

Midweek Study



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When Good People Disagree

Acts 15:1-41

"He who has learned to disagree without being disagreeable has discovered the most valuable secret of a diplomat." – Robert Estabrook

Good people can disagree, and sometimes the disagreement is serious. Acts 15 shows a general disagreement that caused the first-century church leaders to gather and decide. It also shows a sharp disagreement between good friends.

1. The Dispute about Conversion (Acts 15:1-5)

- **"According to the custom of Moses" (v.1)** - These Judaizers weren't just asking for a little ceremony. They were demanding full observance of Jewish law for salvation. See also **Galatians 2:1-5**.
- **"Paul and Barnabas were up on their feet at once in fierce protest" (v.2, Message)** - This dispute came right after God had mightily saved Gentiles on the first missionary journey. Satan always attacks after great victories.

2. The Defense at the Council (Acts 15:6-12)

- **"God chose among us" (v.7)** – Peter is declaring, "This wasn't my idea - this was God's sovereign decision!" He's referring to Cornelius in **Acts 10-11**.
- **"God, who knows the heart" (v.8)** - God doesn't look at circumcision - He looks at the heart, and He gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit just like He did us on the day of Pentecost.
- **"Purifying their hearts by faith" (v.9)** – see **Romans 2:29** to read about the circumcision of the heart.

3. The Decision by Consensus (Acts 15:13-29)

- **"Simon" (v.14)** - James is using Peter's Hebrew name
- **"James answered" (v.13)** - James (the half-brother of Jesus, not one of the original 12 disciples) is the pastor of the Jerusalem church.
- **Amos 9:11-12** - James quotes the Old Testament to show that the time would come when God would restore the temple, and out of that would come a mission to the Gentile world.

- **"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us" (v.28)** – James outlines four requirements, not for salvation but for fellowship (v. 20), because of their connection with pagan temple practices:
 - **Abstain from things polluted by idols** - Avoid eating food or participating in practices associated with idol worship, which was common in pagan rituals and offensive to Jewish and Christian convictions.
 - **Abstain from sexual immorality** - Do not engage in sexual relations outside of God's design for marriage; sexual purity has always been a clear moral expectation in both Old and New Testament teachings.
 - **Abstain from things strangled** - Avoid eating animals killed without blood being drained, since such meat still contains blood and would offend Jewish customs.
 - **Abstain from blood** - Do not consume blood in any form, as it represents life and was forbidden in both Jewish Law and earlier biblical commands ([Genesis 9:4](#); [Leviticus 17](#)).

4. The Disagreement Between Comrades ([Acts 15:36-41](#))

- **"After some days" (v.36)** - The Greek phrase suggests this wasn't immediate. Time had passed since the Jerusalem Council, probably several months.
- **"Barnabas was determined" (v.37)** – This phrase is in the imperfect tense, meaning Barnabas kept on wanting, kept on insisting. He was dug in on this position.
- **"Paul insisted" (v.38)** - The imperfect tense here shows Paul also kept on insisting.
- **"The contention became so sharp" (v.39)** - The Greek "paroxysmos" gives us our English word "paroxysm." This was an intense, sharp disagreement that reached a boiling point. The same word is used in [Hebrews 10:24](#) for "provoking unto love and good works".
- **"Sailed to Cyprus" (v.39)** - Cyprus was Barnabas's home territory ([Acts 4:36](#)).

Applications For Today:

1. **Grace must win over legalism every time** – Legalism insists on performance to be good enough to merit God's favor. We are saved by grace, not by works. However, the grace that saves will work. Grace is the ROOT of our salvation. Works are the FRUIT of our salvation.
2. **Church leaders are to seek God's will and best** – A pastor and church should always seek to say "[it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us](#)."
3. **With human perspectives, conflict is inevitable** – [1 Corinthians 13:12](#) says we do not have perfect vision right now. Paul said, "John Mark is not the mission!!! The churches are!" Barnabas said, "John Mark just needs someone to believe in him. Give him a second chance." Both perspectives, though imperfect, had merit.
4. **God desires unity even with our differences** – Jesus chose Matthew, a tax-collector, and Simon, a zealot (see [Matthew 10:2-4](#)). They had opposite political opinions, but both were chosen. [John 17:11](#) says that God's goal is that His church "be one" – united. We need each other, and the mission is too important (see [Philippians 4:2-3](#)).