

GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (June 30, 2024)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

Two people, both Christians, find themselves on different sides of a political issue, a social issue, a theological issue. Is the difference important enough that they need to divide, separate, no longer associate with each other, or consider the other a Christian? How can we stand firm on what we believe, not compromise, AND still live and love as Jesus commanded us to?

In those early years the Christian community faced a major controversy (Acts 15). Would they divide and turn on each other? They did not. Instead, they modeled a Jesus-honoring way. Christians will disagree on BIG and small issues. How we disagree defines us more than a thousand sermons and songs. The mandate, and example, of our Lord is clear. Love your enemies ... pray for them. That's not natural. I need help. You too?

The Holy Spirit Working Through Conflict (Acts 15:1-29) ESV

Due to the passage's length some verses are omitted. Please read the entire passage

^{15:1} But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' ² And after Paul and Barnabas **had no small dissension and debate with them**, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. (Verse 3 Omitted) ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.'

⁶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and **he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith**. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'

¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through

them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, 'Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old." ¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God ...' (Verses 20-24 Omitted) ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, **having come to one accord**, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.'"

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What was the issue at stake in this passage, and for us?
2. How did the leadership of the Church respond to this crisis?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. What does, "had no small dissension" mean? v.2
4. What does, "keep the law of Moses" mean? v.5

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?

5. What are some of the issues people divide over today?
6. Regarding Christian faith, what cannot be compromised?
7. How is your life today different because of Acts chapter 15?
8. How did Jesus relate to those who disagreed with Him?
9. How do you relate to those who disagree with you?
10. What does God need to change in you as you relate to those who disagree with you? How are you loving your enemies?

As you spend time praying, remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural part of your day. Prayer is a conversation: talking to God and listening to God. Ask God to help you know what aspects of Christian faith cannot be compromised. Ask God to help you love those who disagree with you. Ask God to help you love your enemies. He will help you because He loves you.