The Greeks said this was the only new virtue that Christianity brought into the world. You see, prior to Christianity

fornication was very common and accepted. But Christianity brought with it this faithfulness to the marriage vows and the prohibition of fornication.

So keep yourself from the pollution of idols, from fornication and *from things strangled, and from blood*. That is from things that are strangled. Kill it and let it bleed. Because when you strangle, of course, the blood stays in the meat. So keep yourself from things strangled, and from blood. That sort of covers the same thing.

²¹*For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*

²²*Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.* Now, had Paul and Barnabas come back and said well this is what they said, you know, we don't have to worry about it. We don't have to be circumcised and all that and we don't have to keep the law of Moses. There would have been those who said, oh, they didn't really say that. So they wisely sent some of the leaders from the church in Jerusalem to take the letter there. So that they couldn't accuse Paul of forging a letter or whatever. These men would go and verbally confirm what was written in the letter. The decision that they came to through prayer and seeking God.

²³*They wrote this letter by them:*

The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings. 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"--to whom we gave no such commandment--* ²⁵*it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,* ²⁶*men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ²⁷*We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth.* (They'll confirm to you that this is the decision that has been made.) ²⁸*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:* (Oh, here's the secret. Today every major denomination has its conventions. And we read in the paper the decisions that are being made annually. At the conventions and the issue of shall we ordain homosexuals and many of the major denominations are striving with this issue now. They get at the convention and they have these big arguments. They have splits. A hundred churches will pull out of the convention, you know. It seems like the conventions are bringing more dissension than unity. For really the purpose was to develop unity. This calling of the meeting in Jerusalem. But notice it seem good to the Holy Spirit and to us! Oh, would to God at these conventions that they would gather for prayer and seeking the mind of God. What is the Holy Spirit saying about the issues. These issues that are being debated. What is the mind of God on these issues? Oh, that from these conventions we could write and say, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us! That this is the mind of the Spirit. This is how the Spirit of God is leading us in these issues.

I believe that James as he is giving his suggestion, is exercising the gift of the word of wisdom. Because as the result, it unified the church rather than dividing the church. Oh, how we need the Holy Spirit to bring us the answers to the troubling situations that might arise within the church. The differences of opinions and ideas on these issues. Seeking the mind of the Lord. Seeking the wisdom of God. Seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit in these things makes such a big difference.

So it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater than these necessary things) ²⁹*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.

So no big long list of regulations and rules. But just the simple, basic things.

³⁰*So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter.* ³¹*When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.* (They rejoiced in the comfort of it. All right! Praise the Lord, you know. The issue is resolved.)

³²*Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.* So they stayed on for a while. Just preaching because they had the gift of prophecy. Sharing the word of God with the people. ³³*And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.* ³⁴*However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.* So Judas went back to Jerusalem, but Silas stayed on. ³⁵*Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.* Great church! A lot of good ministers in the church. A blessed church because they were being taught as well as being exhorted. Some days afterward because there was a gap of time between verse thirty-five and thirty-six. Indeterminate, we don't know how long it was. But between verse thirty-five, they went on for quite a while, just growing and serving the Lord. A great thing.

³⁶*Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."* Now Paul just had a wanderlust. He just you know, had been around long enough. Let's get out and get some action. Let's go back to the cities where we've preached. Let's find out how they are doing. No doubt, his heart was on these people. How are they doing after we have left them and all? How are things going? He really wanted to have a trip and go back and visit the brethren and see how they were doing.

³⁷*Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.* ³⁸*But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.* So Paul didn't want to take him again. It probably created quite a problem, getting him transportation and getting him home and all. He was homesick. So Paul said, no, I don't want to take him, you know. He left us the first time. He might get homesick again. We don't want to take him. Barnabas, he was the nephew of Barnabas, was sort of insisting that they take John Mark. Paul was insisting that didn't. And we read, ³⁹*Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.* I mean this was a heated thing. The contention was so great. They said, okay, you go your way and I'll go mine.

And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; ⁴⁰*but Paul chose Silas* (This is the brother that came down. He was one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem) *and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.* ⁴¹*And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.* Now we see an interesting thing in that here are two powerful church leaders, getting in an argument, so severe that they split company. How is it that men of God cannot agree? Is it possible that God wanted two missionary teams instead of one? Cover twice the territory so that God allowed the contention to arise? Because that was the net result of the contention. Barnabas took Mark and they headed off to Cypress. Paul then took Silas. They then headed off to Cilicia and on in of course, they went all the way over into Europe on this journey. But God now had two teams instead of one and thus the effect of it, the overall effect of it was good, as far as the church was concerned, because it broadened their whole missionary endeavor. Now it is interesting to note that when Paul is in the final year of his life, he is writing to Timothy. He is in prison in Rome, things are not looking good. He will soon be facing Nero. And Nero is determined to persecute the Christians. Paul realizes his departure is at hand. He writes to Timothy and he said, my departure is at hand. I've fought a good fight and I have finished the course. I have come to the end. And I have kept the faith. But then he said to Timothy, come quickly and bring Mark with you. Because he will be beneficial to the ministry. So where earlier Paul had this contention because of Mark, now he is calling for Mark to come because of his benefit that he would be to Paul. Also when Paul wrote to Philemon, as he speaks of those that are with him, bringing their greetings to Philemon, he also mentions Marcus as one who was there with him, sending his greeting. So the differences that did exist were ultimately patched up. God still had the two missionary teams instead of one. So God can sometimes use differences of opinion, disputes, He can use them to further the overall work of the gospel as was the case here.

Father, we thank You for the word of God and the excitement, Lord, of seeing the work of Your Holy Spirit. How we thank You for this model that You have given to us for the early church. A church sought Your wisdom and Your guidance to settle the issues that arose. And Lord we pray that we might ever be open and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. That this church will be constantly guided and directed by the Spirit of God. Lord, we thank You for what You have done. We marvel and we stand in awe of Your work. Lord, we thank You for what You are doing daily, day by day. Lord, help us to remain in that place where You will be in control and You can do the things you want to do. Help us, Lord, not to get in the way. To hinder the work that You are desiring to do. May we ever be open and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Continue Your work, Lord, in our midst. Thank You Father for these wonderful people. Thank You Lord for the hunger that You have put in their hearts for You and for Your Word. Thank You Lord for the privilege of being able to share with them Your truth. May we continue Lord to just grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.