

Unstuck: How the Apostle Paul Changed the World

Lesson 4

Acts 15:1-35

December 12, 2021

Stick to Essentials

Introduction

Acts 15 is a rich example of how the early church leadership dealt with conflict and how it melded the Jewish and the Gentile cultures into one church. On the one hand, many Christian Jews saw Christianity as the completion of their long-held traditions and expected new Gentile believers to adopt Jewish customs and the Law of Moses. But, on the other hand, the Gentile believers didn't understand the Jewish traditions or why those would be required to follow Christ.

When faced with whether Gentiles should be required to become circumcised, the apostles and church leadership in Jerusalem recognized that grace saves people. They decided that becoming a Christian did not necessarily mean a Gentile needed to become a Jew. Thus, Gentiles should not be required to be circumcised. They did, however, recognize that becoming a believer meant Gentiles should give up some things from Gentile culture that were contrary to being a witness for Christ.

Acts 15 has less to do with whether people should get circumcised and what kind of food they can eat. But it has everything to do with the grace made available to us by the work of Christ on the cross.

***Memory verse: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 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."*—Acts 15:28-29**

Pray and read Acts 15:1-35. What questions or observations do you have about this passage?

What does the passage say?

1. What were some Jewish believers saying that the Gentile believers must do to be saved? (Acts 15:1, 5)
2. What did the elders and apostles do when challenged with the circumcision of Gentile believers? (Acts 15:6-7)
3. What decision did the elders and apostles come to after being faced with this challenge? (Acts 15:19-21)
4. What did the apostles and elders decide to do to communicate the decision? (Acts 15:22-23)
5. What things did they tell the Gentile Christians that they should refrain from doing? (Acts 15:20, 29)
6. What effect did the letter and words of Judas and Silas have on the churches in these towns? (Acts 15:31-32)

What does the passage mean?

1. How did Peter say that God's grace negated the need for Gentiles to get circumcised? (Acts 15:7-11)
2. What was the reason for opening salvation up to the Gentiles? (Malachi 1:11; John 3:16; Acts 15:17)
3. Why did Peter describe the practice of circumcision as a "yoke?" (Acts 15:10-11; Galatians 5:1-2)
4. First-century Jews were trained from birth to obey the Law of Moses in all aspects of life. With that in mind, do you think that it was reasonable for the Christian Jews to insist that the Gentile Christians be circumcised? (Acts 15:1-5)

5. The Gentile believers were instructed not to eat certain foods (meat offered to idols and meat that had been strangled) because it would be offensive to others. Why did the church leaders think that it was important not to be offensive to others? (Acts 15:19-20, 28-29; 1 Corinthians 10:28-31; Romans 14:2, 15-21)

Applying the passage

1. The Jewish culture of the early church caused many Jewish believers to misunderstand the role of circumcision vs. grace. How does our modern American culture affect the way that we interpret Scripture? (Acts 15:1)

