

# The Jerusalem Council

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Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] of the Lord. Let's sing to his praise, first of all, from the Scottish Psalter and Psalm 85. Scottish Psalter, Psalm 85, that's on page 340.

Scottish Psalter, Psalm 85, on page 340. We can sing verses 6 down to verse 13 of the Psalm. Psalm 85, verses 6 down to verse 13.

That in thee may thy people joy, what thou not us revive. Show us thy mercy, Lord, to us do thy salvation give. I'll hear what God the Lord will speak. To his folk he'll speak peace, and to his saints.

But let them not return to foolishness. Psalm 85, verses 6 to 13. God's praise. Psalm 85, verses 6 down to verse 13.

In thee may thy people joy, what thou not us revive.

[ 1 : 07 ] Show us thy mercy, Lord. Give us good life salvation give.

I hear what God the Lord will speak. To his folk he'll speak peace, and to his saints.

And thou let them not return to foolishness. To them that the adventuring air is his salvation.

That glory in thy land, he'll have a salvation.

Name, ■■■■ God's word in thy completely dois, hiseousness, and the spirit of Toronto.

[ 2 : 35 ] If that he'll walk there, right to his heart in a custom.

Amen. Let's turn together in prayer.

Lord of God, we come before you again this evening. We ask again that you would steady and prepare our hearts for this time of worship. As we've come before you just now in sung worship, we understand as we sing your words to you, we sing words that speak of your goodness towards your people, words that sing of your graciousness, your kindness and your giving of mercy, but also words which remind us that we as your people have duties towards you, that we are called to live lives that glorify you, lives that seek to honour you.

And we ask that would be our story, that would be our situation this week. Help us to strive to live lives that glorify you. Understanding fully that our salvation does not rest in our efforts.

Our salvation does not rest in our works. Our salvation rests in that mercy we've just sung about. The mercy of a God who gives his only begotten Son.

[ 4 : 37 ] The love of a Son who, out of obedience to his Father, out of care and love for his people, who enters into his own creation, who takes on human flesh, who becomes like us in all ways apart from sin, who goes and has a life of full human experience and full human emotion, who has tried and tempted in every way, and who shows his perfect obedience.

It's through his finished work we have all our hope and all our peace. But with that, we do ask you to give us the strength to keep on striving to serve you well. We pray for ourselves, in particular this evening, as a church family.

We thank you for this gathering. We thank you for the great privilege we have of knowing one another as brother and sister. The great privilege we have of calling one another members of the household of God.

We ask for this time together this evening. You would lay aside from our minds the many stresses and strains which we have faced perhaps this week.

This morning we prayed for the previous strains. Lord, we take before you just now the pressures, the upcoming worries, the ongoing situations of this new week.

[ 6 : 01 ] We understand that we come to this place of worship and we find our minds and we find our emotions pulled in many directions. There are many things which weigh heavy on the minds of your people here this evening.

We bring just now before you once more those who are suffering, those who we care for, who are going through terrible days, those we care for, who are struggling with issues of medical worry and of mental health worry.

Lord, you know the details. We bring before you those who are facing a hard time, a dark time spiritually. Lord, again, you know the details. We bring before you the full experience of all that we have going through and have gone through.

We bring these things to you. We understand you have given us one another. You have given us the church and we seek to help one another and to uplift and upbuild one another.

But we all confess there is a point to our ability. There is an end point to our strength. And we say that this much we can do but no more. We tire out so easily.

[ 7 : 08 ] We burn out so easily. We come to a God who does not tire. A God and you are eternal in your strength. And you are gracious in your giving of it to your people.

We ask this evening for a measure of that strength to those who are failing. We ask for reminded mercy of those who are feeling far away from you.

We ask for the closeness of your care to those who are feeling alone. We bring all these situations, all these people before you. As we do so, we also bring before you those who are heavy on our minds.

We bring before you those we have been praying for that past month. Those names, those families, those individuals who we are bringing before the throne of grace.

We bring them again before you just now. Asking Lord you would hear our prayers. Help us not to be tired. Help us not to become disillusioned.

[ 8 : 08 ] But help us instead to have that gospel optimism. To look around North Tolstair. To look at our own homes, our own families. And not to see a lack of care. But instead to see a mission field.

A harvest field. Where there is much gospel hope. And every one of your people here this evening. We are worshipping you as examples of those who are taken from darkness to light.

From death to life. From ignorance towards who you are and what you have done. To a saving knowledge and a saving hope of who our saviour is.

Pray the same would be true of every single person in our district. From the Glen to Gary. Pray Lord for the spiritual good of North Tolstair.

We don't pray for ourselves as a congregation. The fact of who we are. We know Lord that you work out with denomination. And you work out with congregation.

[ 9 : 13 ] We pray for your glory. And your glory alone. Not the fame of this ministry. Not the fame of this church. We ask that as we would be filled up. We ask the same for next door.

That they would be filled up to. We ask for days of gospel blessing. And gospel renewal. Until we see these days. Give us strength.

We ask to serve you where we are just now. With the situation we find ourselves in. Help us to be faithful. In this day of seemingly small things.

Help us to be happy. With this day of small things. Help us to be happy with the providence. Where if we find ourselves living. And seeking to serve. Help us as we come around your word this evening.

To be reminded that we are truly one family. We are truly one body. Of Christ as our head. And every one of us gifted in various different ways.

[ 10 : 12 ] Different abilities. And for different reasons. We ask the Lord you would encourage us. To make better use. To make a fuller use. Of these giftings. We give you thanks for our time together today.

We pray especially once more. For our children of our Sunday school. We thank you for them. That they are children. Who seem to be so diligent in the things of the Lord. Who seem to.

So easily at times. Listen. At least happily listen. Who seem to enjoy engaging in time of worship. Who seem to enjoy attending Sunday school.

Though we thank you for that. We pray that in their young days. They would come to us. Save the knowledge of yourself. Help us not to be a burden. Help us not to be an obstacle to that.

You are able. Lord you are able. To bring them to yourself. And we long for that. We long to see that. We long to hear that. We pray also for the other children in this community.

[ 11 : 13 ] Who perhaps as of now. Have no gospel connection. Have no church connection. We ask Lord for wisdom. And how we share the gospel with them. We ask for wisdom.

And for guidance. And for opportunities. To invite them to Sunday school. That your name would be known. From young to old. Across this whole community.

We come this evening. Once more. Giving you praise. For your many good gifts towards us. We pray once more. For our brothers and sisters. And Galashiels. We thank you for them. We pray for that church plant.

As there are. A small number of faithful Christians. A small number of faithful Christians. Who are seeking to see. A fully established church. In that town.

A town that has not heard. Or has not known. Of evangelical. Of true gospel preaching. Of solid gospel preaching. For so many years.

[ 12 : 13 ] And now we see. That you are moving in that place. And you are bringing your people together. And those who have been praying for many years. Those local to the place. Local to Galashiels.

Praying for many years. For a new church to be formed. Are now praising your name for that. We ask you to encourage them. And be with them. We also remember. As we prayed for this morning.

Our brothers and sisters in China. Pray especially Lord. For Pastor John. We also remember. That the wider situation. In the early rain covenant church. As there are many of their pastors.

And members still in prison. Of the same crime. Of daring to share the gospel. Of daring to publicly proclaim. That there is hope. And there is life.

To be found in Jesus. As we remember them Lord. We admit our ignorance. We admit our own slowness. At times. Slowness to engage in the gospel. Slowness to share the gospel.

[ 13 : 09 ] And we remember these brothers and sisters. Who are willing to give off even their lives. And their freedom. For your name's sake. We pray Lord. For our own government. We pray just now.

For what seems to be confusing. And at times distressing. Political situations. And as we have heard recently. Of bills coming through.

Which could in time. Be of. And have a detrimental impact. On the preaching. And the witnessing of your people. Lord. We leave these things with you.

We pray steadfastly for it. We pray that. These bills would not be passed. In the future. That. That the government would. Step away from these decisions. But.

We know that. You. Tell us quite clearly. In your word. That your people are a persecuted people. And we have had many years. Of gospel freedom.

[ 14 : 04 ] In this nation. What we have. Is an unusual reality. And. If we ever do face persecution. In the future. We simply join in. With. The brothers and sisters.

Across the world. With their daily experience. Help us to make the most. Just now. Of our gospel freedom. Help us to be bold. And faithful. In gospel proclamation. Lord.

Forgive us our sins. We come before you. This evening. Confessing sin. Confessing waywardness. Confessing in our words. In our thoughts. In our actions. Things. Things which are against your.

Very. Eternally. Holy. In nature. We come just now. Confessing sin. And clinging on. To a saviour. Who has made full.

An eternal. Forgiveness. For his people. Who has cleansed us. With his precious blood. Who has given us. His complete righteousness.

[ 15 : 00 ] And took on himself. Our complete unrighteousness. Who became sin. On that cross. For us. It's in his name. And it's for his sake. We ask these many things. Amen.

Let's read. In God's word. We can turn. To the book of Acts. God willing. After. Well next week. I'm away. And cross the bus. After that.

We hope to be in a series. In Acts. Chapter 1. But. This evening. Acts. Chapter 15. Acts. Chapter 15. That's on page. Page. 800.

And. 69. Acts. 15. On page. 800. And. 69. Acts.

Chapter 15. Let's hear. Again. The word. Of the Lord. But some men. Came down. From Judea. And were teaching. The brothers.

[ 15 : 56 ] Unless you are circumcised. According to the custom. Of Moses. You cannot be saved. After Paul and Barnabas. Had no small. Dissension and debate.

With them. Paul and Barnabas. And some of the others. Were appointed. To go up to Jerusalem. To the apostles. And the elders. About this question. So being sent on their way.

By the church. They passed through. Both Phoenicia. And Samaria. Describing in detail. The conversion of the Gentiles. And brought great joy. To all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem.

They were welcomed. By the church. And the apostles. And the elders. And they declared. All that God. Had done with them. But some believers. Who belonged to the party.

Of the Pharisees. Rose up. And said. It is necessary. To circumcise them. And to order them. To keep the law of Moses. The apostles. And the elders.

[ 16 : 50 ] Were gathered together. To consider this matter. And after. There had been. Much debate. Peter stood up. And said to them. Brothers. You know. That in the early days.

God made a choice. Among you. That by my mouth. The Gentiles. Should hear the word. Of the gospel. And believe. And God. Who knows the heart. Bore witness to them.

By giving them. The Holy Spirit. Just as he did to us. And he made no distinction. Between us. And them. Having cleansed their hearts. By faith. Now therefore.

Why are you putting. God to the test. By placing a yoke. On the neck. Of the disciples. That neither our fathers. Nor we. Have been able to bear. But we believe.

That we will be saved. Through the grace. Of the Lord Jesus. Just as they will. And all the assembly. Fell silent. And they listened. To Barnabas. And Paul.

[ 17 : 45 ] As they related. To what signs. And wonders. God had done. Through them. Among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking. James replied. Brothers. Listen to me. Simeon has related.

How God first visited. The Gentiles. To take from them. A people. For his name. And with the words. Of the prophets agree. Just as it is written.

After this. I will return. And I will rebuild. The tent of David. That has fallen. I will rebuild. Its ruins. And I will restore it. The rendiment of mankind. May seek the Lord.

And all the Gentiles. Who are called. By my name. Says the Lord. Who makes these things. Known from of old. Therefore. My judgment is.

That we should not trouble. Those of the Gentiles. Who turn to God. But should write to them. To abstain. From things. Polluted by idols. From sexual immorality. And from what has been strangled.

[ 18 : 42 ] And from blood. For from ancient generations. Moses has had. In every city. Those who proclaim him. For he has read. Every Sabbath. In the synagogues.

Then it seemed good. To the apostles. And the elders. With the whole church. To choose men. From among them. And send them to Antioch. With Paul. And Barnabas.

They sent Judas. Called Barasibas. And Silas. Leading men. Among the brothers. With the following letter. The brothers. Both the apostles. And the elders.

To the brothers. Who are of the Gentiles. In Antioch. And Syria. And Sicilia. Greetings. Since we have heard. That some persons. Have gone out from us. And troubled you.

With words. Unsettling your minds. Although we gave them. No instructions. It seemed. It has seemed good to us. Having come. To one accord.

[ 19 : 37 ] To choose men. And send them to you. For beloved Barnabas. And Paul. Men who have risked. Their lives. For the name. Of our Lord. Jesus Christ. We have therefore.

Sent Judas. And Silas. Who themselves. Will tell you. The same things. By word of mouth. For it has seemed good. To the Holy Spirit. And to us. To lay on you.

No greater burden. Than these requirements. But you abstain. From what has been sacrificed. To idols. And from blood. And from what has been strangled. And from sexual immorality.

If you keep yourselves. From these. You will do well. Farewell. So when they were sent off. They went down to Antioch. And having gathered. The congregation together.

They delivered the letter. When they had read it. They rejoiced. Because of its encouragement. And Judas. And Silas. Who were themselves. Prophets. Encouraged. And strengthened the brothers.

[ 20 : 32 ] With many words. After they had spent some time. They were sent off. In peace. By the brothers. To those. Who had sent them. And so on. We give praise to God.

For his holy. And his perfect. Word. Let's again sing to God's praise. Sing Psalms. And that's Psalm of Gospel. And Church Unity.

Psalm 133. Sing Psalms. Psalm 133. That's on page 175.

Sing Psalms. Psalm 133. On page 175. How excellent a thing it is. And how pleasant.

And how good. When brothers dwell in unity. And live as brothers should. Psalm 133. To cause praise. When brothers should.

[ 21 : 30 ] When brothers dwell in unity.

And live as brothers should. When brothers should. When brothers dwell in unity.

And live as brothers should. For it is like the precious high.

For the mighty of sin. That running over. That his beard.

Upon his collar's tent. That running over. Yet his beard.

[ 22 : 37 ] Upon his collar's tent. Like a monster. Upon the hill.

On Zion. On Zion. On Zion. It. He stands. The Lord. He stores. His blessing.

There. The life. Of. Never. Ends. The Lord. He stores.

His blessing. There. The life. That. Never. Ends. And.

Let's. Let's. Turn back. To the. Chapter. We had. Act. Chapter. 15. As we said. God willing. We'll. Begin a series.

[ 23 : 33 ] And. Acts. But in the meantime. This is the start. Of a series. That will last us. Who knows how long. A very occasional series. Looking.

At the basic principles. Of who we are. And what we do. So this evening. the simple question we have to answer in half an hour is why are we Presbyterian?

Or what does it look like to be Presbyterian? I'll look at some of our distinctives you could see. Now just a few notes to start. There is great danger sometimes in looking at our distinctives.

There is a great danger, a great temptation in becoming prideful at what makes us different to other congregations around us. And we see that and we know that happens.

But our congregations, and I'd argue to their shame, who do pride themselves on their distinctives and be happy with your distinctives and live your distinctives, but don't be proud of them.

[ 24 : 39 ] Don't have that as priority over the gospel itself which we know takes place. At the same time, there's also a danger in never discussing the distinctives.

There are ways where we do worship different to other congregations. So this evening we're seeing, why are we Presbyterian? In future months we'll answer the question, why do we here in North Tolstah, why do we only sing psalms, for example?

Why in North Tolstah do we only do this or that the way we do things? And the whole point of this is, is not to show how smart and how correct we are, but it is to show that what we do has biblical basis.

Nothing we do is just for the sake of doing it. It's not because of just pure tradition. Tradition is good at times, it can help guide us at times, but tradition for tradition's sake, that's not biblical.

In fact, that's quite dangerous. That leads to areas and to practices which are not gospel, which are not beneficial. We want everything we do to at least have a grounding in scripture, if not a clear instruction from scripture.

[ 25 : 55 ] So all that being said, it's a short time this evening. What is, what does it mean, we could say, to be Presbyterian, and why do we follow that?

I guess, first of all, we need a working definition of what it is to be Presbyterian. And rather than give a theological definition, a quote, let's just look at how it works practically.

Next week, in two weeks' time, a week Tuesday, Donald and myself will be going to Presbytery. I'm sure Donald's mind is ready on that.

Donald, being assistant clerk, has got papers for that. I'm sure the last few weeks have been working hard behind the scenes. So a week Tuesday, we'll attend Presbytery, Donald and myself. So two representatives from your congregation, from this congregation, will go to Presbytery.

At Presbytery, there are then representatives of every other island church in the Free Church. a minister and elder from every single congregation. And at that Presbytery, who has more say?

[ 27 : 07 ] Is it the ministers or the elders? Is it those who've been there longer, or us new guys who have little clue? At Presbytery, we are there as one body, comprised of all different churches, discussing and working through the matter.

And once a year, every Presbytery in Scotland sends a number of representatives to the General Assembly. And there, as equals, we have one voice as we debate and discuss what's taking place in the wider Free Church.

And all of that comes back down then to elders who you, the congregation, have elected. Quite simply, it's a church structure that goes from bottom to up and back down, round again.

There's no hierarchy. We often, perhaps, and this is from our own culture, and it's to our own shame, and we know this, and we preach this, but we often forget it.

In a current session, yes, the minister is, more often than not, moderator, and chairs a meeting. But amongst the brothers, does my opinion hold more opinion than theirs?

[ 28 : 23 ] Is my opinion more valid than theirs? I certainly hope not. I am a teaching elder, to use the American system's definition.

I am a teaching elder, and they're leading elders. Elders together. Stornoway, for example, James, when he attends, has no greater say in presbytery than I, when I attend presbytery.

Together we're brothers, working together, seeking the gospel good of our island, and the gospel good of our own churches. And the whole system is not just a man-made system that happens to work quite well.

The truth is, the system finds its roots in Scripture. The question is, well, why does it matter? Why are you spending our time tonight looking at this?

Because we want, do we know, as a congregation, we want as individuals to serve and glorify our Saviour in the best way possible. and we want to act as a church and live and serve as a church according to what we see shown to us in the pattern of Scripture.

[ 29 : 38 ] God is a God of order and not a God of chaos. And it reminds us, if nothing else, it reminds us that your elders and myself, we are not somehow without oversight.

We're not somehow without responsibility. And we are colleagues with our brothers who themselves are colleagues and our brothers and together we try and we strive to the best of our ability to see God's glory known and to see the gospel spread.

Now, a quick caveat before we say any more. This is not a full summary of the topic. You spend two, three weeks in the Free Church College and ETS being taught this and going through this so in 20 minutes we can't summarise the whole doctrine but just to give us a biblical basis this evening it's quite a chunk of text we have so we can just go through it quite efficiently for our short time.

This is one example that are various many examples we can look at to see what is an elder why do we have them and that's a whole different sermon for the future. But this evening just to see why do we do church structure the way we do it?

Why do we have a Kirk session? Why do we have a presbytery? Why do we do it this way? And why are we saying it's biblical? One of the best chapters for that is the chapter we had Acts chapter 15 where we see in this chapter what we see taking place in one sense every single month in every presbytery of every Presbyterian church around the world.

[ 31 : 21 ] Now we're speaking tonight in how presbytery should work. Brothers and sisters we are sinners and at times our sin nature it leads us and it guides us.

At times no matter how good a church system is it breaks down. We know that. I'm not saying for a second that if you follow the Presbyterian church system like we do that means you're somehow better as a person.

Of course it doesn't. But it does mean and we do state here quite clearly you are following what is the biblical pattern. So looking at chapter 15 together we'll be going through at quite a pace so please have your Bibles open as we try and look at some points to show us our biblical basis for being Presbyterians.

First of all we see controversy controversy in verses 1 and verse 2. There's always been issues in the church from the very start there is trouble the very start there is debate and problem and complication amongst the brothers and sisters and we see here these poor Christians in Antioch that there's a gathering problem for them these men these teachers have come and we're saying that in Galatians this is the example of the Judaizing we've been looking at unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved.

that's our summary of our Judaizers in Galatia that is their teaching summarized you must be circumcised men or you can't be saved.

[ 33 : 11 ] Now what that says the salvation of women who knows they didn't care perhaps they wanted to be correct so a great issue a huge issue these Gentile believers non-Jewish pagan backgrounds and they're being told you're all wrong in fact you're so wrong if you don't do this drastic action as grown men you will not be saved that's causing of course distress the poor believers in Antioch they're confused and we see that in how it's worded to us after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them there's discussion there's fervent discussion following on from this absurd statement there is issue in the church and here we see the system kicking in the church system this issue has arisen so the very first thing they do is go to the wider church after no small discussion no small dissension and debate

Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question so we're off to Jerusalem to meet up with a wider gathering of apostles and elders what we'd call perhaps a presbytery or a general assembly a bigger gathering of fellow believers of other church leaders and we're going to say we have this problem help us with it this system the presbyterian system it ensures that there's no congregation having to deal alone with awful issues brothers and sisters and friends we know that in times sadly in churches there are hard situations hard life situations sin situations you name it it happens nothing's changed think of the church the letter to corinthians a congregation of believers and there's sexual immorality at a horrendous level taking place nothing's changed there is hard situations to deal with and this system ensures that no congregation has to deal with this situation on their own they can call in the help of other brothers call in the help of other churches to come and help them cope with what is going on it also ensures that heresy doesn't spread in a congregation say tonight



I start preaching something that's a bit out there I start saying something and you think it's been a year and he's finally showing his true colours I don't think that's right and next week I keep pushing it and a few weeks time I'm still preaching something that's just wrong if we were independent who'd you go to really how'd you get help really but you can through your elders through yourselves you can go to Presby and say our minister he is he's gone his heresy coming out of him his preaching has gone strange and we're worried what's being taught you have a way of making sure the preaching the teaching that the gospel is being shared as it should and that's what we see taking place here Paul and Barnabas they go to this wider gathering and they take the worries of the people there and we see our next point here the journey taking place verse 3 onwards verse 2 onwards they journey quite slowly to Jerusalem they take this route and on the way there they encourage the other churches they're sent note that they are sent and they make their way to the council they're going on behalf of their local church brothers and sisters we're not congregationalists we're not independents in other words this is the way that many congregations are run today many Baptist congregations tend to be congregationalists in their church structure what does that mean it means that decisions are made by vote by congregational vote every decision at times seems to be is made by congregational vote and it's a democracy and the majority wins and then you move on that's how you decide what you're going to do now of course we vote as a church at times there are times when a vote is required and that is good and right you voted in one sense for your elders you voted in one sense to call myself there are times when we do have votes but there are decisions made when you saw the discipleship plan on

Thursday night there was no voting for the congregation on that plan you didn't vote in what should be included or not included you've elected elders and you've trusted us with that job on your behalf and note brothers and sisters Paul and Barnabas like as they're sent on behalf of the congregation and we know this because they've been sent to meet with other brothers and other church leaders there's journey but then also some things haven't changed there's also division verse 5 and verse 6 so they arrive in Jerusalem to bring before the wider gathering the problem they have and to ask advice and to seek guidance but when they arrive there's a problem verse 5 but some believers who belong to the party the Pharisees rose up and said it is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter the

Presbyterian system when it works biblically when it works well it is there to at least seek to stop the loudest voices in the room always winning you'd imagine the Pharisees as we know from Paul as we've been seeing in Galatians the Pharisees and here we see Pharisees who are now believers so we have no reason to doubt their faith we're told they're believers we believe they're believers but like all of us at times we're wrong and here these believers they're still stuck in their past they're still clinging on to their old story and they're still thinking what applied to them once still applies to them today and before we shake our head too quickly out of them brothers and sisters I'm sure there's plenty of things that we are quite wrong on at times and yet we are believers and yet the Lord loves us but here are these believers they're still stuck in their past and all of our training and very years of training as Pharisees we said this before trained not just in theology but trained in public ability public speaking ability so you'd imagine the

[ 40 : 41 ] Pharisees maybe they are holding the floor all the facts and figures and quotes all the charisma as they pace around showing and telling why these Gentiles must be circumcised the loudest voice doesn't always win and the system is made so the loudest voices don't always win even in free church history and perhaps you'll hear this this evening Neil is somewhat of an expert in areas of free church history and he'll come up I'm sure there's times in our own congregation's history our own denomination as he says history our denomination if you go far back enough there are times when if the loudest voices won we wouldn't be here this evening in many ways if the loudest voices won we might have joined with the COS years ago we might have done who knows what but no the loudest voices the most charismatic voices didn't win because together as we see in verse six there is discussion and there is debate the

Presbyterian system it puts a wider wisdom and a wider prayer against the loudest and most charismatic of voices debate and decision I love the summary of verse six and verse seven it tells us a lot and what's not being said the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter and after there had been much debate Peter stood up and said to them so on after there been much debate you see that often in presbytery minutes there was some discussion on said topic and when you're sitting there you think well that was two hours of discussion there was some discussion but looking back you just see there was some discussion there was some discussion on this topic the brothers together were there discussing I'm sure at length the scriptural biblical we see that from the short sermon the short speech here as Peter and James give their thoughts and here we see scripture bringing to bear and here we see debate and discussion amongst the brothers the press period system allows for a free and fair debate again when you sit in

Stornoway in the MA hall every issue that comes up every discussion topic that comes up every minister and every elder we have equal chance to raise our hands to share our thoughts to share our views to vote at a press level of what we do and what happens and what we should think that happens and all this complications and all the detail we all have equal voice and equal say in it this system that we see here in Acts 15 it also demands clear and biblical thinking we see that look here as James quotes from scripture to make his point as he defends what he's saying with biblical truth the Presbyterian system when it's done properly it's not based on conjecture it's not based even on pragmatism on what makes sense it's based if we try to work biblically it's based on scripture if we say yes to this thing what is our scriptural basis how does it benefit the gospel if we say no to this thing how do they bring

God glory how does it benefit the gospel cause and so on we're always trying to bring it back to scripture and quite beautifully and quite simply the section closes with what is often missed out when we think of our church system it is one when done well it is one of support and communication that whole section from verse 22 onwards where we see the formation and the writing of the letter note a few points of this letter again the church Antioch they've been having a hard time you can imagine they're quite worn down they're brand new believers and they're facing all of those complications from those who are Jewish believers and they're new to the whole culture they're new to the whole theology and they're being battered and bruised and here we see the wider church the presbytery the general assembly taking its time to make sure the church of

Antioch did not feel on their own you can see the care and the love they have in writing this letter verse 19 therefore my judgment we see speaking therefore my judgment is we should not trouble those Gentiles who turn to God which write to them and the very basics there of what they say to them and you see and you see the care in the letter and not also what they do they send a letter but also they send back Paul and Barnabas they also send Judas and Silas they send more of their own number to go and to reassure the small struggling pained church say we hear you we care for you and we send these brothers to minister to you to remind you that you are loved by the wider church you are cared for by the wider church here we see communication and support and we're not saying this always happens well in our church system it definitely does not but this is what we're striving towards we're part of a system that biblically speaking shows us we must love and support the smaller churches the smallest churches the struggling churches we're all together as part of

[ 47 : 05 ] Christ's body the presbyterian system when done well when done correctly it is one of support and one of encouragement again as we said when Donald and myself attend presbytery we have no less voice no quieter voice no less heard voice than any other gathering Colin next door Reverend McLeod next door and back with his huge church and big power really in terms of finance and manpower when my hand gets raised his hand isn't picked before mine because we're there to support and love and encourage one and other and you can imagine the joy in Antioch the small church a church like ourselves dealing with a complicated situation and then they have

Paul back and Barnabas back but with them a letter and with that letter these two other brothers leading brothers we find out who are there to reassure the church you are part of a wider body this is the Presbyterian system working at its best this is what we strive towards this is the system we are part of practically here we see the church has been supported and the church has had its grievances had its issues heard and the letter of support has been offered it's been reassured of their importance to other churches in the area in summary brothers and sisters we're not just Presbyterian because it works it's not just convenient we're not just Presbyterian because it's what we're born into because it's what we've always done we are Presbyterian because quite simply we believe it's a biblical pattern of church government it's a way God has set up his churches his congregations his gatherings his family gatherings of his people to work together to serve together it's how it works a recent example for ourselves and this is a simple example a small example our communion season we had

Reverend Colin Macleod retired and we're very thankful to have him or perhaps you won't know is that we weren't really planning to have him originally he was set for a future communion season someone else was planned for our recent communions that person had to pull out due to reasons with control quite last minute so I got on the phone to poor Callum and asked him can you help please otherwise the congregation has me for a whole weekend to listen to and Callum graciously said yes I'm pretty sure he had rearranged other arrangements he had made why because he's moderator this year because he's assistant clerk and clerk to the assembly because he's a man with almost near infinite church knowledge and church history knowledge no because he's a brother in our system who wished and who helped us out when a system works well brothers and sisters it works well we are

Presbyterian because it's a biblical system where we all seek to serve one another not just ourselves and Tolstah you are good at this when you see the statements the financial statements you aren't just good at giving locally to the mission here and we praise God for that but as a congregation you are good at giving to other congregations we see that in West Niles Presbyter recently the amount that is given to help small church planting projects it's incredible here we see the system working well supporting one another and quite simply we are Presbyterian because we wish to see a system that glorifies Jesus that works well that his name is made known the very very pinnacle of our system is Jesus and he is the head and below him as equals brothers all seeking to serve and lead our churches together and then as brothers just now we are equals of our brothers and sisters and our congregations and he is the head

Colossians 1 18 and he is the head of the body of the church he is the beginning the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent at its very best the Presbyterian system it removes the personality it removes the charisma and it makes every one of us look to each other's benefit to help one another and ultimately leads us to look upwards to him who is the head of the church not the moderator it's a clerical role really not the moderator of presbytery not your minister not me he is the head of the church and together as brothers and sisters and together then as brothers seeking to lead congregations together we all fall under his head ship under his leadership and we all seek his glory we're not a perfect system why because it's made up of people who are not perfect and the

[ 52 : 59 ] Lord knew that when he created the system but again and again we see in scripture this is the biblical way of doing it and we praise God for it but he cared enough that in the detail he has given us a way to engage and to help involved in the running of the church on earth all for his glory all for his name sake to put our heads in that a word of prayer Lord we thank you for our time together once more this evening we thank you for the truth of scripture but in many ways we see nothing has changed as we hear of the troubles of Paul and the troubles of that church in Antioch the troubles of these believers who faced hard questions and troubling situations and we see of the care and the support we see of the debate and discussion as the gospel is defended as the freedom we have in our saviour is defended and we see all these things and we give you thanks for it that we in your wisdom have the great privilege of being part of a system that we see to be biblical and that's beneficial for us help us

Lord then to not take pride in our distinctives but to give you thanks for them help us to support one another not just locally but to be mindful that we are part of a wider presbytery to support as best we can other congregations and other churches we bring before you especially just now the vacant congregations in our presbytery south and north and shabost we pray for them as they face difficult days help us to remember them and to keep them in prayer we pray again for our fellowship this evening we thank you for it we would enjoy our time together Lord we pray that he would enjoy his time with us and relaxed with us and able to speak freely we thank you for the great privilege we have of meeting together as brothers and sisters but also as friends who gather with us and together hearing just a small part of what you have done in the lives of our brother help us then as we come to sing our final item of praise do so with hearts and minds full of worship and full of understanding ask all these things in and through and for

Christ his precious name's sake Amen let's close by singing to God's praise from the Psalter and Psalm 121 Scottish Psalter Psalm 121 Psalm page 416 Psalm 1 to 1 I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence do I come my aid my safety cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth have made thy foot he'll not let slide nor will he slumber that he keeps behold he that keeps Israel he slumbers not nor sleeps Psalm 1 to 1 God's praise I to the hills will lift mine eyes from west have come my aid my safety cometh from the

Lord good and matter of him thy truth will not rest like nor will he slumber of the kings he will be loved in his time he he slumber on our streets the Lord be kings the Lord I share on thy right hand of scale heaven by night they shall no smile nor yet the sun by him the

Lord shall keep thy soul he shall his earth be from all him hence for thy glory thou can him come he forever will we'll say our grace just now then followed by the next Lord we thank you once more for our time together this evening next door we thank you for the food prepared for us we thank you again for those who as always seek to serve your gospel kingdom by preparation and by the prayer of your gospel kingdom by preparation and by working hard thank you Lord for the gift of having time together and we ask you bless this evening to our good and to your glory the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit both you now and forevermore amen