

Dealing With Doctrine

Text: Acts 15:1-12

There are basically two teachings in religion: grace or works. Romans 11:6: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." While Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, teachers from Judea came not to strengthen the new converts, but to challenge the Gospel. Doctrine determines destiny.

I. THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT

Acts 15:1, 2

Ecclesiastes 10:1: "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour." The Judaizers had come down to Antioch in Syria, the place where they were first called Christians. The wording, they came "down," to our reasoning seems strange because Antioch lies north of Judea. But it signifies that Judea, especially Jerusalem, is on a higher elevation. We could make note that, in a real sense, the doctrine they were peddling was indeed a move downward. To use the word picture of Solomon, their doctrine was poison heresy: the medicine mixed by the pharmacist which is supposed to be a healing agent to the body, because of rotting flies in the ointment now becomes toxic and ultimately lethal. By the same token, the belief that trusting Christ is not sufficient or good enough but must be maintained by following the law, is indeed a toxic mixture that could also become lethal. Paul and Barnabas, filled with righteous indignation, seemed to be addressing these men as heretics, i.e., proponents and propagators of false doctrine. Later Paul writes in Titus 3:10, "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject."

Galatians 2:16 shows the outright truth that was being rejected: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

II. THE JOY IN THE JOURNEY

ACTS 15:3, 4

The decision had been made that Paul and Barnabas should go to the source of the indoctrination in Jerusalem. Although it was a most serious and probably dreadful prospect in the potential interaction, there was joy in the hearts of Paul and Barnabas. Upon arriving, the good news of this great evangelistic team brought joy! Joy always accompanies conversions, both to the recipients and also to the evangelists. Most importantly, the conversion of lost souls brings great joy to the Lord. Luke 15:10: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Acts 8:39: "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."

III. THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Acts 15:5

Some of the Pharisees who had converted to Christianity were now teaching that, in essence, one must become a Jew before he or she can become a Christian. Jesus said in John 10:9, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." My mother-in-law's house has the main door, preceded by a glass door that first must be entered into before you come through the main entrance. The Judaizers are saying that unless you are circumcised and follow the law, you cannot be saved. Galatians 5:7: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" Notice Paul's wording, "who did hinder you...." We see the powerful influence that people have on our belief system. It wasn't "what," but "who" hindered. I Corinthians 15:33: "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."

When John the Baptist was dealing with the Pharisees in Matthew 3:1-12, he saw the only way to deal with the false teaching of the Pharisees is by the most severe means. Matthew 3:10: "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

IV. THE FACE-TO-FACE CONFRONTATION

Acts 15:6, 7a:

The Church at Jerusalem had a hard time dismissing the rituals of Judaism that were shadows of the reality that is in Jesus. Many wanted to hang on to the Temple, the furniture, the vestments and the sacrifices. Hebrews 10:1: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect." Romans 10:4: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." All that was, and still is, necessary to save anyone was accomplished by the finished work of Jesus Christ. II Corinthians 3:5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." This is our motivation. II Corinthians 9:8: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Peter understood this, but was succumbing to the pressure of the Judaizers and falling back into the rejection of the Gentiles and following the rules and regulations of the Pharisees. Galatians 2:11: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." I Timothy 5:19, 20: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." Acts 15 records the first counsel of the Church where truth must be heralded, and wrong must be identified. Peter received the rebuke by Paul. By the time Peter had returned to Jerusalem, he had arighted his walk and his witness.

V. THE DECLARATION OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 15:7b-11

A. Believing on Christ alone brings the Jew and the Gentile into One Body, the Church. Acts 15:7.

I Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Ephesians 2:16: "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek,

there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

B. All believers have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 15:8.

Acts 10:47: “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

C. Salvation through Christ alone thoroughly purifies the sinful heart. Acts 15:9.

This was the way Christ introduced the Gospel to Paul and Peter most definitely affirmed it. Acts 26:18: “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.”

D. The heavy yoke of tradition is exchanged for the easy yoke of Jesus. Acts 15:10.

Matthew 23:4: “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”

Matthew 11:30: “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

VI. THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 15:12

The declaration of Peter brought a holy hush over the discussions. Then Barnabas and Paul began to tell of the miracles and wonders that accompanied the Gospel that was preached. Mark 16:20: “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.” Hebrews 2:3, 4: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”

Paul said it succinctly in I Corinthians 2:4: “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” It was hard to argue against the Gospel that is preached and surrounded by deeds that only God could do.

-Pastor Pope-