



Acts

Lesson 14, Chapter 15

Paul's first missionary journey was completed and successful. He and his team returned to their home base of Antioch to report to their leaders the details of the mission. Though opposition had come, many Jews and Gentiles had believed in Jesus as Messiah. New churches were established in the southern regions of Galatia, leadership had been established, and the new converts instructed in the basics of their faith.

But, even as the leaders in Antioch rejoiced over God's blessing, new problems were arising within the body. The inclusion of the Gentiles into a religious environment that was previously hostile was proving to be more than just difficult. Many questions and dilemmas regarding culture and faith needed to be addressed. For the Jews many questions regarding the commitment of the Gentiles to the Law of Moses, especially circumcision and purity laws, were a top priority. The Gentiles, having come mostly from pagan backgrounds, knew little about the God of the Jews and what would please Him. The dilemma was severe because the information the Jews had led them to legalism, and the Gentiles lack of information had led them to humanism and paganism. Somehow this chasm between Jew and Gentile had to be bridged if they were going to be effective as the body of Christ.

In Chapter 15, confrontation over these questions escalates. In the area of Judea the Jews were insisting that circumcision be required of

Gentiles for salvation. After much debate among the leaders in Antioch, they agreed to send Paul, Barnabas, and several others to get a final decision from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. After much discussion, which including final dramatic speeches from Peter and James, a verdict was reached.

A letter was drafted to be sent back to the Antioch congregation stating the Council's decision. To demand the Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses was contrary to salvation by grace, but to alleviate some of the social and moral barriers between the factions, two requirements were made. The Gentiles were requested to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things that had been strangled, and they were to keep away from fornication which was any kind of illicit sexual behavior.

Though the Council's edict did much to eliminate disunity, this problem was far from solved. Satan would continue to use this issue as a source of dissension and division within the Church.

Today God's people still struggle with the concept of grace. The idea that we need to do something to gain God's approval remains a stumbling block and a source of contention just as it was in the early Church. As fallen beings the idea of getting something for nothing is very contrary to our thinking. Fortunately, God is not like us!

READ CHAPTER 15

1. *What was the significance of circumcision, and why was it so important to the Jews? See Genesis 17:9-14.*

2. *What was Peter's pro-Gentile argument based on? Verses 8-9*

3. *What does Paul have to say about this issue in Galatians 2:15-16 and Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:1-6, and 1 Corinthians 7:18-20?*

4. *What does James give as the basis of his argument? Vs. 15-19*

5. *Why would the leadership decide it necessary to send some of their own men with Barnabas and Paul to deliver their decree? Vs. 22*

6. *What things did they ask of the Gentiles, and why would those be important? Vs. 20, 28-29*

7. *What caused Paul and Barnabas to go different ways? Vs. 37-39*

8. *Where did their separate journeys take them? Vs. 39-41*



The Council at Antioch established a very important precedent with the decree they established. It set the foundation for the difficult concept of grace versus works in regard to salvation. They were in agreement that following the law isn't a requirement for salvation. This doesn't mean that we can take advantage of grace to allow a life of sin, because we are called by God to live holy lives that are in agreement with the life of Christ we now have within us

- 9. Is there anything in the discussions or the decision that gives the impression that the leadership believed a person could live a continual life of sin yet be saved because of grace? In Romans 8:1-17, what does Paul say regarding this question of whether salvation by grace alone could lead some to live according to the flesh?*

Prayer requests:

Group time notes:
