

Tradition Gets Trumped

Acts 15

Icebreaker: Would you make a good jury member? Why or why not?

Some Background:

We saw last week that many more Gentiles were becoming Christians. Jesus said this would happen in Acts in 1:8. There was just one problem. The way these Gentiles were joining the family of God was not how some Jews thought it was supposed to be. All their lives they had been taught that to be a part of God's people the males had to be circumcised. Some Jewish Christians went to the cities where Paul and Barnabas had converted Gentiles and taught that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be Christians.

Acts 15:1-11

Who did Paul and Barnabas go to for advice?

- The apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

The church in Jerusalem was the oldest of the churches and had elders with the most experience. Jerusalem was also the home of several of the apostles.

Who supported the idea that Gentiles had to first be circumcised and obey the law before becoming a Christian?

- Some Christians who were Pharisees

Peter, who was the first to convert Gentiles gives some testimony. *What does Peter say was the sign that God had accepted the Gentiles?*

- God had given them his Holy Spirit.

Romans 2:28-29—"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."

God has always been after people's hearts.

In verse 11 Peter says both Jew and Gentile are saved by what?

- Grace

Jesus came and fulfilled the law. Through Jesus comes grace and truth (John 1:14). Jesus came to circumcise the hearts of mankind. What Jesus did is not skin deep. He came to change the heart. Peter says that is exactly what he saw God do through grace to these Gentiles.

Acts 15:12-18

Next Paul and Barnabas give their testimony about what God had done among the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas

mention what two things that God did among the Gentiles?

- Signs and wonders—all apart from the Gentiles being circumcised.

James the half-brother of Jesus is the next to speak. *What does James point them back to?*

- Scripture to show that even in the Old Testament God said that this would happen.

Why is it important to turn to scripture when trying to make decisions?

- Because it is the word of God. It has authority over the opinions of people.

God does not always do things the way we expect him to do it. Our preconceived ideas of the way things should work is not always accurate. It is important to differentiate what is tradition and what is scripture. Many churches have made a big deal out of things that are never found in scripture.

Why is it important to realize God doesn't always do things the way we think he will?

- God is bigger and wiser than we are.
- His plans are bigger than us.
- It is humbling.

Isaiah 55:9—"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

When have things not gone your way and you later found out it worked out better than if God had done things your way?

Acts 15:19-21

The verdict—they were not to quench the zeal of these new Gentile converts by placing on them the burden of circumcision or requiring them to obey all of the law. Instead they gave a couple of rules for them to follow. These four regulations were regulations required under the law of any Gentile living among God's people.

Why is it important for new converts to have some guidelines?

- When you come out of the world you may not know the right decisions to make in some situations.
- However, requiring things that scripture does not require can be burdensome.

How is it possible to quench a new Christian's zeal by giving them rules and regulations that are not found in scripture?

- Living the Christian life can be hard enough without a whole bunch of man made rules on your shoulders on top of everything else.

Application

How can you appreciate God's grace in the lives of Christians you are not on the best terms with?