

Introduction:

Today we're going to conclude looking at *Paul's First Missionary Journey*.

Things we will look at in this lesson:

Part One: How to Minister Successfully

Part Two: A Biblical Pattern of Conflict Resolution

Part One: How to Minister Successfully:

01. What does Paul and Barnabas' experiences teach us to expect?

02. What do blame, complaint, and self-pity do?

03. What did Paul and Barnabas change their plans according to?

04. What do victories give us?

05. In whom can the fruit of the Spirit be developed?

Part Two: A Biblical Pattern of Conflict Resolution:

06. What question framed the central issue of the church at the Jerusalem council?

07. What did many Jews have trouble accepting?

08. What did the Lord do to reach the Gentiles?

09. What does Acts 15:1-5 describe?

10. How did the Antioch church respond to the issue between them and the Jewish believers in Jerusalem?

Article 1)

Six Steps to Resolve Church Conflict (Acts 15:5-36):

(1) Clearly define the problem (Acts 15:5).

The issue for the council's consideration was clearly defined by some from the party of the Pharisees. Stating the issue clearly lets everyone know what is involved. For issues to be dealt with, they must first be clearly defined and understood by all.

(2) Have a full and open discussion of the issue (Acts 15:6-7).

The apostles and elders met and had a full discussion of the issue. "After there had been much debate" (verse 7) indicates that perhaps quite a number of people presented their viewpoints. The body of believers was much too large for everyone to discuss it, so only the leaders and those most involved were included in the discussions. If people are going to be part of the solution, they must be part of the process. A church is not meant to be made up of a dictatorial group where one person lays down God's rule for everyone else. We are meant to be a community. When we have a problem that affects the community, the church community is to come together.

(3) Listen to the experiences of godly people whose past walk with God gives them insight into the present situation (Acts 15:7-12).

After much discussion, Peter stood and told of the conversion of Cornelius.

God had validated Cornelius' salvation, not through circumcision but through the giving of the Holy Spirit. So then, Peter concluded, Acts 15:10-11 "Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are.". God had shown through Cornelius that salvation comes by His grace.

Following Peter's address, Barnabas and Paul also told about what God had done among the Gentiles through them. The supernatural element in their ministry among the Gentiles undoubtedly served to vindicate their mission and to indicate God's approval.

The issue was not resolved by experience alone, but relevant experiences were considered. The experiences of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas weighed as one of the important factors in the council's decision.

Article 1) continued...

(4) Test experience with the Scriptures (Acts 15:13–19) and make decisions from a right understanding and application of the Word.

James recognized that this issue had indeed been addressed in Scripture. He quoted Amos 9:11–12 to show that what they were discussing had been foreseen by the prophets. David's tent, his kingdom, had fallen. But God had promised to rebuild, Acts 15:16–17 "After these things I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. I will rebuild its ruins and set it up again, so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord— even all the Gentiles who are called by my name— declares the Lord who makes these things". From this James concluded that it had always been God's intention to include the Gentiles. This led to the God-pleasing decision: Acts 15:19 "Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God,".

This does not mean that whoever can quote the most Scripture should prevail. The sheer quantity of the Scriptures was on the side of the Judaizers. They were well-practiced in quoting all the texts on circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and the dietary and kosher laws. But bulk is not as important as intent. Christians must be careful to read the consistent meaning through the Scripture that unites it all. Jesus said the Scriptures cannot be broken. They cannot be set against themselves. The cord that runs through all of Scripture is God's desire to reach out to and have a relationship with all people—not just Jews—through faith.

(5) Separate the major issues from the minor ones (Acts 15:20–21).

The decision had been reached: whom God receives, let the church not reject. Issues that could not be compromised included repentance and faith in Christ. Cultural issues that were a matter of tradition and preference included the Judaizers' issues—circumcision and dietary laws. Still, the Gentiles were asked to compromise, too. They were asked as a matter of love, not salvation, to refrain from making a show of their liberty in areas where Jewish believers had questions of conscience. Paul indicated that those who insist on keeping certain legalistic regulations are actually weaker in the faith. So the stronger or more liberated believer should, in love, refrain from practices that would offend (Romans 14:1–15:13).

James cited four restrictions for the Gentile believers. Three deal with eating (food offered to idols, things strangled, and blood). Because Jewish and Gentile believers were to share meals together, these considerations were to be observed. Otherwise meal times might cause hard feelings and display dissension to unbelievers. The call to avoid sexual immorality is commanded for righteousness, not a cultural preference. James instructed Gentile Christians to respect and conform to the Jewish believers' moral scruples. With many Gentiles, immorality was a part of feasting. It was proper that the Gentiles should conform to the higher godly code of relations between the sexes instead of following the lower pagan standards to which most Gentiles had been accustomed.

Article 1) concluded...

(6) Clearly communicate the decision to everyone it will affect (Acts 15:22–32). When a decision is reached, both the deliberation process and the conclusion should be made known. The result must not be left in doubt. People should not go away thinking that no definite action has been taken.

The decision of the Jerusalem Council was communicated in a letter outlining what had been decided. To back up the letter, they sent two of their own brothers from Jerusalem. Judas and Silas (who themselves were prophets) were to be the loving face of the Jerusalem church; they would bring encouragement to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

The Gentiles could rejoice at the Jerusalem Council's decision. The leadership of the Jerusalem church, and probably most believers, was completely satisfied with the results, Acts 15:25 "we have unanimously decided to select men and send them to you along with our dearly loved Barnabas and Paul,". Knowing that they were moving forward with God, they could write, Acts 15:28 "For it was the Holy Spirit's decision—and ours—not to place further burdens on you beyond these requirements:".