



Repentance Tabernacle Church

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The Council in Jerusalem!

Lesson Text: Acts 15:1-17, 28-29

Focus Verses: Acts 15:28-29 - 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.

Truth About Covenant: Covenant with God calls us to be in covenant with other people.

Covenant Context: As the church continued to grow into Gentile nations, a major point of discussion arose concerning how to treat Gentile Christians. The New Testament church leaders met in Jerusalem for the first church council, which threatened unity and could have divided the church into two groups. Nevertheless, the apostles followed the Spirit, maintained unity, and preserved the new covenant for all people—an example to us still today.

Men and women can accomplish so much when they come together for a common cause. This is the vision Jesus Christ has for the church, and it is imperative we keep our eyes focused on what can be accomplished if we all work together in unity. As we arrive at Acts 15, growing questions between the Jews and Gentiles threaten to destroy that unity. As the gospel continued to spread to the ends of the earth, the Jewish Christians were concerned that the Gentiles were not fully in covenant with God because they had not obeyed Jewish law. **When truth is at stake, it takes much prayer and thought to carefully work through the issues.** Truth will always require a defense. If an issue of truth is at stake, the solution will require much study, prayer, and discussion. The Acts 15 council is a masterclass on how to deal with controversial developments and still maintain unity in the body of Christ.

Outward differences, such as the old covenant sign of circumcision, should not divide us as long as we have hearts full of the Holy Ghost and faith to please God. Peter and the apostles understood not only did they need to be in covenant with God, but they needed to be in covenant with one another and with new members who were being added to the church. Peter, the man with the keys to the Kingdom, declared the Jewish church was not going to put a yoke on the Gentile church that God did not require. He laid out some parameters for the Gentiles that would help them maintain order and purity (Acts 15:29). The first three prohibitions are not part of being born again, but they were necessary to keep God's church from splintering into a Jewish Christian church and a Gentile Christian church. According to Ephesians 2:14, Jesus tore down the wall that divided the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas seemed to help seal the decision when they mentioned the two voices we should be hearing: the Holy Ghost and us. The final decision appeared to rest in the hands of the pastor of the Jerusalem church, James. But he courageously and obediently took a stand for the gospel, not just to please the people.

Human organizations, even the church, will always have unity challenges. People have different backgrounds and ways of thinking that tend toward division and separation. The Spirit of God that fell on the Day of Pentecost was the great unifier. When we commit to be in covenant with every member of our local church and daily seek to commune with God's Spirit, we can overcome any obstacle that presents itself.

When people are striving to walk in the Spirit, new and better ideas begin to take shape. The creative power of God is unleashed in the earth when people keep their ears attuned to the voice of God. The Holy Spirit was working when the United States of America was born in 1776. **America was birthed with a high regard for God and His laws.** The Declaration of Independence makes this powerful, world-changing statement: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*" However, slavery in the U.S. was officially abolished by the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution which was adopted on December 18, 1865.

Bringing people together and establishing new norms that are better for all humanity have their roots in the power of God working on earth. So much could be accomplished if everyone in the church would commit to working together, hearing from God, and letting God lead us into new frontiers. When it seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us, let us follow the Holy Ghost and be part of all God will do through all of us.