Peter: Living Like the People of God

SETTLING CHURCH CONFLICT

Tuesday, November 3

Reading: Acts 15

> ***Acts 15:4*** *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.*

In the debate recorded in Acts 15, the message of the gospel was at stake. Would the church be a place where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free" (Galatians 3:28) or would it become just another sect of Judaism? Were there some requirements a person must do to be saved or was it the free gift of God?

The issue arose because of the success of Paul's first missionary journey. Some of the Jews who claimed to be Christians argued that obeying the rituals of the Law of Moses (particularly circumcision) was a requirement for Gentiles to enter the church. This flew in the face of the gospel Paul had preached and so a council was called in Jerusalem to settle the issue.

Several principles emerge from this passage on how to deal with church conflict.

- First, <u>they listened to both sides</u> (15:4-5).
- Second, <u>they looked to their leaders</u> (15:6-7) to determine what God's will was in this situation.
- Third, <u>they listened to past experience</u> as Peter again presents his vision and encounter with Cornelius (15:7-11).
- Then <u>they observed what God was doing</u> (15:12) as Paul and Barnabas described the "signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them."
- Lastly, <u>they based their decision on Scripture</u> (15:13-18) through the leading of the Holy Spirit (15:28). The "restrictions" had nothing to do with salvation but were guidelines to help the Gentiles keep clear from pagan worship and have fellowship with their Jewish brothers by not offending in these sensitive areas.

The final conclusion was that salvation was by faith alone. Gentiles could become part of the church with no restrictions and no requirement to follow Jewish rituals. This was confirmed in a letter sent by the council to the Gentile churches, commending Paul and Barnabas and rejecting those who had demanded salvation through the Jews alone.

LESSON ONE: Church conflicts cannot be solved by arguing our personal preferences or beliefs. Decisions must be made in agreement with God's Word. When an issue arises in your church, is the Bible the first place people go to find the answer?

LESSON TWO: This passage reminds us that we cannot add non-biblical requirements on people to be "good" Christians. Issues of personal taste cannot be forced on others. Are there any areas where you look down on others because they don't do it "your way"? What do you need to do to fix this problem?

LESSON THREE: Peter's statement is very interesting. He reminds us that it has always been impossible to be saved by following a list of rules and regulations. Everyone is saved by grace through faith! Any "religion" that states you must earn your salvation is from the devil.