

THE **crossing** **small groups**

Do We Have to Obey the Old Testament Law? Acts 15:1-35 Keith | Simon Sermon Discussion Participant Guide

Icebreaker: If you were starting a "read the Bible in a year" plan, which book do you think would be your biggest hurdle, and why?

Recap

Read:

Our big theme in Acts is from Acts 1:8: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

We've been following the big theme of Acts 1:8, seeing the gospel move from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Paul and Barnabas have returned to Antioch after their first missionary journey, reporting the surprising news that God has "opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." However, this new reality brings a massive question: How do these non-Jews fit into a predominantly Jewish church?

Discussion

Read:

Acts 15:1-6

Certain 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."² This 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.³ The 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.⁴ When 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.

⁵ Then 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."

⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

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1. Some believers argued that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Why did Paul and Barnabas consider this worth a "sharp dispute" and a trip to Jerusalem?
2. How do we sometimes try to add 'requirements' to being a 'good Christian' today that act like modern-day circumcision?

Let's read on to see how Peter re-frames the OT law in light of Jesus.

Read:

[Acts 15: 7-11](#)

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."

Paul nuances this notion in [Galatians 3:23-25](#), saying;

²³Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

3. Peter describes the Law as a "yoke" that no one could bear. According to Peter, and Paul in Galatians, how are both Jews and Gentiles actually saved? Think honestly: what 'yokes' do you place on yourself to try to earn God's approval or feel like a 'good enough' Christian? How is that working for you?
4. Paul and Barnabas had sharp disagreements but stayed engaged in conversation and brought in others to help resolve it. How might their approach inform how you handle disagreements—in your family, church, or friendships?

[Acts 15:13-21](#)

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,

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

¹⁸ things known from long ago

¹⁹ "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

5. In James's judgment (v. 19-20), he tells the Gentiles to avoid some things (*like food with blood*) but keep others (*like sexual morality*). At first glance, this seems like "picking and choosing."

According to the sermon, what is going on here? What framework did Keith offer to help us decide which Old Testament laws still apply today?

6. If we live "consistently" with the Gospel (saved by grace, not by rules), how does that make us more attractive to a world that is tired of "yokes" they can't bear (v.10)? In other words; What's one 'rule' or 'requirement' you've attached to being a good Christian that isn't actually the gospel? How might letting go of that make you more joyful and authentic?

Sharing and Prayer:

During prayer time pray for those who do not know Christ yet and may be distant from him.

There are many reasons why this could be true; because they have a sharp dispute with Christianity, have been hurt by Christians or the church in the past, or simply haven't heard the good news of the Gospel.

Pray for someone by name and that God would soften their heart to see His love for them. Pray that God would use you to be a Paul in their life, someone who is willing to be gentle, loving and speak the truth of the Gospel.

Leader Notes: If you are worried about participation here are a few suggestions.

- Pair up. This adds intimacy but also a little privacy if desired.

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- Write names on note cards. This keeps the person prayed for private but allows the group to still pray God would move.
- Pick a group of people far from God. Those of other religions. Atheists or others antagonistic to our faith.

Passages for the next two weeks:

- February 22: Acts 15:36-41
- March 1: Acts 16:1-15

Feel free to do your own study to prepare for our next study.