



NL STUDY GUIDE

CHURCH *under* CONSTRUCTION: A STUDY OF **ACTS PART 2** MESSAGE 4: THE GREAT DEBATE

Pastor Matt Harder
March 5-6, 2016

Acts 15:1-11, 19 (NIV)

¹ Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 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. ³ 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 believers very glad. ⁴ 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. 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 keep the law of Moses."⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ 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. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

¹⁹ "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 15:1-11, 19 (NIV)

Watch this week's Life Group Session: nlchurch.com/actsvideos.

Watch this week's message online: nlchurch.com/watch.

OBSERVATION

The biggest disagreement in the early church wasn't about worship style, movies or tattoos. The biggest struggle came about because one group of people felt like anyone who wanted to follow Jesus needed to be like them. This conflict led to a rift in relationships that threatened to tear the church apart.

Historical Note

The earliest Christians were Jews by birth. Jesus was also a Jew, and for the first part of the Church's history, it was really an offshoot of the Jewish faith—where they believed that Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah. As more and more non-Jews (or Gentiles) joined the faith, the Jewish Christians felt that it meant they were required to follow the Jewish laws as well. The set of laws followed by the Jews was extensive, and beyond the cultural norms of many of these new believers.

1 The Jewish Christians expected Gentile Christians to embrace their culture as well as their faith. Why do you think this caused problems?

2 What is significant about the this conflict in relation to the church today? What fair or unfair expectations do we tend to place on new believers today?

3 How can we remove cultural barriers to make it easier for people to follow Jesus?

APPLICATION

When you apply something, you put it into practice. It's one thing to read the Bible, it's another thing to live it out. A practical application of what you just observed from today's study can help you discover just how much impact the Bible can have on every situation you may face!

In this section, discuss together ways you can apply what you've learned from the teaching and the Bible study. Then, think about some practical ways you can live out what you've learned.

- 1 The Bible says it was a "sharp dispute." Why did Paul and Barnabas disagree so strongly with the Jewish believers on the subject? Why do we feel so deeply about our cultural concerns?
- 2 It's clear that men were being saved. Why would it be important to some for these people to not only be saved, but live under Jewish law? In what ways do we sometimes set requirements for faith that aren't in the Bible?
- 3 Have you ever struggled with wanting other Christians to follow the same set of cultural guidelines you do? How can this cause trouble for them?

PRAYER

Use the space below to write out your prayer in response to today's message.

My take away today: _____

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