

Cultural Barriers

(Part 1)

Acts 15 (New Living Translation) **1** While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: “Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.” **2** Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. **3** The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone’s joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted.

4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. **5** But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, “The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.” **6** So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. **7** At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. **8** God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. **9** He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. **10** So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? **11** We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.” **12** Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. **13** When they had finished, James stood and said, “Brothers, listen to me. **14** Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. **15** And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: **16** ‘Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, **17** so that the rest of humanity might seek the LORD, including the Gentiles— all those I have called to be mine. The LORD has spoken— **18** he who made these things known so long ago.’

19 “And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. **20** Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. **21** For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.”

The Letter for Gentile Believers

22 Then the apostles and elders together with the whole church in Jerusalem chose delegates, and they sent them to Antioch of Syria with Paul and Barnabas to report on this decision. The men chosen were two of the church leaders—Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas. **23** This is the letter they took with them: “This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings!

24 “We understand that some men from here have troubled you and upset you with their teaching, but we did not send them! **25** So we decided, having come to complete agreement, to send you official representatives, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, **26** who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **27** We are sending Judas and Silas to confirm what we have decided concerning your question.

28 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: **29** You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.”

30 The messengers went at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter. **31** And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message.

32 Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke at length to the believers, encouraging and strengthening their faith. **33** They stayed for a while, and then the believers sent them back to the church in Jerusalem with a blessing of peace. **35** Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch. They and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord there.

Paul and Barnabas Separate

36 After some time Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing.” **37** Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. **38** But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. **39** Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark

with him and sailed for Cyprus. **40** Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord's gracious care. **41** Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

It is great that they have accepted Christ now here is what they need to do to be saved.

I believe that to a large degree this is where much of the church in America is at.

If we don't require it, we sometimes infer that if someone is going to be a Christian they must conform as much to our church culture as they are to Jesus.

Like the Pharisees many of our practices are as much cultural and they are scriptural. After all that is how we experienced Christ.

We have to ask ourselves some very tough questions

We even have cultures within our culture and we struggle to accept each others culture. (music)

How people dress and other things that can become an affront to us seem to gain credence at times.

We need to appreciate each others culture

Even younger people struggle with this

The Kingdom of God is not static nor is it restricted by our culture.

It can be restricted by us but Jesus is going to build His church.

We can look at it from the perspective that they were Jews and under the law previously but it seems to be a very natural thing that occurs.

Ephesians 2:1-22 (NLT) Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. **2** You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. **3** All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, **5** that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) **6** For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the

heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. **7** So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. **9** Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. **10** For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Oneness and Peace in Christ

11 Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. **12** In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. **13** But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

14 For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. **15** He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. **16** Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

17 He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. **18** Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

A Temple for the Lord

19 So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. **20** Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. **21** We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. **22** Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Peters struggle

Galatians 2:11-14 (NLT) But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. **12** When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. **13** As a result, other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

14 When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, "Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions?"

We are sent – Ambassadors

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (NLT) And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. **19** For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. **20** So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" **21** For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,^[e] so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

do we love or despise the culture?

Comment from the reach

Matthew 28:19 (NLT) Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 (NLT) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

We are sent to minister in the context of all cultures

Wheel Graphic

Traditions of men – Matthew 15:6 (NLT) And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition.

Reaching