

- A Study in Acts -

Chapter Fifteen – First Doctrinal Problem

ACTS 15:13-22:

In our last two lessons, we looked into 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. As the Apostles and elders have come together with the Spirit of God, they are now establishing the Divine authority by which unity will be found. This has now begun to be revealed to the multitudes.

There are three ways to establish Biblical authority:

1. **Direct Command** (James will now speak to this in this lesson).
2. **Spirit or Apostolic approved example** (Peter has used this method in his presentation).
3. **Necessary inference** (Paul and Barnabas have used this method).

In this lesson we will see James use the **direct command** method and we will also see the result of all three combined!

Text #1:

Acts 15:13-21 “And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, **“Men and brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴ Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of 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 will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;
I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;

¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the LORD who does all these things.’ (Amos 9:11-12)

¹⁸ “Known to God from eternity are all His works. ¹⁹ Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from sexual immorality, from things strangled,*

and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

James: Here we have **a command** or statement that God has said concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles. James also confirms that the prophet’s words have been fulfilled in the words of Peter, as God worked through him to bring about fulfillment of this fact.

James is going to also quote from **Amos 9:11-12** (Amos would perform his work during the reign of Jeroboam II, and just before the ten northern tribes would be taken into Assyrian captivity); where Amos is prophesying concerning the destruction of Israel (the certainty of Israel’s desolation (**Amos 9:1-10**), and then the restoration of Israel (I will raise up the house of David) which would include the Gentiles (here James is stating that this is fulfilled in the kingdom of Jesus the Christ).

Known to God: James continues to recognize that this was God’s intent even before the creation of men. We see this in the statement of Paul concerning the work of the Christ of God in the existence of the church as God’s eternal purpose in Christ (which would include all men) – **Ephesians 3:10-11**.

This was additionally the foundation of the “**Great Promise**” made to Abraham – **Genesis 12:1-3**.

Turning to God: James concludes “**therefore**”, that these Gentiles, who are converting to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, should not be troubled. Even though James does not mention the specifics of the trouble, we know by the context of everything we are dealing with in this chapter, he is specifying circumcision and the traditions of the Law of Moses.

The description used of the Gentiles “**turning to God**” is a simple description of the purpose of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in conversion (also described as being “**added to the church**” or “**to the Lord**” – **Acts 2:47; 5:14**).

Paul would describe this turning process as the heart of the Gospel he was sent to preach to Jew and Gentile, note:

Acts 26:17-18 “**I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”**

Abstain from: As the Gentiles turn to God, there is an expected transformation in their lives in no different way than in the lives of Jews who have obeyed the Gospel. The only difference is the detail of what or which works of the flesh they would have to abstain from. James here recognizes that the universal works of the flesh, that the Gentiles would have to deal with were associated with immorality, and then things strangled, and blood (which the last are items associated with idolatry and its practices); all of which men were capable of even before the Law of Moses came into being.

Moses has them that Teach Him: This is not given to substantiate the continuation of the Law of Moses, but simply to enforce that for many generations Moses Law has been taught, which included this final culmination of Jew and Gentile into one man (**Ephesians 2:14-17**); bringing fulfillment to the “**Great Promise**” made to Abraham.

And in that same synagogues’ instruction would have to include a time that would come when Moses’ words would be superseded by a greater Prophet!

Acts 3:22-23 “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.’²³ And it shall be *that* every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.” (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**)

Text #2:

Acts 15:22 “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.”

The product of God’s authority, especially when submission to His will is the primary focus is a joyful unity. This is the result of the entire congregation of God’s people as a result of this unified training.

In addition to the unity, they also concluded that chosen men of their own number would be sent to Antioch with the news of this event; especially since the problem had arisen here. This would allow the brethren to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that if any others came with different teaching than this again, it did not originate with them and should be seen as false.

Judas – Barsabas: His surname (Barsabas) means, ‘son of Sabas’ and hints that he may have been the brother of Joseph whose surname was also Barsabas (**Acts 1:23**). This Judas would also be, through the laying on of the Apostles hands, a prophet of God (**Vs. 32**).

Silas: Along with Judas, Silas was additionally a prophet and a leading man among the brethren in Jerusalem. Silas will accompany Paul on his second journey, after a falling out with Barnabas. He will share in the ministry of the Gospel and the sufferings for the cause of Christ with Paul. Not much else is known or spoken of Silas outside of the book of **Acts**; however, the “**Silvanus**” in the introduction of the letters to the church of Thessalonica must surely be Silas.

Next: “The First Inspired Letter!”