Acts 15:25–35 — It Seemed Good to Us

The Common Judgment, Hazarded Lives, the Holy Spirit's Stamp, and the Burden That Was Not Too Great

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Scripture Reading: Acts 15:22–35

> *"It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
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> *"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well."*
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> *"Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation."*

Having Arrived at a Common Judgment

The King James has "being assembled with one accord," but J.N. Darby's marginal note corrects the impression: "become of one accord would look like previous disunion." The assembly was not previously in disunion; the force of the expression is that they had arrived at a common judgment. They had reasoned together, heard the testimony of Paul and Barnabas, heard James cite the word of God, and came to one mind about the matter. It was not majority rule; it was common judgment. The weight of this letter rested on that — the assembled brethren at Jerusalem had all arrived at the same mind, and what they were sending was not the opinion of some but the conclusion of all.

It is a sad thing that only a little while later, these same two — Paul and Barnabas — were not of common judgment about John Mark. Here they were agreed on a

great matter. Later they differed on a smaller one. Common judgment holds on some matters and breaks down on others. That is the way of things in this world. But when the Spirit of God is given his proper place and the word of God is faithfully brought to bear, common judgment can be arrived at even on difficult questions.

Men Who Have Given Up Their Lives

Verse 26 calls Barnabas and Paul “men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” But J.N. Darby’s translation exposes the real force: they had given up their lives. Not risk-taking in the sense of adventure or bravado — they had given their lives over to Christ. Hazard implies something may or may not happen; giving up one’s life is a settled transaction. Paul said, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. The cross, for him, was not a metaphor.

This does not mean every saint is called to the same outward form of service. The Lord has not called everyone to labor in the way Barnabas and Paul did. But he has called every saint to present his body a living sacrifice — that is universal. The body presented to God is not a body simultaneously at home in the world. First John 2 is plain: all that is in the world is not of the Father. The whole world lies in the wicked one. A saint taken out for the name of the Lord has no claim on the world’s resources for self-indulgence, even if he does not travel to Cyprus or Galatia. That is the principle behind what is said of Barnabas and Paul, even if the outward form differs.

It Seemed Good to the Holy Ghost and to Us

Verse 28 is not a public relations phrase. It is not window dressing, put there to lend religious weight to a human decision. The Holy Spirit, sent down at Pentecost and now present in the midst of the people of God, was truly there that day. It truly did seem good to him. His presence in the assembly is not a

convenient formula; it is a profound reality. Where two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, he is in their midst. The weight of that presence was behind this letter.

To invoke the Holy Spirit's name lightly, as a cover for decisions he would never sanction, is a serious thing. Much of Christendom has done exactly this — using the language of Spirit-guidance to authorize things utterly at odds with his mind. Here the manner, the process, and the outcome were all such that he could put his name to it. The facts were laid before the brethren, the word of God was brought to bear, a judgment was expressed, and common mind was reached. That is the kind of assembly process that invites his stamp.

No Greater Burden: Principles That Transcend the Law

Verse 29 is not a comprehensive summary of Christian life. It is addressed to the specific question before the assembly: what is binding on Gentile believers in relation to the law of Moses? Four things are named: abstaining from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from fornication. These are not arbitrary selections from the Mosaic code. They are principles that transcend the law entirely.

Idolatry is the displacement of God himself — something forbidden from the very beginning. Blood belongs to God; life belongs to him and is not man's to dispose of. Fornication violates the sanctity of marriage, which God established in Eden before any law was given. These go back to first principles. The law addressed them, but they were not binding on Gentiles merely because the law said so — they were binding because of what they are in themselves before God.

The wording of verse 29 is deliberately gentle: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Not: if ye do not keep yourselves, ye shall lose your salvation. The positive is stated. The tone is that of elder brothers writing to younger brethren, not of lawgivers issuing commands to subjects. Yet the content is from

the Holy Spirit and therefore has the full authority of God behind it. The gentleness of the wording does not diminish that authority; it expresses the spirit in which it was communicated.

The Consolation: Joy at the Letter's Reception

When the multitude at Antioch heard the letter read, they rejoiced for the consolation. The word consolation implies there had been distress, a weight of uncertainty and anxiety about a serious matter. The question of circumcision and the law was not a trivial one — it went to the heart of their standing before God. To have it resolved, clearly and lovingly, with the full weight of the Jerusalem assembly and the stamp of the Holy Spirit behind it, was a genuine relief. The letter itself was the consolation. There was no separate "consolatory" section; the whole thing, and the manner in which it was presented, was the comfort.

Judas and Silas came as the living voice to accompany the written word. Two witnesses, as was appropriate. They exhorted the brethren with many words and confirmed them. The written voice and the living voice together, united in testimony, carried the weight of the whole assembly from which they came. It was not possible to gainsay it. On the sending end and on the receiving end, there was no twisting, no turning, no room for doubt.

It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us. From which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.