

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 18)

The door of faith had been opened wide to the Gentiles, and the legalistic Jews didn't like it! They insisted that Gentile converts must become JEWS first, before they were allowed to become CHRISTIANS. **In Acts 15, twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, the church had to act decisively to keep that door open.** Peter, Barnabas & Paul give testimony of what God has been doing among the Gentiles; then James anchors their testimony to the WORD and gives his recommendation.

Acts 15:13-18 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Amos 9:11-12 In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.

At one point in Israel's history, there were TWO TABERNACLES in existence at the same time – the tabernacle of Moses in Mount Gibeon, and the tabernacle of David in Mount Zion.

2 Chronicles 1:3-4 So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjathjearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem.

David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem and set it in a tent, the Tabernacle of David! The Tabernacle of Moses had an empty Holy of Holies, but the Tabernacle of David had a new order of worship ("sacrifices of praise") all centered around the Ark!

THE GENTILES WERE TO COME INTO THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID, NOT THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES! ACCESS TO THE ARK IS STILL AVAILABLE – BECAUSE THE DOOR IS STILL OPEN!

Acts 15:19-21 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

The conclusion of the matter was that the Gentiles should NOT have to become Jews to become Christians. They should NOT have to come to God through the Jewish worship system. However, they SHOULD have to leave behind their pagan Gentile worship system! These things had always been "preached by Moses" – **but the Gentiles didn't know that!**

The four "commandments" given here are certainly not the ONLY commandments that the Gentiles will have to obey – that would be a ridiculous idea, in light of the Moral Law of God which is eternal, and in light of the rest of the New Testament. Rather, they are a "crash course" in the laws of God that speak specifically against pagan worship ...

POLLUTIONS OF IDOLS – sacrifices made to images in pagan temples
FORNICATION – prostitutes and sexual rites in pagan temple worship
THINGS STRANGLED – the "food of demons" in pagan rituals (Origen)
BLOOD – drinking blood (of sacrifices or even victims) in pagan rituals

Acts 15:22-27 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Galatians 2:4-5 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IS NOT LIKE YOUR OLD PAGAN WORSHIP!

“We’re not asking for Gentiles to become Jews in order to become Christians – but we are asking you to leave your old Gentile lifestyle!”

Acts 15:28-35 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

What the first century church was really wrestling with in Acts 15 was the question, “Who is the church for?”

The natural “gravitational pull” of every church congregation is toward INSIDERS rather than OUTSIDERS. We have to guard against that! Churches that decide they are all about KEEPING the already saved never get too concerned about REACHING the unsaved. That’s wrong!

Churches designed for church people are full of hypocrites, because you basically have to be a hypocrite to participate! Transparency and honesty are dangerous in a church for church people, so everyone becomes good at covering up their issues to keep in everyone else’s good books.

The casualty of a church just for insiders is GRACE.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who declare that church is for everyone, regardless of belief or behavior. These churches value openness and tolerance more than they value obedience and truth! They end up picking which parts of the Bible they wish to embrace.

The casualty of a church just for outsiders is TRUTH.

What in the world do we do to manage the tension of this very difficult balancing act? We do what the first century church did! And, even more importantly, we do exactly what Jesus modeled in His earthly ministry!

Jesus was full of grace AND truth! He didn’t try to “balance” between them; He was the full embodiment of BOTH of them!

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

It’s easy to create an ALL-TRUTH church model. It may be even easier to create an ALL-GRACE church model. But Jesus didn’t leave either of those options open to us – we must be a GRACE AND TRUTH church!

John 8:11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Acts 15:19 (NLT) And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

Acts 15:36-41 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Barnabas once again wanted to take his cousin John Mark with them on their second missionary journey, but Paul refused because he had deserted them once before. And the contention was so sharp between them that they parted ways, and even picked new ministry partners! **Who was right? It doesn’t matter!** God now had two missionary teams!

Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

Paul takes Silas, while Barnabas departs with Mark back to the island of Cyprus, his home country where the first missionary journey started. However, years later in his very last epistle, Paul lets everyone know that his opinion of John Mark had changed dramatically ...

2 Timothy 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

Someone else’s opinion of you (even a leader’s opinion!) is not the final word on your life. Keep a good attitude, and stay faithful!