

Acts 15

In the book of Acts we have the history of the early church: how the church began in Acts 2 and its growth and spreading to every creature. The first major problem that the church ran into, besides the physical persecution that arose, was the question of how the Jews and Gentiles were supposed to interact with each other within the Lord's church. The Jews have viewed the Gentiles as unclean for centuries and centuries, and were finding it a little hard to deal with these foreigners being accepted into something that God has ordained. The Gentiles viewed the Jews as a small nation of people that were very arrogant and pushy, and were likewise having issues with the Jews telling them that they had to keep Moses' Law. So how did they resolve the issue?

They called together the apostles and had an assembly to resolve this issue. Acts 15 records the events that took place. The first part of the chapter describes the problem with the spreading false doctrine of the Gentile having to follow Moses' Law. Beginning in verse 6 we have the arguments put forth. As we look into the next verses we will see three basic ways to establish authority that is approved by God and the only way we today can find God's commandments to us.

The first to speak was Peter. Peter tells the church and the elders of his encounter with the first Gentile convert, Cornelius. As we look back into the tenth and eleventh chapters of Acts we see the events that surround his conversion. First Cornelius receives a vision that tells him to send men to Joppa. Around the same time Peter receives a vision of a large sheet being let down from heaven and a voice that says, *"Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"* (Acts 10:13). Peter replies, *"By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean"* (Acts 10:14). So we can infer several things from this sequence of events: The sheet was from God, and that there was no animal on that sheet that Peter could kill and eat, because if there was one clean animal on that sheet, then he could have accepted the offer to kill and eat. After Peter's refusal to kill and eat, God tells Peter, *"What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy"* (Acts 10:15). After this happens two more times Peter is commanded to go with the messengers that have come to take him (vs. 19-20) and Peter did just that. Notice he had no other command but to go with the three men. When Peter arrives he still has no idea why he was there at Caesarea, and informs them of how illegal it was for him to be there and ask them why he sent for him (Acts 10:29). Cornelius fills Peter in on his vision and then Peter connects the dots, *"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality"* (Acts 10:34). Peter begins to preach to everyone when the Holy Spirit is poured out on all

the people present and it all becomes perfectly clear. Peter infers that God wanted Peter to come to Caesarea to come and preach the gospel to these Gentiles and to baptize them. In Acts 15, Peter summarizes these events to the council and use his own necessary inferences to show how God approved of the uncircumcised to be baptized.

Next to talk was Paul and Barnabas. They relay all of the examples of the Gentile conversions that they had been apart of. They were primarily located in Antioch, and this was a church with a large majority of uncircumcised converts. We can look in Acts 11 and read about they way the started and continues faithfully in the preaching and teaching of God's word. In Acts 15 there is only one verse that describes to us what Paul and Barnabas spoke of, "*All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles*" (Acts 15:12). The signs and wonders mentioned above was to show how God approved of the Gentiles' status in the church. Because the Gentile could do miracles and signs and wonders they were approved of God and their example proves the point to the assembly.

The last to stand uses one of the easiest and most reliable was to show authority, scripture. James stands and quotes Amos 9:11-12. He uses this scripture to show that all of the events that involved the Gentile was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Here in black and white a prophet of God predicted the conversion of Gentiles and who were they did with stand God?

Today we too can use the same logic to resolve our arguments. We can use the scriptures to find a direct command, approved example, or necessary inference. With out any of these we can not establish Godly authority. We must be willing to put aside or opinions and just rely on God for any and all authority in spiritual matters.

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