

July 28, 2024

God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Book of Acts Chapter 15

Lessons on Dealing with Disagreements

Today's passage found in Acts Chapter 15. Like the previous chapters, it give us examples to follow by the Church of the 1st Century that we can learn from and apply as the Church in the 21st Century era.

Remember the 3 key elements

(1) Continuous Devotion & Worship. (2) Common Care & Concern (3) Courageous Obedience & Faithfulness.

Today we add a 4th Key element:

(4) Clear Commitment to Balancing Adherence to Biblical Doctrine & Gracious Application of Those Doctrines. (i.e. Truth in Love)

I think most of us have come to the stark reality that people don't always get along. Sadly, that is the case even in the Church where people share the same Christ as Savior, and a love for His Church. One of the tragic consequences of The Fall (Adam & Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, Gen. 3) is that sin, selfishness and pride are a part of our human personality and relational experience.

Today's Bible passage records two separate accounts of disagreement between believers. One was a doctrinal interpretation issue, and the other a personal and relational conflict. There seems to be on the surface that

one was resolved somewhat agreeably and the other not so much. But, we shall see that God works for good with His people if we just give it time and let God work things for His will.

If you remember, last week we left off with Paul & Barnabas returning to Antioch after their 1st Missionary Journey of about 12 -18 months. It appears that their great success among the Gentiles on their journey, and in the city of Antioch. This success had drawn the attention and frustration of some of the Jewish Christians (aka Judaizers) who held the belief that Gentiles should follow Jewish traditions and laws (i.e. circumcision, and following all the laws of the torah, and the rabbi's traditions that had developed from those) in order to become a Christian. In theological terms, they felt that in order to be saved it required a mixture of grace (through Christ) and keeping the Law (works). These 'Judaizers' took it upon themselves to confront Paul, Barnabas as well as all the Antioch Church leaders on this issue, This is where we pick up. Listen to just the first 2 verses in chapter 15.

Acts 15:1,2... ¹ *Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* ² *And after Paul and Barnabas had a heated argument and debate with them, the brothers determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.*

Lesson No. 1:

- **Recognize That Disagreements Have Always Existed And Will Continue To Exist.**

Even spiritual maturity does not always erase conflicts personality differences. As someone once coined this phrase:

To dwell above with the saints we love, O that will be glory. But to dwell below with the saints we know, well, that's a different story!

There can be genuine clashes even between Christians who are godly and committed to the cause of Christ. It can also happen between those who have served faithfully together for years.

One point to consider is to resist the urge to take sides too soon, or base your decision on human opinion too quickly. Remember that we can

“Disagree without being Disagreeable”!

That leads us to our next lesson.

Lesson No. 2:

- **Remember That Disagreements Don't Have To Destroy The Love And Fellowship Between Christian Brothers And Sisters.**

If you have been in the Church for very long you will have sadly experienced Christians who experience conflict and get discouraged and drop out of church and stop serving the Lord. Now some of you may say, that's their fault they should be more faithful. That may be technically true, but's that's not a very loving or compassionate way of thinking. The Bible is clear that

we are to love one another, encourage one another and not be a stumbling block. So, maybe it is spiritually immature to drop out and get discouraged with church, but it is unloving and uncompassionate for us as more mature believers to not care about those who fall away and seek to set a better biblical role model for them on how to deal with conflict when it comes up.

Remember our Motto.

LOVE GOD, LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Let's make it our life mission statement.

Lesson No. 3:

- **Commit To Learning And Applying True Biblical Doctrine.**

“The question raised by the Jerusalem council was immense: Are Christians made right with God by faith alone, or by a combination of faith and obedience of the Law of Moses? Is the work of Jesus by itself enough to save the one who trusts in Jesus, or must we add our work to Jesus' work in order to be made right with God”? https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/acts/acts-15.cfm

We need to realize that there is a time and place for nearly everything (remember Eccl. 3). We have a responsibility to stand for truth and to make sure that accurate truth and doctrine is taught, practiced and passed along to new believers. Remember the scripture

Eph. 4:15...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him Who is the Head, into Christ.

Col. 3:16...*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...*

2 Timothy 2: 14-19...¹⁴ *Remind them of these things, and solemnly exhort them in the presence of God not to dispute about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the listeners.* ¹⁵ *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.* ¹⁶ *But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,* ¹⁷ *and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,* ¹⁸ *men who have gone astray from the truth, claiming that the resurrection has already taken place; and they are jeopardizing the faith of some.* ¹⁹ *Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His;” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to keep away from wickedness.”*

It is vital to maintain doctrinal and biblical purity, but we need to remember to keep love and respect in the balance.

Let's look at what the Jerusalem Council of the early church handled this doctrinal conflict...

Acts 15:23-31...²³ *and they sent this letter with them: “The apostles and the brothers who are elders, to the brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles:*

Greetings. ²⁴ *Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have confused you by their teaching, upsetting your souls,* ²⁵ *it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,* ²⁶ *men who have*

risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ *Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.* ²⁸ *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:* ²⁹ *that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from acts of sexual immorality; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”*

³⁰ *So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and after gathering the congregation together, they delivered the letter.* ³¹ *When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.*

We see that the early church gives us an example to follow...come together in prayer and faithfully agree upon a plan of action and doctrinal harmony. Then share that with all and it will help produce harmony and encouragement among the church.

Lesson No. 4:

Trust In God's Providence And Timing To Accomplish His Will.

If you remember that I said that there were two accounts of conflict, one doctrinal/practice of our faith, and the other a personal/relational conflict. Let's look at this second one...

Acts 15:36-41...³⁶ *After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let's return and visit the brothers and sisters in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”* ³⁷ *Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.* ³⁸ *But Paul was of the opinion that*

they should not take along with them this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ *Now it turned into such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.* ⁴⁰ *But Paul chose Silas and left after being entrusted by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.* ⁴¹ *And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

If we take an honest look at this passage it is rather troubling. Here are two giants of the faith, godly men who are consistent in their faith and practice having a “sharp disagreement”. We don’t have the details as to exactly what “sharp” entailed, but it was not just a disagreement on whether to have vanilla or chocolate ice cream...lol. But, what we do know is, that both of these men stayed faithful to their calling and served God and He blessed their individual ministry. It appears that some disagreements may not have a full compromise, ‘Kum-ba-yah’ harmonious ending. But we can learn that we must stay true to our calling and teaching, while at the same time deal with others with respect and love, and keep serving.

Even though it may have seemed that this was a failure of conflict-resolution, we see that God can as Paul stated in **Romans 8:28**...*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

We see this work out literally for this same Paul when we read his letter to Timothy near the end of his life and ministry...

2 Timothy 4:11... *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark (John Mark) and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.*

Lesson Reminder: **Trust In God’s Providence And Timing To Accomplish His Will.**

CONCLUSION

- **Recognize That Disagreements Have Always Existed And Will Continue To Exist.**
- **Remember That Disagreements Don’t Have To Destroy The Love And Fellowship Between Christian Brothers And Sisters.**
- **Commit To Learning And Applying True Biblical Doctrine.**
- **Trust In God’s Providence And Timing To Accomplish His Will.**

Let’s seek to live out our Motto:

Loving God, Loving One Another.

As we fulfill the True Call& Purpose that we as God’s Church are called to...say it with me

We Are Called to Be Powerful Witnesses of God’s Good News Story, Motivated by Love, & Empowered by the Holy Spirit.

For reference sake, following is the entire chapter 15 passage:

Acts 15:1-41... ¹ Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² And after Paul and Barnabas had a heated argument and debate with them, the brothers determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. ³ Therefore, after being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they were bringing great joy to all the brothers and sisters. ⁴ When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to keep the Law of Moses.” ⁶ The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. ⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; ⁹ and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Since this is the case, why are you putting God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our forefathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” ¹² All the people kept silent,

and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they stopped speaking, James responded, saying, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has described how God first concerned Himself about taking a people for His name from among the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the Prophets agree with this, just as it is written:

¹⁶ ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE FALLEN TABERNACLE OF DAVID, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT,’ ¹⁷ SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’ ¹⁸ SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. (TAKEN FROM AMOS 9:11-12, JER. 12:15 & IS. 45:21)

¹⁹ Therefore, it is my judgment that we do not cause trouble for those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols, from acts of sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has those who preach him in every city, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” ²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³ and they sent this letter with them:

“The apostles and the brothers who are elders, to the brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles:

Greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have confused you by their teaching, upsetting your souls, ²⁵ it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to

send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: ²⁹ that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from acts of sexual immorality; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”

³⁰ *So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and after gathering the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. ³² Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers and sisters with a lengthy message. ³³ After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brothers and sisters in peace to those who had sent them out. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. ³⁶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s return and visit the brothers and sisters in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. ³⁸ But Paul was of the opinion that they should not take along with them this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ Now it turned into such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas, and left after being entrusted by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*