

Learning to Work Through Dissension with Other Believers (Acts 15)

I. THE BACKGROUND (Acts 15:1-4)

A. The Type of Problem (1-2a)

- Doctrine – concerns Biblical beliefs
- Discipline – concerns Biblical behavior (Matt 18:15-17)
- Differences – concern Biblical liberty (Rom 14:1-23)

Ⓢ *Principle: Conflict should not discourage us—it's normal.*

B. The Response to the Problem (2b-4)

Ⓢ *PR: We should not always consider compromise as a valid option (doctrine).*

Ⓢ *PR: NOT to “win”, but to discover and yield to the truth.*

II. THE DISSENSION (5)

The issue became personal, as believers of the Jerusalem church identified and struggled with the issue as well.

Ⓢ *PR: We must be open-minded enough to realize that we may be holding to beliefs that are built on our background or tradition rather than upon Biblical Principles. (The key admission is, “I may be wrong.”)*

Ⓢ *PR: If done in sincerity, no issue is wrong to bring up. If someone is truly struggling with an issue, it is best for that individual and for the church body as a whole to bring up the issue, and biblically and lovingly resolve it. Otherwise dissension and division cannot be resolved.*

III. THE DISCUSSION (6-12)

A. The apostles and elders came together to consider this issue (6)

Ⓢ *PR: Input into conflict discussions should logically be limited to those who are qualified to speak on the matter. (Think of this: Would you want your pastor to have a major part in diagnosing a physical illness of yours? Why or why not?)*

B. There was much discussion [lit. investigation or question] (7a).

Ⓢ *PR: We must be willing to offer the sacrifice of involvement for the spiritual health of our church family. This includes altering schedules, allocating time, etc. as needed. Convenience is secondary to truth.*

Ⓢ *PR: We are to speak one at a time, in an orderly fashion.*

C. Peter speaks (7b-11).

Ⓢ *PR: We must have a firm commitment to our fellow believers as spiritual family. Only when we see our responsibility and relationship to other believers will we have the proper consideration and commitment to them when disputes occur. (* Marriage)*

Ⓢ *PR: We are to speak up (if we have something to say), rather than stay silent and become bitter.*

Ⓢ *PR: We are to focus on the issue, and not argue by belittling others.*

Ⓢ *PR: Our goal for this issue is to find a solution, not to assign blame.*

Ⓢ *PR: We must seek to communicate clearly, and be willing, if necessary, to confront error. (Col 3:16)*

Ⓢ *PR: Admonition is a necessary element in Christian relationships. As evidence of sincerity and Christian maturity, we must be willing to accept admonition as well as to give it, as needed. Yield to the truth.*

Ⓢ *PR: We are not to bring up one's past. The issue is the issue.*

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D. _____ and Barnabas speak (12).

Ⓢ *OB: As with Peter, Paul and Barnabas _____ up, giving what information and insight they had on the subject.*

Ⓢ *PR: It is our privilege and _____ to speak up as we have pertinent information on the issue at hand. We should not stay silent if we have something valuable to add.*

Ⓢ *OB: The rest of the church was silent and _____. They were not discussing among themselves, nor preparing their next arguments nor day-dreaming. They were committed to *concentrate* on, *understand*, and thus be able to *evaluate* what each speaker was saying. (Again, evidence of their commitment to discover the truth).*

Ⓢ *PR: We must commit ourselves to truly _____ as others speak. Only then can we completely understand and justly evaluate what another is saying. How many disputes have not been resolved because of someone's failure to listen to the reasoning of another?*

E. _____ speaks (13-18).

Ⓢ *OB: James waited for Paul and Barnabas to _____ speaking before he himself began to speak (13).*

Ⓢ *PR: We must conduct ourselves in an _____ manner, speaking in turn. (Should not be a problem if we're listening to one another).*

Ⓢ *OB: James, who was seemingly the prominent elder, or _____ pastor (Acts 12:17,21), brings the discussion into focus, narrowing it to the actual issue of the conversion of the Gentiles (13).*

Ⓢ *PR: God's _____ for each of His established institutions always calls for a primary leader. The leader is: in the state—heads of government, in the home—the husband/father, in a local church the lead or senior pastor.*

IV. THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH (14-18):

A. James focuses the discussion on the _____.

Ⓢ *OB: James measures Peter's experience with the _____ of God.*

Ⓢ *PR: No matter _____ it is that speaks (James *evaluated* Peter, an apostle!), or what happens (v8 Gentiles rec'd the Holy Spirit), EACH testimony & experience MUST be weighed against Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17). Experience is NOT the final authority (e.g. charismatics, visions, or just plain “this happened to me”), but the Scriptures. Experiences do not validate Scripture, but rather Scripture approves or disproves them (Gal 1:7-8). Position is equally deceiving (1 John 4:1-3), as rank or position alone does not prove anything. The bottom line is NOT who says it, who taught it, or what happened, but “What does (or doesn't) the Bible say?”*

Ⓢ *PR: The actual issue must be _____ before it can be resolved. Resolving the main issue resolves many others. (symptoms/illness?)*