

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

DISPUTE (ACTS 15:1-5)

SWEET 16

Chapter 15 takes place in A.D. 49, roughly 16 years after the day of Pentecost. The church starts to move into a time of organizational structuring.

- Organization tends to happen after a crisis. In ch.15 the church has its first
- organizational crisis: are Gentile converts saved if they don't obey OT law?

SOME MEN CAME TO DEBATE

A group of Christians called the Judaizers went up to Antioch and started teaching other believers that you had to follow the customs "prescribed by Moses" or you "cannot be saved." The Jews had been welcoming Gentiles into their faith for centuries if they adopted Jewish Laws and practices.

WHY NOT KEEP UP THE OLD STANDARD?

Many of the Pharisees had become Christians, but argued that they should keep the rules, the Law of Moses. They failed to see that **Jesus changed the rules.**

- The church in Antioch was the best example of a people that knew that Christians were **saved by grace through faith, not circumcision, works, or laws.**

PAUL AND BARNABAS WOULDN'T LET THIS FLY

After "serious argument and debate" Paul and Barnabas decided to go south to Jerusalem and meet with the elders and apostles in the most influential church.

ARRIVING IN JERUSALEM, THEY SHARED THEIR STORY

When representatives from Antioch arrived in Jerusalem they shared all that happened on their missionary trip. Ironically enough, a group of converted Pharisees raised the issue of the OT customs. The "party of the Pharisees" was a subgroup of Christians that carried their traditions/rituals over into their new faith.

THE LAW OF MOSES

We must not confuse the Law of Moses with the 10 Commandments. The NT never tells us not to honor the 10 C's, but we are free of mandatory circumcision, food laws, and other OT guidelines for living. The OT guidelines set Jews apart from people that didn't honor God. They were a reminder of their dependency on Him.

WRITTEN VS. ORAL

The converted Pharisees also defended oral tradition. This is something that outraged both Jesus and Paul and started many conflicts with the Pharisees.

- As Christians, we base our major practices from the written Word of God. **Traditions are fine, but the Bible is the Christian's anchor.**

DISCUSSION (ACTS 15:6-11)

A MEETING WITHIN A MEETING

The more prominent leaders—Peter, Paul, James, Barnabas, and possibly some others—met to discuss this huge issue about new converts in a mini meeting while the large meeting was taking place. After some discussion, Peter stood in front of the whole group to speak about the central message of Christ.

PETER HAD BEEN IN A SIMILAR SPOT

Peter was there when the 1st Gentile receive the Holy Spirit and was saved (ch.11). About a decade had passed since the first Gentile was saved, and Peter reminded the council that God gave the Gentiles the same salvation He had given them.

"...CLEANSING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH."

Peter affirms that **God makes no distinction between people based on race, nationality, or even pasts**, but if **anyone has faith, they will be saved by grace.** Peter's patience began to wear thin. He accused the Judaizers of putting a burden, yoke, on the Gentiles that even the Jews couldn't carry.

GOD KNEW WE COULDN'T DO IT ALONE

The argument about the law wasn't that it was hard, but that it was ineffective at saving people. **Even the 10 Commandments are impossible to completely uphold** (Matthew 5:21-30), but that reminds us that **we are dependent on God's grace, forgiveness, and Spirit.**

WE WORK, BUT WE CANNOT EARN SALVATION

V11 affirms what Paul later writes in Gal 5:4, "You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace."

- **Do we strive to grow closer to God? Yes! But, if we try to earn heaven, or think because we're "good people" that we deserve salvation; we will become separated from Jesus.**

DIRECTION (ACTS 15:12-21)

"THE WHOLE ASSEMBLY BECAME SILENT"

After Peter defends grace through faith, Paul and Barnabas just add evidence to the work of Christ throughout the Gentile world. After them, James, the leader of the massive Jerusalem church, takes charge. The meeting was going very smoothly. This shows us that debate/business in church can run well.

JAMES AGREES WITH PETER AND PAUL

James takes evidence from Peter and Paul and lines it up with prophecy from Amos 9. Instead of asking "How did this happen?" he asks, "**What is God doing?**"

- **We must line up revelations with God's word. We must also learn to ask, "What does God want?" more than "Why is He doing this?"**

THE CHANGES WERE PROPHESED

Like Peter quoted Joel on the Day of Pentecost, James affirms that there's a new way that people were going to relate to God. The Pharisees wanted to go about religion as usual, but Christ came to change that, and there was biblical proof.

A LEADER LEADS

James stands in front of the assembly. First, he clarifies what they will not do. They will "not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles that turn to God." Meaning, the customs of the Jews will not be forced upon new Christians.

LET'S FOCUS ON THE MAJORS

James decided to focus on the majors of Christian living after the Gentiles gave their lives to Christ. The majors listed in v20: **Abstaining from idol worship** (worshipping only Jesus), **sexual immorality** (Biblical sexual practices), and **eating things strangled or containing blood** (???).

WHAT'S UP WITH THE BLOOD IN MEAT?

This list of "do's" was for Gentile converts. While idol worship and sexual purity make sense, the strangled/bloody meat is confusing. To Jews, eating any kind of meat that had blood in it was repulsive and offensive. Because most of the Gentile areas still had many Jews, the council asked Gentiles to respect law-keeping Jews.

SO, COURTESY AND RESPECT ARE IMPORTANT?

The council came to this conclusion: Jewish Christians, accept Gentiles without forcing your OT customs. Gentile Christians, respect the Jewish Christian's culture/laws when you are around them. **It boils down to loving others and showing them we care by being courteous and considerate.**

THIS "MINOR" IS ACTUALLY A MAJOR

Though Christians can eat meat that has been strangled or has blood in it, we're called to be wise enough to know when something is "permissible, but not profitable" (1 Corinthians 10:23).

- So, a minor like drinking alcohol or meeting curfew at a Christian college can become major because we are being disrespectful or rebellious.

WELL, WE ARE ALL IN AGREEMENT...KIND OF.

At this point, the two opposing groups agreed on the resolution from James to the church at large.

Unfortunately, the unity wouldn't stick.

- By A.D. 100 these two groups worshipped totally apart from each other.

HEALTHY CONFLICT

- Disputes are ok within the faith, as long as they are handled in a Christ-like manner. Remember the Bible is the final authority.
- We are to love and fellowship with other Christians that differ on minor issues.
- Losing relationships over non-essentials is foolish.

GRACE IS GIVEN, NOT EARNED

- We cannot earn salvation; it only comes by grace through faith. When we try to earn salvation or think "being good" saves us, we've distanced ourselves from God.
- This doesn't excuse apathy or laziness. We are called to do "good deeds" to help others and glorify God.

HONOR ONE ANOTHER

- We are to love everyone. We show this with respect, consideration, and courtesy, treating all people as children made in the image of God the Father.
- We are to love others not living the Christian life, while also not condoning actions that are sinful.

CAN DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN SHOULD

- We are to be humble, meek, peacemakers, hungry for righteousness, merciful, and pure in heart.
- We are called to be wise enough to know that even though we can do something, it may be a sacrifice for the greater good if we don't.