

Circumcision of the Heart

Joseph Carty / General

Acts / The Jerusalem Council is held / Acts 15:1–41

The Christian Church was growing rapidly. Satan was angry. He made an attempt to get the church in-fighting. Satan knew he could destroy the rapid evangelistic growth if he could get the Christian Jew and Christian Gentiles fighting about expectation. Thankfully, they agreed and Satan's attempts to destroy the fledgling church failed.

- Sometimes unity is hard.

Unity Candle

It is always interesting to see how different weddings work. Often a unity ceremony with sand, candles, knots, etc.

At a recent wedding, the bride and groom lit a unity candle then put the individual candles back into their holders with the flames burning. Then the bride, with an impish gleam in her eye, bent over and blew out her husband's candle. The congregation burst into laughter.

Later, one fellow commented: "During the marriage ceremony two become one — after the honeymoon they discover which one."

(from Parables, etc 5/83 pg. 5)

- Today we talk
 - about unity

- in Christian Church.
- Continuing series through
 - book of acts.
 - Chapter 15
- Coming Back
 - from mission work
 - Conflict brewing...

Salvation by Circumcision

- Celebration of Mission
 - God's work

Acts 15:1 ESV

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.”

- They must be circumcised

- not all
 - must be keeping entire
 - law of “customs of Moses”

Acts of the Apostles Chapter 19—Jew and Gentile

With great assurance these Judaizing teachers asserted that in order to be saved, one must be circumcised and must keep the entire ceremonial law.

- All Ceremonies
 - Priesthood
 - Temple
 - Sacrifices
 - Ceremonies
 - Feast Days
 - Circumcision

Debates and More Debates

- Huge debate
 - needed leaders to

- discuss together.

Acts 15:2 ESV

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.

- Paul had a big
 - debate with them.
 - knew they were wrong...

Acts of the Apostles Chapter 19—Jew and Gentile

Paul had dedicated himself and all his powers to the service of God. He had received the truths of the gospel direct from heaven, and throughout his ministry he maintained a vital connection with heavenly agencies. He had been taught by God regarding the binding of unnecessary burdens upon the Gentile Christians; thus when the Judaizing believers introduced into the Antioch church the question of circumcision, Paul knew the mind of the Spirit of God concerning such teaching and took a firm and unyielding position which brought to the churches freedom from Jewish rites and ceremonies.

- Paul knew they
 - were not teaching
 - right thing.

- Paul knew that
 - numerous Jewish rites
 - and ceremonies
 - that were not for Gentiles!
- What rites and ceremonies?
 - circumcision...
 - but not only that.
 - sacrifices
 - priesthood
 - temple
 - and feast days.
- Satan wanted
 - to get them fighting!
- The Christian Church
 - was growing rapidly.

- Satan was angry.
- He made an attempt
 - to get the church
 - in-fighting.
- Satan knew he
 - could destroy the
 - rapid evangelistic growth
 - if he could get the
 - Christian Jews
 - and Christian Gentiles
 - fighting about expectations.

Stan Mikita, a professional hockey star, used to get into a lot of fights during games. He stopped when his eight-year-old daughter asked a very grown-up question: "How can you score goals when you're always in the penalty box, Daddy?"

Bits & Pieces, July, 1990, p. 19.

- Big danger

- for early church.
- Big danger today.
- In-fighting will
 - destroy the mission.

Jerusalem Council

- So...
- They have a big meeting
 - all leaders there
 - delegates from all over

Acts 15:3-4 ESV

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. 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.

- Introduced Paul
 - Paul tells stories

- Gentile converts
 - many happy.
 - Others not...

Acts 15:5-6 ESV

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.”

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

- Big fight
 - required to keep
 - law of moses
 - circumcision
 - ceremonial law
 - sacrifices
 - feast days
- *Some good motives...*
 - protect church
 - Sincere Conversions

- Fear of compromise

› Ecumenism

Unity is Based on Truth

- We can't have
 - unity in falsehood...
- Another danger...

In quarreling, the truth is always lost.

- Publilius Syrus.

Cornelius

- Peter stands up
 - tells story from

- chapter 10
- Cornelius
- Gentiles receive Holy Spirit
- Speak in tongues

Acts 15:9 ESV

and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

- Peter had never
 - been in Gentile home
 - never taught Gentiles
 - considered unable
 - to be saved...
- God showed
 - gospel for them
 - for us!
- Now Christian Jew

- who were Pharisees
 - wanted them out
 - unless they
 - became Jews...
- More than anything
 - Satan wanted Christians
 - to be fighting!

Two battleships met in the night and began to attack each other. In the conflict, a number of crewmen were severely wounded, and both vessels were damaged. As daylight broke, the sailors on the ships discovered to their amazement that both vessels flew the English flag.

Peter's conclusion:

Acts 15:10-11 ESV

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

- Don't Place Yoke Upon Them
- Yoke / burden
 - what is yoke?
 - Ten Commandments
 - All Ceremonial law
 - Feast Days
 - Just circumcision?

Acts of the Apostles Chapter 19—Jew and Gentile

This yoke was not the law of Ten Commandments, as some who oppose the binding claims of the law assert; Peter here referred to the law of ceremonies, which was made null and void by the crucifixion of Christ.

- Don't required
 - Gentiles to keep
 - ceremonial law
 - temple
 - sacrifices
 - priesthood

- feast days
 - circumcision
-
- Then Paul and Barnabas
 - tells more mission
 - stories of God's leading!

Acts 15:12 ESV

And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

- Everyone is shocked
 - miracles among Gentiles.

- How can they
 - say God is not
 - working among them
 - as they are...

One day a professor demonstrated to his class the power of an electromagnet. He placed 2 lbs. of nails on a table with the wires of an electromagnet under the table. When he flipped the switch, the nails came together and he was able to form the nails into various shapes as long as the current was on. When the current was cut, the nails fell back into a pile. This reminds us that as long as the current of God, the Holy Spirit, runs through us, we have *unity* and God can form us into any shape He chooses for His purposes. (Johnny Bley - Sermons Central).

First Pope?

- Leader of Council
 - James brother of Jesus

Acts 15:13 ESV

After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me.

- Notices not Peter
 - (first pope)
- Quotes from [Amos 9:11-12](#) -

[Acts 15:16-18](#) (ESV)

“ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’

- Promise from God,
 - He will redeem Israel
 - He will bring in Gentiles
 - called by name of God!
- James adds
 - 4 things to require
 - for Christians:

Final Verdict

Acts 15:19–20 *ESV*

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 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.

- That means

- Pharisaical Christians
 - were wrong...
 - Paul was right...

Acts of the Apostles Chapter 19—Jew and Gentile

It was his sentence that the ceremonial law, and especially the ordinance of circumcision, should not be urged upon the Gentiles, or even recommended to them.

- Entire ceremonial law
 - including
 - circumcision
 - priesthood
 - feast days
 - “not even recommended”!
- Not your opinion
 - do if you want.
- If Gentile
 - should not do it!

Letter of Approval

- Then send letter
 - stating same:

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Acts 15:23–29 ESV

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. 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, 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, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 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.”

- Rejoiced with good
 - news of the letter!

- Satan Failed!

Happily Ever After?

- Not everyone celebrated...
 - most accepted
 - others upset
 - Pharisaical Christians...
 - still pushing their agenda...
 - Large influence

Galatians 2:11-13 ESV

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

- Peter
 - at Jerusalem Council
 - advocates for
 - unity
 - removal of wall Jew/Gentile
 - no circumcision

- no ceremonial law
- no feast days
- Later Visits Antioch
 - visits with Gentiles
 - Leaders from Jerusalem
 - Peter stops
 - fellowshiping with Gentiles
- Many do the same.
 - Barnabas follows!!!
- Paul - direct confrontation

Galatians 2:14 ESV

But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Keeping Step with God

- God had revealed

- His will at Jerusalem Council
 - Peter and James agreed

- Now backsliding on position???

- Paul stands firm

- › When God Clearly reveals His Will
 - › Follow until given new marching orders.

- Never absolute unity at church.
 - Accept it.
 - We are broken people.
 - Affirm unity we have...

Modern Day Applications...

- In-fighting Destroys Churches
 - carpet

- opinions
- non-essential issues
 - “genealogies”
- Church controversies today
 - women’s ordination
 - music
 - political issues
 - abortion
- Which ones are
 - essential to address???
 - Which ones are truly moral issues?
 - Which ones are not just biased by my political views?
 -

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter’s night. He said, “The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth’s winter eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness.” Christ has given us an

alternative-to forgive each other for the pokes we receive. That allows us to stay together and stay warm. (*Wayne Brouwer, Holland, Michigan, quoted in Leadership, p. 68*).

- People say
 - church members fight...
- Show me a family,
 - that does not fight
 - and I'll show you a family
 - that has not connection...
- It is inevitable
 - to have some conflict
- The true issue is
 - how do we manage it?
- Do we discuss it?
- Do we listen?
- Do we trust?

- Do we forgive?
- Do we pursue unity again?

Circumcision of the Heart

- The Pharisaical Christians
 - partially right...
 - Circumcision is BIG ISSUE.
- Different kind of circumcision:

Romans 2:28–29 ESV

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

- Solution to controversy:
- Answer for Unity:

1. Personal Conversion
2. Personal Humility

3. Personal Study for Truth