

WE ARE SENT

LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Growth Group Curriculum Week 6 – October 17, 2021 – Acts 15:22-35

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

At the end of Acts 14 Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch after preaching the gospel in numerous cities. Upon their arrival, they shared about how God had continued to open the doors to sharing the faith with Gentiles. However, trouble was brewing and as we pick up Acts 15 we read about the differences of opinion that had emerged regarding the Mosaic law, particularly circumcision. Some argued strongly that all followers (including Gentiles) of Jesus should be required to follow the law of Moses which included circumcision and eating “kosher” food. Paul and Barnabas did not agree with those stipulations.

Acts 15 tells the story of the first church council – the Jerusalem Council. As the debate ensued both Simon Peter and James - the brother of Jesus - stood to affirm the testimony of Paul and Barnabas. Neither of them believed that the Gentiles needed to adhere to the law of Moses, which included circumcision.

In Acts 15:19-20 James offers this compromise. *“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.”*

James’s proposal seemed to offer a way that helped to promote mutual tolerance and fellowship. The end result was that a letter was written and leaders of the early church (Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas) were selected to carry the letter to congregations in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. A letter can seem impersonal and can also be easily misinterpreted and so the Council wisely chose to send trusted leaders to the churches in order to “explain its origin, interpret its meaning and secure its acceptance.” (John Stott – The Acts of the Apostles)

Antioch is more than likely mentioned first in Acts 15, because that is where the controversy had started. The church gathers again to hear from Paul and Barnabas, but this time, instead of hearing



about the movement of God amongst the Gentiles, they hear the encouraging news that Gentiles who believe in Jesus should be openly received without having to follow all of the Mosaic laws.

Exploring the Text

Acts 11:19-30 and 13:1-3

²² 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, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. ²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁴ ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Tell about a memorable “ah-ha moment;” that is, where something confusing suddenly became crystal clear to you.
- 2) We are halfway through our sermon series on the book of Acts. Have there been any surprises or new things you have learned as we have looked at the story of the early church?
- 3) Vs. 22-24: The church in Jerusalem responds to issues with the church in Antioch. What was the situation in Antioch; which leaders did the Jerusalem church send back to that church; and what did Jerusalem give to the Antioch leaders to communicate to that church?
- 4) What are some of the “unsettling things” that crop up in the life of churches? How have you seen these situations dealt with? Would you have chosen to deal with them differently?
- 5) The early church had to discern ways to compromise. When have you found yourself in a place or position when you had to compromise in order to help move something forward. How did it make you feel? How can we make compromises without losing our integrity?



- 6) Share about a time when a friend, or some leader you trusted, came to you in person with encouraging words for a problem you were going through in your life or your faith.
- 7) What do you think the apostles would say if they wrote a letter to La Jolla Presbyterian Church today? What would they talk about?
- 8) What about your current “church life” do you find most encouraging and strengthening to your faith?

