



The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-35

February 9, 2020

The Church's mission in terms of relationships of Up, In, and Out

The severe complexity of Jewish/Gentile relationships in the early church

A Jewish Christian's understandable mindset: circumcision as central as baptism

What circumcision meant and what it cost

A summary of the narrative in Acts 15

What we can learn from their example in our complexities today

ONE: Gather together to consider the matter: v. 6

Much debate, personal testimony, listening, and Scriptural meditation

Finding the good and the Holy Spirit's voice through togetherness: v. 22, 25, 28

TWO: Emphasis on God's action

Peter: v. 7,8; Paul and Barnabas: v. 12; James: v. 16-18 (Amos 9:11,12, LXX)

Looking for God through Scripture, tradition, experience, reason (Wesley)

THREE: Refusal to conflate apples and oranges

Apples: circumcision and law-keeping is not required for **salvation:** v. 1 and v. 11

Oranges: table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles will require accommodations: v. 20

The relation of the four prohibitions: idol food, blood, strangled, sexual immorality

The core of their identity as God's holy people: see Leviticus 17-19

Practical guidance for life together with Jews and Gentiles

Paul's principle of becoming all things to all people: see 1 Cor 8:13; 9:19-23

The practice of this principle for us requires the ability to discern (and not conflate!)

FOUR: The fruit of Spirit-led resolution as joy

The promise of good: v. 29

The result of joy and encouragement: v. 31,32

NOTES:

Disagreement on the place of circumcision in the early church. v.1,5

Gathered together to consider this matter. v.6

Much debate. v.7

Peter's testimony. v. 7-11

Paul and Barnabas' testimony. v.12

James synthesizes with Scripture and articulates a favorable compromise. v.13-19

The four provisions: v.19-21

1. Not eat things offered to idols
2. Not eat strangled things
3. Not eat blood.
4. Refrain from porneia.

The encouragement of the church. v.31

Date: around 50AD

Observations: notice that the focus begins with circumcision, but circumcision is ruled out, and instead other actions of Jewish sensitivity are set in place.

What is the exact nature of the prohibitions? True moral realities or Jewish accommodations? The same with porneia, or different?

Consider Wesley's Quadrilateral: Word, Tradition, Experience, Reason

Notice that Paul did have Timothy circumcised in Acts 16, but Titus was not compelled to be circumcised when he came to Jerusalem for the Council in Acts 15. Schaff argues Timothy was circumcised as a Jew (Jewish mom), as an expedience to work with the Jews. I like this quote: "Paul was inflexible in resisting the demands of false brethren, but always willing to accommodate himself to weak brethren, and to become as a Jew to the Jews and as a Gentile to the GEntiles in order to save them both.")1 Cor 9:19-23

Note the continuing observance of the law for Jews as expected, see for example James to Paul in Acts 21:20-25. So in the church there continued different practices with respect and unity, and when those things clashed, Paul called for sensitivity to the weaker brother.

Note: the commands around dietary restraint was not just to not offend Jews looking on, but to actually enable table fellowship together, and thus the Eucharist ultimately. (The two things: don't eat food contaminated with blood and not eat food having been offered to idols)

Note that the dietary/sexual requests are a "burden," even though small.

Lev 18 has 24 prohibitions

