

Acts 15:1-12; 19-41

1“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers,
“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” 6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, 23 with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some

persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” 30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Descriptive

Describes what happened in a particular situation or historical context, without implying that everyone should do the same.

Example: The book of Acts describing how the early church shared possessions.

Prescriptive

Intends to command, instruct, or prescribe behavior for all believers (or a defined group).

Example: Moral commands like “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

This passage reports what happened without:

- Issuing a command
- Declaring one man right and the other wrong
- Presenting the separation as an ideal model

Disagreement does not define destiny.

Acts 15 teaches us that even Spirit-filled leaders can fail to embody the unity Scripture prescribes—yet God remains faithful to advance His mission.

The beauty of the Gospel is that we are reconciled to the Father through Christ, and the theme of reconciliation is a theme that occurs over and over again.

- **Unity and Reconciliation**

- Matthew 5:22-24 But I say to that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother will be liable to council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.
- Ephesians 4:1–3 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- **Patience and Restoration**

- Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, less you too be tempted.
- Proverbs 15:1 A soft answers turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger

Acts 16:1-5

16 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Why Timothy is different:

- He has a **Jewish mother**
- He is seen as **Jewish** by local synagogues and is known to them
- His circumcision is not about salvation, but **access**

This is **missional strategy**, not theological compromise.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might

win those outside the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. **23** I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Reconciliation is always the biblical endgame.

The Spirit of God indwells fallible people and continues to work through us and sometimes even despite us.

Life Group Discussion Questions:

- 1) What did God say to you during our Sunday gathering?
- 2) How was the conflict leading to the Jerusalem council handled correctly?
- 3) Had you been Paul or Barnabas, how do you think you would have handled the disagreement?
- 4) When disagreements occur, are you ever tempted to be most concerned with maintaining your reputation with friends, or a veneer of peace, or your pride?
- 5) Have you ever been in a season where you felt that God was silent, only to look back and see that he was still involved with the details of your life?
- 6) Describe a time when you were reconciled to a believer after a disagreement. Would it have been possible without the Word of God and the Spirit of God working on your heart?
- 7) What missional lesson do we learn from Paul's decision to have Timothy circumcised?
- 8) Can you recall a time when you had to leave your comfort zone in order to "be all things to all people that by all means you might save some?"
- 9) From your Life Group time, what is an idea or two from your discussion that you can work to apply this week?