

Our Mission:

To share Christ with the world
and grow disciples for Jesus



Loving God and Loving Neighbor as Ourselves

Background:

The early church struggled between the traditions of Judaism and the inclusivity of the Gospel. In other words, the early church was often in discord, and frequently this put the mission among the Gentiles at risk. Paul and Barnabas did not give up, and Peter followed by James come to their defense. In verse 19 James declares that, 'we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.' Acknowledgement of this new work of the Holy Spirit, and inclusivity toward neighbors wins out over the enslavement to tradition.

Theology Connection:

In today's text we see the same argument that was made against Luther. Those who opposed him defended traditions based upon an age-old understanding of Scripture. How could Luther be right, and tradition be wrong? Once again, the creativity of the Holy Spirit runs afoul of the religious institutions that were designed to provide a foundation as well as a structure to the faith. Once again, we too easily confuse the work of the church with the mission of Christ.

Application:

We too are in a time of transition. Some of the teachings of the church might need to be reviewed and evaluated by the Gospel. Traditions of the church may no longer serve their intended purpose. We are challenged to look for God outside the structure of the church and follow the Holy Spirit out into the world. Are we capable of doing this? Can we let go of some of our treasured traditions in order to live out the mandate of the Gospel?

The Text: Acts 15: 1-18

¹Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

⁷After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

⁹He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

¹²The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶"After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

¹⁷that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things' —

¹⁸things known from long ago.

ADULT

As a parent, we want to make sure our kids fit in and are accepted. Yet, and it may seem a bit contrary, we want them to stand up for what they believe in and not simply go along with the crowd. As you look back over your life, what were some of those moments when you had to take an unpopular stand? Has that ever involved a matter of faith?

YOUTH

Please read Acts 15:1-18

This passage is a reminder to me that God sees our hearts. God wants us to do the right thing but also knows that we will sin and make mistakes, but God loves us anyway because he knows our hearts. It's a comforting feeling.

I also like how the people debated the issue of circumcision and all were able to speak and share their thoughts. Have you ever found yourself in a situation or a relationship where you didn't know where you stood with the other person or other people? What was the situation and how did it make you feel?

In what ways do you sense God stirring something in you or putting something on your heart to which you should respond?

Let us pray:

Dear God, You know our hearts please help keep our hearts pure and guide us to do the right thing. In Jesus' name, amen!

CHILDREN'S

After Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and reported all that God had done through them. While they were there, a man began to preach in the area of Judea. He told the people that they must do certain laws of the Jews in order to be saved. This really bothered Paul and Barnabas, and they attempted to argue with this man. All of those involved decided that they should go up to Jerusalem and take the matter before the apostles and elders. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, they told the council about their travels and what they experienced. Everyone was overjoyed until a few followers of Jesus, who were also Pharisees, rose up and exclaimed that the gentiles must follow the law of Moses. Peter stood up before the group and explained that the gentiles received grace just as the Jews had. He explained that God knows our hearts, and what we truly believe!

Think:

1. What did you learn from this story?
2. What is your favorite part of the story?

Remember:

God knows we cannot follow the law perfectly, we make mistakes. Sometimes we choose to disobey the law. The law was given by God to the Jews so they could be people set apart, holy, for Him!

Pray:

Dear Lord,

Please help us to follow Your commandments. Thank You for giving us the time and freedom to worship You! In Jesus' name we pray, amen!