

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To Spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 14:4-28:31

8. Christ's Merciful Resolution To The Tensions Between Culturally Differing Believers (Acts 15:19-35)

I. Introduction

- A. Scripture clarifies what is right and wrong on all issues of faith and practice, cf. 2 Timothy 3:15-16, 17.
- B. However, how we **live out** that righteousness *must* be **metered** by a **sympathetic consideration** to fellow believers or the lost who have **different backgrounds** from us, for their consciences have often been programmed to have differences of opinion on what is "right" and "wrong", and we are responsible not to wound their consciences, cf. 1 Corinthians 8:12-13.
- C. Christ exemplified how this was to be done in His work through the Jerusalem Church in Acts 15:19-35:

II. Christ's Merciful Resolution To The Tensions Between Culturally Differing Believers, Acts 15:19-35.

- A. In our last lesson, we learned the Jerusalem Council had decided that circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law were not necessary for Gentile believers, Acts 15:1, 6-11, 13-19.
- B. Since Acts 1:1 shows Luke implied what Jesus had **begun** to do in His earthly ministry He *continued* to do in the Church after His ascension, we know this decision was made by the Lord's ruling in the Council!
- C. That being so, James and the other leaders of the Jerusalem Council with him were also used of the Lord to provide a **merciful resolution** to the **TENSIONS** between **culturally differing believers** , 15:19-35:
 - 1. James knew that were Gentile believers to flaunt their liberty before Jews who had heeded the Law, it would create needless tensions with Jews, especially with unsaved Jews the Church was to evangelize.
 - 2. Thus, he urged that Gentile believers be directed by letter from the Council to be **considerate** of Jews in avoiding certain things that were overtly abominable to them due to their background, Acts 15:20:
 - a. James urged that Gentile believers avoid "food polluted by idols" (Acts 15:20a), food sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29) and possibly eating in pagan temples, 1 Cor. 8-10; Bib. Kno. Com., N. T., p. 395.
 - b. James urged that Gentile believers avoid "fornication" (Acts 15:20b), a term in this context referring to the Leviticus 18:6-20 moral code that included not only obvious immorality, but things like the union of close relatives that Gentile groups often practiced.
 - c. James urged that Gentile believers avoid eating strangled animals and blood (Acts 15:20c), that they respect a very basic rule of God (Lev. 17:10) that dated back to the Noahic Flood, cf. Gen. 9:4; *Ibid.*
 - 3. He added that these restrictions would not be hard for Gentile believers to heed, and that they would also be wise to heed; after all, the Mosaic Law was widely known in every city in the Roman Empire, making these issue well known and therefore reasonable for Gentile Christians to observe, Acts 15:21.
 - 4. James' verdict not only met the approval of the rest of the Council members, but they added to his conciliatory tone by choosing to send two witnesses from their own group to testify the validity of this ruling along with Paul and Barnabas as they reported back to the Church of Antioch in Syria, 15:22.
 - 5. The witnesses they sent included a Jewish believer, Judas, and a Gentile believer, Silas, a wise choice in view of the Jew-and-Gentile relationship issue involved, Acts 15:27; *Ibid.*, p. 396.
 - 6. This delegation was met with great joy and consolation for the Church at Antioch, Acts 15:30-31, and both Judas and Silas exhorted and confirmed the Church through their preaching, Acts 15:32.
 - 7. In time, though Judas and Silas were released by the Church of Antioch to return to Jerusalem, Judas returned while Silas remained with Paul and Barnabas, Acts 15:33-35a. This bit of information set the stage for the new missionary team of Paul and Silas, cf. Acts 15:40.

Lesson: *Though announcing the liberty of Gentile Christians not to be circumcised and not to keep the Law to be saved, the Jerusalem Council also called them to modify their behavior so as not to offend Jews on basic, important Jewish taboos for the sake of godly love! This directive edified the Church.*

Application: *May we obey God's Word, but in WAYS that do NOT HURT the CONSCIENCES of weaker brethren or the lost who have an imperfect ethic that does not comprehend the ways of God!*