

TEXTUAL ISSUES (ACTS OF HOLY SPIRIT, CHAPTER 15)

Intro. People really don't want others to know about the gospel; i.e., the proclamation that Jesus the Christ is not only Deity, but Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. And for those who do proclaim, many do so out of tribal needs for affirmation. Otherwise, they would not be hurt by those who reject the Christ and His message. Otherwise, their raison d'être would not be focused upon things other than the Christ and His message.



Today in Acts 15 we encounter Judeans who were more concerned about tribal affirmation than following the orders of the Christ regarding the Law. They used their need for tribal affirmation to defecate on the gospel, to diffuse its power, and to commit the ultimate blasphemy: People must answer to human rules for morality and accountability, rather than the Lord God Yahweh. Note how Holy Spirit works when the Christ is ignored...



NO TO NONSENSE! MY POST IN FACEBOOK REGARDING THE RESTRICTIONS FROM WASHINGTON ON WHAT LANGUAGE THE CDC CAN USE...

"No to Nonsense!" Regarding the latest attempt to resurrect the world of 1984 in recent CDC language restrictions,⁷ I declare that the diversity of science-based scholars are more than a fetus of thought, more than a transgender transformation of Truth.

Evidence-based thought is the greatest threat to the political predators among us. We are but mere vulnerable tribal entities without Truth. "What is Truth?," Pilate asked long ago. Seek the evidence, seek rigorous thought. Seek Truth.

We need Truth, evidence-based Truth or we become mere tribal animals relying on ego-stroked truth, not the sentient creatures the Creator intended. It is our entitlement—for indeed "we are endowed with certain inalienable rights..."

May God forgive us for not using our brains as was intended. "... know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free."

I call on all Americans to set the record straight. We will not be fooled. We will not be manipulated. We will seek Truth, regardless of what language thought we are forbidden to use. There is a time to Say No to Nonsense!

The time is now.

⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLIRDobjOVA>

Acts 15:1-11. *They gotta be like us!* Some dudes came from the high ground of Judea to Antioch, land of the unclean, uncircumcised and Roman lovers. They taught that unless you follow the custom of circumcision, you cannot have eternal life. Paul and Barnabas were not happy with this disrespect for the Law and its contradiction of the Christ's teaching. So, they and some others were commissioned to go to Jerusalem, to see the apostles and elders there about what to do.

Traveling through Samaria and Phoenicia, they spread the news about how non-Jews were also being converted to the Christ. When the folks in Jerusalem heard, they were glad, very glad. But there was a fly in the ointment...

[Some Southern Baptists in Jerusalem with a temperance heritage were more straightforward—“The new believers must not be allowed to drink alcohol, and required to accept the 2001 BF&M. And, no dancing by the way.”]

Some believers with a background as Pharisees were more straightforward—“The Gentiles must be circumcised, and required to obey the Law.”

After the apostles and elders discussed the question, Peter stood up and spoke:

Hey folks, you learned recently that God made a choice that the non-Jewish believers among you can hear the gospel and believe. God, who knows people's raison d'être, showed He accepted them by Holy Spirit's gift, just as He showed us. The Lord God made no distinction—He has purified their hearts by faith. Now what's up with this? Why do you test the Lord God by putting burdens on non-Jewish believers which we nor our ancestors were able to bear?!!! NO! It is through the gift of mercy by our Lord Jesus that we are redeemed, just as they are!

- Q What were the Judeans saying about the Law when using “ethos” (εθος, customary) to describe the necessity for circumcision?
- Q What is this evidence, this presence of the Lord God we call Holy Spirit? How is He manifested?
- Q What distinguishes the circumcised from the uncircumcised?⁸ Just what is the *raison d'être*?

⁸See Leviticus 26:41—Circumcision was the ritual that made a man into a Hebrew, so to speak. But this reference to uncircumcised hearts shows that, *right from the beginning*, the inward attitude was crucial. Six hundred years later Jeremiah accused the Israelites of being uncircumcised in heart (Jeremiah 9:26); another 600 years after him Stephen made the same complaint (Acts 7:51). On this basis Paul wrote, “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly... No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is a circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit” (Romans 2:28-29). Leviticus offered more than a legal system; these laws appealed to a person's relationship with God.

ACTS 15:1-11

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ²This 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. ³The 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. ⁴When 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.

⁵Then 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."

⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷After 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. ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now 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? ¹¹No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Acts 15:12-21. *Barnabas&Paul Amaze, Peter Speaks, James Decides*. Wow, what an impact—the entire crowd became quiet—Barnabas [note change] and Paul told them about Holy Spirit’s work of signs and wonders among non-Jewish believers. Afterwards, James spoke:

Family—listen to me. Peter has described how God at first showed His love by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself. The prophets are clear, for it is written by Amos:

I will rebuild David’s broken if not destroyed legacy after all this exile disaster. I will rebuild, and I will restore. Why? So the remnant may seek the Lord God, and all the non-Hebrews who bear my Name. I say it, for I am the One who does these things, things that have been know for ages!

So, it is my decision, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for non-Jews who are returning to the Lord God. Let us write to them, instead, telling them to abstain from:

1. Food offered to idols.
2. Sexual morality.
3. Meat from strangled animals.
4. Blood.

After all, the Law has been preached in every city from the first days, and it is read in synagogues every Sabbath.

- Q Why was it so marvelous that non-Hebrews were being converted, returning to the Lord God Yahweh?
- Q Was this turn of the Gentiles a new thing, a part of the “new covenant,” unique to Christianity?
- Q Was James’ decision a good one? Perfect? What part of the decision would become problematic later in Christendom?

ACTS 15:12-21

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. ¹³When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶"After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' [Amos 9:11-12] ¹⁸ that have been known for ages.

¹⁹"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead 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. ²¹For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

Acts 15:22-29. The Letter and the Couriers Are Cast.

The whole church, with the apostles & elders, chose two of their own to verify the validity of the letter—prophets Judas Barsabbas and Silas, two leaders within the church at Jerusalem.

Here's the content of that letter:

From your brethren in Jerusalem, the apostles and elders send greetings to believers in Antioch, Syria & Cilicia...

We've heard about the nonsense from Jerusalem—which was not authorized by us. We've learned it bothered you, troubling your minds by such nonsense. So? Well, we chose some folks and sent them with Barnabas & Paul [note order], men who have risked their very lives for the name of the Lord Jesus the Christ.

Ergo, you'll know by Judas & Silas that this letter is true. It seemed good to Holy Spirit and us that you are not burdened with anything beyond the following requirements. You are to abstain from:

- 1. Food offered to idols.*
- 2. Blood.*
- 3. Meat of strangled animals.*
- 4. Sexual immorality.*

You will do well to avoid these things. Sincerely yours.

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. ²³With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.

²⁴We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—²⁶men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁷Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹You 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.

- Q Does the letter from James and the church in Jerusalem contain suggested advice, rules for living, or requirements for redemption? Or, to what extent should we follow James' letter?
- Q Why were the prophets Judas Barsabbas & Silas sent to accompany Barnabas & Paul?

Epilogue: Acts 15:30-41

The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³²Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. ³³After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁵But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

³⁶Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

ADVANCED BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR ACTS 15 OF HOLY SPIRIT⁹

15:1 *Some men.* Probably from "the party of the Pharisees" (v. 5). These were believers who insisted that before a person could become a true Christian he must keep the law of Moses, and the test of such compliance was circumcision. *from Judea.* Meant that these legalists were given a hearing, not that they correctly represented the apostles and elders of Jerusalem (cf. v. 24).

15:2 *go up to Jerusalem.* See notes on 12:1; Gal 2:1. Those who hold that Gal 2:1-10 refers to the famine visit of 11:27-30; 12:25 argue that since Gal 2:2 says that the visit mentioned there was occasioned by a revelation, it must refer to Agabus's prediction of the coming famine (11:27-28). Those who believe that Gal 2:1-10 refers to the Jerusalem council visit of 15:1-22 assert that the famine visit occurred at the time of Herod Aprippa's death in A.D. 44 (11:27-30; 12:25). Thus Saul's conversion, which was 14 years earlier (Gal 2:1), would have occurred in 30, the probable year of Christ's crucifixion—which obviously seems too early.

15:4-22 The sequence of meetings described in vv. 4-22 is: (1) a general meeting of welcome and report (vv. 4-5); (2) a meeting of the leaders (perhaps to one side) while the church was still assembled (vv. 6-11); (3) a meeting of the apostles, the elders and the whole assembly (vv. 12-22). **15:4** The first meeting was a report, cordially received, about the work done among the Gentiles.

15:5 *believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees.* Some Pharisees became Christians and brought their beliefs with them. They believed Gentiles must first become converts to Judaism, and be circumcised (see v. 1), and then they would be eligible to be saved by faith. Perhaps some of them had gone to Antioch and now returned to present their case.

15:7 *Gentiles might hear.* Peter's argument was his own experience: God had sent him to preach to the Gentiles (10:28-29).

15:8 *giving Holy Spirit to them.* Irrefutable proof of Holy Spirit's acceptance (see 10:44,47; 11:17-18).

15:9 *purified their hearts by faith.* Peter's way of saying what Paul affirmed (Ro 5:1; cf. Gal 2:15-16).

⁹Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

15:10 *a yoke.* The law (see Gal 5:1; cf. Mt 11:28-29).

15:11 *through the grace of our Lord.* No circumcision was required. *we are saved, just as they are.* See Ro 3:9.

15:12 *assembly became silent.* See note on vv. 4-22. Apparently the people had remained in place while the apostles and elders met. The assembly had not remained quiet during that time, but now they became silent to listen to the leaders.

Barnabas and Paul. The order here puts Barnabas first (perhaps reflecting his importance in Jerusalem), whereas in the account of the missionary journey the order was "Paul and Barnabas" after the events on the island of Cyprus (13:7,9,13,42).

15:13 *James.* The brother of the Lord. His argument added proof from Scripture.

15:14 *Simon.* Peter (see v. 7). James uses Peter's Hebrew name in its Hebrew form (Simeon). *a people for himself.*

15:16 *After this I will return.* Some have taken this quotation from Amos as setting forth a sequence of the end times, including (1) the church age (taking out "a people for himself," v. 14), (2) the restoration of Israel as a nation (v. 16) and (3) the final salvation of the Gentiles (vv. 17-18). Others declare that the quotation merely confirms God's intent to save Gentiles.

15:19 *not make it difficult.* Circumcision was not required, but four stipulations were laid down (see note on v. 20). These were in areas where the Gentiles had particular weaknesses and where the Jews were particularly repulsed by Gentile violations. It would help both the individual and the relationship between Gentile and Jew if these requirements were observed. They involved divine directives that Jewish believers asserted were given before the Law.

15:20 *food polluted by idols.* See v. 29; 1Co 8:7-13; Rev 2:14,20. *sexual immorality.* A sin taken too lightly by the Greeks and also associated with certain pagan religious festivals. *meat of strangled animals.* Thus retaining the blood that was forbidden to be eaten (see Ge 9:4). *blood.* Expressly forbidden in Jewish law (see Lev 17:10-12). Reference here may be to consuming blood apart from meat.

15:22 *apostles and elders, with the whole church.* Apparently there was unanimous agreement with the choice of messengers and with the contents of the letter (vv. 23-29). *Judas (called Barsabbas).* The same surname as that of Joseph Barsabbas (see 1:23 and note). The two may have been brothers. *Silas.* A leader in the Jerusalem church, a prophet (v. 32) and a Roman citizen (16:37).

15:23 *in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.* Antioch was the leading city of the combined provinces of Syria and Cilicia.

15:28 *seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.* Prior authority is given to the Spirit (whose working in the assembly is thus claimed), but there was also agreement among the apostles, elders and brothers (vv. 22-23).

15:32 *prophets.* One of the primary functions of prophets in the early church was, as here indicated, to encourage and strengthen the brothers.

15:36 *towns where we preached the word.* Towns of the first missionary journey (see 13:4-14:26).

15:38 *he had deserted them.* Mark had turned back at Perga and did not go to Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (see note previously on Acts 13:13).

15:39 *they parted company.* Barnabas and Mark do not appear again in Acts. However, in 1Co 9:6 Paul names Barnabas as setting a noble example in working to support himself. Also in Gal 2:11-13 another scene is described in Antioch that includes Barnabas. Mark evidently returned from his work with Barnabas and became associated with Peter (see 1Pe 5:13). During Paul's first imprisonment, Mark was included in Paul's group (see Col 4:10; Phm 24). By the end of Paul's life he came to admire Mark so much that he requested him to come to be with him during his final days (2Ti 4:11). *Cyprus.* The island of Barnabas's birthplace (cf. 4:36).

15:40 *Silas.* Had returned to Jerusalem with Judas after delivering the Jerusalem letter (vv. 32-33). His presence in Antioch now indicates that, after reporting to those who had sent him, he came back to Antioch to participate in the church's work there.