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As we look at the growth of the Church (Big C) filled with Believers we see a controversy start between the Jewish Believers and the Gentile Believers. The issue is twofold, circumcision and food. As a note, as the gentile portion of the Church began to overtake the Jewish population of the Church concerns grew among the Jewish part as to their authority.

Fortunately, God does not operate on a popular vote, He is God and He rules His Kingdom through the Trinity.

Acts 15

The Dispute over Circumcision

([Genesis 17:9-27](#); [Leviticus 12:1-8](#); [Joshua 5:1-9](#))

1And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

This term “came down” was to almost any place from Jerusalem. Jerusalem sat atop or near the top of Mt Moriah. The only higher point close by was the Mt of Olives called Olivet. So, people

would refer to coming down or going up was always a reference to Jerusalem to include Judaea.

The real point here is not geography but the question of “circumcision”. Can a person be saved if they are not circumcised? If circumcision is for males as a sign of the covenant what about females? Had the Law changed about Circumcision?

We find the introduction of a covenant with Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 17 that also introduces circumcision. This was approximately 1950 BC that circumcision is established as a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant with God. As a point of reference, God tells Abraham in about 1914 BC to sacrifice his son Isaac about 46 years after the Covenant is given. Abraham abided by God’s direction as to circumcision as a sign of a covenant between God and him. It was not codified in the law yet.

The Law of Circumcision was not given until it was given to Moses.

Leviticus 12:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. 3And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. 4And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of

her purifying be fulfilled. [5](#)But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days.

[6](#)And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: [7](#)Who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female. [8](#)And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

The cleansing period for the mother was twice as long for a girl baby as for a male child. It is a bit complicated in the thinking, but you can study it to see the reasoning. On things that God did not specifically address such as twins the Jewish Priesthood would extrapolate and establish doctrine based on what they had seen God establish on single births.

The reason the mother was unclean a shorter time for the male child was that on the 8th day the male would be circumcised thus bringing purification to the child. The mother would then continue another 33 days in uncleanness.

It still leaves the question; if circumcision is a sign of the covenant between God and man how are the females included?

According to Ellicott's Commentary, obviously I am not the only one that wondered this:

“And though women could not indeed be admitted directly into the covenant, yet they shared in its privileges by virtue of their consanguinity to the men, who were as sponsors for them; and thus Sarai changes her name equally with her husband.”

“consanguinity /kŏn"săn-gwĩn'ĩ-tē, -săng-/

noun

- 1. Relationship by blood or by a common ancestor.*
- 2. A close affinity or connection.*
- 3. The relation of persons by blood, in distinction from affinity or relation by marriage; blood relationship.*

"lineal consanguinity; collateral consanguinity"

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition • More at [Wordnik](#)”

But we know the real issue in the New Covenant is not “circumcision of the flesh” but “circumcision of the heart” which men and women are both equally able to participate in. However, this was not understood in the early Church due to Jewish influence based on the Law. The New Covenant reveals God's love of men and women as equal.

Now onto the issue of salvation. These men come down from Judea (Jerusalem) and begin teaching that gentiles or even Jews

who have not undergone circumcision cannot be saved. This of course flies in the face of the Truth. Can you imagine what would have happened if this were allowed to stand in the early Church; that a person had to perform an act of the flesh to be saved? Had to become Jewish in order to access Christianity?

Consider the Truth that Jesus Christ's work on the Cross was total and complete. The only thing needed to access salvation through the Blood of the Lamb was "Belief". **Belief in Faith in Christ** on what HE did. ***Ephesians 2:8*** "***you are saved by Grace through Faith and that not of your own, it is THE GIFT of God, not by any works lest any man should boast.***"

Now back to our verses:

2When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

One of the others would be Titus.

Galatians 2:1 ***Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.***

The Church would experience many divisions in its lifetime. Most of these divisions lead to religions. Religions that at their beginning were many times aligned with God but over time the

faulty foundation gave way to more controversy falling farther away from the God of the Bible. Many religions today including so called Christian religions are so far a foul of God and His Word they are an abomination. This issue of circumcision and allowable food was the first division within the Church.

The primary leader of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem was James the half-brother of Jesus based on Church History, not on Biblical validation. James was called “James the Just”. Church history claims that James the Just was appointed as leader of the Jerusalem Church by John and Peter as neither of them wanted notoriety or that role. They preferred to just carry the Word of Christ to the Jewish and Gentile nations.

3And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

When it says “And being brought on their way by the church” commentators liken this to the original commission and suggest that there may have been an additional Godly commission to take on this mission to Jerusalem to correct the error of requiring circumcision of Believers as a pretext to Salvation. Similar to the original commission in Acts 13.

Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

As the group led by Paul and Barnabas went toward Jerusalem, they would visit other cities and tell them of the growth of the number of Believers. It caused great joy with the other Believers as they went.

4And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

This was not an executive session with the Jerusalem Church leadership. This included all of those in the Church in Jerusalem. We know this in vs 4 it declares; “they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders”.

The Council at Jerusalem

5But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.

Religious division rears its ugly head in demanding a legal physical response to the Spiritual Truth. A Spiritual Truth that clearly separated legality from Grace, God’s Grace. The Law was clear from the time of Moses that the sign of belonging to God was circumcision, that was the Law. Now in the New Covenant

the Law being fulfilled by Jesus the Church would now be under Grace. That was a stumbling block for the Jewish legalists. Jesus had wanted them about this.

Matthew 21:44 [43](#)Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. [44](#)And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

This stone of stumbling was Jesus, His New Covenant, the New Commitment from God to man. Jesus warned the Jews especially that if they could not move from the Law to Grace, they would be destroyed.

Matthew 21:42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

One verse Jesus was referring to was in Psalms.

Psalm 118:22 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

[6](#)And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Now they may have gone into executive session as it declares that the “apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.” By executive session I am refereeing to the Church population in Jerusalem being excluded from this discussion and

only the leadership was involved. There are times when this makes sense to have a quiet debate and conversation. With a large mass we know from experience that people can get out of control and a meeting falls into chaos.

7And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

Even though a smaller group of men we are told that there was “much disputing”. A gentler way of saying arguing was taking place. There is usually one person who is well respected that sits and listens to this type of argument, holding his peace until the right moment. This is portrayed here by Peter finally rising to speak.

Peter was in the perfect position to carry this role at this time. He saw the vision of what God declared; Anything that God declared as clean was clean.

That was the basis of the ideal that Gentiles were acceptable into God’s Kingdom without precondition and no legal requirement to be met, sinners repenting and asking the Savior to save them by FAITH.

Peter was told to preach to the gentiles and invite them into God's Kingdom, contrary to his prior thinking and belief. Peter did as instructed but at some cost among the Jewish Believers. Peter continues to recount those events for the Jerusalem Church leadership.

8And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; 9And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

The single Word that can bring a halt to dispute due to its Author. Grace, Grace from God towards us and all Believers. God has granted us a way out of our sin and into His Kingdom, by HIS GRACE and MERCY, neither of which we deserve. The only condition put on man here and now is "Faith". Belief in Jesus.

12Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

That word carries a great influence among Believers, God's Grace. We cannot dispute about it; it is beyond our reach and lies totally and completely with God. He chooses when to make it available and controls all access to it. It is His and His alone.

13And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: **14**Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus now speaks as leader of the group. He references “Simeon”. Simeon is the Greek form of Simon, helping us understand James the Just is speaking of the Apostle Simon Peter through the context.

Transliteration: Sumeón

Phonetic Spelling: (soom-eh-one')

Definition: Symeon, Simeon, the name of several Israelites, also a tribe of Isr

Usage: Simeon or Simon.

...“God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name...”

The declaration is that God instituted, visited by His Holy Spirit and sent those whom He chose to the Gentile Nation to take out of them those who would Believe.

Romans 9:26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Romans 9:26 further declares this Truth that God determined that He would make salvation available to the entire world, including the Jews. God declared that the Gentiles were not His Chosen People, but He in His authority has now declared that they, the

gentile Believers, are to be called the “children of the living God”.
Praise God for that Grace to us.

15And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

16After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

17That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

James is referring to Amos:

Amos 9:11In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old:12That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.

James the Just gets started on the right foot here declaring what God had already declared. It was partially misunderstood that God was talking about building a Temple of Stone, “tabernacle of David” but in fact the Temple that God was building would be made of individual stones or Believers. This Temple was not made by hands but by the Holy Spirit and would be called the Church Big (C) Church. This Church would not be made of Jews or Gentiles, males or females but only of Believers.

1 Peter 2: 4To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, 5Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:16 16Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

The Church of God established by Jesus the Messiah is built of living stones, filled with His Holy Spirit, crafted and fitted together to build the Temple the Big (C) Church of the Living God here on earth.

18Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. 19Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

James who is speaking now declares a verdict that he apparently has made on this matter. "Wherefore my sentence is.." Apparent in this statement is his authority as leader of the Jerusalem Church to determine a verdict in this case.

With what is to come brings a cloud of confusion for some in the future. It all centers around freedom under Grace and caring for a weaker Brother or Sister in the Lord. We'll get to the response in a second.

20But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things

strangled, and *from* blood. [21](#)For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

The basis was the Law given to Moses. It would be later that the issue would come up. Not only later but farther away from Jerusalem. Being this close to so many Jews and their attention to anything that was offered to idols made it difficult to “one size fits all”. We know that is true, “one size does fit all”; Jesus died for all mankind without regard for ethnicity, or sex, all are invited.

1 Corinthians 10:[23](#)**All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. [24](#)Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. [25](#)Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: [26](#)For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. [27](#)If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. [28](#)But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: [29](#)Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? [30](#)For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?**

[31](#)Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. [32](#)Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: [33](#)Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

What could possibly go wrong with such a clear understanding of Grace?

The Letter to the Gentile Believers

22Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

It appears the Jerusalem Church leaders wanted to put a stamp of approval on their decision and wanted some of their own guys to make this declaration or at least accompany Barnabas and Paul when it was delivered to Antioch.

23And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: **24**Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment:

The leadership challenges the assertion that they had sent those men to them to tell them that they needed to be circumcised to be saved. They pointedly say, we did not send them with any such message.

25It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth.

Those chosen were listed here and will be the spokesmen from the church in Jerusalem.

28For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

The conditions were legal condition to stay pure which is a Holy thing for all of us to do. The challenge comes in the form of what does God say is legal and what does God say is illegal for Believers. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 clarified the differentiation on this issue. The core being that we watch out for our weaker brothers and sisters that we not do anything that causes them distress in their walk with Christ.

The Believers at Antioch Rejoice

30So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. 32And Judas and Silas,

being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*. [33](#)And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. [34](#)Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. [35](#)Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

This family of Believers was strengthened by the fellowship which is a directive given by God. It is so critical to continue to fellowship with Believers, in good times and especially bad times.

Hebrews 10:[23](#)*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)* [24](#)*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

([Acts 13:1-3](#); [Acts 18:23-28](#))

If you recall the controversy over John Mark, the author of the Book of Mark and the nephew of Barnabas. When John Mark left during the mission trip it rubbed Paul the wrong way. Now preparing for the second missionary journey the issue arises again about taking John Mark.

[36](#)And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and* see how they

do. **37**And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. **38**But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

*Acts 13: 13*Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

39And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

Luke the writer here seems to side with Paul on this issue but reveals the resolution to the conflict. The word chosen is “contention” in English. The original word used is only used twice in the entire Bible:

Transliteration: paroxusmos

Phonetic Spelling: (par-ox-oos-mos')

Definition: stimulation, provocation

Usage: stimulation, provocation, irritation, angry dispute.

2. irritation (R. V. contention): [Acts 15:39](#); the Sept. twice for אִצְרוּת, violent anger, passion, [Deuteronomy 29:28](#); [Jeremiah 39:37](#)(); Demosthenes, p. 1105, 24.'

Deuteronomy 29:28 **28**And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.

It represents more than a minor dispute, there was fierce anger between Paul and Barnabas over Barnabas's nephew and future gospel writer Mark.

40And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

41And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

So, we have two missionary journeys simultaneously; one with Paul and Silas and one with Barnabas and Mark. Just so you know later in life Paul looks upon Mark as a friend and co-worker for the Kingdom and asks that he come see him in Rome while Paul is in prison.

2 Timothy 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

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