

Acts 15:5 – 35

5 Paul, Barnabas, and the disciples that came with them arrived in Jerusalem and shared with the brethren there the testimonies from their missionary journey. Then some of the Pharisee converts confronted them about not circumcising the new Gentile believers and teaching them to obey the Laws of Moses. Apparently the church in Jerusalem kept with orthodox Judaism. That would have been a good idea in a city of observant Jews. If you wanted to share Jesus with them, you wouldn't first offend them by having a slice of bacon. The Pharisees lived to be completely obedient to the Law and prided themselves in observing it's every detail. No wonder they were surprised that the converts weren't doing the same. This was a fundamental issue for both sides. Galatians 5:3 Is it necessary for Christ followers to keep the Laws of Moses?

6 We don't know which Apostles were there, but Peter was one of them. It seems that there was some effort to have oversight of the growing movement through the leadership in Jerusalem. The church was founded on the Apostles' doctrine, so any new issues should be approved by Jesus' appointed representatives.

7 Peter reminded them of the precedent set when the angel sent him to the home of the Centurion. (Acts 10,11) At that time, the leadership had decided that Gentiles must be receiving the Holy Spirit and therefore were part of the believers. They didn't address the issue of circumcision and the Laws of Moses.

8 The confirmation that they were indeed saved was the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the same way that they had experienced it. This helped them see that God accepted them without keeping the Law.

9 Peter declares that the important thing is a heart that is right with God, even if the dietary and ritual laws are not observed. God sees the heart. Cleansing or purification was no longer looking to an animal sacrifice (law), but faith in what the Messiah did for us. Romans 3:21-22

10 Testing God – that was what the Jews did in the wilderness by demanding that God operate in the way they wanted Him to. Exodus 17:2 What Peter is getting at is that if God gave the Gentiles the Spirit without them being circumcised or keeping the law, then what right does man have to insist they keep it. They are obviously saved without the law.

A yoke was figuratively considered as a burden or sins. Lamentations 1:14 It wasn't always negative but did imply a lot of work. Peter is saying it is an unnecessary burden for the Gentiles.

The law with all its addendums and sayings associated with it was truly too tedious for the average person. Consider what Jesus said in Luke 11:46.

11 Now Peter makes a definitive statement that applies to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. It is not in keeping the Law that we are saved. It is the grace of God that saves us all. Grace implies that it was without our own merit. Ephesians 2:8-9

12 Then Paul and Barnabas added to what Peter said by show how that grace was extended to numerous Gentiles as signs and wonders apart from their works or keeping the law. This was an affirmation from God that they were on track.

13-18 James is the brother (half-brother) of Jesus. He is apparently the spokesman for the group, sometimes known as the first among equals. He sums up the precedent and then confirms it with a Scripture. James could have picked a number of Old Testament texts but he chose Amos 9:11-12. The passage includes the Messiah of the house of David and the Gentiles seek the Lord and being called by His name.

19-21 James makes a judgment like a judge would in a court but we'll see how he reached it in verse 28. He has heard the evidence and shown a Scriptural verification. He now suggests what should be asked of the Gentile converts. The issues were chosen as they would help the new converts avoid idolatry. "make it difficult" – used on here in the NT but used in the LXX of what the lions could have done to Daniel and of the nagging of Delilah with Sampson.

Here is their to do list all of which is connected with idolatry (1John 5:21): Don't eat meat offered to idols, avoid sexual immorality, and don't eat things strangled or with the blood still in them. This would help them make a break with the culture they were previously so involved in. For the testimony of the church, and the growth of the new believers, those things were avoided. It has nothing to do with their salvation, but is about the testimony of the church. What would they have suggested in our day?

22-27 The introduction of the witnesses. We have seen before how important matters were to be settled by witnesses. Perhaps the men that caused the trouble were on a fact finding trip but overstepped their role.

28 -29 "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" Together the group sensed the leading of the Holy Spirit. John 16:13 That is how we desire to be led.

30-32 The message was delivered and was an encouragement to them. 1Corinthians 14:3

33-34 Once the church was satisfied with the answer and the fellowship from Jerusalem, they sent them back. Some manuscripts include verse 34 that has Silas deciding to stay on in Antioch.

35 Lots of teachers and preachers in one church! It must have been a real spiritual center for learning and growing in the Lord.