

ACTS 15

The Jerusalem Council

Dissension over Circumcision

1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching (διδάσκω, imperf.) the brothers,

Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (σώζω, aor pass.).¹

2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.² 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some from among the party of the Pharisees³ who had believed (τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες (perf. act.)) rose up and said,

It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.⁴

The Church Gathers

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.⁵ 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them,

Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe (πιστεύω, aor.). 8 And God, who knows the heart,⁶ testified (μαρτυρέω, aor.) about them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. 9 And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith (τῇ πίστει).⁷ 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples (τῶν

¹ "Circumcision is necessary for justification." This is a phase one justification issue.

² This very important question had to be settled in Jerusalem among the church's top leaders.

³ As a former Pharisee, Paul likely personally knew these individuals. He had been one of them.

⁴ "Circumcision is necessary for justification, and obeying the Mosaic law is necessary for sanctification." Now it is a phase one justification and phase two sanctification issue.

⁵ This seems to be a closed door session of the apostles and elders only.

⁶ **Ac 1:24** 24 They prayed and said, You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen....

⁷ See *Faith Alone*.

μαθητῶν)⁸ that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe⁹ that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.¹⁰

12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, James replied,

Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles¹¹ who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.¹²

19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,¹³ 20 but should write to them to abstain: (1) from the things polluted by idols; (2) from sexual immorality; (3) from what has been strangled; and (4) from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.

The Letter of Encouragement to Antioch

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brothers, 23 with the following letter:

The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Because we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word

⁸ Here “disciple” seems synonymous with “believer.”

⁹ In this passage we see both phase one faith and phase two faith. Believe in belief !

¹⁰ See *Grace Alone*.

¹¹ The Old Testament indicates there will be many Gentiles in the Messianic kingdom, and they will remain as Gentiles.

¹² **Am 9:11-12** 11 In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, 12 that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, declares Yahweh who does this.

¹³ Gentiles may turn to the Lord Jesus as Gentiles. They do not have to become Jews.

of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements, 29 that you abstain:

from what has been sacrificed to idols,
from blood,
from what has been strangled, and
from sexual immorality.

If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. 32 And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. 33 And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.¹⁴

Paul and Barnabas Separate

36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas,

Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are.

37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.¹⁵

¹⁴ The church thrives when there are many teachers and preachers.

¹⁵ Churches need the visit of wise, godly men, for their strengthening.

Notes