

## **WHEN CULTURES CLASH**

TEXT: ACTS 15:13-35

Peter had just given the original Apostles Creed, i.e., Acts 15:11: “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” The same penman who recorded Acts 15:11 also scribed, “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1). Doctrine determines destiny! Now Pastor James, the half-brother of our Lord who has become the pastor of the mother church in Jerusalem, steps up to confirm and speak his heart under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration. It seems appropriate that the church’s first pastor would be the man who knew Jesus well for the first thirty years of our Lord’s life and who, after the resurrection of Christ, was personally visited by our Lord and believed, transferring the family bond into the most worshipful bond.

The Jerusalem counsel has made the necessary discussions and final decisions on the matters at hand. They decided to send Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with the backup of two prophets, Judas, surnamed Barsabas and Silas to give the outcome and decisions of the church leaders on the matters of what constitutes salvation by grace through faith and how the Jews and Gentiles shall live in harmony as the Body of Christ. As I came to the end of my study for today’s sermon, I thought about Psalm 133:1, 2: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments.” This was truly a clash of cultures but with God, are things are possible. It is a reminder that even today, with the cultural clashing going on, God can and is most willing to have us in unity; but it must always be on His terms.

### **I. IT IS GOD’S SOVEREIGN WILL FOR GENTILES TO BE ACCEPTED INTO COVENANT WITH THEIR JEWISH BRETHERN.**

Acts 15:13-18

Pastor James points out that God is not through with Israel and the promise given in Amos 9:11, 12 is recalled by James that one day David’s throne shall be restored in the earth. In the meantime, during this age of grace, James confirms what Peter and Paul have been preaching: the Gentiles are as much in God’s plan as the Jews. Paul gives a breakdown of this in the comparison of tree grafting (Romans 11:13-36).

I remember many years ago preaching in Chico, CA, home of a great aggregate of walnut groves and orchards in America. Groves are where the walnuts grow naturally and farmers plant orchards on purpose. As I observed mile after mile of walnut orchards, I was in awe of strange configuration of the trees. You could easily see two different types of trees combined into one trunk. I was informed that the taste of the English walnut was preferable, but the root system could not hold up successfully in the California soil and climate. On the other hand, the Black walnut has a much stronger flavor, not always appreciated by the American palate, but has an incredibly strong root system. So the growers in central California have been very successful at grafting the

English walnut tree into the strong black walnut trunk. The result is a great harvest of a sweet nut in a durable root system. Romans 3:1, 2: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." Therefore, with the strong root system of the Old Testament combined with the grafting in of the Gentiles in the New Testament, we will see the most wonderful harvest by the end of the age of grace.

## II. THE MESSAGE TO THE JEWS

Acts 15:19-21

Acts 15:19, 20: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood."

The pollution of idols is when meats offered to idols became a stumbling-block. Paul discusses this thoroughly in I Corinthians 8. His summation is in verse 13: "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Paul went on to say that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, are to abstain from fornication. This is the Greek word *porneia*, which means all manner of sexually unclean activity outside the bands of holy matrimony. Then he adds abstention from eating of blood. We know that Peter was given the vision to accept the Gentiles by our Lord using the image of permission and command to eat the unclean animals (Acts 13:9-15).

These three practices have to do with not only not partaking of physical involvement, but even abstaining from the appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). The sacrifices of the Gentile heathen involved immoral activity as well as the drinking of blood.

There is a striking difference in the ceremonial law and the moral laws of God. Look up Leviticus 11:1-23. Here you will see the dietary laws of the Jew. There is repetition of a statement of not eating that which is unclean as being that which is "...unclean to you." Then God says that eating these meats would be considered "...abomination unto you." We see in Deuteronomy 12: 31 that human sacrifice is "...abomination to the LORD, which He hateth." In Deuteronomy 18:10-12 that along with sacrificing their children and the practices of the occult are emphatically forbidden: "For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD..." (Deuteronomy 18:12a). We also see if women don the apparel of men and men don the apparel of women, in an attempt to confuse the sexes that God made separate, God declares this as abominable: "...for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God" (Deuteronomy 22:5b).

God has removed the ceremonial laws that kept Israel separate from other cultures until the Messiah would come. The Messiah has come and through His death those ceremonial laws that were considered abomination to Israel alone were taken away. Colossians 2:14: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." However, in Acts 15 James takes a strong stand with the other apostles that the moral laws of God should be upheld. The differentiation is that which is abomination to Israel can change, but that which is abomination to God has and never shall be changed. This does not

mean by any stretch of the imagination that salvation is anything other than by grace alone, through faith alone, and to God alone be the glory. It does mean what Romans 6:1, 2 teaches us: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

### **III. THE MESSAGE TO THE GENTILES**

Acts 15:22-35

Romans 14 is a great chapter to set alongside I Corinthians 8. Here we see Paul is explaining to the culture that has been reared up thinking that meat offered to idols is only meat to them, yet to others is a throwback to idolatrous and immoral activity. If any lifestyle, habits or entertainment bring to mind evil, then it should be out of our life. Romans 16:19b: "...I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil." I Thessalonians 5:22: "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Ephesians 5:12: "For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret." We should all please Christ in all we do and we should all be considerate of different cultures that have come together to form the Body of Christ. Romans 14:7, 8: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

### **CONCLUSION:**

The Bible is (as always) more relevant than today's news. As our present cultures clash around us, we should remember only Christ can bring the diverse cultures together. Only Christ can bring the love that the world tries desperately to imitate but can never duplicate. John 13:34, 35: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."

-Pastor Pope-