

Marks

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond

of Discipleship

July 11, 2021

Day 1: Acts 15: 1

Some 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."

What does a person have to believe and do to be considered a follower of Christ? This is the question that is addressed in this chapter. "Christ is Lord" is the earliest statement of faith. After making that statement a person has to begin their walk with the Spirit and depend on the Spirit to guide them. When we are a follower of Christ we do not know all that that means when we begin to follow, just as we do not know all of the turns in the road as we begin a journey.

Question: Do you know what circumcision is? And how it is done to adults and why it is done just to men?

Challenge: Do you think that Christianity has anything similar to circumcision for Jewish males?

Scripture: Galatians 3:8-16

Day 2: Acts 15:2

This 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.

From the earliest times the church has sought to settle disputes through a council. Jesus asked us to live in love and humility. I think this means that we have to be flexible because in a particular situation we may not have the correct answer. When we ask the opinions of others we show humility. In our decision making we need to leave room for the Spirit of God to work in us and guide us.

Question: Why do you think Paul went to Jerusalem to settle this question?

Challenge: Come up with a working definition of humility.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:1-9

Day 3: Acts 15:3-4

The 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. When 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.

This is the second time the church in Jerusalem heard about the Gentiles being converted (Acts 11:1-4, 18). Peter reported on his experience and was greeted with suspicion. The church needs to test to see if some new idea is from God. But the testing must be done in humility and without personal bias. It is interesting that many of the believers were pleased to hear about the Gentiles coming to faith. In that time the Jewish belief was that the Gentiles (all non-Jews) were unclean and therefore not to be associated with at all. It seems that the message of Christ was having an effect on the Jewish people in the Church.

Question: Why do you think they needed a second meeting to decide this issue?

Challenge: What signs have you seen that God is alive and well and active in our world?

Scripture: Matthew 24:4-31

Day 4: Acts 15:5

Then 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."

Not all were happy to hear the news about the Gentiles coming into the faith. Some still believed that more was required than to confess Christ as Lord. To obey the Law of Moses was in essence to become religiously Jewish. Individuals that were born to a Jewish mother were ethnically Jewish. All those who adhere to the Jewish faith and become circumcised (for men), and follow the Law of Moses are religiously Jewish. An ethnic Jew may not be a religious Jew.

Question: What is your ethnic origin?

Challenge: Do a little research and see if in order to be a citizen of America you have to speak English.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:17-25

Day 5: Acts 15:6-8

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After 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. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

Peter reminded the ones gathered to decide this issue; that they have discussed it before. Peter knows that the Spirit of God is moving in new directions. The message of salvation was important enough to God to send his only Son. God will not let the stubbornness of some or the laziness of some stop that message. The Good News will be preached to the entire world. Congregations will either get on board with that or be left behind.

Question: What do you think made someone an Elder in the early church?

Challenge: In our local church how do we decide important questions?

Scripture: Acts 11:1-18

Day 6: Acts 15:9-11

He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now 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? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Peter's closing comment is simple; if they (the Jewish people) could not be saved by the Law why do we want to put that on others? It did not work for us, why would it work for the Gentiles? Christians do not have to speak the same language or worship the same way or believe the same. The minimum requirement is that we acknowledge Christ as Lord; we live in love with our neighbors, and follow the Spirit's leading.

Question: If we speak different languages and worship differently, then what *does* unite the church?

Challenge: In the next two months go to a Greek Orthodox service and a Quaker service. Write down the differences you notice.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-9