

Acts 15:1-5, 19 *And certain men [ethnic Jews from the early Jerusalem Church] which came down from Judaea taught the brethren [from the gentile Antioch Church], and said, “Except ye [You must] be circumcised after the manner of Moses, [or] ye cannot be saved”.² When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation [reasoned and disputed differences] with them [and couldn’t reach agreement], they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.³ And being brought [sent] on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring [announcing] the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.*

⁴*And when they were come to [arrive at] Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared [announced] all things that God had done with them.⁵ But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed [were believers in Christ], saying, “That it was needful [required] to circumcise them [the gentile believers], and to command them to keep the law of Moses¹.”*

¹⁹*... Wherefore my [James, the pastor of the Jerusalem Church] sentence is, that we trouble not them [don’t put the requirements of circumcision or the Mosaic Law], which from among [when] the Gentiles are turned to God.”*

I. Introduction: Everyone needs wisdom when making everyday decisions.

A. Christians have a source of wisdom not recognized by the world.

James 1:5 *If any of you [Christians] lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally [generously], and upbraideth not [without criticism]; and it shall be given him.*

B. Racism and social discrimination can be a source of hurt, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The Bible addresses this issue directly.

C. The Church of Jesus Christ should set the example for the world in eliminating all forms of discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Discrimination must be excluded from the Church if we are to reach ALL people (Jesus’ command) with His gospel.

¹ The “Law of Moses” included many legal requirements such as not working on Saturdays, strict dietary restrictions, and ceremonial washings.

D. An example of an integrated church can be found in

Acts 13:1 *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch [a church with members from many different countries and cultures] certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas [from Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean], and Simeon that was called Niger [from Africa], and Lucius of Cyrene [also from Africa, modern-day Libya], and Manaen [from Palestine], which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul [a Jew from Tarsus].*

II. Rise of Prejudice: the basis of salvation (verses 1–3)

A. Prejudice from the believing Jewish Pharisees²: These early believers understood the gospel as a way for gentiles to be saved by becoming Jewish through circumcision and keeping the Mosaic Law.

1. They were wrong in their spirit. Their devotion to Christ was out of duty, not affection for Him and the brethren. Jesus said:

John 13:35 *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

2. They were wrong in their theology. Their understanding of salvation was by faith in Jesus' sacrifice **plus** works, but the Bible clearly says:

Galatians 2:16 *Knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the law**, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that **we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law**: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

3. The Apostle Peter was subject to this Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles. God gave Peter a vision to correct Peter's thinking in this regard. The story is in Acts chapter 10.

B. Prejudice toward Simeon and the Gentiles from Antioch: Paul and Barnabas disagreed with these Pharisees and insisted that salvation was by the grace of God through faith, separate from keeping any law. This dispute was sent to the Jerusalem Church, where the Apostles were teaching, to resolve.

III. Review of the Church: the Apostles reviewed the Scriptures and the activity of the Holy Spirit of God to come to their conclusions. (verses 4–12)

A. The Gentiles [Cornelius] had received the Holy Spirit. In this way God changed the hearts of these prejudiced men.

Acts 10:44 – 45 *While Peter yet spake these words [his explanation of Jesus' death as the payment for their sins], the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word [many gentiles who had gathered to hear Peter's teaching]. And they of the circumcision which believed [the prejudiced Jewish Christians] were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that **on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.***

² These Pharisees were believers in Jesus Christ but had brought their prior understanding of salvation through their own works into the church. Now they were trying to impose their biased understanding as doctrine on gentile believers. They also brought their prior prejudices of gentiles into the church.

B. Salvation is by God's grace.

1. Peter explained to the Jerusalem Church about his experience when he explained the gospel to these gentiles.

Acts 15: 7 – 8 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth [when I preached to them] should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness [showed that they had truly been saved], giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us [the Jewish Christians];

2. Peter explained that the same grace given by God to the Jews was now also given to the gentiles.

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved, even as they [gentiles].

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves [salvation is not something you earn]: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

C. There is no difference between us, we are all the same at our birth.

1. We all have a common bloodline (ancestry).

*Acts 17:26 And [God] hath **made of one blood** all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed [when they would live], and the bounds of their habitation [where they would live].*

2. No one has a preferred place in God's economy.

*Romans 3:9 What then? are we [Jews] better than they [Gentiles]? No, in no wise [not at all]: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they **are all under sin**.*

3. We are all the same when we are born again. Religion, status, or gender does not give us a preferred standing before God.

*Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for **ye are all one** [equal, no one higher than another] **in Christ Jesus**.*

4. Only Jesus Christ can allow you into God's family.

*Ephesians 2:19 Now therefore ye [Ephesians, mostly Gentiles] are no more strangers and foreigners, but [you are now] **fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God**;*

IV. Reasoning of James: we should accept the gentiles as Jesus has accepted the gentiles: as equals in Christ. (verses 13–21)

- A. God is calling a people for His Name: All the saved of all the ages have been put into Christ and have become the Church, the bride of Christ.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Revelation 7:9 *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude [group of people], which no man could number, **of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues**, stood before the throne [God, the Father], and before the Lamb [Jesus Christ], clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;*

- B. God is calling all men to belong to His family, verses 16 - 17

Amos 9:11 – 12 *In that day [when God disciplines Israel] will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen [the Temple in Jerusalem], and close up the breaches thereof [fix the broken walls]; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom [a neighboring country related to Israel], and of **all the heathen** [gentiles], **which are called by my name**, saith the LORD that doeth this.*

- C. God desires "...that we trouble not them... (Acts 15:19)" of different backgrounds in the church (don't discriminate because people are different from us).

V. Seven Biblical Principles when Confronted with Racism

- A. We are one race Acts 17:26 (see above)

- B. We are created in the image of God Genesis 1:26 – 27 *And God said, **Let us make man in our image**, after our likeness: and let them have dominion [control, authority] over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So **God created man in his own image**, in the image of God created he [God] *him* [the first couple]; *male and female created he them.**

- C. God is no respecter of persons

Romans 2:11 *For there is no respect of persons with God.*

Acts 10:34 *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons ..."*

- We (as God's subjects) have responsibility to respect many things, including three that God specifically ordained.

1. Family, see Genesis chapter 2

2. Government, including law enforcement, Genesis Chapter 9 & Romans 13:1 – 7

Romans 13:3 - 4 *For [civil] rulers are not a terror to good works [don't make people who obey laws afraid], but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? [How do you live so that you don't have to fear these rulers?] do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same [the civil authorities]: For he [any ruler, including a police officer] is **the minister of God to thee for good** [to enforce laws and keep order]. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain [he has the authority to use force if you are breaking laws]: for **he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.***

3. Church see Ephesians chapter 5

D. Love our neighbor, as the Good Samaritan Luke 10:30 - 37

Leviticus 19:18 *Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but **thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**: I am the LORD.*

James 2:8 *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**, ye do well:*

E. Bear one another's burdens. Compassion is your hurt in my heart;

Galatians 6:2 *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

F. God desires all to be saved

2 Peter 3:9 ***The Lord is not slack** [delayed indefinitely] *concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering* [amazingly patient] *to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that all should come to repentance.**

G. We can be brothers & sisters through Christ

Galatians 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond [slave] nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one [equal, no one higher than another] in Christ Jesus.*