

"The Battle for Liberty"

Part 4

Acts 15

Introduction: Tonight, as we return to our study of Acts, we are stepping back into a scene where the church at Jerusalem with the apostles and the elders have made a decision about what to do with the Gentile believers. There were certain Jews that wanted to command the Gentiles that they had to be circumcised and had to keep the Law if they were going to be Christians. They basically wanted the Gentiles to become like Jews. But that was not what God required of the Gentiles or the Jews pertaining to salvation. God required faith and faith alone.

Notice Acts 15:7-10

Peter explained to the church and the Jews that the Gentiles were saved by faith alone. James then spoke and explained that in the Kingdom the Gentiles would remain Gentiles and therefore there was no need to make them become as Jews now.

The church then determined that they would not put a burden on the Gentiles that they or the Jews could not carry but they would give them a list of things that they needed to abstain from.

Notice Acts 15:19-22

There were Jews in every city and the concern was that the Gentiles do nothing that would be offensive to them which if they did it would make it more difficult to win them to Jesus Christ.

Notice Acts 15:23-24

Here is where we stopped last week. The church had made the choice to send a letter to the churches and what we read here is the content of the letter. Before we leave verse 24, I want us to notice what this false teaching did to the believers. They were troubled and their souls were subverted. Notice the meaning of the word "subverting."

It literally means to pack up baggage, to tear down, or to dismantle. In other words, it describes a process of packing up instead of making ready in order to remove. Figuratively in the present context it means to cause inward distress, to upset, to subvert, to overthrow or to unsettle. The idea was that Satan was using these false teachers to overthrow the minds of these new believers. It also has the idea of making bankrupt. So, these false teachers were being used by Satan to steal away the Truth in their minds and fill their minds with false theology.

Application:

Let us keep in mind that we too are in a spiritual battle and the enemy would love to do the same thing to us if we would permit him.

Ephesians 6:12

¹² For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

It is his desire to keep us from being effective for the Lord. Either by getting us confused with false teaching, getting us entangled in the world, or tempting us to get into sin.

➤ **Delivering the Truth**

Notice Acts 15:25-27

Paul and Barnabas would deliver the letters and they would be joined by Judas and Silas. It is important to notice here that these letters would be delivered in person. Not handed down from person to person but they were hand delivered.

Application:

In our day of text messages and emails face-to-face meetings are few and far between. In certain situations, there are things that can be much better resolved in a face-to-face meeting. The church at Jerusalem anticipated questions as the letter was read so what better way to deal with the matter than to send men to deliver the letter that could answer the questions. In our day emails and texts are convenient but you cannot feel the emotion of the conversation and you cannot read facial expressions.

2 John 1:12

¹² Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

3 John 1:13-14

¹³ I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee:

¹⁴ But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

Notice Acts 15:26 again.

They were sending man who had risk their lives in sharing the Gospel. These men had given their lives over to the Lord. Notice what Paul says in Acts 20.

Acts 20:22-27

²² *And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:*

²³ *Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.*

²⁴ *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

²⁵ *And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.*

²⁶ *Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.*

²⁷ *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*

Notice Acts 15:28

Here in this verse, we see the most important statement concerning this matter. It was the Holy Spirit who led them to give the answer they gave and they were all in unity with the Spirit. These leaders counted the Holy Spirit as one of them as they gathered for a solution to the situation.

Application:

What a lesson there is here for us! There should always be included in our meetings and our decisions, the will of God as communicated through the Spirit. We should always have a seat available for the Spirit when we face any decisions in our lives so He can set with us as we seek the will of God. There should be within us the desire to walk in the will of God.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

When we read how they were in the unity of the Spirit we need to consider a few more thoughts. This was not necessarily an easy decision to reach.

Notice Acts 15:29-31

The Gentiles rejoiced with great comfort when they heard the news. It was great news because they were not forced to carry the heavy burden of the Law. There was no need to become like the Jews. They could be who they were in Christ.

Application:

This is a good reminder for each of us. We do not need to try to be like someone else. We can be ourselves in Jesus Christ. God has made of each of us in our own unique way. You have your personality and I have mine and God uses us just as we are. I do not need to try to be like other pastors because I am not them. I am the person God made me and I am free to be me. With all of our quirks and flaws our God still loves us and He still uses us. Getting back to these Gentiles they were very happy with the decision. But there were some who were not and that was the Judaizers. This decision right here brought even more hardships upon the early church.

Notice the words of Whitcomb on the decision made by the Jerusalem church.

"This decision had the effect of antagonizing many unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem. From this time onward, the Christian mission within the nation (in and around Jerusalem) faced growing difficulties. There was an increasing zeal against Rome within the nation, as Jews during the next two decades would become more violent against Roman government officials, seeking to throw off the Roman yoke that was upon them. All of this proved to be very difficult for the life and ministry of the Jerusalem church. As the result of this Council, theologians have made this conclusion: James, along with others, made a magnanimous choice, one of the most marvelous decisions in the history of the Church, but it ended in the final destruction of the church in Jerusalem. What should they have done? Wasn't this the will of God? Was the will of God to destroy the church in Jerusalem? This is a very heavy question. When the godless Jews in Jerusalem became suspicious that these Christian Jews were pro-Gentile compromisers, this led to the downfall of the Jerusalem church. The same Jews who were determined to free themselves from the Roman yoke were also determined to destroy these saved Jews whom they considered to be compromising their Jewish faith. When Jerusalem collapsed in A. D. 70, the Christian

Jews fled to another area to escape with their lives, and the church in Jerusalem disappeared and never recovered."

The Holy Spirit led the leaders at the Jerusalem church to make a hard decision. They did not know all that would unfold in the near future but I am sure they were aware of the response which the unsaved Jews would have toward this decision. The Jews would certainly not be happy and it would cause them to be more bitter toward the Jewish believers, the church, and the Gentiles.

Application:

We must understand that when we follow the will of God not everyone is going to approve and some will become angry.

Matthew 10:34-35

³⁴ *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

³⁵ *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*

There are times when we follow the will of God that others will rise up in an attempt to stop us. There will be times when to follow the will of God takes a great deal of faith because we do not know what the response from others might be and we do not know how it will impact our lives down the road.

James 1:5-8

⁵ *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

⁶ *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*

⁷ *For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*

⁸ *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

We do know that God's will is good[beneficial], acceptable[pleasing], and perfect[lacks nothing]. When we follow the leading of the Spirit and walk in the will of God, we can be sure that no matter what the journey is like we shall see the mighty hand of God as He meets our needs.

Matthew 6:27-33

²⁷ Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

²⁸ And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

²⁹ And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

³⁰ Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Conclusion:

Let us be determined to know the will of God and walk in it.

Jeremiah 29:13

¹³ And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.