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Acts 15:1-29

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Exegetical Study

1. **Acts 15:1-21** - *“Some men came down from Judea to Antioch [of Syria] and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’ This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. 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 church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.’ The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.’ The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James¹ spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the*

¹ This James was Jesus’ half-brother, who would later write the book of James. He became a leader in the Church in Jerusalem. The other James, the brother of John, had been beheaded (see [Acts 12:2](#)).

Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things"² that have been known for ages. It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.' "

- a. Christianity is not about circumcision or being Jewish
 - i. The men who came from Jerusalem to Antioch of Syria were believers in Jesus Christ.
 - ii. These men traveled about 300 miles to basically say, "In order to be a Christian, you first must become a Jew and be circumcised."
 1. If this was true, then Christianity would just been a sect of Judaism.
 - iii. Pastor Gary said, "Circumcision is putting a knife to the place of reproduction. And God was basically saying this, 'I want you to put a knife to the place of reproduction as a way of cutting away the flesh so that you will always remember that you are a people who belong to me. I am your father as God, and you to be a people who are the product and the result of my divine design.' ... So, circumcision became the mark in their flesh at the point of reproduction as a reminder that [they] were a people belonging to God. ... It became [something] that distinguished them from other people on the earth. Today circumcision is practiced... as a matter of tradition or sometimes a matter of hygiene, but it has no bearing on someone's relationship to Christ. ... It was started with Abraham and it is still a right practice today..."
 - iv. Paul and Barnabas stated that being a Christian has nothing to do with going through Judaism, rules, and regulations; it was about going directly to God through a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- b. The Meeting in Jerusalem
 - i. There were Pharisees who were believers in Jesus Christ, but they were firm in their belief that a person must first become a Jew.
 - ii. Peter reminded everyone how he was a first-hand witness of salvation and the Holy Spirit coming to Gentiles. (see [Acts 10](#) concerning Cornelius and his household)
 - iii. Pastor Gary said, "[The] evidence for a born-again life [is] a pure heart. Now, I only point [this] out because I have some friends who are card-carrying charismatics - I believe in all the gifts of the Spirt - [who believe that speaking in tongues is] the evidence of being born again.

² [Amos 9:11-12](#)

Peter could have said, 'We know they are born again because we heard them speaking in tongues!' That's not what he said. He said, 'We know that they are born again because God has purified their hearts by faith.' It's all a heart-work that happens, and it was evidenced by a changed life."

1. **Acts 15:9** – *“He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.”*
 - iv. Peter emphasized the fact that the Law of Moses was not able to save anyone, and in fact, it was impossible to live out.
 - v. Peter clearly declared the truth that *“it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.”* (**Acts 15:11**)
 - vi. Paul and Barnabas shared their testimony about all that God had done among the Gentiles, and how salvation had come to the Gentiles by faith in Jesus Christ.
 - vii. James agreed with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.
2. **Acts 15:22–29** – *“Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.”*
- a. James disavowed the men who had come from Jerusalem to Antioch.
 - b. Pastor Gary said, “[These] are basically three rules about dietary [matters] and one rule [about] morality.
 - c. James wanted believing Gentiles to follow four specific things:
 - i. Don't eat food sacrificed to idols
 1. The Gentile believers were Greco-Roman people in belief and behavior, who embraced the pagan gods of the Greeks and the Romans.
 2. In that day, all of the meat at a local market had already been dedicated at a pagan temple.
 3. The Gentiles weren't concerned about where the meat came from, but the Jews were very concerned, because they believed

- the meat was defiled because it had been offered to idols.
4. The request was simply, out of consideration for Jewish believers, don't eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols.
- ii. Don't eat blood
 1. **Genesis 9:4** - "[God said,] '... you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.' "
 2. **Leviticus 17:10-11** - "Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood - I will set my face against that person who east blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood..."
 - iii. Don't eat the meat of strangled animals
 1. Animals that had been strangled to death still had blood in its body, so this was request was associated with not eating blood.
 - iv. Don't commit sexual immorality
 1. Sexual promiscuity and immorality were rampant in the culture of the Greek and Roman Empires.
 - v. Pastor Gary said, "I'm going to tell you why they came up with these four [guidelines]. What is the one thing that these four have in common? ... The one thing that all four of these regulations have in common is [sensitivity]. ... [James wanted them to be concerned about Jewish believers, because they didn't believe it was right to do any of these four things.] Let me tell you why this is important. Every single one of us who claims to know Christ as our Savior... we do not live a life unto ourselves alone. We live our lives unto God, and we live our lives with others in mind. [We are to] live our lives with sensitivity toward other people, [some of whom] are Christians and others who are non-Christians. ... We have to make sure that whatever we decide to do, in terms of our freedom, doesn't offend someone else whose faith is 'weak.' By week, what [Paul] means is, they may not have the same freedom, it doesn't mean that they are less of a Christian. It means, [they] don't have a clear conscience to do something that you think you have the freedom to do. ... [We should honor and respect [their position on a matter based on their conscience.] ... [This is about not] using our freedoms to stumble someone else or cause someone who is not a Christian to decide they don't want to become a Christian because of the exercise of your liberty. You may not be under the rules and regulations of the Law of Moses, but you are always under the law of love. Sometimes, sadly friends, we care more about our liberty than we [care] about loving our brother and sister in Christ. ... The Christian life is not living on an island. The Christian life is keeping others in mind and [making sure that] God is preeminent in your life. ... There are plenty of disputable matters today. There are disputable matters of

doctrine... that are non-salvation doctrinal issues, [that] are differences of opinion, and there are disputable matters of how Christians live their lives.

1. **Romans 14:1-3** - *“Accept him whose faith is weak, **without passing judgment on disputable matters**. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.”* (Emphasis added)
2. **Romans 14:13-21** - *“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. **Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification**. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.”* (Emphasis added)

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the 1984 New International Version (NIV)