

GROW:

OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE



Disputes in the Midst of Growth

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Acts 15.1-35

The Growth of the Church

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OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE

The gospel spreads, the church grows:

1. 1.1-6.7 Gospel spreads in Jerusalem
2. 6.8-9.31 Gospel spreads to Judea & Samaria
3. 9.32-12.24 Gospel spreads to the Gentiles
4. 12.25-16.5 Gospel spreads to the Gentiles in Asia
5. 16.6-19.20 Gospel spreads to Europe
6. 19.21-28.31 Gospel spreads to the ends of the earth (Rome)



1. Dispute & Dialogue (15.1-5)

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”

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2. Discussion & Discernment (15.6-18)

⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! **We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”**

2. Discussion & Discernment (15.6-18)

¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ “After this I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things’ [Amos 9.11-12]—

¹⁸ things known from long ago.

3. Decision & Dissemination (15.19-35)

¹⁹ “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:

3. Decision & Dissemination (15.19-35)

- 1. Food polluted by idols**—likely associated with idol worship and the rituals connected to it (cf. 1 Cor 10.14-22 - idol worship through the eating of such foods). Contrast this with 1 Cor 8.7-13 regarding the exercise of our freedom. Still applicable today.
- 2. Sexual immorality**, probably associated with temple prostitution—tantamount to idolatry. Still applicable today.
- 3. Strangled animals**—forbidden under the Jewish cultic laws (Lev 17.10-14, 18.6-30).
- 4. Blood**—this is forbidden in the Jewish laws, reflecting the Jewish concern over the sacred nature of life as possessed in the blood.

3 & 4 stem out of a consideration for the Jewish cultic practices and for Jewish believers, since “Moses has been preached in every city...read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”
No longer applicable to us today.

3. Decision & Dissemination (15.19-35)

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:
Greetings.

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.

²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

3. Decision & Dissemination (15.19-35)

³⁰ So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

Reflection & Applications

How do we deal with disputes, especially regarding very key matters or issues?

1. Do we make effort to dialogue and clarify in order to maintain unity?
2. Do we discuss and discern, considering all the facts, esp including what the Spirit is showing and Scripture is saying?
3. Do we decide and disseminate the decision clearly, affirmingly and wisely?