

Acts 15 brings us right into the first recorded doctrinal showdown of the church:

And certain [men] came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1 NKJV)

The tragedy is that their zeal for the law blinds them to the finished work of Christ.

Whenever salvation requires an add-on, the gospel is being subtracted.

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. (Acts 15:2 NKJV)

The church's first council was born not out of comfort but controversy.

Sometimes contending for the faith means contending within the faith family.

So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. (Acts 15:3-4 NKJV)

Share what Jesus is doing, not just what you're debating.

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command [them] to keep the law of Moses." (Acts 15:5 NKJV)

In their minds grace is amazing, but not enough.

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law [is] the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20 NKJV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV)

Jesus plus nothing = salvation that produces obedience.

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. (Acts 15:6 NKJV)

Spiritual authority is exercised in community, not isolation.

And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up [and] said to them: "Men [and] brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as [He did] to us, "and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. (Acts 15:7-9 NKJV)

The Spirit's indwelling is heaven's stamp of approval.

"Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15:10 NKJV)

The Gospel in One Sentence

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." (Acts 15:11 NKJV)

Grace doesn't play favorites; neither should we.

Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. (Acts 15:12 NKJV)

Experience doesn't trump Scripture, but it does illuminate it.

And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men [and] brethren, listen to me: "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return

And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.' "Known to God from eternity are all His works. (Acts 15:13-18 NKJV)

If your interpretation of the Bible excludes the nations, you need a bigger view of the Bible

"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, "but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, [from] sexual immorality, [from] things strangled, and [from] blood. "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (Acts 15:19-21 NKJV)

James isn't attaching fine print to salvation; he's giving family guidelines for table fellowship.

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:9-13 NKJV)

Freedom in Christ is never freedom from love.

Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, [namely], Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this [letter] by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "[You must] be circumcised and keep the law"--to whom we gave no [such] commandment-- it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:22-29 NKJV)

Doctrine is not crafted by majority vote but by Spirit-guided exegesis.

The gospel removes burdens; it doesn't pile them on.

So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. And after they had stayed [there] for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. (Acts 15:30-35 NKJV)

Acts 15:1-15 Jesus Plus Nothing: Defending the True Gospel
Calvary Chapel Titusville 6/15/25
Pastor Paul Andris

***Guard the Gospel,
Contend in Community,
Let Experience Confirm,
Not Define,
Love Limits Liberty,***

Wherever human hearts drift toward performance, the Spirit drifts us back to the cross.

You therefore, beloved, since you know [this] beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him [be] the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:17-18 NKJV)