

The First Church Council Meeting (Acts 15:1-35)

I. Introduction

A. *This Week in Clear Living*

1. Dispute over circumcision of believers (15:1-5)
2. Meeting of the Jerusalem Council (15:6-21)
3. Decision of the Jerusalem Council (15:22-35)

Question: Why did the believing Jews want to cling to circumcision?

B. In verses 1-5, while in Syrian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were confronted by Jews about circumcision.

1. The Jews were clinging to their legalistic teachings, but they were wrong.
2. Such teaching is equally wrong today.
 - a. *A person is not saved or lost based on church attendance. However, a born again believer will probably regularly attend most services.*
 - b. *A person is not saved or lost based on financial contributions to the church. However, a born again believer will probably want to financially support the Lord's work.*
 - c. *A person is not saved or lost based on Bible study. However, a born again believer will probably want to learn biblical instruction.*
 - d. *A person is not saved or lost based on witnessing to others. However, a born again Christian will probably want to see others enter into a personal relationship with Christ.*
3. In verse 2, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation.
 - a. They had a big argument.
 - b. The argument was about whether or not Barnabas should be circumcized.
 - c. Those that argued with Paul and Barnabas were probably born again believers, or at least part of the Christian community.
 - 1) "Them" in verse 2 (*autos*) - themselves or the same.
 - 2) Dr. Richard N. Longenecker called them Jewish Christians from Jerusalem.
 - e. In Romans 11:25, Paul wrote about a mystery of God, and that mystery is how the Lord will someday bring Christians and Jews together. This has not yet happened.
 - f. They encouraged Paul and Barnabas to discuss the disagreement with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Unsaved Jews would not have done that.
4. In verses 3-5, they headed for Jerusalem,
 - a. They shared their success with others during their journey and brought great joy.
 - b. In Jerusalem, the brethren received them.
 - c. They were confronted by a sect of the Pharisees.
 - d. The sect of the Pharisees were probably legalistic Jews and not saved.

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- e. The saved Jews had probably listened to the Pharisees and experienced some doubts.

1) Have you ever doubted your salvation?

2) What would you do if you ever doubt your salvation?

Question: Who presided over the Jerusalem Council?

- II. According to Dr. J. Vernon McGee, this dispute was over the interpretation of the gospel, not the facts of the gospel.
- A. The Jews could not dispute the facts of the gospel. Too many witnesses had seen the risen Jesus.
- B. So they argued against the interpretation of the gospel.
- C. Dr. Longenecker wrote that Paul and James wanted to minimize conflicts between Gentile and Jewish Christians.
- D. In verses 6-11, the council began and there was much disputing.
1. The apostles and elders could not agree.
 2. Peter took the lead in dealing with the controversy.
 - a. By this time, he has matured into a strong, stable Christian (about 49AD).
 - b. He spoke about God opening the gospel to the Gentiles.
 - c. He indicated that Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way by the same gospel.
 - d. People have always been saved the same way by the same gospel. This was not new even though it was new to many people.
 - 1) This truth can be hard to understand.
 - 2) ***Old Testament Jews and Gentiles were saved by faith in the Lord. They demonstrated their faith by repentance, obedience, and offering sacrifices that symbolized the one true Sacrifice.***
 - 3) ***New Testament saints are saved by faith in the Lord. They demonstrate their faith by repentance, obedience to the Holy Spirit, and accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.***
- E. In verse 12, Paul and Barnabas reported on their very successful ministry to the Gentiles.
- F. According to Scriptures, no one spoke after the three spoke.
- G. In verses 13-18, James spoke to the council.
1. James was the head of the Jerusalem council.
 2. He was Jesus' half brother.
 - a. He had been a very legalistic Jew.
 - b. He wrote the Epistle of James.
 - c. James 2:26 says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

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3. James agreed with Peter that God was calling out Gentiles to be a people for Him.
4. In verses 15-18, he even said that Peter's words were consistent with the prophets.
5. The saving of Gentiles is not an afterthought with the Lord.

Question: How did Paul convince those at the council to accept his position? What legal-type conditions were added by the council and why?

- III. In verses 19-21, James announced the decisions of the council.
- A. Paul and Barnabas had persuaded the council by sharing a testimony of their ministry.
 - a. People can often argue with us about theology.
 - b. Arguing with us about our testimony is lot tougher.
 - B. Notice the legalistic slant. ***Was James correct or incorrect?***
 1. He said that the Jews should not trouble the Gentiles that had turned to the Lord.
 2. The Gentiles should abstain from the pollution of idols.
 3. They should abstain from fornication.
 4. They should abstain from things strangled.
 5. They should abstain from blood.
 - C. He attributed the decision to the fact that Moses was preached in the synagogue every Sabbath.
 - D. ***Dr. McGee wrote that James was not trying to change the rules for being saved. Instead, James was asking the Gentiles to go along with those four things as an accommodation or courtesy to the Jews.***
 - E. In verses 22-35, Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas were sent back to Antioch.
 1. The council sent them back to share the Council's decision.
 2. Judas and Silas also went with them.
 - a. The brethren held both men in high esteem.
 - b. They could corroborate what Paul and Barnabas reported from the council.
 3. The council gave them a letter to share with others.
 - a. The letter indicated that some unauthorized Jewish believers had initiated the original dispute.
 - b. The letter reported the council's decision.
 4. In verse 32, Judas and Silas confirmed what Paul and Barnabas reported.
 5. Judas returned to Jerusalem.
 6. Silas remained in Antioch.

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Question: How was the Holy Spirit building Jesus' church in this lesson? How was the Holy Spirit showing His deity in this lesson?

- IV. The Holy Spirit was involved throughout the events surrounding the council.
- A. I Corinthians 14:33 says, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."
 - 1. The Christian Jews had brought confusion to the church with their proclamation about circumcision.
 - 2. The council cleared up the dispute, gave clear guidance, and strengthened the church for both Jews and Gentiles.
 - B. By settling this Jewish matter, the Holy Spirit showed concern for Gentile believers. The Holy Spirit is not a Respector of Persons.
 - C. The Holy Spirit was increasing the church daily in accordance with Matthew 16:16-18.

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Next week's lesson: "Trouble in Philippi" (Acts 15:1-41; 16:1-40)

Five Day Recommended Reading:

Monday:	Acts 15:36-41
Tuesday:	Acts 16:1-5
Wednesday:	Acts 16:6-10
Thursday:	Acts 16:11-18
Friday:	Acts 16:19-40

Study questions:

1. Why did Paul and Barnabas split?
2. Do you think that it was God's will for them to split?
3. Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised.
4. Why did Paul cast the demonic spirit out of the woman?
5. After the earthquake, why did the jailer want to get saved?
6. When Paul and Silas were free to go, why was Paul so antagonistic?
7. Is it possible that Paul perhaps had too great a temper?
8. How was the Holy Spirit building Jesus' church in this lesson?
9. How was the Holy Spirit showing His deity in this lesson?