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| Subject | Lessons from Acts Series | 4415 |
| | | Acts 15 |
| Title | 7 Lessons from Acts 15 | |
| Proposition | To study Acts 15. | |
| Objective | To consider seven lessons which Acts 15 helps me to consider and appreciate and apply in my own life. | |

7 Lessons from Acts 15

Introduction:

1. Chapter 15 deals with one of the major problems that troubled the early church—the relationship of Christians to the Law of Moses and particularly how the Gentiles were to relate to it.
2. Many Christians of Jewish background were seeking to bind circumcision and other parts of the law upon Gentile converts.
 - 1) They were, in effect, saying to Gentiles, *“You must first become a Jew before you can be saved.”*
 - 2) This was no part of the gospel that Paul preached (cf., Book of Galatians).
3. The matter was settled during a meeting held in Jerusalem by the apostles and elders.
 - 1) The decision was by the Holy Spirit (15:28) and agreed to by all present, including the Apostles.
 - 2) A letter was sent out to the churches stating that such attempts to add to the gospel were not authorized!
4. We read about Paul and Barnabas continuing to preach and teach in Antioch for a period of time and then “some days after” they decided: LET US GO AGAIN.
 - 1) Before the 2nd Missionary Journey of Paul is begun, though, there is a matter of disagreement between himself and Barnabas.
 - 2) The contention was SHARP (v. 39) and they decided to part ways and this actually developed into two teams going forth rather than one.
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DISCUSSION: Acts 15 Helps me in that it—

I. Stresses the importance of Going to THE RIGHT SOURCE for answers (v. 2).

Acts 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

1. Sometimes we might wonder about the AND ELDERS part of this statement.
 - 1) There is no question but that there is a difference in authority between APOSTLES and ELDERS.
 - 2) There were only 13 men + Paul who ever were so designated by our Lord.
 - 3) These are the ones to whom the promise of John 16.13 apply.

- 4) **But, also, in the 1st Century as today, there were elders appointed.**
 - 5) **The Jerusalem church had elders.**
 - 6) **A decision announced with the approval of the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church would be MOST WEIGHTY!**
 - 7) **In fact, it would be more readily accepted by the faction most influenced by the Judaizers.**
 - 8) **Most likely those elders would have received the miraculous gift of PROPHECY by laying on of the apostles hands.**
 - 9) **If an uninspired elder of the Jerusalem church had opposed the Holy Spirit's decision, that would have been the end of that elder's tenure, I am confident.**
2. **Lots of people were actually giving ANSWERS to this question.**
- 1) **The difficult thing to do is to find who is giving God's answer.**
 - 1- **1 John 4.1 lets us know that there were false prophets in the 1st Century.**
 - 2- **Not only that, it tells us plainly that there were **MANY false prophets gone out into the world.****
 - 2) **Merely receiving AN answer to a question could not suffice for men who are intending to please the Lord.**
 - 1- **It is receiving God's answer that matters!**
 - 2- **You and I, like the brethren in the 1st Century, can find MANY answers to the questions of our day.**
 - 3- **The one and only place we can find God's answers to our questions today is from the Bible.**
3. **Acts 15:28 *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;***
- 1) **We should take notice that the decision—GOD'S ANSWER—was given by the Holy Spirit.**
 - 2) **Since the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit, their answer would have been identical with the answer that *seemed good to the Holy Spirit.***
 - 3) **Since the elders, very likely had been given the gift of prophecy by the laying on of the hands of an apostle, their answer would likewise have been in harmony.**
 - 4) **So the GOOD RESULT of going to the right source in this instance was that a solution to the issue came from the Holy Spirit.**
 - 5) **This did not end all discussion of the matter, because there will always be people who do not accept God's answers.**
 - 6) **But, for those who do want God's answers it has now been given and cannot be questioned by honest souls.**
4. **This is why the PLEA of going BACK TO THE BIBLE that we seek to stress to all men everywhere is SO VERY IMPORTANT!**
- 1) **Various ideas can be presented that sound so fine.**
 - 2) **The answers given ARE ONLY FINE, if they seem good to the Holy Spirit!!!**

Acts 15 Helps me in that it—

II. Shows me what brings GREAT JOY to Christians (3).

Acts 15:3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

1. **Christians, are a joy-filled people.**
 - 1) **We have much to be happy about.**
 - 2) **Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:**
 - 3) **It is highly inconsistent for a Christian not to be filled with JOY.**
 - 4) **Paul tells Christians REJOICE IN THE LORD (Php 3.1).**
2. **One of the things that OUGHT to cause the most rejoicing in the heart of a Christian is THE SAVING OF LOST SOULS—THE ADDITION TO THE BODY OF CHRIST OF NEW CONVERTS!**
3. **When we get our JOY from learning of successes in the field of evangelism, we are being just like the 1st Century Church.**
4. **So as Paul and Barnabas headed toward Jerusalem for this discussion of the problem of circumcision, their hearts must have rejoiced when they saw the response of brethren to the work they had been doing among the Gentiles.**
5. **It is always such a source of joy and happiness when we receive news on Facebook or other sources about recent baptisms. Letter from Theo Scullard.**

Acts 15 Helps me in that it—

III. Shows the DANGER of Sects (5).

Acts 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

1. **There was ALMOST universal rejoicing among the brethren regarding precious Gentile souls receiving the teaching of the gospel and being saved.**
2. **However, verse 5 shows us that the rejoicing was NOT universal.**
 - 1) **We must ask WHY?**
 - 2) **The text tells us about a SECT.**
 - 3) **There existed some Christians who were NOT rejoicing at the addition of the Gentiles to the family of God.**
 - 4) **This group of Christians is described here as CERTAIN OF THE SECT OF THE PHARISEES.**
 - 1- **The troubling word there is SECT.**
 - 2- **There is no room in the body of Christ for sects!**
 - 3- **A SECT is a division.**
 - 4- **In the original it is: *hairesis*. From it we get our English word HERESY.**
 - 5- **It means a PART or DISUNION.**
3. **1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions**

among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

4. This word is listed in Galatians 5.20 as one of the **WORKS OF THE FLESH**.
5. Peter provides a **STRONG WARNING** against those who would bring in these heresies: 2 Peter 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, **and bring upon themselves swift destruction**.
6. Jesus prayed that His disciples would be **ONE**— John 17:20-21 **Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; (21) That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.**
7. We are so thankful for the event recorded in Acts 15 which would head off the problems that developed from this SECT mentioned.

Acts 15 Helps me in that it—

IV. Provides a **COMPANION PASSAGE** to Romans 10.17 (7).

Acts 15:7 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 should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

1. Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
2. These two passages go together and support one another!
3. Faith comes by hearing.
4. It is the way the Gentiles here AND all men EVERYWHERE come to be saved.

Acts 15 Helps me in that it—

V. Gives a **DESCRIPTION** of the Folly of Seeking Authority from the OT (10).

Acts 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

1. Peter is arguing the **FOOLISHNESS** of trying to put on the **YOKE** of the Law of Moses after that law has already been nailed to the cross.
2. Colossians 2:14 **Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;**
3. Whereas Jesus says: Matthew 11:28-30 **Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**, certain teachers in the 1st Century were saying **PUT ON THIS HARD YOKE OF THE OLD LAW**.
4. **THE YOKE OF THE LAW** was a common rabbinical expression used to speak of being closely bound to the **WILL OF GOD**.

- 1) The only problem is that such terminology is inconsistent with the EASY yoke that Jesus promised us.
- 2) You and I need to understand Jesus' statement here.
 - 1- He is NOT saying it is easy to live the Christian life.
 - 2- He is saying the burden of sin and what sin brings as a consequence is a HEAVY YOKE.
 - 3- In comparison to the HEAVY YOKE of sin—eternal punishment, what Jesus asks of us is an extremely EASY yoke, because it leads to ETERNAL LIFE.
5. The way to be **CLOSELY BOUND TO THE WILL OF THE LORD** is no longer through the Law of Moses!!!
6. In this verse the Apostle Peter is rebuking the false teachers who would seek to TEMPT GOD by putting a YOKE upon the neck of the disciples which no one could bear!

Acts 15 Helps me in that it—

VI. Provides more THEOLOGY: God is OMNISCIENT (18).

Acts 15:18 **Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.**

1. It is James, the Lord's brother, who speaks here.
2. He is affirming, AND PROVING IT BY THE PROPHET AMOS, that God had planned all the while to bring in the Gentiles to be saved.
3. James teaches us here something about the nature of the God we serve and worship!
4. It is a marvelous statement of God's OMNISCIENCE.
 - 1) Our God is OMNIPRESENT (Psalms 139.8ff).
 - 2) Our God is OMNIPOTENT...
 - 1- Genesis 18:14 **Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.**
 - 2- Job 42:2 **I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.**
 - 3- Jeremiah 32:17 **Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:**
 - 3) Our God is OMNISCIENT...
 - 1- Psalms 139:1-4 **O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. (2) Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. (3) Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. (4) For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.**
 - 2- Psalms 147:5 **Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.**

5. **As Christians, it is our great privilege constantly to be students of THEOLOGY—we need to learn more about God!**

Acts 15 Helps me in that it—

VII. Shows me WHO was involved in teaching the WORD OF THE LORD (35).

Acts 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

1. **Yes, Paul was involved.**
2. **Yes, Barnabas was involved.**
3. **BUT, look at that last phrase: WITH MANY OTHERS ALSO.**
4. **There are lots of compliments that have been paid to the great Antioch church.**
5. **Surely, the fact that there were many others involved in the teaching and preaching of the word of the Lord IS WHAT MADE THEM SUCH A GREAT CHURCH!**

Conclusion:

1. **Acts 15 is an important chapter.**
2. **Problems were threatening to destroy the rapidly growing church.**
3. **However, the word of the Lord was appealed to by wise Christian leaders, and the results were POSITIVE.**