

Journey Through the New Testament

Acts 11 – 15

“The Spirit of a Wide Circle”

5-26-19

Introduction

There was never a dull moment in the “Acts” of the apostles. As the gospel spread across the region, so did persecution. Both Jewish and Roman authorities stirred up opposition to the “Good News.” Paul and his companions experienced stoning and imprisonment but never faltered in their mission to the Gentiles. Missionary voyages resulted in growth of the church among the Gentiles. As the church grew, new dilemmas arose and decisions had to be made about how to handle differences.

Leader Notes: *Gentile* refers to all people who are not Jewish. Christianity began as a Jewish movement until Paul was called by God to take the gospel message to the Gentiles—all people. Jerusalem was the center of the gospel until the believers scattered due to persecution. As the church spread, controversy arose between the Jewish church in Jerusalem and the Gentile believers in other regions. (*Harper-Collins Bible Dictionary*)

Opening Prayer

O God, the faithfulness and power of the early believers is inspiring and humbling. Give us courage to open ourselves to your Spirit so that we can be bold in proclaiming your love for all people. Give us wisdom and strength to be your church when difficulties arise. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Growing Pains

Bible Study Acts 15:1-12 (CEB)

What?

1. What controversy developed among the believing Pharisees in Jerusalem? (v. 5)
2. What steps did the church leaders take in order to address the problem? (v. 6-12)

Read Acts 15:13-20

1. What decision was reached? (v. 19-20)
2. What was this decision based upon?

Read Acts 15:22, 30-34

1. What did the church in Antioch think about the decision? (v. 31)

So What?

1. So, what dynamics brought about the controversy?
2. What are some of the difficulties that arise with decision making in the church?
3. What makes compromise or decision so difficult when church leaders disagree?
4. So, in this scenario of the early church, what do we see in regard to law and grace? (Note verses 8-9)
5. How does this issue compare to differences of belief that is happening in the church today?
6. What do we see in the early church scenarios that serves as a model for decision making in the church of today?

Leader Notes:

- v. 1-14 Leaders and missionaries with diverse backgrounds came together and the wider church becomes involved
- v. 7-12 Testimony is given about a new thing that God is doing in a new time and place.
- v. 15-21 Scripture and tradition are considered in the decision-making process.
- v. 28 The decision is guided by the Spirit.
- v. 30-31 The decision is positively received.
(Commentary, *New Interpreters' Study Bible*)

Now What?

1. What could *church leadership* do to improve communication, compromise and cooperation when difficult decisions need to be made at church?
2. What could *you* do to improve communication, compromise and cooperation when difficult decisions need to be made at church?
3. What part does listening play when resolving difficult issues and difference in belief?

Closing

Lord, gives us eyes to see and ears to hear. Amen.