

Acts 15, A Disciplined Church
6-21, The Discussion
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A. Overview

1. 15 is the third trip of P&B out from Antioch, following famine visit to Jer. and missionary trip to Turkey.
2. Last time:
 - a) The purpose of the trip is disciplinary, not legislative. Follows the instructions of Matt. 18.
 - b) Contrast between 15:3 and 15:4-5, between those who rejoice over what God has done through P&B, and those who want to add Circumcision.
3. This time: three presentations in conference that settled the matter.
 - a) Peter: the precedent of Cornelius.
 - b) B&P: the evidence of the recent trip.
 - c) James:
 - 1) Supports this line of argument with Scripture
 - 2) Suggests a compromise, w.r.t. v.5 (law of Moses, but not circumcision).
 - d) Note openness to data about what God has done, rather than
 - 1) sophisticated theologizing, or
 - 2) twisting the Scripture to explain the data away.

B. 7-11, Peter

His argument has three steps.

1. 7-9, It is indisputable that Gentiles can be saved by faith apart from circumcision.
 - a) 7, You all remember how distinctly God sent me to Cornelius. Though I was originally criticized for the event, after my explanation of the circumstances you all agreed (11:18) that God had indeed "to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."
 - b) 8, The validity of their faith is beyond question. God knows the hearts, and he confirmed it with the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - c) 9, By granting them this sign, the same one we experienced (cf. argument in 11:17), he removed any distinction between what happened to us and to them. It is by faith (emphatic position) that both we and they are saved.
2. 10, Works, on the other hand, have a questionable pedigree. Even we and our fathers find them unbearable.

Application: Contrast Peter's view here with Paul's testimony in Phil. 3:5,6. Even today, I've heard Jews carp about the view of this verse: "The law's not a burden. We keep it joyfully every day." The learned theologian can rationalize his way around the law and persuade himself that he is keeping it; the tender

conscience of the simple country fisherman will not accept the rationalizations. Perhaps this is why God established the fisherman as the apostle to the circumcision, and sent the learned rabbi off to the Gentiles. Paul would be too likely to argue fine details of doctrine. Peter sees through the smoke with down-home insight.

3. 11, Therefore, instead of insisting that *they* must come through circumcision the same way as *we*, it would be more appropriate to conclude that *we* must be saved by grace, the same as *they*. "Even as" is "according to the same manner," viz., through faith. This verse directly challenges and reverses v.5.

C. 12, Barnabas and Paul

1. Note order: Barnabas takes the lead here because of his stature in the Jerusalem assembly. He is truly one of them.
2. The nature of the presentation. Even though Paul has just written Galatians and has a carefully developed theological argument, their position here is based on the facts of their experience, not that argument. Perhaps due to the fact that the speaker is "word of wisdom" Barnabas rather than "word of knowledge" Paul.

Application: Theology is useful for grounding sympathetic saints against attack; not so much for responding to antagonistic opponents. Don't throw out theology: Gal is as much a part of Scripture as is Acts 15. But don't rule out the existential argument, either. Each has its place.

D. 13-21, James

1. His character and position.
 - a) Brother of the Lord Jesus, Matt. 13:55.
 - b) 12:17, appears to be prominent leader of the assemblies. Also borne out by his words in 19, lit. "I [emphatic] judge," cf. Paul's role in 1 Cor. 5:3.
 - c) Eusebius records that he was a Nazarite, highly regarded even by unsaved Jews on account of his strict piety.
 - d) Thus a man likely both to favor the conservative position and to sway the assembly.
2. His analysis, 14-18
Two pronged: observable evidence, and scripture. The two must be considered together.
 - a) 14, Peter has declared *how* [not that] God saved the Gentiles (that is, by faith, not by the burden of the law).

The wording is extremely suggestive: "Gentiles" is *egnoi* "nations," commonly used for non-jews, but "people" is *laos*, which is usually the name for the Jews! God is turning the nations into his own people.

- b) 15-17, the OT prophets themselves agree *that* Gentiles would bear God's name.

(NB: extensive discussion on differences between the LXX, which James follows, is irrelevant. On any reading, Amos does not address the question of *how*, and on any reading, he agrees *that*, the Gentiles will be saved.)

- c) 18 is a summary: the existence of the ancient prophecy shows that these recent events are not unanticipated, but known to God all along.

3. His recommendation, 19-21

A negative and a positive, followed by a reason.

- a) 19, Negative: "Don't trouble them." Rare word for "trouble," only here in NT, but occurs several times in the LXX:
- 1) Judg. 14:17, what Samson's wife did to Samson to learn his riddle.
 - 2) 1 Sam. 28:15, what Saul did to Samuel in bringing him up from the dead.
 - 3) Mic. 6:3, supposed offenses of God against his people that might move them to rebel in the way that they have.
 - 4) Jer. 46:27, what no one will do to Israel when God has restored him.

The basic sense is "to bug, to annoy." Later refs (15:24; Gal. 1:7; 5:10) use *tarassw*, a more neutral term. James is being very forceful. "Get off the back of the Gentiles." In the context, the reference is to the circumcision requirement.

Application: Quite unexpected, given James' background; shows the depth of his walk with the Lord. Beware stereotyped responses, either from others or from ourselves. If we're open to the Spirit's leadership, we will surprise ourselves and others.

- b) 20, Positive: the four requirements. What is their role? Why some food rules, but not others (e.g., pork)? Why fornication, but not murder? Some read 21 to suggest the objective is not to offend Jews, but pork and lack of circumcision would offend them well enough!

Answer may lie in the chiastic structure of Leviticus.

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Reminders of Atonement | 1-7, sacrifices | 23-25, feasts |
| Agents of Atonement (priests) | 8-10 | 21-22 |
| Need for Atonement | 11-15 | 17-20 |
| Day of Atonement | 16 | |

Focus on "need for atonement."

- 1) Before ch. 16, it concerns ceremonial uncleanness:
 - a> unclean animals (which Peter's vision set aside)

- b> uncleanness due to reproduction
- c> leprosy
- d> issues

It is noteworthy that the only reference to circumcision in the entire book is in this section (12:3).

- 2) After ch. 16, it concerns moral offenses, all related in one way or another to the ten commandments.
 - a> 17:2-9, no meat to be offered anywhere but at the tabernacle, to guard against idolatry.
 - b> 17:10-14, no eating blood (probably same reason)
 - c> 17:15-16, no eating things that are not slaughtered (because the blood has not been let out).
 These three all center around the danger of idol worship, which could be hindered by requiring special attention to how animals were slain (thus can't participate in pagan feast).
 - d> 18:1-30, Fornication
 - e> 19 is a pot-pourri of other commandments, covering the gamut of the decalogue.
 - f> 20 returns to false gods and adultery from the perspective of family, thus v.9 at the center.
 - 1> 1-8, extended section on idolatry (offering children)
 - 2> 9 For every one that curseth his father or his mother
 - 3> 10-21, Extended section on fornication (cf. ch. 18)
 Thus three out of the four chapters of Lev. 17-20, the first two and the last, are covered by James' regulations, which receive the most detailed discussion in those chapters.
 - 3) Conclude: James is saying, "Don't bother the Gentiles with the ceremonial law. But remind them of their continued obligation to the ethical law, as exemplified in these principles." Thus he effectively splits the difference with the Pharisees, who in 15:5 wanted circumcision and submission to the law of Moses; James agrees to some laws, but not to circumcision or other laws of its ilk.
- c) 21, Reason. But what is the reason?
- 1) Conform for the sake of not offending the Jews in the various localities? But the very lack of circumcision was just such an offense, far more fundamental than not eating blood. Also, why the emphasis on those who *preach* Moses? Wouldn't the number who *hear* him be far greater, and thus a greater motive to avoid offense?
 - 2) Better: Note contrast between "we write" (20) and "them that preach [Moses]" (21). Don't force the church to propagate details of Jewish custom, since the Synagogue will take care of that. Cf. 20:21-25, which recognizes an important distinction between gentile and Jewish believers in their attitude toward the law.

Summary:

1. Concern with *both* scripture and God's demonstrated working.
2. James' readiness to allow others to differ, in spite of his personal conservativeness.

Hymn: No Blood, No Altar Now.

Analysis

- A. 1-2, Disagreement in Antioch [Last message]
- B. 3-5, Contrasting Responses to the Gentile Mission [Last message]
- C. 6-29, Jerusalem Conference
 - 1. 6-21, Discussion
 - a) 6 Sunh/xqhsa/n te oi(a)po/stoloi kai\ oi(presbu/teroi i)dei^n peri\ tou^ lo/gou tou/tou.
 - b) 7-11, quote p: Peter's speech
 - 1) quote f: 7 pollh^s de\ zhth/sews genome/nhs a)nasta\s Pe/tros ei)^pen pro\s au)tou/s,
 - 2) quote:
Surface syntax as shown. Deep structure is skewed:
 - a> 7-9, we know that faith does save, because it saved the Gentiles.
 - b> 10, by our own experience we know that works are only a burden.
 - c> 11, therefore we must be saved as they are, and not vv.
 - a>)/Andres a)delfoi/,
b> result p: Faith has already saved them.
 - 1> text: aq p
 - a: aq f: u(meis e)pi/stasqe o(/ti
 - b: qa: a)f' h(merw^n a)rxai/wn e)n u(mi^n e)cele/cato o(geo\s
 - 1: dia\ tou^ sto/mato/s mou a)kou^sai ta\ e)/qnh to\n lo/gon tou^ eu)aggeli/ou
 - 2: kai\ pisteu^sai:
 - 2> result
 - a: 8 kai\ o(kardiognw/sths geo\s e)martu/rhsen au)toi^s dou\s to\ pneu^ma to\ a(/gion kaqw\s kai\ h(mi^n, *kardiognwsths* is here to confirm the *pisteusai* of v.7.
 - b: 9 kai\ ou)qe\n die/krinen metacu\ h(mw^n te kai\ au)tw^n, th^| pi/stei kaqari/sas ta\s kardi/as au)tw^n.
 - c> Contrast: Faith must save us, too. They can't come our way; we must go theirs.
 - 1> Neither we nor they can be saved by the law.
 - 10 nu^n ou)^n ti/ peira/zete to\n geo/n,
 - a: e)piqei^nai zugon e)pi\ to\n tra/xhlon tw^n

maqhtw^n

1: o(\n ou)/te oi(pate/res h(mw^n ou)/te h(mei^s i) sxu/samen basta/sai;
contrast Peter's view here with Paul's testimony in Phil. 3:5,6. The learned theologian can rationalize his way around the law and persuade himself that he is keeping it; the simple country fisherman knows it is an impossible burden.

2> Both we and they must be saved by grace.

11 a)lla\ dia\ th^s xa/ritos tou^ kuri/ou)Ihsou^ pisteu/omen swqh^nai kaq' o(\n tro/pon ka)kei^noi.
Note reversed order: not "they shall be saved in the same way as we," i.e. through circumcision, but "in fact we must come in the same way as they," through faith.

c) 12, Paul and Barnabas:

1) 12)Esi/ghsen de\ pa^n to\ plh^qos,

2) kai\ h)/kouon Barnaba^ kai\ Pau/lou e)chgomene/nwn o(/sa e)poi/hsen o(qeo\s shmei^a kai\ te/rata e)n toi^s e)/qnesin di' au)tw^n.

NB: Having just written Gal, Paul could certainly have delivered a masterful theological argument here. Instead, he simply cites the effect of the mission to the Gentiles. Shows proper role of theology: for the systematic instruction of sympathetic hearers, not for the refutation of opponents.

d) 13-21, James' Decision

quote p: James

1) quote f: 13 Meta\ de\ to\ sigh^sai au)to)\s a)pekri/qh)Ia/kwbos le/gwn,

2) quote: Reason-conclusion p

a>)/Andres a)delfoi/,

b> a)kou/sate/ mou.

c> Reason: Analysis: summary p

1> Detail:

a: Present experience: quote p

1: quote f: 14 Sumew\n e)chgh/sato kaqw\s not hoti

2: quote: prw^ton o(qeo\s e)peske/yato labeli^ne)c e)qnw^n lao\n tw^| o)no/mati au)to^.

b: Previous prophecy: quote p

1: quote f: 15 kai\ tou/tw| sumfwnou^sin oi(lo/goi tw^n profhtw^n, kaqw\s ge/graptai, Amos 9:11-12.

A. What is the point of James' argument?

1. That Gentiles can come into the kingdom?
YES. This is the point of the reference to Peter's comments.

2. That they don't need to be circumcised?
NO.

- B. How does Amos support it?
1. That Gentiles will seek the Lord? Only if we take LXX over MT.
 2. Take relative clause as subject of sentence, because of lack of repeated *et*? Then the sense would be that the nations over whom God's name is called join Israel of old in enjoying dominion over Edom, prototypical of the rebellious nations. But Waltke 10.3.1, Judg. 1:4; omission of *et* is not unknown with second of a series.
 3. *** That Gentiles will be in the kingdom? Yes, on any version of the text.
 4. That it is David's tent, rather than palace, indicating a new era? Cf. Edersheim on feast of booths as millennial, pp. 269,70. Ingathering of all nations.
 5. "After this," so that Amos is made to describe something AFTER what is happening in the first century? That is, Israel's dominion is NOT the first thing on the agenda. It will happen LATER.

2: quote:

- A. 16 Meta\ tau^ta a)nastre/yw
- B. kai\ a)noikodomh/sw th\n skhnh\n Daui\d th\n peptwkui^an,
- C. kai\ ta\ kateskamme/na au)th^s a)noikodomh/sw
- D. kai\ a)norqw/sw au)th/n,
- E. 17 o(/pws a)\n e)kzhth/swsin oi(kata/loipoi tw^n a)nqrw/pwn to\n ku/rion, kai\ pa/nta ta\ e)/qnh e)f' ou(\s e)pike/klhtai to\ o)/noma/ mou e)p' au)tou/s,

3: quote f: le/gei ku/rios poiw^en tau^ta

2> Summary: 18 gnwsta\ a)p' ai)w^nos esti tw| qew| panta ta erga autou. Works = v.14; known = 15-17

d> Conclusion: Recommendation: quote p

1> quote f: 19 dio\ e)gw\ kri/nw cf. 1Cor. 5:3 egw ...
hdh kekrika

2> quote: reason p

Special focus on episteilai (v.20) and khrussw (v.21). We'll exhort them THIS, since Moses already has people to preach THAT.

a: text: contrast

- 1: mh\ parenoxlei^en toi^s a)po\ tw^n e)qnw^en e)pistre/fousin e)pi\ to\n qeo/n, parenoxlew in LXX:

- A. Judg. 14:17, what Samson's wife did to Samson to learn his riddle
- B. 1 Sam. 28:15, what Saul did to Samuel in

bringing him up

C. *Mic. 6:3, supposed offenses of God against his people that might move them to rebel in the way that they have*

D. *Jer. 46:27, what no one will do to Israel when God has restored him.*

The basic sense is "to bug, to annoy." Later refs (15:24; Gal. 1:7; 5:10) use tarassw, a more neutral term. James is being very forceful.

2: 20 a)lla\ e)pistei^lai au)toi^s tou^ a)pe/xesqai tw^n a)lisghma/twn tw^n ei)dw/lwn kai\ th^s pornei/as kai\ tou^ pniktou^ kai\ tou^ ai(/matos:

b: reason: 21 Mwu+sh^s ga\r e)k genew^en a)rxai/wn kata\ po/lin tou\s khru/ssontas au)to\n e)/xei e)n tai^s sunagwgai^s kata\ pa^en sa/bbaton a)naginwsko/menos.

2. 22-23, Letter [next study]

D. 30-35, Return to Antioch [next study]