

**May 18th, 2025**  
**Devotional**  
**“Council at Jerusalem” - Acts 15: 1-18**

**Monday: “Certain People” - Acts 15: 1-4**

If you asked Christians today if circumcision is necessary in order to be part of the Kingdom of God, most people would probably tell you know. Some may cite family history, but very few would claim that you *must* be circumcised in order to be part of the family of God. Yet, that is the question facing gentile believers who Paul had raised up. Is circumcision necessary to be part of the faith?

Paul had taught no, it is not necessary. As he raised up new believers and planted churches from those with no Jewish lineage (those called gentiles) he was teaching Christ crucified alone. But at Antioch filled with new believers Jews came from Judea and started to contradict Paul - of course you need to be circumcised. You cannot be Jewish without being circumcised and you cannot be a believer of Jesus if you aren't a Jew. And a dispute erupted.

While it is hard to image the church today fighting over circumcision we certainly fight about a lot of things. How to baptize. How old you need to be in order to be baptized. Who is welcomed at the communion table -the list goes on and on. This week let us invite God's teaching through the book of Acts to illuminate our path in the midst of disputes as well.

**How would you feel if you were Paul and someone came to contradict your teaching with people you love?**

**Prayer:** God, we often like to think that we have all the answers, yet Lord, the Truth lies in you alone. While we are grateful to catch glimpses, we are not the ultimate authority, you are. So let your Truth and Way guide us this week and beyond, we pray. Amen.

**Tuesday: “Law of Moses” - Acts 15: 5**

Often in the Gospels the Pharisees get a bad rap. If Jesus is arguing with anyone, it is the religious establishment, including the Pharisees and other leaders of Jewish life. But if we give a charitable reading to the Pharisees, they are trying to uphold the traditions of the faith. What traditions? Specifically the law of Moses, because it is a sign of the covenant.

While we think about circumcision coming from God to Abraham and his descendants as a sign of the covenantal promise, it was the law of Moses that brought circumcision and all of its accompanying practices into law. If you would ask Pharisees why circumcision was important, they would not have pointed to Abraham as much as the law of Moses.

They are trying to keep people on the right path by upholding the law and the tradition. Which Paul would have understood as a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

Tradition is an extremely important thing. But it must be tempered with being obedient to the Holy Spirit. We need both a heart of tradition and a spirit of submission to God in our lives.

**How do tradition and following the Spirit not seem to gel in this first section of Acts 15?**

**Prayer:** Lord, your ways are beyond our human understanding. Give us hearts that embrace your mystery - the mystery of tradition *and* the mystery of following where you are leading today. Give us discerning hearts and wisdom as we follow you and you alone. Amen.

### **Wednesday: "Grace" - Acts 15: 6-11**

The church in Jerusalem at this point in time was led by James. In his wisdom, we allowed the opposing sides to have "much discussion" which is a nice way to say debate the topic out. But it is Peter who stood up and put the matter to rest, calling those gathered to believe through grace that we are saved as the sign of the new covenant, not circumcision alone.

It is no accident that it is Peter who stood up and spoke. Just a few chapters earlier (Acts 10) he had his own conversion experience around the question of who was in and who was out, as God gave him a vision of clean and unclean animals. When Peter instead in the vision to live into the tradition, denouncing unclean foods, God reminded him that anything that God says is clean is clean.

In Acts 11, Peter then has to defend his own actions that follows. How he went into the home of a gentile (who would have been considered unclean) and baptized his family.

In Peter's mind, this is a settled matter. Grace abounds.

#### **How has grace abounded in your life?**

**Prayer:** Lord, we thank you that you are God and we are not. We thank you Lord that you declare who is clean and it is not up to us in our human ways. And we thank you, O Lord, above all else for the grace that claimed our life and claims the lives of others. Alleluia and Amen!

### **Thursday: "God Had Done" - Acts 15: 12-14**

When I read Acts 15 from the beginning, I imagine Paul and Barnabas heading off to Jerusalem raring for a fight. Who are these people to come and confuse the people they love? Those that they had been teaching about the faith?

But once Peter spoke, in many ways the fight left them, and instead their words rang out with praise for God. They told of what God had done amongst the gentiles they had seen. The signs and wonders. The people whose lives were changed as they came to believe the Gospel.

What an example for our lives as well. What would it look like if next time we are in a disagreement with another believer, we praised God? Not a backhanded praise like "God I thank you I am not like so and so" but authentic praise - "Lord, I thank you for what you have done!"

It reminds me of the ancient hymn "To God be the Glory" why? Because "great things he has done. He loveth the world so he gave us his son!" True words throughout the ages.

#### **How can you change the tenor of an argument to praise to God?**

**Prayer:** Lord, we do want to give you all the honor, glory, and praise. Lord, remind us that you do not need us to defend you with our words so much as testify to your grace and love with our actions. When we become heated, let us turn our hearts to praise and find our rest in you, we pray. Change us, O Lord. Amen.

### **Friday: "Agreement"- Acts 15: 15-18**

At this end of this time of praise and testimony, James spoke and reminded the people of how what had been pointed out by Peter and lifted up by Paul and Barnabas was seen through the prophets as he called to mind the words of Amos 9, that even the gentiles would bear God's name.

James, in his wisdom, was able to unite the tradition of the prophets with the bold work of Paul for such a time as this, as Paul lived into his call from God to take the Good News to the gentiles.

Acts 15 reminds us that God offers a third way - bringing together the past and the present in a way that leads to God's future.

**How is God calling you to be a wise bridge-builder like James between the past and the present to the future?**

**Prayer:** Lord, we thank you for your servants throughout the ages who did not speak by their own mind, but through your wisdom. May we, too, be people of your wisdom who share your love and grace with the world. Amen.