

## - A Study in Acts -

### Chapter Fifteen – First Doctrinal Problem

#### ACTS 15:3-12:

In our last lesson, we looked into the first two verse of this chapter, which introduce the doctrinal conflict that has found its way from Jerusalem to Antioch of Syria. This is not an external problem, but one that has come from within; the attempted re-insertion of the Law of Moses (namely circumcision – **Vs.1**, and the keeping of the Law of Moses – **Vs.5**). After a great dispute, whereby Paul would state in his own words, **“We did not yield submission even for an hour”** – **Galatians 2:5**; it has been decided that since the problem originated from these men coming from Jerusalem, they would go there to solve this issue. In this lesson, we will begin to look into the pattern by which all doctrinal issues should be solved!

#### Text #1:

**Acts 15:3-5** **“So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. <sup>4</sup> And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup> But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.””**

**First:** In **verse 2**, we learn from Luke that Paul and Barnabas would be sent to Jerusalem with **“Certain others”**; Paul will tell us that one of these others is significant enough to mention by name – Titus; **Galatians 2:3**. The significance is found in the entire verse, note:

**Galatians 2:3** **“Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.”**

Titus would accompany them as a living example of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ apart from circumcision and the Law of Moses. He would become a significant illustration of the principle of Gentile entrance to the **“Called Out”** solely on the basis of faith in Christ.

#### Passed Through:

The disciples of these areas that Paul and Barnabas (and certain others) would pass through as they journeyed south, were far more ready to rejoice in the success of the Gospel among the Gentiles, because they would be more closely related to the Gentiles than the Jews.

**Received:** As Paul and those traveling with him arrived in Jerusalem, the **Body of Christ** there received them. They would then give a report of **“all that God had done with them”**. The meeting and report would be interrupted by the true source of the problem that Paul had come to deal with, the Pharisees. Remember that these have come into the Body of Christ; not with pure intent and faith in Christ, but to undermine those who had (**Galatians 2:4**). They intend to bind

on Christians that circumcision and the Law of Moses are still necessary, which Paul will refer to as being put into bondage, especially if they were successful.

**Text #2:**

**Acts 15:6 “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.”**

**First:** It is necessary to note in the text a vague transition that takes place between **verse 6** and **7**. Before Peter is going to address the general assemble who have come out to hear the conclusion of the unified Apostles (Peter to speak first then Paul with Barnabas), and the elders (James to speak representing them); that they met together first, to determine what the Spirit of God would determine should be done. This would show to all, that this problem did not originate with those guided by the Spirit of God, and would also demonstrate that everything to come would be! This is verified by Paul’s version of these events, note:

**Galatians 2:2 “And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.”**

**Second:** What is not mentioned in **Verse 6** is that the Spirit of God is fully in control of the singular Gospel and Doctrine of Jesus Christ. The consideration of this matter was not a general debate, but a process of revelation, both of the truth to be taught and a unified front of solidarity that could not be undermined. This is referred to by all of these leaders in the letter that will follow, note:

**Acts 15:28 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things”**

**Text #3:**

**Acts 15:7-11 “And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up *and* said to them: “Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, <sup>9</sup> and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.””**

**Much Dispute:** It is uncertain, and I would not debate either way, whether or not this dispute was during the private meeting, or once they prepared to move to the assembly to present the instruction. There would seem to be more evidence that the dispute was without; as we have already mentioned the Spirit of God being with those of reputation assembled, and that from the chaos of the assembly prior to the teaching, we then see the product of unity on the whole body – **Verse 22**.

In addition, we know that at the end of Peter's dissertation, the multitudes are going to remain silent while Paul and Barnabas speak next.

But at any rate, the instruction is the vital portion of what transpires next, as it will bring in the afore mentioned effect of unity on the whole **Body of Christ**.

**Peter Speaks:** There are three ways to establish Biblical authority:

1. **Direct Command.**
2. **Spirit or Apostolic approved example.**
3. **Necessary inference.**

Here Peter is going to introduce first an approved example, whereby God accepted Gentiles apart from circumcision, and the Law; and given a direct sign by God of His approval. In fact, Peter shows that they became pure by their faith; and anyone trying to bind anything on the Gentiles apart from this, is in fact testing God directly.

All men will be saved by the favor of God through Jesus Christ, and this is why it is called "The Good News" and commanded to be preached to all men!

**Text #4:**

**Acts 15:12** "Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles."

**Paul and Barnabas speak:** Here we have an illustration of a necessary inference.

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- God worked miracles through Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles.
- Paul never included circumcision or the Law as he preached among the Gentiles the Gospel of Christ.
- The conclusion then is either God accepted the Gentiles without circumcision and the Law of Moses, or God approved of liars. For He showed He approved of the preaching of Paul by the miracles he performed.

**Next: "Direct Command, and Result!"**