



Guarding the Gospel – Part 3

Unified by the Truth

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, it was about a month ago now that we had our first ever National Equipped Conference in Boise, Idaho, in downtown Boise to be specific, 850 North Front Street to be specific, in the East Pavilion of the Convention Center in room 400, which is deemed the main ballroom there. We started promptly at 7:00 on Friday night and everyone came in. We filled up their room there and everyone was sitting in their seats facing the front. We had worship. Joseph led it and we had lyrics on the screen and everyone was singing off the same page, singing the same songs, singing the same notes, most of them, singing in the same key, same meter. It was one of those moments that you feel like is recreated every time we have a service here.

But it struck me at that conference of how different that one was in particular, because it was so far from here. And yet we had a contingent of people from Aliso Viejo, from Huntington Beach, from Tustin, from New Braunfels, Texas. We had people, of course, from Meridian and from all over Boise. But because we put the word out a little bit broader, we had people from Nebraska, from Georgia, from Florida, from North Carolina. We had people from Kalispell, Montana, from Washington State. We had people from all over the place. And as they were sitting there singing, it dawned on me that the idea of having this conference in downtown Boise in one particular room is just such an amazing feat physically, to have everybody get there from all different places.

And I know that it's not that weird to you, but it's weird to me when I think about how many things had to happen to get everyone in that room singing at the same time, the same lyrics, the same song. It was just amazing. They came on a whole bunch of different planes. They flew from different airports. They had connecting flights in different cities. Some didn't even fly. They drove there. Those who did fly had to get to the airport. Some got dropped off by relatives, some parked in the long-term parking, you know, some Uber'ed there. And they all had to get to this place. They got in their hotels, they went down to this conference center, it was on the fourth floor. Some took the elevator, some took the escalator, some walked the stairs. Some came through the north entrance. Some came through the west entrance. They came from all over and all different places. And yet they settled down in their seats and all sang a bunch of songs at the same time.

And I thought, well, that's just, it's a weird thing, right? Of all the things that had to happen to make that physically possible, I mean, all the decisions of not going here and not going there and getting here on time and making sure that you don't do that and you go over here to this. It just was kind of weird that all of that happens and what you have to say no to make that.

The reason I thought about that this week when I was studying Acts Chapter 15 is because this is all about doctrinal unity. And like they were physically in unison at one place from all different corners of the country, I thought to myself, here are a bunch of people in Jerusalem getting on the same page doctrinally, which of course is a virtue in the Church that we are unified in the faith. That's an important priority of God for us and to think of what that takes to



make that happen. That we are going to have our own imaginations, our own thoughts, our own conceptions, our own ideas. And to say no to this one, say no to that one, say no to this one, say no to that one, and get to a place where we all are affirming the same doctrinal statements that we believe theologically this is the truth. We affirm this, we state it, we stand on it. And what you say is what I say and what she says is what she says and all of that to say we are getting to a place in our minds of all coming to read off the same page, to say the same thing.

And even as I say it and describe it that way, to intellectually get on the same page, that's just not a value in our culture today, have you noticed that? I mean, even unity becomes like a bad word. Like I can't like express myself. I can't think for myself. I can't step out of line. There's all of this concern about, you know, losing my autonomy and my expression of what I want to think and what I want to do. Particularly when it comes to Christianity, when it comes to religion in general, when it comes to our conceptions of God. And that's exactly what God would have us do. And we see it playing out before our eyes in Acts Chapter 15. And God is giving a thumbs up to this, that this is the way it ought to be. That Christians who name the name of Christ ought to all agree about biblical doctrine. So important.

I want to have you look at this passage with me in Acts 15, remembering this, that unity is a lot harder than you think, and yet it's more important than you might ever imagine. Right? People went to Boise to do that conference. To have that experience of teaching and worship and fellowship from all parts of the country because they deemed that it was important. They said no to a lot of other things to make sure they all got there and got on the same page at the same time. And intellectually, theologically, in terms of my mind, my intellect, and what I affirm about God, it's the same thing. It's a very hard thing to do to have us agree about theological concepts. It's harder than you think, and yet it is far more valuable than you think. As a matter of fact, it becomes essential for us who claim to know the mind of God about X, Y, or Z, which is exactly what's taking place here in this passage.

Now, if you've been with us, we've been in this text for three weeks. This is the third week we get to the place where they've already reached their conclusion about the question on the table. And the question on the table was, there are people out there from Jerusalem who are saying if you're going to become a Christian and follow the Jewish messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, well, then you better subject yourself to the Levitical laws, the ceremonial laws of Moses. You better do it, starting with circumcision and dietary restrictions and special days and festivals and feast days and all that. You ought to do all of those ceremonial rules. They had to come together to address this. You got people saying this and people saying that. They're saying different things. Well, let's get on the same page here doctrinally. And that's what needed to happen.

And they were done with the conclusion and now they're going to disseminate that. They're going to propagate the decision here that had been reached after studying Amos 9 and several other passages and all the ways that God had affirmed that what was happening through James and what was happening through Peter, what was happening through Paul and Barnabas, all of that was God's work and that we should think in those terms that this is



right and if anyone saying something different, well then they're wrong. Again you can see why that's not a popular way to even talk in these days. Everyone wants to be respected as being right, no matter what they might say.

So let's look at the conclusion here in verse 22, we're going to read verses 22 through 29 and try and understand how they responded in a letter that they sent out and what we can learn about the difficulty of doctrinal unity and yet the importance that makes it essential and worth the work. Acts Chapter 15 beginning in verse 22, "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church." Now remember, they're in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Council. They gathered from all different places to come here together and they said, we've decided it is a good thing here, it's the right thing, the whole church agreed and affirmed it, "to choose men from among them," this church in Jerusalem, "and to send them to Antioch," of Syria, remember that's about 275 miles north, "with Paul and Barnabas." That's where they were ministering. They'd been there for a long time as leaders in the church, they've gone out on the missionary journey. They'd come back to it and now they're going to go back to Jerusalem and we're going to have some key people go with them.

And so "They sent," bottom of verse 22, "Judas called Barsabbas," not Judas Iscariot. Right? He died. We learned about that in Chapter 1. It's not a very popular name in the nursery today, but back then it was a very popular name, and that's probably why they had nicknames. They didn't want to call him Judas anymore. They called him Barsabbas. So "Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas." Well, there's a name we can learn more about in the book of Acts. And you know that name if you know the Bible. And who were they? "They were leading men among the brothers." These are important people. They stood above the others in some way. We'll look at that later. And they sent them "with the following letter."

And here's the letter. Kind of the shortest New Testament epistle. Here it is. Ready? "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders." Like all ancient communication, it starts with the signature line up top. We always sign our letters at the bottom. They sign their letters at the top. And they said, okay, who's it from? "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders." Who is it to? "To the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria," that's the surrounding version. We call it Syrian Antioch as opposed to Pisidian Antioch where they went off on their missionary journey to, "and Cilicia," that's the area there in Asia Minor which is modern-day Turkey, where they went on the missionary journey and they said "greetings." That's the basic nomenclature of the early letters and epistles of the first century period.

And here's the message, "Since we heard that some persons have gone out from us," they said they're from Jerusalem, they said they're from the church of Jerusalem, "and they troubled you with words, unsettling your minds." That doesn't look like unity. That looks like we don't know what to think here. Right? Some people think this. Some people think that. "Although we gave them no instruction," we did not tell them to bring a different message to you. Clearly we didn't. "It seemed good to us," verse 25, "It seemed good to us, having come to one accord." So now we've all met together. All the leaders have come together. We've looked at Scripture. We've discussed what God has been doing here in the early Church, "to



choose men and to send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have sent therefore Judas and Silas," Barsabbas and Silas, "who themselves will tell you the same things by the word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements. And then here's the list repeated again. A little different order, same four things. What do you do? "Abstain from things that have been sacrificed to idols" That's normally how they bought their meat in a Greco-Roman society, in a place where you had people sacrificing and dedicating that meat to idols. You need to abstain from that. If that's been done, don't eat it. "And from blood," that was the concern of Leviticus 17 and Leviticus 18. "And from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality."

And as we said last time, that's not sexual immorality with a capital "I," the kind of immoral thing that takes place in any situation across time, from the beginning to the end of the Bible. We're talking about those relational connections, those marriage connections that were described there in Leviticus 17 and 18 regarding who you could marry and who you couldn't marry. There are some things there that are universally immoral, but here are the things that had the kind of concern of grating against the conscience and the propensities in the mind and the conditioning and the cultural conditioning of the Jewish people who were Christians. Listen, don't marry your first cousin in this situation. It's not good, because they're going to look at Leviticus. They're going to stumble over that. Just like meat sacrificed to idols, just like strangled animals or things that still have blood in it. Don't do that. Okay?

So, that we learned last time was a ceremonial respect for those who had not had the kind of conditioning that you might have as a Gentile and you're going to create conflict that's unnecessary. But that's not about salvation. The real question on the table about salvation was do I have to keep the ceremonial laws to be saved, do I have to be circumcised? And the answer, of course, was no. "No greater burden than these." These are the kinds of things that you do to create peace in the Church. "If you keep yourselves from these," Gentiles throughout Cilicia and Syria, "you'll do well. Farewell." Okay.

Now, we looked at why that was something that by the end of the New Testament had changed because the conditioning, after decades in the Church of these former leaders, the pharisaical believers, and that wasn't a bad term. That meant they just went to seminary. They were well trained in the Torah and in the law, and they'd committed Leviticus to memory. That was the leadership of so many of the early churches. And they said as that started to be replaced throughout the early Church, well then these things became less of an issue. And we see the transition certainly in the book of Romans Chapter 14 and the book of First Corinthians and we see this changing. But the point is the sensitivities, as we see even in Romans Chapter 14, listen, don't unnecessarily offend your brother. If you're going to really mess your brother's conscience up, it would be better for me never to eat meat again. And so that's what we're dealing with here.

But the question of what is the gospel? Does it require adherence and submission to the ceremonial laws of Moses? The answer was no. So they were clarifying. Now that's not what



the Pharisees who had gone out, the believing Pharisees from Jerusalem, to say to people up there in Cilicia and in Syria. But that's what we're clarifying. So what they've told you and how they've unsettled your mind, we're going to separate that from the truth. We've come here to reaffirm the truth and to assert the truth. Now we want you to know that this is the truth and we want you to agree with the truth. And so we've all come to one accord in Jerusalem. We want you now to be all in one accord.

This whole sermon is about doctrinal unity. It's about theological consistency between you and me. And the key in this is really found in verse 28. And that's why and I know the order of your Bibles is different than the order of the outline, but sometimes we need to go to the heart of the issue to kind of set the table for everything else in the passage. So let's rush to verse 28 and let's get our first point here this morning to say, okay, what is the key in all of this? And I think this is required in our generation more than ever, that we deal with the basic logic of this verse. And I'm going to read it in a way that sounds very elementary, that sounds very like why is he making the point the way he's making it? But I think you'll see this is critical that we think this way about what's being said in verse 28 and then everything else will fall into place. Okay?

Verse 28. Let's read it. "For it has seemed good," this is the middle of the letter from these leaders. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit." Let's just pause there. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit. Whoa! Right? Well, if it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, I mean the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the eternal omniscient one or the omnipotent, well if it seemed good to him, well, then the rest of the sentence makes sense, "and to us." Right? Okay, well, what matters there? What matters is if it's good to the Holy Spirit, because that's the real question. If the question is how do you get saved? You have to have your proselytes or your converts who become proselytes and get circumcised and eat kosher, the real question is what is the Holy Spirit think? Because whatever the Holy Spirit thinks, if he thinks this is good or this is bad, well, then we're going to do what he says.

And even in sending this letter out, this is the point, we're going to say, hey, the cultural sensitivities, the implications of the truth and how we ought to deal with our brothers and love them in a way that doesn't offend them. This is the whole point is agreeing with the Holy Spirit. We've come to one accord and if you don't think that that necessarily implies in the preceding verses that the whole point of doing that and thinking it's proper is because it accords with what the Spirit thinks. Are you following me on this? If the Spirit thinks it well then we should think it too. And if the whole point of this letter and the whole point of this sermon is you and I being in doctrinal conformity and you and I being unified in our theology, well, then I guess the key to it, as elementary as it sounds, is the first point that I've laid out for you on your worksheet.

Let's write it down. Number one, you ought to "Commit Yourself to Agree with God." Duh, right? I mean, yeah. No, that's it. Commit yourself to agree with God. Okay. It's as simple as that and as difficult as that. Commit yourself to agree with God. In saying that I've said something though it sounds very elementary that is really profound in our generation because



in our generation we just don't think this way anymore. To them, it made perfect sense and I'm so glad it was stated this way. If it seemed good to the Holy Spirit then it seemed good to us. Right? If the Spirit says X, Y or Z, well, then I should say X, Y or Z. And here's the thing about unity. If you agree with the Spirit and I agree with the Spirit, then guess what? We're going to agree with each other.

So to be doctrinally on the same page is basically to discover what it is that the Holy Spirit thinks and of course, the Holy Spirit happens to be in sync with the Father and the Son. The Triune God is in perfect harmony and fellowship in agreement. They think the same things. They are the triunity of the eternal, omniscient, sovereign, all-powerful God. And whatever he thinks well, then I ought to think it because he knows everything, right? So he is the truth. Matter of fact, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth. And I'd sure like to know what he thinks. If I can know what he thinks and you can know what he thinks, well, then guess what? We'll be on the same page no matter what topic we're talking about, no matter what we're dealing with. And so that's important.

And let's break this down into three categories. The first thing you need to know, like letter "A," if you're taking notes on this, the idea is if I know that my job is to agree with the Spirit and if you agree with the Spirit, I agree with the Spirit, everyone in your small group agrees with the Holy Spirit, then we're all going to be unified. We're all going to have doctrinal harmony and unity together. If that's the case, then I need to know this. That truth is something external to me. If you're taking notes, that's the thing you ought to jot down. Truth is external to me. Let's just think about that before we just personify or objectify truth, let's think about what the word means. Right? Pilate asked the question, "What is truth?" It's a good question. But truth is a way to describe, follow me now, truth is a way to describe something, I'm making an assertion, a propositional statement, a statement that says this is this. Right? This is that.

That statement is an assertion about something that we're claiming agrees with reality. That there's something that's out there that this statement is describing and those two correspond to each other. Right? Simple. Let's just start at the beginning. Is there a God or is there not a God? There's a statement. If you say, "Yes, there is a God," and your neighbor says, "No, there is no God," he's an atheist. Right? You're saying things that are logically incompatible. The question is, objectively, is there a God? If there is a God then the person who says there's a God is saying a statement that corresponds with reality because there is a God. Or if your neighbor is right and there is no God and he says there is no God, and you're believing there is a God, well, then those two are incompatible statements. Which one corresponds to external reality? Which one corresponds to something outside of either one of you? Because you can affirm one thing, your neighbor can affirm something else. But the real question is which one of you is saying and asserting something that is actually harmonious with reality?

This is what we call, not to get too philosophical, an epistemology, right? Knowledge. We call this the Correspondence Theory of Truth. We're saying that truth is not something subjective. We're saying truth is an assertion about something that corresponds with reality. Right? Did you eat a burrito for lunch yesterday? If those words can be understood as an assertion that



you and I can understand what that means, then what we want to know is if we could go back in time and ask the question, did you actually eat a burrito? Well, then we would have a statement that corresponds with something that actually happened, something that's real. And that's what truth is. A truth is a descriptive word that describes assertions that correspond with reality.

So was Jesus the Son of God? Was he all God and all man? Did he die on a cross? Was there an exchange of your sin for his righteousness on that cross? Did he rise from the dead bodily three days later? You can see these are all assertions. And as so many others have said, we need to make sure that when we talk about Christian truth claims, that we know that those truth claims are in the category of every other truth claim that we make that corresponds with reality. And today, that's not the way we think. Right? Your neighbor wants to say, "Well, I don't believe in God." I know my neighbor here he's got this new church sticker on his car. And I know he believes in God. I don't believe in God." And then you can sit around and say over your barbecue in the cul-de-sac this weekend, "Well, you know what? That's your truth. And that's my truth."

If you say your truth and my truth, we start adding pronouns, possessive pronouns to the word truth, then really, we've lost all meaning to the word truth. We certainly don't have a correspondence view of truth. We don't believe that truth corresponds with reality. We're just basically saying, "What's your opinion?" And now we've said, because of our autonomous views of what we think we are, we think that we can assert something and it's true for me. No, that's a ridiculous statement. It's an illogical statement. Any more than you walking into Chase Bank and saying, "I'd like to withdraw \$1,000,000, please." And she says, "Great, swipe your card" and you put in your PIN number and she says, "Sorry you only got \$15 in your account." And you say, "Well, that's your truth." Right? "My truth is I have \$1,000,000 in there and I'd like to cash out today."

You can go try it, right? Go try it in a non-threatening way so you don't end up arrested. But go try it. You can call the manager over. You can do whatever you want. You can call your philosophy professor from your university you graduated from. You're not going to win the argument, right? We don't really believe when it comes down to things that matter that you can choose to believe whatever you want and that makes it true for you. Right? There's no such thing. You don't want your doctor to think that way. You don't want your accountant to think that way. Right? But we think that somehow, as Francis Schaeffer was so good at trying to help us understand that we've thrown religion and truth claims about God into a category of opinion, and therefore it's a kind of truth that really doesn't correspond with reality. And the whole point of Christianity, Bruce said and Nancy Pearcey said in response to learning from Francis Schaeffer, you cannot separate those two. It's illogical. Truth claims of Christianity are assertions about relation to reality. They are supposed to correspond with reality.

So the question was, how do I get right with God? How do I get my sins forgiven? The Pharisees came and said, "You don't get your sins forgiven if you trust in Christ and repent of your sins unless you also have circumcision take place. You need to keep the laws of Moses. Then God will forgive you." Now, that's an assertion about reality. And the question is, did it



really happen? Did you get forgiven after you got circumcised or did you get forgiven before you got circumcised? Or you say I'm not getting circumcised at all because it's clear that God has said that through the promise of Abraham and Genesis Chapter 12 and all that God had said and all that God was doing in the New Testament times and all that was affirmed miraculously, we dealt with all of this last week, that we can now say definitively that you can have your sins forgiven without ever eating kosher, without ever being circumcised, without ever submitting to the ceremonial laws of Moses. If you say that, that's an assertion about reality.

So the first subset of this point, which is simply I need to agree with the Spirit, you need to agree with the Spirit, we need to agree with God, that's what we need to do, is that truth is external to you. It's not about what you'd like to be true. It's not about what you think to be true. It's not your propensities, your interest, your ideas, your preferences, your desires. That really has nothing to do with it. And that's going to... here's another word you can put next to the first point, letter "A," is humility. That means I am starting any discussion with the humility that I can't intuitively decipher truth. Truth is outside of me. And it needs to be obtained. It needs to be discerned. It needs to be from the outside. I need to get it from the outside. And that is an epistemological shift that so many people today, they think in terms of, you know, Oprah Winfrey. My truth, your truth or whoever else likes to talk in those terms. It seems like everyone is now. And we just need to stop with that because you really don't live that way.

And when it comes to if there is a God and how you are saved and how our sins are forgiven, there's an objective reality and my statements need to correspond with that. How do I know? I need to tap into the one who knows everything and to be able to know what he thinks. And so when they say "it seem good to the Holy Spirit and to us," they're saying in that statement something our generation desperately needs. And that's why we're going to start here with that sentence. Okay. Now, the third section, "C" is going to follow hard after the second section. So don't think I'm not going to letter "C." But let's go to letter "B" here if you're taking notes in that logical, sequential way.

If truth is external to me, Ok, if I'm going to be unified, which is the ultimate goal of this sermon that we are on the same page doctrinally, I need to ascertain that external truth and be able to get it. I need it to come into my brain. I need to properly assess it and understand it and to agree with it. If it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, then I need it to be good to me. I need it to, in my mind, be affirmed and embraced. And that's something the Bible says is really hard for us as falling creatures. We struggle with that. You can quote in your own minds First Corinthians Chapter 2 verse 14. And to think "The natural man does not perceive the things of God." There are things about God that we struggle to embrace.

We can jot down Psalm 50 when it shows that the pattern of most people is to create God in their imagination, and they believe God is whatever they think God should be. They think God is just an extension of my preferences. Here's how it's put in Psalm 50. It says that you think God is altogether like yourself, right? And it's not because you're looking for external information to learn. You're not trying to get it. Right? You're basically projecting your preferences and assuming God is like that. And because God doesn't immediately respond to



that, although he will on the day of judgment, we think, oh, we're fine. God doesn't do anything when I think God is X, Y or Z. And so that is a reality that we need to get to say, I need to ascertain it. And now getting to the point, letter "B," what you need to do and what I need to do is to pray that we will ascertain it.

So let's put that down. Letter "B." We need to pray that God would give us understanding of the truth. Truth is external to me. Right? How to get saved. What I need to do is I need to be praying that God's Spirit would allow me to see what he sees. I need to be able to ascertain what he knows. So I need that to happen. I need to pray for God, to quote Psalm 119, which is a great passage you would expect me to quote at this particular juncture, verse 18. I need to be praying, put it metaphorically, that "My eyes would be open so I would behold the wondrous things in your law." I need God to be able to get that outside information into my head so that I can agree with it. As Jesus said repeatedly, they need "eyes to see and ears to hear." Like every little postcard in Revelation 2 and 3 it ended with this. "Let the churches hear what the Spirit says to the Church." You need to be able to have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the Church. So I need to have the capacity to have that.

Second Corinthians 4:4. The problem is that non-Christians have blinded eyes and they don't see it. And so we need to pray that our eyes would be open so that we will perceive it. Here's a good passage to jot down, in Deuteronomy Chapter 29, Moses is talking about the problem of the people during the wilderness wanderings. And he says three things in this passage. I think it's verse 4. He said they didn't have a mind to understand. "They didn't have eyes to see and they didn't have ears to hear." Okay. There's the problem. And I want that problem to be fixed. I want to be able to embrace the truth. And to do that, I got to have a mind to understand, I got to have eyes to see and ears to hear. That's all metaphorical, of course, except for the first statement. Eyes and ears, that's metaphorical. I need to be able, I guess, to physically hear it if someone's teaching it. And then I need to be able to say, "Yeah, I concur with that, I agree with that, I embrace it."

And so I need to ask God to give me ears to hear. I need to have God give me eyes to see. That's a good prayer to pray and we're going to get to point "C" really quick, some of you're concerned. But let's get this point down by running this home in the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians Chapter 1. Go there with me. This one's worth looking up. We need to see this with our own physical eyes that our ears might have understanding. Ephesians Chapter 1. Paul's praying this phrase, it's a long sentence, but we'll jump into the middle of this prayer in verse 16. And Paul says to the people he's writing to, "I did not cease to give thanks for you," well that's sweet, "remembering you in my prayers." Well that's nice. No, here's what he's praying for, verse 17, and this is serious business right here. Are you with me? Ephesians 1:17. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ." What are you talking about? He's talking about the Father, the Father of the Son. "The Father of glory." I'm praying that he "may give you the Spirit, capital 'S,' of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened."



Now my eyes are on my face. You can see this is all metaphorical. My heart, the internal spirit that I have. I want my spirit to be able to comprehend, to ascertain, to embrace, to receive that truth. I want the "eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he's called you," because that's what he's concerned about in this particular passage and I'm concerned about in our passage, like a lot of things, but starting with the gospel itself, how do I get saved? I need to be able to know. I need to pray that God would give me the "eyes of my heart to be enlightened." By the way, if you studied doctrine, one of the categories of doctrine is the Doctrine of Illumination, we call it, which does come from passages like Psalm 119, it comes from passages like this in Ephesians Chapter 1 verses 17 and 18. We need to be people who are praying that God would give us the ability to understand that external truth.

You pray for that for your kids when they go to learn mathematics or they go to learn history. You want them to understand it. And when it comes to theology, same thing. We're praying because of this particular aversion that we have to truth about God, that God would open up our receptivity to that. Okay, great. So far so good for a lot of people who will say I'll pray that. The Mormons pray that, pray for a burning in the bosom. Pray that somehow I'll get impressed with something that I'll know it's true. I'll have some subjective sense of this is right. Or a lot of new agers, just go out on a rock and contemplate my navel and think about the wind and dolphins and then maybe I'll have some new thoughts about God and I'll be enlightened. Okay. That's not how it works when it comes to God's truth.

Check this out now. Go with me to Second Peter Chapter 1. Second Peter Chapter 1. When it comes to knowing the mind of the Spirit, if I'm going to agree with the Spirit and you agree with the Spirit then we're are going to have unity. What I need is to know what the Spirit thinks. And to know what the Spirit thinks, really for us is not the problem it used to be. Because thank God, the Spirit has put his mind on paper. This is what this text is all about. Now let's get into this text. We'll start in verse 16 in Second Peter Chapter 1.

But before I start reading it, I want you to see where it's going. So drop down to the bottom. Of course, these chapter divisions were added later, and so it's just to help us find our way around. But look at Chapter 2 verse 1. It starts with a contrastive conjunction, but. "But," after all that he's just said, "false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, and they'll secretly," stealthily, in a way that's imperceptible sometimes, "bring in their destructive heresies," you've got to be careful, "even denying the Master," the Lord, "who bought them," quote unquote. They're claiming that they've been redeemed by him, but they're not even recognizing his authority, "bringing upon themselves swift destruction. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned and blasphemed." Okay, great.

So we're going to talk about the false teachers. We're going to talk about people even like the Pharisees that came from Jerusalem and said, you got to be circumcised if you're going to be forgiven. So we got bad doctrines. They're called heresies. They don't comport with what the Spirit thinks. So how do we know what the Spirit thinks? Start in verse 16, just to give some context. Chapter 1. Second Peter Chapter 1 verse 16. "We did not follow cleverly devised



myths." Who's we? Who's the author? Peter. Peter was one of the apostles. "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord," that's a big word, "Jesus," that's a big word too, Savior and "Christ." Right? The Messiah. "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

Now you can think about a variety of things that he did that were majestic. Right? He did heal the sick. He raised the dead. All of that is an expression and testifies to his majesty. But there was a time, there was a day when all of that didn't have to be, you know, kind of composited in my thinking from external signs. But there was a day he lit up like he was the kind of glory of God. And so he starts to talk about that. It's called the Mount of Transfiguration. And he says when he received honor and glory from God, the Father and "the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I well pleased,'" quote unquote. "We ourselves heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."

So I saw the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James and John. We saw that which simply comported with all that he was doing in fulfilling prophecy. Even when John the Baptist was doubting because he was in prison, he said, "Look at the things I'm doing that fulfilled biblical prophecy. I am the Messiah. Yes, I'm the one. You shouldn't look for another. I am the fulfillment of the Old Testament." Now think this through. With all of that, he says, next verse, verse 19, "And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed." Right? Here's the apostle saying, "We saw every evidence, both external, that we had to put together to show that he was the one fulfilling prophecy. And we had that day when his glory was radiant on a mountain, the Mount of Transfiguration. We saw all that, and it confirmed this in a way that was undeniable."

Now, let's speak about that word that propositional written prophetic word, "To which," middle of verse 19, "you do well to pay attention," speaking of all the metaphors now, "to a lamp shining in a dark place." How dark is it? Well, Chapter 2 verse 1. Right? We had all those old prophets of the Old Testament, leading people astray who were false, and we got false teachers that are going to be among the people of Christ. We're going to even have people going out saying, "If you want to be a Christian, you better eat kosher." You going to have all these kind... It's going to be dark. But you need the light. You need the light and it's found in the prophetic word, that "lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns," Christ is coming back, "and the morning star rises in your heart."

First John Chapter 3. We're going to see him. We're going to "be like him." It's going to be a whole new experience. It's going to be great. We're going to have these resurrected bodies, all that's coming. "Knowing first of all," when we talk about that word, that lamp, "no prophecy of Scripture," the writings, the written word of God, "comes from one's own interpretation." Now, why do people want to think that they can write their own Bibles? They wouldn't say it that way. But they sit on a rock and think, I think God would let you love whoever you want to love. I think God really doesn't care what you think about the gender of a person who is pastoring your church. I don't think God really would say if you're a sincere Buddhist, that you're still going to hell. We have all these thoughts. Why would you want to think that way?



Well, because some of you have thought and your friends have thought the Bible is just those people doing the same thing. It's their best interpretation of God. They get impressions and they come up with ideas that they think about God. And I get an impression and I come up with ideas about what I think is God. So what's the difference, right? It was those ancient's best thoughts about God. I'm going to have some good thoughts about God and we're going to hold those up as equal authority. And the text is saying, that's not how the Scripture came to be. "No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation. No prophecy," verse 21, "has ever been produced by the will of man." It wasn't that they sat around saying, I think this about God, "but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Here's a great descriptive of the Spirit of God picking up Moses, picking up Isaiah, picking up Joel and Amos and Obadiah and Micah and Peter and James and John and picking them up and utilizing them to write his message. And therefore, not only should I be humble, knowing truth is external, not only should I pray that God would open my mind to understand his truth, but to agree with the Holy Spirit is to take the book that he wrote and to honestly and sincerely and diligently study it. I got it. It's a lamp shining in a dark place. If I want the truth, I don't listen to people's opinions. If I want the truth, I don't listen to polls. If I want the truth, I don't listen to culture. I go to a book that was written by the Holy Spirit. It's the product of the Holy Spirit. And I look at those propositional truths and I pray for God to give me understanding of them, and I want to see his truth. And I pray for that as I read it, as I study it, as I memorize it, as I meditate on it, and I come to agree with the Holy Spirit.

"It's seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." That simple phrase is packed with meaning for a day like ours, with all this relativistic subjectivity where people are thinking, "It's my truth, your truth, and we should equally respect each other's truth, because truth is relative." No. Truth is, by nature, a statement, an assertion about something that we claim is externally true. We need to discover what that is and the Bible says about itself and it punctuates itself with predictive prophecy that proves it, that this is the word of the Holy Spirit. And therefore, my goal is to be able to diligently and honestly understand that because the Spirit is enlightening my eyes, because truth is not in me, truth is out there. And here's the Spirit of God who knows all things and knows what truth is.

It's like parents in a household who say, "Hey, little kids," they got all these kids in their house, "here's what fire is, here's what fire does, and here's where fire should be." So here is mom and dad saying that, right? Here's what fire is and here's what it does and here's where it ought to be. It's going to be on the stove. It's going to be in the fireplace. It'll be under the big, you know, tank of water in the garage. And you'll hear it come on and off and the gas will light. So that's what fire is and that's what it does. Little kids, they sit around and they may not know, they don't know or they start to experiment a little bit and they have ideas. And the point of this is I want to know what mom and dad think because they know more than me. And it may be that someone in that childhood band of people may say, "Well, I think I'm going to start a fire in my closet because I think that's where fire should be." And some elder brother goes, "No, no, no. Mom and Dad say that's not where fire should be, because here's what fire is and here's what fire does."



God knows all things. God has revealed his truth. He's told us here are what things are, whether it's gender, whether it's sexuality, whether it's church practice, whether it's doctrine, whether it's how to be saved. God has disclosed the information. Our job is to be able to understand it. And God's Spirit has been given the task in John 14 as the Spirit of Truth to give that truth to us. And he did it through the pen of the apostles and prophets. Our goal is to commit ourselves to agree with him. And that's what it's all about. That's the hard work and yet the simple truth of what's bound up in that simple statement.

Now back to our text as though we had time to study any more of it. Acts Chapter 15 verse 22. Let's start at the beginning now, and I won't even take time to read it, but just skim through it. Right? I guess I'll read it. "It seemed good to the apostles and the elders." Who are those dudes? Big, big boys, right? The apostles. Wow. They're the authorized representatives of Christ. "And the elders." Who are those guys? Specially qualified, specially trained, specially gifted, specially called, specially affirmed leaders in the church of Jerusalem. And they decided and the church all applauded "with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

So we got Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, and they were leading men among the brothers." So they said, this is what we're going to do, and then we're going to take these guys and these guys are special within the church and we're going to write a letter. And the letter is going to say, we've got the apostles and the elders are going to write all you guys, the Gentiles. And we got people out there who are saying the wrong things. We're going to give you guys who are going to tell you the right things. And we've chosen those guys to send to you. "They've risked their lives for the sake of the name," along with Barnabas and Paul. "And you got Judas and Silas, verse 27, "they're going to just confirm the same things that we have said." And so that picture of all these people. Look at all the men. I highlighted them in my Bible. I got all these people named, all these titles of people named. They're all used now to convey this information to the Church.

Now this second point is going to bother some of you because you're going to think if you're not listening carefully, that it's a contradiction of last week. And I'm just going to tell you, it's not a contradiction of last week. We talk about Mary Baker Eddy or Ellen G. White. Or, we talk about Judge Rutherford or we talk about Brigham Young or Joseph Smith or we talk about whoever it might be, Mohammed. We talk about all these people that then say, I'm going to put myself up here on the same shelf as the Bible. And we said, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Right? We believe in Scripture alone is the arbiter of truth. And God has spoken, the Holy Spirit. You got to agree with what the book says. And then we think, well, great, we can take all these teachers and just throw them in the trash can. And that's not the point.

The Scripture has teachers and leaders leading men as it's put in this text. Right? And they're going to be used as a channel and a conduit to get that information to you. And they're going to be people who are distinguished in their knowledge and understanding of this book and this information. And they're going to relay to you to try and get some kind of unity around that truth. They're going to be tools and vessels to get you to carefully and thoughtfully understand



that truth. Now, that may seem like, "Wow, I don't know." I'll prove it to you in a minute, but let's at least write it down. Our goal, then, is to align ourselves, number two, with God's leaders. You need to "Choose to Align with God's Leaders." Number two, choose to align with God's leaders.

And it's not that they're co-equal authority. They're certainly not. But they become people who are leading men in the congregations that then say, I'm going to devote myself like we saw in Acts 6 to the ministry of the word and to prayer. And they are constantly praying for knowledge and insight into God's word. Let me see wonderful things in your word. Enlighten the eyes of my heart to understand your truth. They're praying that. And then they're studying the word. And they can quote Amos Chapter 9, and they can say why Amos Chapter 9 fulfills the promise of what God is doing among the Gentiles in the first century. And they have that information as they give themselves to that task. And then they become very useful tools in your life because you can align yourself under their teaching and you can say, I want to learn from them what the Holy Spirit thinks.

Now, it's not that you blindly see them on the same level as the Scripture, because you, as we're going to see later in the city of Berea, they're going to be very careful to check to make sure the teachers are saying the biblical thing. Right? They're going to search the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was so. And that's a great way to put it. Right? You should never believe your preacher, even though they may be leading men among the congregation who know the word and are given to prayer and the Scriptures. But you ought to give them some deference in teaching you. And before you dismiss in 20 minutes what it may have taken 20 hours to make sure in their minds was clearly biblical and aligned with the truth, you need to be giving them some special deference and respect for the role that they play. But you're always someone that should say, well, ultimately they're not the authority. They're under the authority of God's truth. But that's how God has set up the church.

Let me show you one passage. It's all we have time for. Go to Ephesians Chapter 4, really quick, a familiar passage. But we can't miss this. And I'm going to make that large assertion that I know may, you know, it may ruffle your feathers a little bit and you think, "Oh, man, I mean, am I supposed to align myself under the teachers in my church?" My answer is yes. Right? With the caveat that I know that just because they say something doesn't mean that it's authoritatively true, it doesn't even mean that everything your pastor says is in keeping with what the Holy Spirit says. But that's their job.

Ephesians Chapter 4 verse 11, "God gave some as apostles and prophets," which, according to Chapter 2 verse 20, are the foundational offices of the Church. Apostles and prophets. The authoritative establishers of Christianity and the prophets who teach New Testament truth without a New Testament. Christ himself being the chief cornerstone and the Church is built on top of that. And to be built on top of that, those bricks need some organization. And the organization comes from the evangelists and the pastor-teachers. And the evangelists echo the apostles because they go out just like Silas and Barsabbas went out as messengers of the church of Jerusalem. They come and establish clarity of doctrine as they establish churches and missionaries do that, evangelists do that.



And then you have the pastors and teachers it says, and they serve in the role that the prophets served in the early church. They're teaching New Testament doctrine WITH the New Testament because the apostles and prophets have codified that revelation, and now they have a book. It's called the New Testament, it's got 27 books in it. And now we know what the Spirit has confirmed with miraculous signs and wonders. Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4, and we have in our hands something that those people simply reiterate, the teachers, they teach this truth.

And so all of that is for what? Ephesians Chapter 4 verse 12, our theme verse for Compass Bible Institute across the street, "To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." Now, here's the goal. "Until we all attain to," here's the bad word in our culture, "the unity of the faith." We need to be on the same page. We need to think doctrinally the same. We need to be theologically in step with each other and to "the knowledge of the Son of God." And that's what the teachers are for. That's what the shepherds are for. "To mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Why? Because it will counter this problem, verse 14, that "we can no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness, in deceitful schemes," as we saw in Second Peter Chapter 2 verses 1 and 2. There's a lot of that going on.

But what we need is an elder brother, a leading brother among the brothers who's going to stand up and say, "Hey, mom and dad said, this is fire. This is what it does and this is where it ought to be. And you're trying to light a fire in the hallway, and that's wrong. And you need to stop doing that, because I'm telling you, I know what mom and dad said." And so it is that we need to be that kind of person in our lives to say where are the leaders who can help me rightly understand the truth, not because they're equal authority, but because God gives them as gifts. Look at the verb and verse 11. He "gave the apostles and prophets" and that verb continues on, "and the evangelists and the shepherds and teachers." So he's the one who gives these leaders to the Church, and that is important. And we ought to see that, and we ought to be the kinds of people who recognize that oversight.

Acts Chapter 20 verse 28. Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders and he says, "Give attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God." So there is a role in the Church and in your life for leaders who are giving themselves to teaching, who are supposed to be telling you and explaining to you and helping you understand and elucidating the truth of what the Holy Spirit has taught. And they're teachers of the Bible and you ought to have some and you ought to have some trusted ones. Matter of fact, you ought to go to a church and say, "This is my church and these are my pastors."

Every time I meet a person who claims they're a Christian, that's the first question I ask. Ask my wife, ask anyone who has heard me do evangelism. Every time someone says, "I am a Christian," I say, "Who is your pastor? Tell me who your pastors are." And when they say, "Jesus is my pastor," we've got a problem, right? Because I understand that's a very noble



thing and you think you just said checkmate to me, right? "Well, Jesus is my pastor, can't do better than that." I understand that. But here's what Jesus the Good Shepherd did. He gave us under-shepherds, and all of us should have under-shepherds, because he gave them to you so that you can rightly understand what the Chief Shepherd says, because the Spirit of God has appointed them to that task. And what are you saying? You don't need what God has appointed. You're not going to take advantage of the gifts that he says in this passage are given to the Church. You got to have those. And so it is important that we find them. And I think all of us need to have that relationship with our teachers.

So many things we can say. Are there false teachers? Of course there are. Jesus said, "Beware of the false teachers." Right? Matthew 7 verse 15. I get it. But you need to be the kinds of people who, just like in this text, recognize the conduit and the avenue through which he's going to affirm and establish you in the truth so that you're not just listening to every bestselling Christian book and going, "Well, I guess that seems popular." Your teachers are supposed to root you and ground you so you're "not driven and tossed in every wind of doctrine."

All right. There's one more verse in this passage back in Acts Chapter 15 verse 29. And it's review for us. That's why we didn't leave but 2 minutes for that. That's not really the reason, but... Here it is. We repeat the same list of four things. "Abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood, what has been strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourself from these you'll do well. Farewell." End of short epistle. Here's the instruction and it's going out. And as we saw up there in verse 27, Judas and Silas are supposed to, along with Barnabas and Paul, they're saying the same thing by word of mouth. They're trying to get people to align with this.

And let's just say you're in the church of Syrian Antioch and the day that you had this read and Barnabas and Paul showed up and Silas and Barsabbas showed up, you had the sniffles, so you didn't go to church. And so they came and then they went and they went off and did something else the next week. And so you didn't have that. You would hope that the congregation after church, once you were well enough to receive someone because you got the sniffles, that you would have the Christian brothers come to your house and give you that information because you've been disturbed and unsettled in your mind. I'm hearing two different things about how to be saved. So I need clarity. I need unity. I need us to think the same about these important truths. And you would want people, congregants, to help you, align you, to spur you on, to think the right things, to help align you to do as Paul said in Romans 15, to instruct one another. That's not the shepherds and teachers who have given themselves to full-time prayer and the word, but people who are in the congregation making sure that they're instructing one another.

He says, "I'm satisfied that you're full of enough knowledge," Paul says to the Roman Christians, "to instruct one another." And you ought to be doing that. As Paul said to Timothy in Second Timothy Chapter 2 verse 2, you ought to find faithful men who you can take what I entrusted to you and teach other people, and that they can teach other people. We need this discipleship. We need this helping other people be aligned with the truth. You want unity in



the church? It's more than just, "Hey, listen to that sermon." And so often people say on the patio, "Well, I really want to send that sermon to my...." And I said, "Why don't you listen to it three times and then YOU share it, put it in your words, and you help those people understand it."

So number three, I'll put it this way, you need to "Call Others to be Unified by the Truth." You need be calling others to be unified by the truth. The truth is what unifies us, and we need to say that it's external to ourselves. I need to pray that God would help me. I need to have the word as the primary conduit through which that comes to my mind. And if I'm a Christian, I should have pastors who are doing a faithful job of expositing that to me. But now that I get it, I ought to be putting my arm around people saying, hey, you ought to do the same.

And this particular list is the implications of the truth. Think about it. Here he's talking about and we can make this case if we had more time. I touched on it last week. Romans Chapter 14, the book of First Corinthians. We have all of this discussion about sensitivities to people's consciences, and they're saying, here's an implication of how to do it. Because there are people with convictions that they've conditioned through their upbringing in Sabbath school. And you need to be careful not to blow them away by eating your, you know, your ham and cheese sandwich in front of them for lunch. Just you need to love your neighbor enough to kind of take your personal convictions and to show love for each other.

Well, that's like tertiary issues, third-level issues. You've got secondary issues which are church practices, and you got ultimate issues, which are issues of truth and assertions about God and about the gospel and about sin and about repentance and faith. So those are things that we should say all Christians who name the name of Christ, they ought to be unified around that truth. Churches, they may have a different view of how often you take the Lord's Supper or how you should conduct a baptismal service, or who's the right candidate for baptism. You've got a lot of practices on that second-tier level that I would just quote to you First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 10, to say every church should agree with itself on that. Right? We're going to have other churches that agree on the gospel and on God, and we're going to call them brothers and we're going to meet up in heaven. But we as a church, we should be on the same page doctrinally about church practice.

But then there are personal convictions. Right? That's the third level where we have some conviction about the fact that we all agree on modesty. But that doesn't tell me, you know, how long your dress needs to be. Right? And we may have all the same conviction about gluttony, but we're not having, you know, some kind of agreed-upon measure of how heavy you can be before you disqualify yourself from being a small group leader or something like that. That's a terrible illustration. But there are principles we affirm, but the outworking and implications of those principles, we may disagree on those things. And all I'm saying is that, as Paul said, we're not going to quibble, we're not going to argue, we're not going to dispute over those opinions, as he calls it, which are the implications of the truth. But we're going to love each other enough to have instructions like this set of instructions so that we do well. We live in peace with each other within our congregation.



Churches agree on church practice, right? And how they flesh out the conducting of church. And then all Christians ought to agree on who God is, what the gospel is, who Christ is, and who we are as sinners saved by grace. All of that, right? There's so much to that. But that should be the kind of thing that helps us all say we're all going to get on the same page, even though there are some things that we may not agree with the church down the street. And yet there are things even within the church, we all have different convictions about working out our sanctification in certain areas that are disputable matters, as he says in Romans 14.

Martin Luther, interestingly enough, was known as a guy who splintered the Church. Right? Matter of fact, his movement was named the Protestant Reformation. He's protesting. He seems like such a person who doesn't want unity. Well, of course we know anything about Martin Luther, he was convicted that we should all be unified. Matter of fact, he talks so much in his Table Talks about unity. He talks about us being unified, talks about us being hand-in-hand as churches. He was all about this concept of being together on the same page, but he was willing to divide when it came to people saying, like we saw in Acts 15, well, to be saved, you got to do X, Y and Z. So we need absolute adherence, we need to be willing to break fellowship with people who are troubling people's minds and saying unbiblical things in contradistinction to Scripture. Right? And yet, as Christians together, we need to be unified.

Now, I know unity is such a bad word and the world has absconded with that word. And they've sullied the word for us, unity, because they think, "Ah, you can't think for yourself, can't be authentic, can't step out of line." How about this word? They haven't stolen this word yet. Com-unity, community. Think of that word. It comes from Latin and all it is is a compound of having a common unity. You can have the sense of community, which still brings a sense of warmth and I need that and I desire community, I want to be a part of a whole I want to be a part of a body, a team. All of that community talk really is nothing other than a way of saying that we are together unified. And so we need to be unified. We need to have community and there are people like Martin Luther who are known for breaking things up, which of course, was not his intent. His intent was to be clear on what God said. I want to agree with the Holy Spirit about these things. But once we have that, we're saying we do shoot for absolute, complete, harmonious, unified, doctrinal, as it says, unity of the faith. We should do everything to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. That's what the Bible teaches and that's what I want. That's what they were achieving there in Acts 15, and I pray we might accomplish it better than we ever have before even in a day with a lot of conflict going on.

Let's pray. God help us in the midst of a tumultuous time when people have been conditioned, even in the Church, to think that if their thought and feeling aligns with something that they want to assert is true, well then that makes it true. Help us to know truth is external to us, that we need to find it and there's a lamp sitting there on our shelf and in our phones that's shining the truth. And we need to take that truth, not as the opinion or the guesswork of ancients about you. Not the best thoughts that people had in the Bible times about who you were. But this is a set of writings people moved by your Spirit to write this down, that you're the ultimate author of Scripture, and to know your mind is to know your book.



And I pray God that we would all find good and faithful expositors of the word that we can benefit from. We can be good Bereans making sure that what they say is biblical, having that assurance that there are folks who we give that task to that help us to understand what your mind has put on paper. And that we are people who pray for eyes to be opened, not just here in our church, but everyone who names the name of Christ to rightly embrace truth that unifies your people. Unity not just by being nice. The nicety unity approach, God, we know that that's not biblical. Sometimes it seems like it's not nice to say that if anyone preaches a different gospel than the one you've received, let them be anathema. That sounds mean. And yet, God, we've got to make distinctions between those who are upsetting and troubling people's minds because they're out of step with what your Spirit says. So give us unity that brings us community, that lets us be able to say that we've found a place where we're on the same page and working to be increasingly unified around the truth that you've revealed to us in your word.

In Jesus name. Amen.