

Good morning! When we were 19 or 20, Pam and I were involved with Quiet Fire, a coffeehouse ministry to young people. The church to which we belonged offered us a tremendous amount of freedom to use the whole building. We had a large, open room upstairs, painted in bright green and raspberry colors with cable-spools for tables, and overstuffed sofas and chairs we often used the sanctuary for worship. One night we were in the sanctuary and were behind the communion rail praying, when a member of the church came in and demanded that we leave that “sacred” area behind the rail. That person was deeply offended and some of our young believers were hurt and confused. Is that what it means to be Christian? I've thought about that incident many times since. This morning, let's consider this letter written to some new Christians in Antioch two thousand years ago:

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.” So when they were sent away, 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.

**Acts 15:22-31**

This letter follows Dr. Luke's fascinating account of a rather contentious leadership gathering in Jerusalem. There was disagreement over requirements for new believers and the role of Gentile believers, particularly whether or not they had to become Jewish to be followers of Jesus. These leaders hammered out a way to approach these new Antioch believers. They didn't want to load them up with a lot of extraneous demands so they sent a team to mentor these new Christians and wrote them a letter saying, "OK, just to get you started, don't eat animals sacrificed to idols or strangled and don't sleep around." The response was joyful encouragement. I like it! If we aren't careful, you and I can quench the joy of people around us---especially new Christians---by demonstrating a works-based view of what it means to be Christian. Instead of weighing them down with a lot of heavy requirements, we need to build them up with what a joy it is to belong to Jesus and be adopted into His family. How about you this morning? Do you remember the joy of being new in Christ? How exciting it was to be part of a movement that was changing the world? Maybe you've lost your first love. This morning, take some time just to tell Jesus that you love Him. Worship Him and thank Him for being who He is. Ask Him to direct your steps today and then watch for His direction during the day. Jesus is still as supernatural and exciting as He ever was...look for what He will do today!