

# Acts of the Apostles

## Part 33 – How to have a Church Fight

### Acts 15

#### Only fight about something that matters

What's worth fighting about for us?

1. Inspiration and sufficiency of the Scripture
    - a. The Bible is God's Word and contains what we need in order to know, love, and follow Him
    - b. Saturated in the Scripture
  2. Transformation > Behavior modification
    - a. External conformity must yield to internal change
    - b. Measure is status of heart and state of mind, not compliance
    - c. Gospel Transformation is our first DNA strand
  3. Everyone is welcome
    - a. Because *everyone* needs the Gospel – *everyone* – no matter who they are
    - b. Neighbor is a verb
  4. Truth of the Gospel: life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
    - a. The reality on which we found our lives and ministry
- We fight for the unity in the church but we fight from a foundation of unified belief
    - We can't compromise foundational beliefs for the sake of unity – we end up with a club and not a church
  - Question for this church fight: do you have to become a Jew to become a Christian (v.1-5)
    - Important question because it deals with #3 and #4 above – who is welcome what is the Gospel?
  - Peter: NO – don't add to the Gospel (v.6-11)
    - Cornelius (v.8) – the positive example from the vision, experience, and confirmation (“Just as He did to us...”)
    - Theology – there is no distinction (v.9, 11), only by faith is our heart cleansed
    - Experience – no yoke needed (v.10) – had been rebuked by Paul (Galatians 2)
  - James: NO – don't take away from the Gospel (v.12-21)
    - It's what the Bible said would happen (v.13-17)
    - Take a people for Himself of Gentiles (vs. from the Gentiles)
    - The Gospel is such good news that it cannot be for a homogenous group – to think otherwise reduces the Gospel to an ethnic message instead of an evangelistic message

### **James: now, let's be at peace**

- The abstentions were related to idolatry and immorality
  - Certainly, they were theological and ethical – this is the way of Jesus
- They were also for the witness of the church – new Gentile believers living with Jews
  - The ethical shift doesn't have to harm the Gentiles' freedom and provides a context for witness – “Hey look, they really are transformed”
  - Re: Freedom – no mention of circumcision or Sabbath, because Gentiles don't need to be Jews first to be Christians
- Takeaway: there are preferences to be set down for the sake of witness and unity
  - Music, Programs, Traditions, Norms, etc.

### **Resolution**

- Be followers first – “seemed good to Holy Spirit and to us...”
  - Don't get it backwards
- Lead in the small group and announce in the large group
  - If the large group pushes back forcefully, you may need to rethink your strategy
- Be wise in how you communicate
  - Affirmation is a great salve

*This church fight ended with joy and encouragement*

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What's the dumbest church fight you have ever been in or heard about? What is the most consequential church fight you have been in or heard about?
2. In the sermon, Trent said that we fight for unity but we fight from a foundation of unified belief. Why is that important? Read Ephesians 4.1-6. How does Paul express the fight for unity from unified belief?
3. In Acts 15, the church was fighting over whether one had to become a Jew first (via circumcision) before becoming a true Christian. What would be a modern-day parallel of becoming something before being a “real Christian?”
4. Peter's answer was no, because that would be adding to the Gospel. He listed three reasons: his experience with Cornelius in v.8 (see Acts 10), his theology in v.9-11 (saved by grace through faith alone), and his previous failure in v.10 (see Galatians 2). Which one is the most compelling argument to you? Why was it important to include all three arguments?
5. James' answer included some rationale and a plan for living at peace with one another (abstention from idolatry and immorality). What would be something to give up that would help you in your church or ministry relationships? How would it help?
6. Acts 15.28 is clear that they followed the Spirit's leading. What are some examples of getting the order wrong (aka “It seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit”) and how did it play out in your life or in the church?