



Church Matters: Being One

The Council at Jerusalem

1Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2This 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. 3The 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 brothers very glad. 4When 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.

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

6The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7After 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. 8God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

12The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. 14Simon^[a] has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15The 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,

17that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things^[b]

18that have been known for ages.^[c]

19"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20Instead 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. 21For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers

22Then 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, two men who were leaders among the brothers. 23With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. 24We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— 26men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29You 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.

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

LIFE Community Leader's Guide
Sunday, March 11

Big Idea: God's people can resolve differences by following three principles

Key Verse:

Acts 15:28

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"

Opening Question:

What is the most significant thing that has happened to you this past week.

Study/Discussion Questions:

Read through the passage together.

Observation Questions

1. What is the tone or "feeling" of the Council at first and how does this tone or "feeling" change through the course of the chapter?
2. What is the issue being discussed?
3. How is the issue resolved?
4. How is the decision communicated?

Interpretation Questions

1. Why was this issue such a decisive issue?
2. What did the decision that was made mean to the ministry of Paul?
3. How did the decision influence or affect the Jewish believers?
4. How did the decision influence or affect the Gentile believers?

Application Questions

Bryan highlighted 3 principles from this council from the early church.

- *The Church came together.*
- *Each side reconsidered their assumptions.*
- *Each side re-examined Scripture.*

1. What are some issues that have threatened the unity of the Church through the centuries?
2. How would you apply these principles to some of those situations listed from question 1 above?
3. When divisive issues come up what response can you have that best meets the standards of love for God and others? Think about this personally.

What about the issues facing us currently?

Leaders Note: The idea behind this study is to examine how the early church dealt with a potential divisive issue and to apply it to our lives. It is our hope that your LIFE Community does not become a point of debate or division.

Therefore on the following page we have highlighted how we suggest people apply these principles over the current issues facing us now.

1. Where can you come together to talk through the issues of Women in Leadership and Membership facing us now?
 - There are numerous forums being created for people to talk, ask questions, hear responses. These are on the following dates: April 29 (12:45pm) and April 30 (7pm) - Forum on Women in Leadership; May 6 (12:45pm) and May 7 (7pm) - Forum on Membership;
 - Adult classes on June 3rd and June 10th at 9:50 and 11:15am.
 - Finally we can all come together to decide on the issues at our Annual General meeting on June 11th.

2. Each side reconsidered their assumptions and re-examined Scripture: How can we reexamine our assumptions and reexamine Scripture:
 - There are information packets available online and from the office to help people read through how the elders examined their assumptions and Scripture. They have many resources from both sides as references and deal with some of the key Scriptures on these issues. Read them personally.
 - Contact a pastor on staff to talk through issues more personally.
 - Attend the classes and forums above to talk through these issues.
 - Most importantly spend time searching through God's Word personally and in prayer as you think through these issues.

Close your time in prayer for each other, the process and the upcoming meeting.