

Christ Blesses One Church Through Another

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[0:00] All right, well, I'll read Acts 15, but to understand the context a little bit better, we'll begin reading in Acts 14, starting at verse 26.

! We read God's word, trusting it is his inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, sufficient word for you and me, his people. So Acts 14, starting at verse 26.

This is referring to Paul and Barnabas on one of their missionary trips. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

Now, when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

So they stayed there a long time with the disciples. Acts 15, 1. And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

[1:12] Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders about this question.

So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles. And they caused great joy to all the brethren.

And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders. And they reported all things that God had done with them.

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them, Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us that by the mouth of the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

[2:28] So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Now, therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved in the same manner as they. Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Paul and Barnabas, declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, listen to me. Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take them out, a people for his name.

And with this word, this, the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written. After this, I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which had fallen down.

[3:40] I will rebuild its ruins and will set it up so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who does all these things.

Known to God from eternity are all his works. Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood.

For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. Then it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas, who was also named Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

They wrote this letter by them, the apostles and elders and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.

Greetings. Since we have heard some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying you must be circumcised and keep the law to whom we gave no such commandment, it seemed good to us being assembled with one accord to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[5:23] We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to us, for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.

If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch, and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Please be seated.

Let's pray. Let's pray. O Lord, the way that you work among your people, among the churches, it's so humbling and so beautiful and so glorifying of who you are.

We pray, Lord, that by your Spirit, you'll cause us to see the way that you work through the church and use the church in the way that you want us to see that today, Lord, that you will apply that to this congregation, that you will guide us, that you will give us wisdom.

[6:59] You'll help us to ponder what is the way that you have given churches to receive the blessings of Christ Jesus. We ask this for your glory. Amen. Well, our American tradition tells us that at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin made this comment.

And to appreciate what he said, we have to remember, these are former citizens of England that are now living at the colonies that don't want to pay taxes back to England without representation. And those who rebel against the monarchy of England are considered treasonous and therefore, they would be publicly hung.

And Benjamin Franklin's comment, at least according to tradition, was this. We must all hang together or most assuredly, we shall all hang separately. Here come representatives from all the colonies taking a strong stand together for their future.

In a different context, this sentiment captures a reality that we read in this passage. Isolated churches, places where God's power had been manifested, displayed, the gospel was preached, people believed, even among the Gentiles, and churches are now planted.

But on their own, they're isolated. And the enemy is attacking and devouring, and there are wolves creeping in and bringing lies that undermine the gospel. And the principle we see is that we must help one another.

[8:35] We must hang together. So in the first century, these churches are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the apostles in a powerful way.

The New Testament scriptures as we have them now are still being written and given even in the midst of all these travels and these discussions. The principle for us that I want to focus on and encourage us with today is this.

From Acts 15, we see that Christ blesses his churches through one another. That simple statement that we can understand that, see it in God's word, and then discern together what that means for this congregation, that Christ blesses his churches through one another.

As we walk through this passage again, I hope to point out eight principles that we see in how God does this. So let's begin at where we started again, chapter 14, verse 26.

Notice how this one church in Antioch, which is modern-day Turkey, it's called Asia Minor, they receive the truth, they receive the gospel, they are formed into a church, and they enjoy a time of peace.

[9:49] We read in verse 26 of chapter 14, from there, Paul and Barnabas sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

Other churches sent them there, they were commended to go. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, take all the believers, all those who heard the gospel and received God's word, gather them into an assembly, they reported all that God had done with them, with the church, and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

And the pattern of ministry was to present Jesus Christ first in the synagogues because they already know of God the Creator. They already have all the Old Testament. They have the law and the prophets and the Psalms, and they know the true God, but they need to know about the Messiah.

And so, they're explaining that this gospel of the Messiah has gone out not only to you here in the synagogues, but to Gentiles, and God is causing them to believe.

Verse 28 of chapter 14 says, so they stayed there at the church in Antioch a long time with the disciples, with the believers, with this church. They're enjoying truth and peace.

[11:04] But then, in chapter 15, verse 1, comes a disturbance to this peace in the church of Antioch. Look at verse 1. Certain men came down from Judea.

He's saying came down in an elevation reference. You know, so the mountains of Judah were a high point. That's why the Psalms of Ascent are Psalms you would sing going up to Jerusalem. But if we look at it on the map, it's further south. They came up. They traveled. And they brought with them, remember what's in Judea is Jerusalem, the big hub of the people of Israel in the first church from which all the missionaries were being sent out.

And these men taught the brethren in Antioch, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. So, this is the big occasion for everything that we read in chapter 15 of Acts.

My focus today is on our series on the church. It's not to necessarily spend our time on this theological debate or all the meaning or look at all the rest of the New Testament about that, but instead on the process.

[12:22] I don't want to skip over the theological debate, but I want to point out that what these men from Judea were teaching is false. Paul knew this was false. Barnabas knew this was false.

And it was reading the Old Testament wrong. Deuteronomy 36 says, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul that you may live.

And the decision that we finally get by the end of Acts 15 around verse 28 or so is the same decision concluded and made very clear throughout all the rest of the New Testament. For example, Paul, the same apostle, in Romans 2, 28 and 29, he wrote to the church in Rome, no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly or is circumcision outward and physical, but a Jew is one inwardly.

Circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit. This is the correct interpretation of that Deuteronomy 30 prophecy. Philippians 3, 3, Colossians, Ephesians, so many other places in the New Testament and all of the book of Galatians make this very clear.

For example, Philippians 3, 3, we are the circumcision who worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

[13:46] Okay, so for all these reasons, we will not spend any more time on the theological discussion of the occasion of this process, but instead we need to ask, why do we have all of these details in Acts 15, if it's not just to give the conclusion that's made very clear elsewhere in Scripture.

We have all of these details, I and the whole Reformed tradition believes because it does teach the church the process to follow when truth and peace are disturbed.

So that's what we'll focus on. Let's see all that we can learn. So chapter 15, verse 2, what was going on in what was going on in this church in Antioch?

The truth was being attacked and there were men, mature believers, preachers of the gospel like Paul and Barnabas. As a reminder, Barnabas means son of encouragement. He's the one who disciplined Paul for about 13 years.

When they came as missionaries to another city, the people seeing these two minister together said Barnabas is Zeus and Paul is Hermes. Zeus is like the fatherly figure, the older wise one, powerful.

[15:03] That was Barnabas and Hermes is mouth, you know, and that's Paul. Paul is doing the teaching and the talking and that's who Paul and Barnabas are. Paul's an apostle. He carries apostolic authority from Christ himself and yet within this church in Antioch, there's great dispute over the truth.

It's being challenged and questioned. Verse 24 says this church in Antioch was troubled with words that they were unsettled in their souls.

This is what happened when false teaching or false words come into a church. An attack on the truth undermines peace. An attack on truth is what unsettles peace.

It's impossible to have peace in a church if we don't care about truth, if we don't care about doctrine. That's the first principle we can notice. And I think now we have an apostolic example of how truth and peace are to be protected by churches.

even though Paul's an apostle, the church in Antioch verse 2 says determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others from them, so messengers from the church in Antioch, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.

[16:31] This is how God in his wisdom chose to bring clarification, to uphold truth and the peace in this local church in Antioch. It wasn't just for Paul to write it down as breathed out scripture, though that would have been enough and should have been received joyfully.

It was for the church to decide together to send them and messengers to go get help from another church. So that's the second principle. A local church acts on the authority Christ has entrusted to her to uphold truth and peace.

Paul and Barnabas, even though they knew the answer that circumcision was not to be forced upon Gentile converts in the new covenant, that that's not what saves you, they modeled humility and they trusted that the Holy Spirit in dwelling in the church would illumine this matter with authority to protect the church in Antioch.

So the Holy Spirit through the church was directing Paul and Barnabas along with other messengers to submit themselves and this matter to the council of another church, which would include apostles,!

elders, and all the brethren, the whole church, so that all churches in centuries to come would have a pattern to follow. The third principle we can glean then is this, the most mature believers here, this was Paul and Barnabas, along with messengers that this congregation would trust, they report back, they humbly brought a threat to peace and truth forward into the light of the broader kingdom of Christ and they asked for help from another church.

[18:17] Verse 3 says, so being sent by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria and as they went they're describing the same things they were describing back to the church in Antioch.

God is converting Gentiles and those churches heard that news and it caused them great joy to all the brethren, the whole church hearing these reports.

You notice the pattern, it's that, it's what, it's written in Romans 10, people can't believe in Christ unless they hear the gospel and how will they believe unless someone preaches and then here's the part that we can very easily miss today.

Paul writes, how will they preach unless they are sent? And here Paul is modeling that. These churches are sending Paul. They are giving him that authority to go on their behalf and to do this good work.

So now they're traveling from Turkey, Asia Minor all the way back to Jerusalem. According to quick research, this would be about 300 miles if you were to do it by foot, which is probably a good estimate.

[19:32] 300 miles would take on average about three weeks to travel by foot. Hartleys, when you all went to Rangeley, Colorado, we, we, it's out of the way, but it was a day's travel.

You know, we're going to load up, we're going to drive there for a day and, and it's farther than I would go, you know, on a regular basis, but it is doable. And here they're traveling for 300 miles on foot, three weeks.

And notice how even a trip to meet with another church is an occasion for fellowship. They have Paul and Barnabas along with these other messengers from the church in Antioch spending three weeks together and stopping at other churches along the way.

And as they go, they're telling of God's faithfulness and praising God together. So the trip itself is a blessing. And distance does not matter.

If help can be gained, even if it takes us three weeks to get to a place, it's a blessing and enjoy the journey as we go. Verse four, when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders.

[20:48] Here's an important point, important point of distinction. Initially, in verse four, we're told it was the church, which implies the whole assembly, and the apostles and the elders.

A Presbyterian form of government has the elders gathering as a presbytery without the church. Other forms of government would have what they would view as succession to that role of a bishop, like above the elders.

So that would be like a Roman Catholic or even Episcopal or something like that. What I'm going to present to you is what a congregational, still reformed, Puritan, you know, mode of congregational church government has, which includes the church and messengers from the churches.

And they were received by them. Notice how they approached them having been sent by another church. Now they're formally received by another church.

It's not individuals claiming an authority of their own. They're not presenting their own agenda or interests. They were formally sent on official church business on behalf of a congregation in Antioch.

[22:08] And they could approach this church now as delegates, as messengers, as representatives, and greet one church on behalf of another.

Verse 4 says, they reported all things that God had done with them. And the principle here, this would be number five, is that Christians work not for their own church alone, but Christians work alongside all God's laborers.

We work together. 3 John verse 8 says, we therefore ought to receive such that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

So when we have representatives from other churches that are laboring for the kingdom, laboring for the common cause, we are to receive them as fellow workers of the truth. Verse 5 says, now this is within the church in Jerusalem, some of the sect of the Pharisees, that means this group that had been really good at keeping the law of the old covenant, but notice the wording carefully in verse 5. Pharisees who had believed, they rose up saying, I think, I think those people from Judea and Antioch got it right. I think Paul and Barnabas maybe are getting this wrong.

[23:28] They says, it is necessary to circumcise Gentiles and to command them to keep the law of Moses. the church in Jerusalem is now also divided on this same question of truth.

Believers within the church, they belonged to this congregation. How is the church going to handle this? Some of our members hold this to be true, others of our members hold this to be true.

How do we resolve this? In verse 6 we read, so the apostles and the elders came together to read the matter. So in verse 6 we don't see the whole church being mentioned at least not initially.

It's the elders and the apostles setting extra time aside to consider the matter that originated in another church but which now also exposes further clarification needed in their church here in this city.

But if you look down at verse 12 we're told all the multitude so before long even if it began being considered by the elders before long they found a way to involve the whole congregation and it's a big church in Jerusalem described as a multitude.

[24:49] They came together the representatives of the church the elders and even with the apostles with them showing humility involving all the members inviting the brethren the whole church to prayerfully weigh the teaching that's been introduced at another church and they made time in

their busy schedules for this need.

Again not only the elders maybe initially setting that time apart but eventually the whole church saying this is important. They accepted this other church's request for help as a natural part of the scope of their work as a local church.

They put other tasks on hold for a moment they called a special meeting or several meetings of their church to consider this matter that was troubling another church.

Verse 7 says when there had been much dispute vigorous debate strong arguments being exchanged and weighed. see how the concerns of one church have become now the concerns of another church.

Here's a principle for us when one church asks another for assistance with a matter that threatens peace or truth Christ expects churches to help one another.

[26:16] How do I come to this conclusion? The Holy Spirit is directing every one of these steps things. And when they give their answer their conclusion they say it seemed good to the Holy Spirit.

This is the authority of Christ guiding the work of churches with authority to labor for peace and truth helping one another.

In verse 7 Peter rose up and said to the men and brethren and I'll summarize verses 7 through 11 he's saying we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ anyone will be saved.

In verse 12 we read that all the multitude this is the entire local church that was actively participating in a theological discussion as official church business.

They kept silent now and they listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. Verse 13 says after they had become silent James spoke.

[27:20] To summarize he said God knowing from all eternity that all nations would call on the name of God this is how he is restoring the kingdom through David's line in Jesus Christ.

He is rebuilding his kingdom on earth from the ruins of that kingdom. And now the church made up of Israel and all nations is recipients of God's grace.

Now verses 20 and 21 are tricky and I can't spend a lot of time on them now. I also don't want to skip over them entirely. Look at verse 20. It says we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.

Verse 21 for Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. He's saying this, as the gospel goes out and God has a people that he has dispersed and put them in synagogues to hear the Old Testament to prepare them to hear the good news of Jesus.

And as people believe whether Jew or Gentile they need to enjoy fellowship with one another. And the practices of these pagan temples to demons should not be brought into the church in any way.

[28:44] So sexual immorality was cult prostitution and it was bundled in with worship of the emperor and the demons of a given city. So what he's making clear is this, don't force them to be circumcised.

Salvation is by grace not by the ceremonial law. But as believers united into a church they are all to live in fellowship together.

And this must be clear by the love you have for your congregation choosing the church even when there are Jews, weaker Jews who are understanding now this transition away from the ceremonial law to the new covenant commands.

In other words, don't circumcise them but also protect the fellowship of these newly forming churches. Don't create stumbling blocks one for another.

verse 22, it pleased the apostles and the elders with the whole church. There's an agreement here.

[29:52] There's what you could call a common suffrage. It's using the authority that Christ has entrusted to a congregation to affirm what we believe to be right.

We don't want barriers to fellowship but salvation is by grace not by keeping the law. And because it pleased them then they sent men of their own church to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas and it lists who those men were.

Now notice the detail at the end of verse 22. These were leading men among the brethren. To be sent on behalf of a church to another church as a messenger is a great honor. Leading men, these are men who are a blessing right here to our church. They have the fruit of the spirit. They're capable. They will bring credibility to this decision. And it pleased the whole church. Here's our seventh principle. These believers experienced a special God directed pleasure.

[30:58] A blessing of arriving at a resolution, better clarity, and consensus with other believers. Combining the wisdom of their churches.

The satisfaction of confirming truth together, bringing closure to a divisive question, affirming this pleasing conclusion. It was enjoyed by all.

If it's a blessing, it should be shared. It should be something that everyone can know they have a part in. The elders were not acting alone as an entity unto themselves.

It pleased the apostles, the elders, with the brethren. All who participated in this lively process together were edified. They all exercised the authority Christ gave the church, fully participating to help another church.

Verse 23 says, then they wrote this letter by them, the apostles, the elders, and the brethren, to the brethren, the whole church, who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

[32:07] So notice now, this letter is going to be a blessing not just to the one church at which the question originated, but to other churches. Let it be multiplied. You could say these churches became almost a laboratory to accelerate, pinning down gospel truths to protect the peace.

The others didn't have to go through great dispute to be blessed by this wonderful revelation and this conclusion. They said, greetings. Verse 24, since we have heard that some who went out from us, they had been part of that church, they have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, you must be circumcised and keep the law to whom we gave no such commandment. They're saying these people, using words to cause division, do not have the authority of this church. We gave them no such commandment.

Paul and Barnabas modeled being sent humbly as delegates of a church, where these others are going around as troublemakers. Their authority is not to be taken seriously.

In verse 25, they report, it seemed good to us being assembled with one accord. Assembled in the name of Jesus, having prayed, discussed vigorously, and arrived at a conclusion.

[33:32] It seemed good to us to send these messengers with Paul and Barnabas, giving you our conclusion. Here's an eighth principle. After the churches discern the mind of Christ together, when they declare his truth, it carries his authority.

The church has the authority delegated by Christ. And as we prayerfully discern the mind of Christ together, when the church acts, it's not just like a social club making a vote on some transaction. It's not like a parent-teacher association appointing this or that or doing something like that for the government. government. No, it's the authority of the kingdom of heaven carried out through the common suffrage of a local church.

It's the whole church exercising what Christ gave it, which Christ himself called the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And they do this by sending a letter to other churches in the hands of messengers.

Their authority was a declarative statement of truth in line with God's word. So their authority was declarative.

[34:51] They send it through these chosen men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't forget, these are Christ's ambassadors.

They love him. We receive them with love. Please receive them back this way. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth.

See, here's two witnesses coming to also bear witness and report on the discussion of the church and help the church to receive it well. Matthew Henry commented out, these were chief men and he drew four conclusions from that.

It shows a respect to the church at Antioch. Even though Antioch is newly formed and like a little small sister compared to the massive church in Jerusalem, the church in Jerusalem respects that little church in Antioch way out of the way.

We're sending some of our chief men to report this back to you. You are important, little church. Number two is to encourage Paul and Barnabas. We're not making them go back alone.

[35:57] This is not just their burden. We're in this together. Number three, as a solemn embassy, here comes this small little group coming and it's men that should be received with reverence and respect so that the message will be highly regarded when it's heard.

And fourth comment by Matthew Henry, it was a way of keeping their communion with the saints as the Nicene and Apostolic Creeds affirm. It's a way to say we have the same gospel.

We're in the same kingdom. We have the same interests. We share in your communion. Notice that this is a letter upholding truth. What it's not is a church in Jerusalem applying censures saying now those men who brought in this false teaching need to be excommunicated or publicly admonished. That's not the role that's given in us as an example of a church to another. The authority to discipline, to carry out, you know, the decision making of censure or of consequences for sin, that belongs to one local church only.

Another church beyond that, even in an association and a congregational understanding does not have that authority. But they do have a true spiritual declarative authority.

[37:17] And when it's the truth from that aligns with God's word and in our case also the confession of faith as one more safeguard, it should be received with spiritual authority of truth.

Verse 28, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than those necessary things. And it's exactly what James had suggested.

Again, not Peter, not the Pope. In this case, it was James whose suggestion they followed. Verse 31, I'm sorry, verse 30.

After they say farewell, it's our blessing, when they were sent off, they came to Antioch. And when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter.

The letter is not just to officers, the letter is to the whole church. And the letter would be presented to the whole church. Verse 31, when they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.

[38:22] And every letter we get in the New Testament, this is the occasion, this is the context. Gather the church together. A public reading of this now breathed out New Testament letter for the good of the church.

And notice how they received God's word. They rejoiced over its encouragement. Here's the ninth and final principle that I see in this passage.

When one church labors to uphold truth and peace for another, it leads to rejoicing and encouragement. It's a blessing.

It's a blessing from God through one church to another. So I've asked you to begin praying with me and gathering more information considering how can our church carry out these principles of this chapter.

I'm encouraging us to consider, strongly consider and participate in a lively way with Brett Shaw when he comes in a few weeks as the chair of the Rocky Mountain Reformed Baptist Association of Churches for these reasons.

[39:34] There's also nine of these coincidentally, but these are fast. Okay, here's the nine reasons. Number one, I've thought about how in Matthew 25, Jesus says, And he's speaking to those he calls his brothers, my brethren, my disciples.

It's Christians have a principle that's to be applied individually. Initially, I believe. Show love to one another, even the least among these that are his brethren that he adopted, as if you're doing it unto the Lord.

And if that's true for us as individuals, how much more for us when we're gathered disciples of Christ, collectively. A church cannot obey Christ so long as it remains bent inwardly on itself.

We take care of one another, but we also are like these churches that we see beyond our own walls, our own lives, our own needs, our own desires, our own maybe even priorities.

We let what God's doing in his broader kingdom shape all of those things, and we do it as unto the Lord, out of love for him, no matter how small or out of the way another church may be.

[40:50] Number two, because we need to pray and we need to receive the prayer of other churches. Ephesians 6, 18 commands the church to be praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit for all the saints.

We're commanded to pray for other churches. Think about this. When we pray, it's the Lord stirring our hearts to care about what he cares about, and our actions will follow our prayers.

Those churches we know, we will pray for. On the other hand of it, it's we don't want to be a church trying to work through whatever God has given us to work through faithfully without the help and the prayers of others.

And I see this correlation so clearly, at least on a few occasions, where we might be feeling a time where it's heavy or where it's uncertain. We don't know what to do.

And someone who doesn't even know what I'm feeling or what might be going on, they tell me weeks later, we were praying for you that day from the pulpit. It might be someone in Florida or somewhere else, some other church praying for our church.

[41:58] And I just see when God does something that I had no other solution for it has to be the answer of the prayers of other churches. We receive that and we don't want to go it alone because that means we'd be missing out on other churches praying regularly, devotedly, and knowingly for our church.

Churches that want to know our church and what God's doing here. Number three, because we need to practice in this life for the life to come. I preached on this a while back and it still, it amazes me what Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, how all the saints, the whole church, officers and members, everyone will one day rule over angels when Christ returns in the new heavens and the new earth.

That's what the life to come will be like. We will be ruling. And Paul applies that to the local church. He says, well then, how can't you make a simple decision for yourselves? You're going to be given so much more authority in the life to come.

So brothers and sisters, think about it. These few years right now in church life, for each of us, this is our time to actively participate in the life of this church because this is where God prepares us for the life to come.

We gain practice in ruling well, both locally and in helping other churches like the church in Jerusalem did. And that's when we're serving others and seeking the wisdom and the mind of God and setting time aside to do that.

[43:35] We don't even know how the Lord is using that preparation for the life to come. Number four, because from time to time, any church and every church will need help upholding truth and peace, including ours.

There may be times where we are called upon to consider a matter and weigh it and wrestle with it and dispute over it and give advice. And there will be times most likely where this church will need it.

Number five, because the authority of each local church is already safeguarded in our second London confession of faith. And as long as we associate with churches that share our same confession of faith, the authority of a local congregation is never in question.

Number six, because an association of churches provides an opportunity for peace, increase of love, mutual edification, without which it is hard for churches to survive, especially church plants.

It just provides extra strength that the Lord will use to bless in the way he's ordained. Number seven, because all Christians have remaining sin. We are not just barely sinners still.

[44:47] We are all still deeply flawed. I am deeply flawed. Whoever this church appoints to the office of elder and deacon will be deeply flawed.

And so we ought to proactively seek out mutual submission and accountability. Galatians 6, 1 and 2 says, Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

See, we're all ones that can very easily be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Number eight, because an association gives us strength in numbers to withstand the

attacks of our own sin, Satan, worldliness, and wolves.

It's a way to apply that wise principle of Ecclesiastes 4, 12, which says, though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Number nine, and finally for today, it's more from common sense and looking back at history. Regional associations in this Reformed Baptist tradition have survived and thrived by supporting one another sacrificially.

[46:08] This is true in the 1600s and 1700s in England. In the time of Spurgeon, he died an early death, and in his own words, he thought it's because he was tired of fighting a battle against those that didn't share the same confession of faith.

He called it the downgrade. It was so exhausting when people view themselves ultimately above God's own word. More recent generations have also proved it viable.

It's been a resurgence of Reformed Baptist churches around the world, and those that are thriving and those that are encouraged in the ministry tend to be ones that very quickly put themselves in a regional association like the one in southeastern USA, Southern California, Texas, and even one in New Zealand, and one forming in England as well.

I believe we are part of a movement trying to get back to these wonderful principles in Acts 15, and my prayer is that, Lord willing, these ancient paths that were marched out in the scriptures and over the centuries can prove once again to be a source of God's provision and accountability and encouragement for entire churches like ours in this generation, and if God will be pleased to preserve Reformed Heritage Church, maybe even for generations to come.

So, beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, associating ourselves is one way that we can be a vessel of Christ's blessings.

[47:47] We need discernment about which association, which timing, those types of things, but I see this principle so clearly. Christ loves to bless his churches through the ways that he has established.

Wouldn't it be a joy and a delight to serve as a vessel to bless other churches and also to be an empty vessel receiving that blessing from Christ, even as it comes to us through other churches. Our Lord loves to bless his churches, and he does this through one another, through other churches. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your faithfulness over the centuries to your people, to your local churches.

We thank you that you're the one who began the good work in any local church. You're the one who will see it through to completion, and you've also ordained the means, the secondary causes that will carry out your will and your purpose.

We do pray, Lord, that you'll give us good discussion, good clarity, good wisdom, good questions to ask. We pray that your Holy Spirit will guide this church on the right decision, the right timing in a way that brings you all the glory.

[48:57] We thank you, Lord, for your word, how it's alive, how even though this happened in the first century, more than 2,000 years ago, we could relive it as if we're there.

We could be in any one of these churches, and we thank you for how you are so faithful, Lord, and one day you will come and rule over the new heavens, the new earth, that great cloud of witnesses to which we belong as well in Christ.

We praise you for your faithfulness, Lord, your power. Amen.