

Readings

Scripture

¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. ³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

⁶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.

¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old."

¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

- Acts 15:1-21 (English Standard Version)

Sermon Outline

The Challenge of Living By Grace
Acts 15-16:5

The Acts of the Apostles
Brad Anderson

We struggle to live by grace... (Acts 15:10-11)

Which contexts present a special challenge to live by grace?

In the context of lengthy process... (Acts 15:1-21)

In the context of delivering communication... (Acts 15:22-35)

In the context of sharp disagreement... (Acts 15:36-41)

In the context of submissive application... (Acts 16:1-5)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- How does your family or church usually decide what to do when areas of controversy arise?
- Looking at the concerns of the Pharisees in Mark 2:16, 18, 24 and 7:6, what other things might these teachers be saying are necessary for the Gentiles to do? If you were one of the Gentiles hearing that these regulations were required, how would you feel about your faith? As a strict Jew, why would these things be important to you?
- The letter of Paul to the Galatians was probably written after the journey described in chapters 13-14 but before the events of chapter 15. From Galatians 2:21, 3:5 and 3:10-14, what is the main issue as Paul sees it? If these regulations were accepted, what would that do to all converts so far?
- What is the significance of the council's decision in light of Acts 1:8?
- In light of this section does Galatians 5:6 seem like a good summary of what it really means to be a Christian? Why or why not?