

# When Controversy Erupts

Acts 15:1-3

Introduction: I suspect we would all like to think that the perfect church is one without any problems. Oddly, I don't remember reading about any congregation in the New Testament that did not have some problem at some time. With Satan walking about as a lion, seeking to devour us, we understand why problems develop (1 Pet. 5:8). Has any of us never experienced problems in the Lord's church?

The way to learn how to handle various controversies that arise in any church is to examine similar situations in scripture. The problem at hand will not be the same. However, we can learn how the situation was handled.

In Acts 15, a controversy erupted in the early church. Let us examine the scripture to learn how this early dispute was handled. Let us determine how we might apply the lessons learned from this text.

I. A great dispute arose in the church at Antioch (Acts 15:1-3). Men came from Judea (particularly Jerusalem) teaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved.

A. Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them (Gal. 5:1-4).

B. The church sent them to Jerusalem to settle the problem. Why?

1. Because the source of the problem was with the brethren who came from Jerusalem. In other words, they are subject to the elders of the church where they are members.

2. Because these brethren apparently did not respect what Paul and Barnabas taught on this subject. They needed to hear it from men of reputation.

3. Because God also sent them (Gal. 2:1-2).

C. Notice these brethren were not kicked out of the church though the church disagreed with their false doctrine.

II. These men were well received in Jerusalem and the issue clearly defined (Acts 15:4-5).

III. When the apostles and elders gathered to consider the issue, both sides were represented, and they were given time to speak (Acts 15:6-7a).

IV. The apostles explain the evidence for the conclusion that all should understand.

A. Peter explains that God has chosen the Gentiles to be his children (Acts 15:7-11).

1. This was not a recent event (Acts 11:14-18).

2. God made no distinction between races.

3. The Jews know the Old Law was difficult to follow, so why reestablish it?

4. Jews and Gentiles are saved in the same manner (Col. 2:8-14).

B. Paul and Barnabas explain how God showed his approval of the Gentiles by the signs and wonders they performed (Acts 15:12). Consider; Heb. 2:3-4.

C. James explains the prophecies that included the Gentiles for salvation (Acts 15:13-18).

1. Another prophecy is similar (Hosea 2:23).

2. This plan to include the Gentiles for salvation was eternal.

V. A letter was drafted (Acts 15:24-29).

A. It clarified the churches position.

B. It condemned the false teaching that required circumcision and keeping the Old Law.

C. They support the work of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles.

D. They explain four things that are required of all men from the beginning of time (Gen. 2:24; 9:4).

VI. Lesson we learn.

A. The apostles and elders solved the controversy by using the same methods we use today. They used commands, approved examples and necessary inferences.

B. The truth of the conclusion, as reasoned through the given evidence, must be followed. It wasn't a suggestion, nor was it considered a matter of opinion.

C. The whole church needs to understand the truth of any controversy though they are not directly involved in the discussion.

D. The elders are the defenders of the faith (Titus 1:9).

E. Public discussion of a doctrinal issue is an effective way to establish the truth.

Conclusion: If controversy erupts in this congregation, I pray we will remember Acts 15 as a guide to establishing the truth. The truth can bear up to scrutiny. However, falsehoods will crumble under the weight of the truth.