

These can't be rules that Gentile believers have to follow to be saved. Salvation by grace alone has already been clearly established. A big motivation appears to have been fellowship. By following these rules about food, the Gentile and Jewish Christians could eat together without unnecessarily offending Jewish Christian consciences.

So the first priority is to remove any obstacle to the gospel of grace. However, fellowship & the unity of believers, is also vital.

Read Galatians 5:13. How is this related to this instruction to abstain from certain foods?

Can you think of any examples of how we might 'put ourselves out' for the sake of fellowship and unity in the church today?

The requirement about abstaining from sexual immorality was a bit different – probably a reminder that even though the Gentiles didn't need to become Jews, God's moral standards still mattered (eg. the 10 commandments). This example was probably an area where non-Jews at that time had very different standards – like our wider society today.

Read John 14:15, 21; Ephesians 4:20-24; 1 Peter 1:13-16; James 2:14-26

What would you say to someone who claims the instruction to abstain from sexual immorality proves salvation isn't by grace, but does require that we follow rules?

Finish by praying:

That our words and witness would clearly communicate that salvation is by grace alone

That we would find ways to remove any unnecessary cultural barriers for others coming to faith in Jesus

That we would be willing to 'put ourselves out' for the sake of fellowship and unity in the church

Praise God for his awesome love for all people



Acts: Go

Growth Group Study Guide

Week 5

"Messy Mission"

14 November 2021

Acts 15: 1-21

Series Overview:

The Book of Acts is the second part of the writing from Luke (the first part was the Gospel of Luke). Acts is a dynamic book detailing the beginning of Christ's Church, as the good news of Jesus Christ spread from 120 ordinary people, to the worldwide movement we see today. In Matthew 28: 18-20, we read how Jesus commissioned His followers to "Go", and in the book of Acts we see the outworking of that commission. As we spend a few weeks digesting the stories and truths from Acts, our desire and prayer is that we will discover afresh, the hope, passion and dynamic of a small group of people, transformed by the love of Christ and empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit to witness to God's great plan for all people.

Acts 15:1-21

Today we are looking at some of the challenges that can arise when we get involved in God's mission of love to the world. What can we learn from the Council of Jerusalem?

Read Acts 14:26-28

This is the tail end of Paul's first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas have just returned to Antioch from where they'd been sent out, after something like 2 years on the road.

What do you know about Paul's first missionary journey? (it's ok to glance back over Acts 13-14).

What is the big news that that Paul & Barnabas share with the church at Antioch in vv26-28?

It's hard for us to understand just how big this news was. The Jews were God's special people in Old Testament times. They had been waiting for their Messiah forever and now Jesus has arrived (even if many failed to acknowledge him). The gospel was preached first to the Jews. Jesus was a Jew! The first followers of Jesus were Jews! The early Jewish Christians felt like Jesus was their Messiah. They felt like the gospel was their gospel!

Yet what we see here is God pushing out beyond their narrow ideas about his kingdom. He's opened a door of faith to the Gentiles ...to everyone else!

In the sermon, Steve talked about the example of 'Mary', and of people from different cultures. Spend some time reflecting on how we might unintentionally forget the size and breadth of God's kingdom. Discuss any examples that come to mind.

Read Acts 15:1-2a

Early Jewish believers felt like the Gentile (non-Jewish) believers needed to obey Jewish laws, including circumcision, if they were to be saved. Can you think of any good motivations they may have had for this?

Why were Paul and Barnabas so unhappy about this? (Provide scriptural support for your answer.)

Read Acts 15:2b-4

What did Paul & Barnabas do about this disagreement? Is there any lesson for us in their response?

Read Acts 15:5-19

Summarise the roles played by the various parties in this 'Council at Jerusalem':

- The apostles and elders
- Peter
- The whole assembly
- Barnabas and Paul
- James

What might we learn from this about decision-making in the church today?

Peter recounts the events that we can read about in Acts 10:1 – 11:18. What did God teach Peter and the Jerusalem believers through these events?

James quotes mainly from Amos 9:11-12 essentially making the point that it was prophesied that the Gentiles would be brought into God's kingdom. Why is this so important?

What do you think about James' conclusion in v19?

The early church realised it was crucial they didn't put any barriers in the way of salvation by grace alone. Can you think of any examples today, where we might unintentionally put barriers in the way of salvation by grace alone?

Read Acts 15:20-21