

WHAT IS CORE TO FAITH?

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Read **Acts 15** (bold added for emphasis), which records a debate in the early church over peripheral beliefs. As you read, highlight the views that were in question and the names of the people who played a role in this debate. Pay careful attention to the details that give us a picture of their posture of grace as they navigated this controversial topic.

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. ⁷ After 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. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now 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? ¹¹ No! **We believe** it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

¹² **The whole assembly became silent as they listened** to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. “**Brothers,**” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

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¹⁶ “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the rest of mankind 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.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. In your experience, how has the church made it difficult for those who are turning to God for the first time.
2. What can we learn from Paul, Barnabas, Peter and James about navigating discussions about views that aren’t necessarily core to our faith?
3. The longer we are Christians, do you think it becomes more or less difficult to remain curious and engaging about our peripheral beliefs? Why do you think that is?

APPLY IT

1. Take the beliefs assessment found at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581799be2994ca5361dd1133/t/600869490b492e213e57b064/1611163979020/Groups_Core_Vs_Periphery_2020.pdf
2. Consider this quote and make a short list under each category that can help you prioritize what matters most.

“In the essentials, unity. In the non-essentials, liberty. In all else, charity.”
St. Augustine

3. So, what do you think is essential? What are the non-essentials? And what can you let go of in order to offer more grace and love so WE don’t make it difficult for people turning to God?

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION (IF DESIRED)

1. What core beliefs of Christianity have been most foundational to your faith?
2. What are the peripheral beliefs you find yourself stuck on or confused about?
3. What would you say are the peripheral beliefs that cause most people to avoid faith? What advice would you give someone who is interested in faith but is stuck on a confusing or peripheral view?