

Acts 15 Bible Study

1. Have you ever known Christians to argue and disagree over things? Think of some examples? Would you describe these as 'major' or 'minor' issues?

Particularly try to tease out if there is any relationship between how 'major' the issue is and how sharply people disagree.

2. Read Acts 15:1-6. What was the 'question' that needed resolving? How could this matter have arisen in a church with the apostles as its leaders?

Not all of the implications of the gospel had yet been worked through. All were agreed that Gentiles had been given God's Spirit (chapter 11), but now it is suggested that they must still become Jews first. The people suggesting this were those who were most thoroughly immersed in the Old Testament Law and Jewish culture, so they would have held on to those things very tightly.

3. Read Gal 2:1-16. It is likely that the events described here happened before those in Acts 15. How does this help to understand what was happening in Acts 15?

The issue here is keeping the Old Testament food and ceremonial laws of 'clean' and 'unclean'. Gentile Christians would have 'unclean' hands etc after being in the marketplace and associating with other Gentiles and so on. Peter knew this to be nothing, but he felt the pressure of certain Jewish Christians and began to behave as though those things mattered – hence Paul's accusation of "hypocrisy" = 'play-acting'. By Acts 15 Peter had changed his mind!

4. How does the view of the Christians in v5 contrast with that of the Christians in Phoenicia, Samaria and others in Jerusalem (vv3-4)?

NB NIV "very glad" in v3 = "greatly rejoiced" – many other Christians rejoiced at the spread of the gospel and the salvation of the Gentiles..

5. Read Acts 15:7-11. Summarise Peter's argument in your own words.

People are saved by God's grace when they believe that Jesus died and rose for them. Whether Jew or Gentile, salvation is the same. This goes for being saved as well as staying saved!

6. Read Acts 15:12-29. Why does James say that they ought not to put any burden on the Gentiles, and then sets out four things they should tell the Gentiles not to do, all of which come from the Law of Moses?

v21 is the key – these are things that would prevent Jewish Christians from easily relating to Gentile ones, all four things were associated with pagan temple worship and idolatry. These were most likely the causes of Peter's trouble in Gal 2.

7. *If you have time...* Read Acts 15:30-16:5. After all the effort to help Christians to live in peace and not keep the Law, we read of Paul and Barnabas disagreeing so strongly that they part company, and of Paul having Timothy circumcised! Are these things contradictions?

Salvation is not at stake. Paul and Barnabas go separate ways, but God uses them both. Then see also Col 4:10 & 2 Tim 4:11. Timothy was of Jewish birth and for a mission that would take him into Jewish territory it was thought worthwhile not to cause unnecessary offence over the issue of circumcision.

8. Read Rom 14:1-15:3 and 1 Cor 9:19-23, 10:23-33. How do these verses fill out what is going on in Acts 15? Are there specific examples of how you can apply this principle? Are there things you need to repent of or at least change your attitude in regards to other people's consciences? Spend some time praying about these things.

*Encourage people to identify the things that **they** have treated as "major" issues but were really minor things and might have been harsh towards another Christian as a result.*