

September 24, 2023
Acts 15:1-21
“Dissensions, Discussions, Decisions”
“Law, Liberty, Customs, Cultures, Love And Respect”

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The Council of Hippo, A.D. 393, and the Council of Carthage, A.D. 397, were the councils that finalized and determined the Canon of Scripture. These councils were of utmost importance. However, in reality the Jerusalem Council was the most important of all councils in the development of the early church. The reason being, it determined that salvation is for all, both Jew and Gentile, and was by God's grace through faith, not of works. This truth put all men and women on an equal footing. There was to be only one church, not two. There is only the one true church made up of genuine, born again followers of Jesus Christ. As our title states, the relation of Law and liberty, the relation of customs and cultures, and the solution of correct doctrine that salvation is by grace through faith for all, coupled with love and respect for one another among believers is the basis for a solid, God honoring body of believers called the church.

V 17, “Amos, an O.T. prophet, was permitted to see the great restored Tabernacle of David to come that would include also the Gentiles.” Scripture verified the salvation of the Gentiles along with the Jews.

999 miles by Jesus and one mile by man=lostness. Not of works.

Vv 19-21, the decision was handed down that the Judaizers were forbidden to trouble the Gentiles by teaching anything other than grace through faith. In the matter of fellowship among the two groups some guidelines were set in place. Don't offend the Jews by eating things contaminated by idols, this was repulsive and blasphemous to a Jew, so not a good idea for unity, right? Fornication was common among pagans, the Gentiles were now to conduct themselves morally like the Jews, man and woman for life. Dietary laws were to be followed so as not to offend a fellow believer.

Can you imagine thinking you have been saved and then have a group come up and tell you that you have to be circumcised to “really” be saved? This caused confusion, division, and disunity; exactly what the devil desires in any assembly of believers. Paul and Barnabas rose to the occasion to fight this heresy that was driving a wedge between believers in the church. Any good under-shepherd of God's people must be willing to stand up against any heresy that may come into the church to confuse or mislead the congregation.

The distance from Antioch Syria to Jerusalem was 250 miles. They visited along the way and the trip must have taken a month or probably more.

At the Council Peter recounted the Cornelius event demonstrating how God accepted him without works but by grace through faith plus nothing; the Holy Spirit was given as God's seal of approval. Hard to argue with . . .

Vv 13-21, James gives the summary now. Note that he was a pious Jew and glad of it but he saw the validity of the argument before him. The opposers were looking to him for support but in the end got truth which is much better.

The prohibitions should be viewed not as primarily theological but more sociological in nature; not as divine ordinances for acceptance before God but as concessions to the scruples of others for the sake of harmony within the church and the continuance of the Jewish Christian mission. Therefore James added the rationale of **v 21**, “For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath,” that is to say, since Jewish communities are to be found in every city, their scruples are to be respected by Gentile believers. To sum up, we may say that two types of “necessary” questions were raised at the Jerusalem Council. The first had to do with the theological necessity of the circumcision and the Jewish law for salvation, and that was rejected. The second had to do with the practical necessity of Gentile Christians abstaining from certain practices for the sake of Jewish-Gentile fellowship within the church and for the sake of the Jewish Christian mission throughout the Diaspora, and that was approved. The major work of the council had to do with the expression of that freedom in regard to the scruples of others, per Martin Luther.” This information/summary gleaned from *Richard N. Longenecker*

(1) Have the Gentiles abstain from food polluted by idols. (2) Have the Gentiles abstain from sexual immorality. (3) Have the Gentiles abstain from the meat of animals strangled to death and the consuming of blood. Plainly put these were moral/social issues to help with unity within the church.

Vv 15-18, James now brings in the witness of Scripture, the words of the prophets. This was the ultimate test. (1) What was happening in the church was in agreement with the OT prophets. (2) Not just the one quoted from Amos 9:11-12, but from the prophets in general. (3) James's main point, Gentile salvation does not contradict the OT.

Application:

Galatians 2:20-21 "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing." (CSB)