

What God Has Done, *Soli Deo Gloria*

Acts 15:1-34

Part 3, November 10, 24, 2013

I. The Issue

A. The dissension and dispute at Antioch

1. Who caused the dispute to arise in Antioch?
2. What were they teaching the brethren?
  - a. “There is a strange proneness in us to make our opinion and practice a rule and a law to every body else, to judge of all about us by our standard, and to conclude that because we do well all do wrong that do not just as we do.” (Matthew Henry)
  - b. “The first strife was concerning the office of Christ, whether we are saved only by his righteousness apprehended by faith, or if we also have need to observe the Law.” (Geneva Bible)
3. Were they authorized to teach this doctrine? (Verse 24)
  - a. “The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law.” (John 7:18-19 ESV)
4. How does Luke describe the response by Paul & Barnabas? Unity or truth?
  - a. Dissension (ESV), sedition (Calvin): *stasis* - a *standing* (properly the act) that is (by analogy) *position* (*existence*); by implication a popular *uprising*; figuratively **controversy**: - dissension insurrection, standing, uproar. (Strongs)
  - b. Debate (ESV): *zetesis* - a seeking, an enquiry, a questioning, debate, a subject of questioning or debate, matter of controversy. (Strongs)
  - c. Read Acts 15:24 troubling your souls or unsettling your minds or subverting your souls - *Anaskeuazo* - to pack up baggage in order to carry it away to another place; of an enemy: dismantling, plundering; of a place: to overthrow, ravage destroy towns lands etc; to turn away violently from a right state, to unsettle, subvert.
5. What solution to the crisis was determined?
  - a. Why was the authority of Barnabas & Saul not sufficient?
  - b. Who was appointed as the delegation to Jerusalem?
  - c. To whom were they to present the question?

II. The Jerusalem Council

A. The Journey

1. What was the route of the delegation?

2. What did they do en route to Jerusalem?
  3. What was the reaction of the brethren?
- B. The Debate
1. Who received the delegation? (3 groups of people)
  2. What was the first thing that they (Barnabas & Paul) did?
  3. Who stood up while they were speaking?
  4. What was their contention?
    - a. Were there separate conditions to their assertion?
    - b. Were they asserting that salvation was dependant upon the conditions, or were they insisting on something different than those who had been subverting the brethren in Antioch?
  5. Who came together to consider this matter? See also verse 12, 22, 23.
  6. Were Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James the only ones who spoke?
  7. At what point did Peter finally speak?
    - a. Vs. 7 - What did God do in the early days through Peter?
    - b. Vs. 8 & 9 - What five things are attributed to God?
      - (1) To what was God bearing witness?
      - (2) What, for Peter, was the undeniable proof that God put no difference between Jew and Gentile believers?
      - (3) How does Acts 10:15 relate to the last clause of 15:9?
    - c. By doing these things, what was God declaring regarding circumcision, the Law, grace, faith, and justification? (See also Galatians 2:16)
    - d. Why does Peter say that they were putting God to the test?
    - e. What was the unbearable yoke?<sup>1</sup> Read Matthew 11:29-30.
    - f. What is Peter's positive conclusion?<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Acts 15:10-11 The rabbis often used the metaphor of a yoke with reference to the law, and Peter's reference to "yoke" here refers not just to circumcision but to the whole of the Mosaic law (see note on v. 1). By speaking of the law as an unbearable yoke, Peter was not denying that the law was God's gift to Israel. Rather, he was arguing that Israel was unable to fulfill it perfectly and that salvation could not be obtained through the law (cf. Rom. 2:17-24). Only one means of salvation exists for both Jew and Gentile: God's "grace" (Acts 15:11) in Jesus Christ. Paul also refers to any requirement to keep the OT laws as "a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). By contrast, Jesus calls people to take his new "yoke" upon them, a yoke that is easy (see note on Matt. 11:29). (ESV Study Bible)

<sup>2</sup>**we shall be saved, even as they**; either as the disciples, the Gentile converts, who without circumcision, and the works of the law, were saved by the pure grace and love of Christ, in dying for them, and on which they alone depended for salvation; or else as the Jewish fathers were, for they were justified, pardoned, accepted, and saved in the same way, as the saints under the New Testament are: they

8. What is Luke trying to say when he wrote, “And all the assembly fell silent...” What was the Holy Spirit doing to those assembled?
9. What did Barnabas & Paul declare to the council?
10. What explanation point was the Holy Spirit making through their testimony?

C. James’ Judgment

1. Why does James refer to Peter as Simeon?
2. What does James say that God did through Simeon?
3. By using the word *prophets* in v. 15, what is James saying regarding Scripture confirming the testimony of Peter, Barnabas, and Paul?
4. What two events were witnessed by the Apostles?<sup>3</sup>
  - a. When was David’s tent rebuilt or raised?
  - b. What promised salvific event would that bring about?
5. What was the effect upon the Gentile Christians of the teaching of the men from Judea and of the believing Pharisees? (Vs. 19)
6. James’ letter proposal - what four things were Christians to abstain from?
7. Do these abstentions predate the law?

---

could not keep the law perfectly, nor was there then, nor now, salvation by it, only by the grace of Christ; and in that way, and that only, Old and New Testament believers, Jews and Gentiles, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, are saved. The Gentiles were not saved by the light of nature, nor the Jews by the law of Moses; the one were not lost for want of circumcision, nor the other saved by it; the only way of salvation to both, and under all dispensations, is the Lord Jesus Christ; through whose sacrifice sin is atoned for, through whose blood it is pardoned, through whose righteousness men are justified before God, and are accepted with him; and through whom saints have communion with God; and by whom, and whose grace, and not by their own works, they shall be saved with an everlasting salvation, from sin, law, death, hell, and damnation: and the salvation of one and of another, even of all that are saved, Jews or Gentiles, is by grace; no one is deserving of it; they have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God; have done that which is abominable, and they themselves are abominable in the sight of God; they have destroyed, and cannot help themselves; nor have they anyone good thing but what they have received from the Lord, and therefore ought to ascribe all to his grace; it is by that they are what they are, have what they have, and do what they do. Salvation, in all its parts and branches, is owing to grace; and so it is with respect to all persons that are saved; some are not saved by their works, and others by the grace of Christ, but they are all saved by grace; and none have any room to boast of themselves against others. (John Gil)

<sup>3</sup>In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, saith the Lord who does all these things. (Amos 9:11-12 Brenton’s English Septuagint)

8. What logical conclusion did James arrive at regarding circumcision and the law? (See also verse 24)
  9. Does James seem concerned that the Law was not known by Gentile believers? Why or why not? (See verse 21)<sup>4</sup>
  10. Who chose the delegation that was to deliver the letter to Antioch?
  11. Who was chosen? Read Acts 1:23 and Acts 15:22 - what do you discover?
- D. The Letter
1. To whom is the letter addressed?
  2. Who and what is rejected and judged and what was the message that troubled and unsettled/subverted their minds/souls?
  3. How does James describe the decision, actions, and teaching of the assembled council and the Holy Spirit? Why was this important?
  4. Are the abstentions necessary for salvation? Why are they necessary?
  5. What is promised at the end of the letter?
- E. The Letter Delivered
1. How was the letter received by the believers in Antioch?
  2. What did Judas and Silas do for the believers? (See also 1 Cor. 14:3)
  3. Verse 34 in all the English translations until the ASV, NASB, NIV, ESV.
  4. Were Paul and Barnabas the only teachers in Antioch?

---

<sup>4</sup>Acts 15:19–21 James agreed with Peter that they should not trouble the Gentiles with the ritual laws. But he knew that Gentile Christians would have contact with Jewish Christians who still kept the ceremonial provisions, including laws about sacrifices, festivals, unclean foods, and circumcision. He offered a proposal by which Gentile Christians could have fellowship with Jewish Christians and avoid giving unnecessary offense. The word for (Gk. *gar*) at the beginning of v. 21 gives the reason for James's proposal: the Gentile Christians should abstain from certain things because "in every city" there are still Jews who observe these ceremonial laws and think them to be important. The first three requirements (see v. 29) seem to be contextually sensitive and designed for these specific circumstances: abstention from food offered to idols, from blood (meat with the blood in it), and from strangled meat (which would also have blood in it). (But Paul in other circumstances permitted believers to eat food offered to idols; see 1 Cor. 8:1–11:1.) The fourth requirement, dealing with sexual immorality, was of course not a contextual or optional standard of obedience like the other three. It may have needed special emphasis and clarification because many Gentiles' consciences were so corrupted that they did not hold to a high standard of sexual purity. This reaffirmation of the believer's need to maintain sexual purity also serves as a reminder that the moral standards of the OT still need to be obeyed. James concludes his appeal (v. 21) by noting the widespread (in every city) teaching and affirmation of the Mosaic law, thus suggesting that there is no need to give unnecessary offense either to Jewish believers or to unbelieving Jews who might otherwise consider becoming Christians in the future. (ESV Study Bible)