

Acts 15:1-29

Presbytery Meeting

Introduction:

We see here in Acts that Luke points out that the church is a corporate entity. The church is not made up of individualistic philosophy that we so often see today within the modern church. There are those who view the church as independency. That is, the individual decides on whether or not they should join or leave. The church in Acts reveals for us the exercise of pastoral oversight and spiritual authority through the foundation of Christ as her head, built upon the foundation of apostles and elders and pastor-teachers. (Eph. 2:20-22)

I. Dissension – v. 1-5

A. False Teachers

1. Emissaries of Satan – Gal. 5:2-4
2. Paul and Barnabas unable to persuade

B. The Heart of the matter

1. How could the Old Testament laws and regulations now with the coming of Christ be improper?
2. Dietary laws – Acts 10:10-16
3. Circumcision – Acts 2:38,39

II. Debate –v.6-21

A. Peter’s message – v.7-11

1. The conversion of the Gentiles was God’s work of election – v.7 (I Pet. 1:1-2; 2:9-10)
2. God gave them the Holy Spirit – v.8
3. Peter’s firm rebuke – v.10 (Gal. 5:1; Matt. 11:28-30; I John 5:3)
4. Peter stresses the heart of the gospel – v.11; Rom. 11:6

B. Paul and Barnabas speak – v.12

C. James speaks – v.13-18

1. James refers to the Prophet Amos who recalls David’s “fallen tent” (Amos 9:11-12)
2. James states that “God first concerned Himself in taking from among the Gentiles a people for His Name.” v.14

D. James’ proposal:

1. We should not make it difficult for Gentiles who are turning to God. James is affirming justification by faith alone. (Jam. 2:14-20)
2. Gentile believers should take particular care to distance themselves from their former life. (I Cor. 8:1-13; 10:14-33; Matt. 5:27-30)

III. Decision –v.22-29

A. The Presbytery adopted James’ proposal and sent a letter to all the churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia

1. Those churches who insist on circumcision as a requirement have no authorization from the Presbytery – v.11
2. The leading of the Holy Spirit and the Presbytery is responsible not to place any burden upon the Gentile believers – v.28 (John 14:26; 16:13)

Conclusion:

1. *Dissension in the church can and should be resolved by spiritual leadership of Elders.*
2. *Discussion and debate is permissible at Session, Presbytery and Synod meetings but there must be sound reasoning based upon Biblical evidence.*

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