

Acts 15: Handling Religious Controversy By Establishing Biblical Authority

Sunday PM 08/21/22

Introduction:

In the previous lesson we pointed out some fundamentals in handling controversy. Understanding the issue at hand, go to those involved, some things to do and not do, have a commitment to do what God's word says. But almost everybody claims to be going by God's word. If such were true there would be no division among followers of Christ and His prayer in **John 17.20-21** would be realized.

John 17:20 *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

So, why the division and religious confusion? One reason is how people view the scriptures and establish authority. In our text we see how the Apostles handled the issue of circumcision and the Law of Christ.

I) The Three Apostolic Methods in Acts 15.

A) Necessary Inference?

1. What is that? A necessary conclusion based on what we know.
 - a. Example - go to the store to get bread. I leave and come back with some bread. I have not specifically stated I have gone to the store but you know I did so.
 - b. The Hebrew writer used this is **Hebrews 7**.

Hebrews 7:12 *For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.*

- i. **Priests were from the tribe of Levi.**

ii. ***Jesus is our High Priest but not of the tribe of Levi but Judah.***

iii. ***Therefore, the Law must have changed.***

2. **Acts 15** - Peter's statement.

Acts 15:7 *And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9 "and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."*

- a. Referring back to the household of Cornelius and his household.
- b. **Acts 10.7-9** Peter's vision (dream) God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile.
- c. Whoever does the will of God will be saved.

Acts 10:34 *Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*

- d. Why was Cornelius baptized? For remission of sins. Was he circumcised? No.
- e. The Law of Moses condemned but could not forgive, compared to a yoke which brought one into bondage.
- f. If circumcision saved then why preach Jesus?

3. Jesus used necessary conclusion in **Matthew 22.29**.

Matthew 22:29 *Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.*

4. Paul used necessary inference in Galatians.

Galatians 3:16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

5. We see this with observing the Sabbath and the Lord's Supper.

Acts 20:7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

B) Approved Apostolic Example

1. Not all examples in the Bible are approved. Peter's hypocrisy in ***Galatians 2***.
2. Some examples such as Peter walking on water was limited to what the Apostles only could do.
3. Some examples are for us to apply, to copy.
4. Paul and Barnabas' argument.

Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

- a. Paul was called to be a minister to the Gentiles. ***Acts 22.21***.
 - b. Paul and Barnabas worked with the church at Antioch for a whole year, ***Acts 11.26***
 - c. They preached to the uncircumcised, they performed miracles to show this was approved by God.
 - d. Thus follow their example of preaching to the Gentiles without demands circumcision.
5. We see this with the Lord's Supper.

Acts 20:7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came

together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

C) Direct Command (Statement)

1. Usually the easiest to understand as we think of the Ten Commandments. Each being a direct command.
2. James' argument.

Acts 15:13 *And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: **14** "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. **15** "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: **16** 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; **17** So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.' **18** "Known to God from eternity are all His works. **19** "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, **20** "but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. **21** "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*

- a. James quotes from the prophets.

Isaiah 2:2 *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD'S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it.*

Isaiah 49:6 *Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"*

Micah 4:1 *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD'S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. **2** Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the*

LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 3 He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war any more. 4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

b. God specifically states that the Gentiles will be included in this New Law.

3. Apply this to the Lord's Supper. Jesus commands us to observe this and specifies the elements of the Supper.

Matthew 26:26 *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

II) The Letter.

A) Need to communicate to other places.

1. They wrote a letter not a creed book.
2. To Christians about this matter.

B) Meeting the approval of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 15:28 *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:*

1. There was no vote to decide the matter but what seemed good with the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:

Nothing is settled until it is settled right. Nothing is settled right unless it is settled with the word of God.