

The Council at Jerusalem

Acts 15

MAIN IDEAS

- Dissension over how the Kingdom is going to permeate the world
- The question: what is required for a saving relationship with Jesus?
- The issue is being driven by believing Pharisees
- What to do when gospel and culture clash?
- Conflict in the church (Paul and Barnabas)

Begin by reading chapter 15.

Chapter 15 is a pivotal chapter in the book of Acts. It is where the gospel of grace first gets hashed out. There are two opposing groups: Peter, Paul and Barnabas on one side vs. the Pharisees on the other. The Pharisees were ok with Gentiles being followers of Jesus as long as they observed the Law. The dispute was over circumcision, Kosher eating, and keeping with the Sabbath observances. The others saw this as a new day—where faith would be king. Circumcision and abstaining from “unclean” animals had their time, but now faith in Jesus alone was key. Paul further expands on this idea in many of his letters.

- Read Galatians 1:6-9. What does he mean by “another gospel”?
- Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Why the emphasis on “not as a result of works”?

As the story unfolds, Peter takes center stage and relays the story of how he was led by God to bring the Gospel to Cornelius in Acts 10 (read 10:1-48). Then Paul gets up and tells how God did amazing things in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles on his mission trip.

Why do you think the Pharisees resisted so much?

Finally, James (the Lord’s brother and leader of the Jerusalem church) gets up and summarizes the arguments. He quotes the prophet Amos (9:11-12) and says that the entrance of the Gentiles into the church was prophesied long ago and that the doors should be wide open to them without the Law as a requirement.

- Read 15:10-11. What is Peter’s attitude towards the Law?

- Read 15:12-21. How does James become even more prominent than Peter?
- Read 15:19-20. The church wrote a letter to the Gentiles. What did they advise them to do? Why focus on these issues?

If the Apostles were to write a letter to the modern day American church, what do you think it would say?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Do you get frustrated by those who seem to take the gospel too lightly? Are you acting like a Pharisee or do you feel you have legitimate concerns about how the gospel is treated? Explain.

Where do you see churches actually making it harder to follow Jesus?

When someone says, “I was in a church that was very legalistic”, what comes to your mind?

GROUP RESPONSE

Share any experiences you have had in a legalistic church.

Share a time you questioned yourself as to whether or not faith alone was enough.

REPRODUCE

Make sure when sharing the Gospel you don't add anything to it. Grace producing faith is enough.

KEY VERSES

From the sermon:

- Acts 15:19

Additional verses from the study:

- Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29
- John 6:28-29