

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JUNE 21ST, 2026 // THE BOOK OF ACTS

DEBATE (ACTS 15:1-5) SOME MEN FROM JUDEA

As the church grew and flourished in Antioch, it drew the attention of other Believers.

- The men who “came down from Judea” were probably from Jerusalem, and they planned on convincing the Gentile Believers of the necessity of keeping the laws of Moses.
- This is the first record of internal strife within the Church.

“UNLESS YOU ARE CIRCUMCISED”

Circumcision was the leading rite of the Jewish religion, and you could not be considered an authentic Jew without it.

- It had been THE sign of the covenant with Abraham for over 1,900 years, and they were not ready to stop it just because some Gentiles didn't see it as necessary.
- To them, it was more than tradition; it was essential for salvation.

SERIOUS ARGUMENT AND DEBATE

Paul and Barnabas engaged these Judaizers because their “Jesus Plus” doctrine was producing confusion and anxiety in the Church.

- **There are majors and minors. When anything contradicts a major, it is worthwhile to establish the truth that is immovable.**

“UP TO THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS”

Everyone agreed that the topic deserved more discussion and that the only way to be sure was to talk with the oldest leaders in the Church, especially the ones who had walked with Jesus.

- **They sought the acknowledged authority of those who had been with Jesus; we seek the authority of Scripture that has been given to us by the Holy Spirit.**

“GREAT JOY TO ALL THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS”

Luke inserts that, as they traveled to Jerusalem, they took the time to share what God had done during their first missionary journey. The gospel was spreading!

- **Whenever Christians hear how God is working anywhere, they rejoice because people are being saved. Cold or indifferent responses to God's movement may reveal more about our relationship with Christ than we want to admit.**

WELCOMED AND CONFRONTED

After arriving in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and given the opportunity to share about their journey and the contention in Antioch over circumcision and the law.

- Immediately, some voiced their position on every Gentile being circumcised and beginning the process of keeping the law.
- **Some ideas and traditions have strongholds throughout Christianity. The only response can be from God's Word.**

TRUTH (ACTS 15:6-18)

“THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS GATHERED”

This wasn't just a disagreement. The decision made here would seriously affect the entire Christian Church, and it deserved much deliberation.

- It is worth noting that there is no implication of heated arguments or anger. It seems like there was a real desire to understand what Christ had done for His Church, not just for Jews or Gentiles.

“PETER STOOD UP”

Peter may have been one of the oldest, most respected men in the room. Plus, he had personal testimony of God's work among the Gentiles.

- Peter had been called by God to share the gospel message with the Gentiles so they could hear and believe.

GOD GAVE THEM THE HOLY SPIRIT

Peter said that God knows the heart and that God was the one who gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit, just like He did for the Jews who believed.

- **Peter was making it clear that the new sign of salvation was a changed heart and that there would be no difference between Jews and Gentiles.**

“SAVED THROUGH GRACE”

The yoke of keeping the law was never possible, so why would they expect the Gentiles to do better than anyone else?

- Peter declared that we (all) believe and are saved through (by) the grace of the Lord Jesus.
- **By grace, through faith = Jesus alone.**

THE SILENT ASSEMBLY

After Peter's declaration, the assembly was ready to hear what God had been doing throughout the region.

- Barnabas and Paul were clear to share how God had been working in and through the Gentiles.
- Signs, wonders, and changed hearts accompanied God's work, not circumcision.

JAMES RESPONDED

James, a leader in the Jerusalem church and the brother of Jesus, took the opportunity to remind them that God had shared His plan for the Gentiles in the Old Testament.

- Gentiles, who would be called by His name, had been chosen and known long ago.
- Gentiles are not a back-up plan; they were always part of the plan to make Christ known throughout creation.

GRACE (ACTS 15:19-21)

THEREFORE

With the evidence of Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and the Scriptures, James finally gave his judgment that issues like circumcision should never be insisted on for Gentile Believers.

- But he still offered a response to the Gentiles and also to those who sought to conform the Gentiles to their image.

IDOLS, SEXUAL IMMORALITY, FOOD, BLOOD

With the issue put to rest (for now), James called for obedience to a couple of commands and a couple of concessions.

- These issues were common among the Gentiles; committing to avoiding idolatry and immorality should be on the mind of every Believer.

The last two are interesting as James calls for them to voluntarily refrain from eating certain foods and meat that had not been properly prepared.

- Remember, Antioch was a place where Jews and Gentiles worked together as Christians in community, and these simple concessions could protect that unity, as some had lived their entire lives with a certain diet.

COMPROMISE

- Some things should never be compromised.
- **If we do not compromise in the non-essentials, we will compromise unity.**
- **Do we know what God's Word says we should never compromise? Are we choosing our word over His Word?**

STUMBLING BLOCKS

- Stumbling blocks will make people fall.
- **Sometimes it's Jesus, and sometimes it's us.**
- **When Jesus is the stumbling block (Romans 9:32), He is there to remind us that He is the cornerstone of our faith and to keep us from sin. When we are the stumbling block, we are hindering others from Jesus. Why would we want to be stumbling blocks?**

UNITY

- We can choose to be compatible with other Believers in non-essentials.
- **We can't make them compatible with us.**
- **We will not compromise doctrine for the sake of unity. But we must be willing to make practical arrangements so we can work together to make a united witness to the lost. This past week, did we argue more about politics, religion, and economics than we shared our faith? Who will we represent this week—Christ or our opinions?**