



Church Polity in the Book of Acts

Acts 15:1-35

7/14/19 PM

THE CHURCH AND DOCTRINAL ISSUES

Introduction:

I. A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS DIVISION (15:1-21)

A. Antioch's Conflicting Situation (vs. 1-6)

the dispute (vs. 1-2a)

the delegation (vs. 2b-4)

the debate (vs. 5-6)

B. Peter's Collaborating Statement (vs. 7-12)

his discourse (vs. 7-10)

- by revelation (vs. 7)
- by the gift of the Holy Spirit (vs. 8)
- by evidence of cleansing from sin (vs. 9)
- by the ineffectiveness of the Law to save (vs. 10)

his disagreement (vs. 11)

the discussion (vs. 12)

C. James' Concluding Summary (vs. 13-21)

his observations (vs. 13-18)

Amos 9:11-12

his opinion (vs. 19-21)

- Jewish believers must not tamper with the freedom of Gentile believers.
- Gentile believers must not tamper with the feelings of Jewish believers.

II. THE POWERFUL SOLUTION TO THE DEBATE (15:22-35)

A. The Council's Decision (vs. 22)

adoption of James' suggestion

appointment of church spokesmen

B. The Contents of the Declaration (vs. 23-29)

greetings (*chairo*) and farewell (*rhonumi*)

general guidance (vs. 24-27)

specific guidelines (vs. 28-29)

Abstain from...

- food sacrificed to idols
- blood
- the meat of strangled animals
- sexual immorality

C. The Conclusion of the Dissension (vs. 30-35)

reunion and report (vs. 30)

response and rejoicing (vs. 31-32)

return or remain (vs. 33, 35)

General Observations...

- 1) The difficulties in a local church constitute a real test of the vital Christianity of its members.
- 1) Unity is always wrong when it compromises the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone.
- 2) Concession is right when it does not compromise essential truth and is done out of love to avoid offending others.
- 3) The authoritative guide for *all* decisions must be the Word of God.

Observations from this text and others we've studied recently...

- 1) The Gentile churches that had already been established were given encouragement and the evangelism of the Gentiles could proceed without hindrance.
- 2) Church government is local and retains a strong element of congregationalism.
 - the local church appointed its own officers (e.g. ch. 8)
 - the local church is responsible for its own ministries (ch. 13) but can carry these out in cooperation with other churches (ch. 15)
 - the local church should settle its own affairs (c.f. I Cor. 6) but can call for help from a sister-church
 - the local church should have and develop fellowship with other congregations (ch. 15)

Applications for our church today...

- 1) how to deal with differences of opinion that touch upon doctrinal issues
- 2) how to make ecclesiastical decisions and how to communicate them to others
- 3) how important it is to encourage one another (especially the missionaries we send out and the churches they start)
- 4) how very vital are doctrinal issues, especially the definition of the Gospel: salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone