



I. The Dispute in Jerusalem (15:1 - 5)

Verse 1

Certain people (Jewish converts to Christianity) came down from Judea (they could not stay home) to Antioch

and were teaching the believers:

“Unless you are circumcised, (peritemno = to cut around) according to the custom (ethos = prescribed by law) taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Many Jewish converts had a difficult time accepting the Gentiles were “equal partner” with them without living according to the Laws of Moses. These men were passing a **negative judgement** on Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey.

The Redefining of Salvation!

Paul has preached, “And by him [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39)

The men from Judea taught in essence:

- 1) Jesus has saved up by his blood
- 2) but we have to do our part by
 - a. Being circumcised (becoming Jewish)
 - b. Following the Law of Moses (works)

This is not a side issue – it is at the heart of what Christianity believes! Is salvation an act of God’s grace through Jesus Christ or is salvation an act of man through decision to be circumcised and following the law? **Jesus would become an example rather than a redeemer!**

“Works righteousness” remains a huge false teaching in the modern Christian church

Verse 2

This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute (stasis = an insurrection) and debate with them. (zetesis = a questioning) So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

The best people to deal with this insider challenge is the ones who have already proven that they can persuade the outsiders to believe.

This reminds us that the true shepherd of the body of Christ has to contend with both inside and outside challenges to the truth!

Verse 3

[therefore]

The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria,

they told (ekdiegeomai = describe in detail) **how the Gentiles had been converted.** (epistrophe = turn from idolatry to God) This news made all the believers very glad.



Verse 4

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed

- 1) by the church (ekklesia)
- 2) and the apostles
- 3) and elders,

to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

Verse 5

Then [but]
some of the believers
who belonged to the party (haireisis = dissension)
of the Pharisees (specialist in the Torah)

stood up and said,
“The Gentiles must be circumcised
and required to keep the law of Moses.”

Even though these Jews who were once Pharisees had become believers, they could not accept others coming to Christ without having to be Jewish first (Ex. 12:48-49, Isa. 56:6) and without a willingness to submit to the Torah.

NOTE: The Apostle Paul was a former Pharisee! (Phil. 3:5)
He understood that Christ was a “new way” to righteousness with God (see Galatians 2:16)

II. The Jerusalem Council (15:6 - 11)

Verse 6

The apostles and elders met (synago = came together as one)
to consider this question.

Verse 7

After much discussion, (zetesis = debate/questioning)

Peter got up and addressed them:

“Brothers,
you know that some time ago
God made 1) a choice among you
that the Gentiles might hear from my lips
the message of the gospel and believe.

Peter points out that proof of God’s choice of Gentiles was the fact that God sent him to offer them an opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ.

Verse 8

[and]

God,
who 2) knows the heart,
showed (martyreo = testimony/witness)
[to them]

[that he accepted them]
by 3) giving the Holy Spirit to them,
just as he did to us.

Again, Peter points out the proof of God’s acceptance of the Gentiles – the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

God knows their heart – and this is the issue! Not works of the body!

Not just to them – but “just as” he did to the Apostles!

Verse 9

[and]

*He did not discriminate
between us and them,*

for 4) he purified (katharizo = to be pronounced free from the bondage of past sin choices through the payment of a debt) *their hearts*

by faith.

Peter remembers the vision God gave him (Acts 10:28)
These “Pharisees” would believe that these Gentiles were still “common and unholy” but God called them holy.

In other words, God justified them by faith – not requiring anything else but belief in Jesus Christ!

Verse 10

*Now then,
why do you try to test* (peirazo = on trial) *God
by putting on the necks of Gentiles
a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors
have been able to bear?*

If God did it this way – why do you feel like more is necessary?
The truth is – NONE of the Jews have been able to live up to this standard either! The law is a revealer of sin, not a redeemer of sin!
The yoke that law places upon our hearts is that we NEED a REDEEMER!

Go back to Galatians 3:2-3!

Verse 11

*No!
We believe it is
through the grace of our Lord Jesus
that we are saved,
just as they are.”*

Grace = undeserved – therefore unearned – therefore by faith alone in Jesus alone!

One again, “just as” we were saved! All people come the same way!

III. The Jerusalem Council – Paul and Barnabas

(15:12)

Verse 12

The whole assembly became silent
as they listened to Barnabas and Paul
telling about the signs and wonders
God had done
among the Gentiles through them.

Paul and Barnabas echo the same reality: We saw God work miracles as a proof of his acceptance of the Gentiles without any expectation of becoming Jews first.

NOTE: Both Peter and Paul do not use “theology” but experience to confirm their argument.

IV. The Jerusalem Council – James (15:13 - 21)

Verse 13

When they finished,
James spoke up.
“Brothers,” he said,
“listen to me.

This is James (“The Just”, “Camel Knees”) the half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55) who will become the leader of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 21).

It is clear from this verse that James carries a great deal of respect, even from Peter and Paul.

Verse 14

*Simon has described to us
how God first intervened
to choose a people* (laos = special people)
*for his name
from the Gentiles.* (ethne = nations)

The Jews have always felt they were the “special people” of God, now, James is saying that God has ALSO chosen others from the “nations” to be His special people.

Verse 15

*The words of the prophets
are in agreement with this,
as it is written:*

James turns to scripture to add “Theological” backing to this truth. James quotes Amos 9:11-12. No decision of the church leadership can be valid unless it is Biblical!

Verse 16

*“After this I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent. (restore the
covenant made with David)
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,*

Verse 17

*that the rest of mankind
may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles (ethnos = races/nations)
who bear my name,*

Verse 18

*[says the Lord,
who does these things’ —]*

things known from long ago.

These are not new ideas – this has been the plan of God from the beginning!

Verse 19

“It is my judgment (krino = legal statement) ,
*therefore,
that we should not make it difficult
for the Gentiles
who are turning to God.*

This is another proof of James’ high position in Jerusalem. For him to make a “judgement” he has great responsibility in the early church. This is the final statement!

*Instead
we should write to them,
telling them to*

- 1) *abstain* (apecho = a (no) + echo (to have))
from food polluted (aligema = ceremonially soiled/defiled) *by idols,*
- 2) *from sexual immorality,* (*porneia = sexual deviants*)
- 3) *from the meat of strangled* (pniktos = animals killed without shedding blood) *animals*
- 4) *and from blood.* (haima = life blood)

Why These Four Guidelines?

Why these four guidelines?

There are 613 laws in the Torah – why does the early church select these four guidelines?

Some say:

- 1) Trying to keep the Gentiles from annoying the Jews by maintaining some forms of religion.
- 2) Some say these guidelines apply to situations when Jews and Gentiles work together.
“If you’re not going to become Jewish, at least be sensitive to some of their concerns.”

My opinion is that these guidelines were laid down prior to the Mosaic Law and are universal principles given by God which all humanity should adopt. 1) Separate from idol worship, 2) Choose covenant, 3) Drain blood, and 4) Don’t eat blood.

*For
the law of Moses has been preached
in every city
from the earliest times
and is read in the synagogues
on every Sabbath.”*

The law of Moses is well known in these places, but the obligations of God are simpler than understanding and following the whole law. Gentiles still need to be sanctified unto God out of the world, but need not be burdened with the whole Mosaic Law.

V. The Jerusalem Council – The Letter (15:22 - 29)

Then

- 1) the apostles
 - 2) and elders,
 - 3) with the whole church,
- decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They chose 1) Judas (called Barsabbas) (Judah = “he shall be praised”) (Barnabas = “Son of Rest”) 2) and Silas, (Silas = “woody”) men who were leaders among the believers.

With them they sent the following letter:

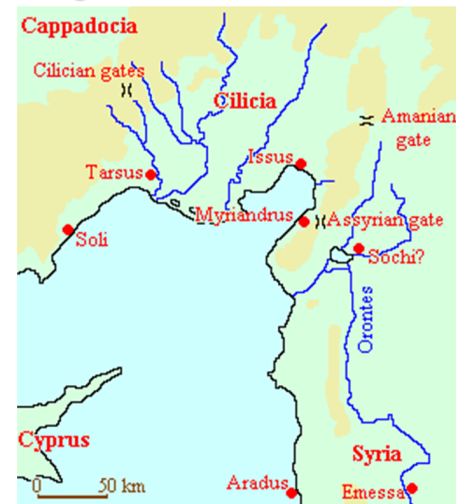
The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in

- 1) Antioch,
- 2) Syria
- 3) and Cilicia:

Greetings.

We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization (ou diastello = No instructions) and disturbed you, (tarasso = agitate/stir up negatively) troubling (anaskeuazo = subvert/reverse) your minds by what they said.



Verse 25

So we all agreed (homothymadon = homo (one) + thumos (passion))
to choose some men
and send them to you
with our dear friends
Barnabas and Paul—

Verse 26

men who have risked their lives (psyche)
for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 27

Therefore
we are sending

- 1) Judas
- 2) and Silas

to confirm by word of mouth
what we are writing.

Verse 28

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit
and to us not to burden you
with anything beyond
the following requirements:

Decisions must be prayed about, seeking the confirmation of the
Holy Spirit.

Verse 29

You are to

- 1) abstain from food sacrificed to idols,
- 2) from blood,
- 3) from the meat of strangled animals
- 4) and from sexual immorality.

You will do well to avoid (diatereo = keep yourself free) these
things.

FAREWELL.

VI. The Joyful Reception in Antioch (15:30 - 35)

Verse 30

So the men were sent off
and went down to Antioch,
where they gathered the church together
and delivered the letter.

Verse 31

The people read it
and were glad for its encouraging message.

Verse 32

Judas
and Silas,
who themselves were prophets,
said much to

- 1) encourage
- 2) and strengthen
the believers.

Verse 33

After spending some time there,
they were sent off
by the believers
with the blessing of peace (eirene = harmony/accord)
to return to those
who had sent them.

Verse 34

[but Silas decided to remain there]

Verse 35

But Paul and Barnabas
remained in Antioch,
where they and many others
taught and preached the word of the Lord.