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### The Triumph of Grace in the Jerusalem Conference and The Sharp Disagreement of Two Great Men

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THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE IN THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE  
and  
THE SHARP DISAGREEMENT OF TWO GREAT MEN

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 64  
ACTS 15:30-41

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ACTS 15:30-41 "So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."

Paul and Barnabas were the two men who were responsible for the church getting a good start. They built the church on the principle of grace. Under grace God does the work and God gets the credit. Under legalism man does the work and man gets the credit. So Paul and Barnabas were the apostles of grace. Paul, Barnabas, and Simon Peter were the three great men in these first fifteen chapters of the Book of the Acts. But in this study we will see the Great Apostle Paul fail in the application of the principle of grace as he began the second missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas will fall into a hot argument over John Mark. Barnabas was right and Paul was wrong. But in spite of Paul's failure at this point he became the greatest grace man in all the earth. In Acts 21 we will see Paul make another tragic mistake when he took a vow in the Temple in Jerusalem which was contrary to every grace principle. For that failure Paul will be thrown in jail and will spend four years behind bars and in some ways he will delay the plan of God in his life. So let us take heart when we remember that the greatest believer who ever lived had weak spots and sometimes failed. Let us remember that the continuous application of grace in the life, and the power of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

In verses 30 through 35 we are going to see the triumph of grace in preaching. The Jerusalem Conference had come to an end and this conference had established grace as the operating principle of the church. This made it possible for the church to get started in the world on the right foundation. These men went back to Antioch, called a meeting of the church and delivered to them the findings of the conference.

ACTS 15:31 "Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation." This means they publically read the findings of the conference and explained the meaning of them. The Antioch church members rejoiced as this great report was presented.

ACTS 15:32-35 "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also."

These visiting church members from Jerusalem tarried a while in Antioch and preached. They preached the grace of God. Now some people don't like grace preaching. They want to hear exciting preaching about the evils of bubble gum and wild women. Some people have given these things up in the energy of the flesh so they like to hear trash like this and they call it preaching. You see, when people make moral advances in the energy of the flesh and have attained a fine moral life and have come to believe that morality is spirituality, they want to hear morality type messages. To this kind of preaching they can give their loud "Amens" and have a wonderful opinion of themselves. It doesn't take any brains to do this kind of preaching. All you have to do is have a big voice and know how to shout in the right place. Most legalistic preaching brings many loud "Amens". Many people living a good, moral, legalistic life and pompous and proud and are not filled with the spirit at all. Remember, the Christian way of life is on the inside of us. But today we have so many morality lectures and sincerity leaders--all done in the energy of the flesh. You see, man by man's effort can improve the environment, and if he can just improve it enough, they argue, then Jesus will want to come back and establish his kingdom. This is a sort of leftover from those who a few generations ago were the people called post millennialists. Judas and Silas, the two men from Jerusalem, explained to the Antioch church members the findings of the Jerusalem Conference. The word "prophet" here means men who speak for God. The unique prophet of the Old Testament was Moses. He was the writer of the Law. Prophets were men who had the gift and office of prophecy. Both the Major and Minor Prophets had the gift and office of prophets. In the New Testament the unique prophet was Jesus Christ. Also the Apostles had both the gift and office of prophets and they wrote most of the books of the New Testament. Here are two men from Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, not apostles, who had the gift of apostles. So we meet these two great men, preaching to the saints here in the beautiful city of Antioch. "Exhort" means to encourage. In other words, they taught grace and applied it. So these preachers brought stability to the saints in Antioch. So when their preaching mission was over, they went back to Jerusalem in great happiness and assurance. Verse 34 is not in the original and we will not deal with it here.

ACTS 15:35 "Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also." So Paul and Barnabas took up their work again. Please notice that "teaching and preaching" were joined together here. So many people separate these two things. Many believe that preaching is shouting, using emotion and great excitement. This many people call preaching, whether the preacher says anything or not. Then many think that teaching is something stale and dry and not too interesting. The Greek language here says, "Teaching even preaching". Biblically there is no difference in teaching and preaching. Preaching and teaching are joined together and they go together. Preaching that doesn't teach the people something isn't worth anything. The Pastor is a teacher-preacher. Preaching means to communicate well. So Paul and Barnabas taught and preached, preached and taught, and communicated grace to the church members.

ACTS 15:36 "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." Paul was always anxious to be on the move. So he proposed to Barnabas that they have another missionary tour. The latter phrase is incorrectly translated and instead of "see how they do", the Greek says, "see how they have it". In other words, Paul didn't want to see what they were doing, but he wanted to see what they knew. He wanted to see how much doctrine they knew. Paul wanted to find out if these young Christians had caught on to true doctrine. It is more important to know than to do without knowing. When you know doctrine, then your doing will be pleasing to God. When you know true doctrine, then you perform properly. Young Christians need to know Bible doctrine more than they need anything else. Paul knew that knowing Bible doctrine was more important than anything else in the church. What young people need is what old people need. All need Bible doctrine above everything else.

The purpose of the local church is to propagate doctrine. Churches are falling apart today because they have a program but little doctrine. When young people go off to college, what are they going to rely on? The answer--doctrine from the Word of God which they received in the church. When pressure times come to all of us, we fall back on the Word of God we have stored away in our minds.

So Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go again and inspect and see how they have it in their minds".

ACTS 15:37 "And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark." Please notice that it says Barnabas was "determined". So we have two strong men here teamed up together. There are two words in Greek that are translated "determined". One is "Thelo" and this means the determination built on emotion. The other word is "Bulomai" and means determination built on volition and mentality. Barnabas was determined to take John Mark along because he knew it was the will of God and it was right. His mentality was filled with grace, and he had come to this decision in the proper way. Now John Mark had deserted them on the first missionary tour and was afraid of the robbers in Pamphylia. He ran home to mama in Jerusalem and the church members there had razed him about being a quitter. But he rebounded and repented and his Uncle Barnabas knew that he should be forgiven and would prove that he could make good. Barnabas had recovered from his legalistic defection as described in Galatians 2:13 and Barnabas knew what grace really meant. So here are two great men having it out. John Mark had been saved in Jerusalem, evidently under the ministry of Simon Peter. His mother was evidently quite wealthy, and the first church met in her home. According to Colossians 4:10 she was the sister of Barnabas, so Barnabas was the uncle of John Mark. Some had wanted Mark to study for the priesthood but in order to be a priest, one had to have a complete body. Not wishing to go in that direction, John Mark had cut off part of his little finger and this became his nickname. This is the young man who had deserted them on the first journey, now Uncle Barnabas wanted to take him along. But Paul would have none of it and would not think of taking him along. Now let me state here that Paul was wrong. Paul later on will repent of this wrong and in Colossians 4:10 and 2 Timothy 4:11 he will admit that he made a mistake at this point.

ACTS 15:38 "But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." I call this the legalistic lapse of Paul. The word used for "thought it not good" shows that Paul was not thinking conclusively.

ACTS 15:39 "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus" The Greek word for "Contention" is "Parazoumos" and means one big eye to eye, shouting, bitter disagreement. It was just about as bitter a division as men could have. It was a shouting confrontation.

But in spite of this bitter confrontation there are several interesting, triumphant things here. For one thing, Barnabas clung to grace and did the right thing. In the second place, the church stayed out of the argument and sent Paul off with another missionary partner and a great controversy was bypassed. Barnabas, by taking John Mark along, saved the church one of her great leaders. It was indeed the triumph of grace. John Mark would become a great leader in Northern Africa and would win many to Christ. He also would become the author of the Gospel of Mark. Now Barnabas was keen enough to see this potential in this young man and he stuck by his guns. So let's get this point clear in our minds. What right do we have to judge others? God knows all the facts so let's leave judgment to him. People are forgiven by God and are disciplined by God. God has both the prerogative of forgiveness and punishment and it doesn't belong to us.

ACTS 15:40 "And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." So Paul chose Silas and please notice something--the church delivered them over to the grace of God. The word "Being recommended" really means to be delivered over to. This was a great triumph for this church. They didn't take sides in this argument. A divided church with groups taking sides is one of the most terrible spectacles one can ever behold. Telephones begin to ring and the people split right down the middle. But the Antioch church was a church of doctrine and a church of grace and they stayed out of the fight. The next time someone tries to cause a division in the church of which you are a member, please remember this incident. Stay out of differences and live by grace and doctrine. So this great church in Antioch delivered both of these missionary teams over to the grace of God. They put the matter in the Lord's hands and rested on the grace of God. Their personal differences didn't split the church. Though Barnabas was right and Paul was wrong, the church didn't take sides. In time God would straighten it all out. This is a fantastic triumph of grace. Mature believers mind their own business, they respect the privacy of others, and live by grace and leave judgment unto God. The Antioch church stayed strong and the great missionary work moved on.