

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: We should not allow the presence of conflict to discourage us, as it is to be expected—it's normal.*

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

- ⓐ *Principle: We should not always consider compromise as a valid option, as in the case of critical doctrinal issues.*
- ⓑ *Principle: Our goal in any dispute is 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.

- ⓐ **OB**serva**T**ion: Though saved, the believing Pharisees still _____ with erroneous beliefs that they had learned from the past. They were sincere, but they were definitely wrong in this area of their understanding.
- ⓑ **PR**inciple: *We must be open-minded enough to realize that _____ 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.”)*
- ⓐ **OB**: The believing Pharisees were not _____ for bringing up this issue, though it was an error of a very basic sort.
- ⓑ **PR**: *If done in sincerity, no issue is _____ 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 _____ came together to consider this issue (6)

- ⓐ **OB**: Though verses 4, 12, and 22 seem to indicate that the entire church was present, only the apostles and elders took part in the discussion. Why? Simply because the apostles and elders were the most qualified to discuss the issue because of their callings (offices & duties – Eph 4:11; Heb 13:17), gifts (abilities – Rom 12:3-8), training (2 Tim 3:14), and spiritual maturity (1 Tim 3:1-7). This was a Biblical issue, and the apostles / elders were the Bible “specialists”.
- ⓑ **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?)*

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

- ⓐ **OB**: The truth was important enough for these believers to _____ time and energy (with no doubt much inconvenience) into the matter in order to see it resolved.
- ⓑ **PR**: *We must be willing to _____ 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.*
- ⓐ **OB**: People were orderly, speaking in _____.
- ⓑ **PR**: *We are to speak _____ at a time, in an orderly fashion.*

C. Peter speaks (7b-11).

- ⓐ **OB**: Peter addressed the group as “_____.” This is significant in that it indicates his courtesy and commitment to his fellow believers. Though to him the issue was personal and the solution obvious, Peter still considered and respected the others as his spiritual kinsmen. Despite the existing differences, they were not enemies but family, & he was committed to honor this relationship.
- ⓑ **PR**: *We must have a firm _____ 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)*
- ⓐ **OB**: Peter spoke to the issue, rather than remaining _____.
- ⓑ **PR**: *We are to speak _____ (if we have something to say), rather than stay silent and become bitter.*
- ⓐ **OB**: Peter argued the _____ rather than name-calling and labeling.
- ⓑ **PR**: *We are to focus on the issue, and not argue by _____ others.*
- ⓐ **OB**: Peter did not attempt to assign _____. The issue was not “who is at fault” but “what is the truth?”
- ⓑ **PR**: *Our goal for this issue is to find a _____, not to assign blame.*
- ⓐ **OB**: Peter’s input was to the _____, and included admonition (10).
- ⓑ **PR**: *We must seek to communicate _____, and be willing, if necessary, to confront error. Col 3:16 commands us to be “teaching and admonishing one another”, and coincides with the learning & living of truth as we “let the Word of Christ dwell in [us] richly”.*
- ⓐ **OB**: No _____ response is recorded from those to whom Peter addressed.
- ⓑ **PR**: *_____ 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.*
- ⓐ **OB**: No one brought up Peter’s _____! He had denied Christ 3 times!
- ⓑ **PR**: *We are not to bring up one’s _____. The issue is the issue.*