
a *Grace Notes* course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study

by Warren Doud

Lesson 301: **Acts 15:1-14**

ACTS, Lesson 301, Acts 15:1-14

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Acts 15:1-14**Acts 15:1**

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved.

And certain men which came down from Judea

It's about 300 miles from Jerusalem to Antioch.

These men were Jews, because non-Jews would not care about the matter of circumcision. And it's clear that they were Christian believers, because, although they were from Judea, they referred the matter to the church leaders in Jerusalem. As they were serious Judaizers, it could be that they were of the party of the Pharisees. They could at least be identified as those of the "party of the circumcision", the promoters of this legalistic doctrine. In any case, they are self-appointed teachers, those who see it their duty to set other people straight, to impose their own rules on believers.

taught the brethren

This chapter, for the first time in Acts, records dissension which took place in the early church. [I have judged that the matters which were discussed in the early verses of Chapter 11 were not dissent, but debate. See notes on Acts 11:2. wd]

"Their presence in the Antiochean congregation is not to extend the church through evangelism; nor do they come to encourage the believers in their faith. Their purpose is to place a strict requirement on the brethren that specifies whether or not they can be saved: they insist that the Jewish rite of circumcision is necessary for the salvation of Gentile Christians. This Jewish stipulation is sufficient to alarm both Paul and Barnabas."¹

¹ Baker.

There was peace and prosperity in Antioch, both in the temporal and spiritual sense. We see in other parts of Scripture that Satan will use times of quiet to raise these sorts of issues, in his campaign to "blind the minds of those that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them."

"No age of Christianity, not even the earliest, has been without its difficulties, controversies, and corruptions.

The presence of Judas among the disciples; Ananias and Sapphira among the first disciples (Acts 5), were proofs of the power which moral evil possesses to combine itself with the holiest works.

The misunderstanding of the "Grecians and Hebrews" in the days of Stephen, the suspicion of the apostles when Paul came from Damascus to Jerusalem, the secession of Mark at the beginning of the first missionary journey, were symptoms of the prejudice, ignorance, and infirmity in the midst of which the Gospel was to win its way in the hearts of men.

And the arrival of the apostles at Antioch at the close of their journey was presently followed by a troubled controversy, which involved the most momentous consequences to all future ages of the church, and led to that visit to Jerusalem which, next after his conversion, is perhaps the most important passage in St. Paul's life."²

except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved

TOPIC: CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision was the principal ritual of the Jewish religion. It was indispensable to the name and privileges of a Jew. Proselytes to their religion were circumcised as well as native-born Jews, and they held it to be indispensable

² Conybeare and Howson, Chapter VII.

to salvation. It is evident from this that Paul and Barnabas had dispensed with this rite in regard to the Gentile converts, and that they intended to found the Christian church on the principle that the Jewish ceremonies were to cease.³

The New Testament is plain about the place of circumcision in the spiritual life of Jewish Christians. **Romans 4** is the definitive statement about this, and you should read this chapter at this time.

Also, read Romans 2:25-29, to see that the apostle Paul is explaining to Jews the difference between the outward physical practice and the inward spiritual meaning of circumcision.

Circumcision is a sign of imputed righteousness; it is the sign that one has believed and is cleansed by the blood of Christ and has God's Righteousness credited to his account. Gen. 15:6; 2 Cor. 5:21.

The true significance of circumcision was not in the physical act being perpetuated but in the reasons the ritual was begun in the first place. Circumcision was a sign that something had already taken place, namely, Abraham's salvation.

Circumcision was also a seal. A seal indicates the validity of the thing to which it is attached. It has no significance apart from that which it covers. Circumcision was a seal attached to something valuable, salvation.

Paul refused to agree to circumcise Titus, when these same Pharisees demanded it in the Jerusalem conference. **Galatians 2:1-5**.

However, when Paul found it necessary to conciliate the minds of the Jews and to prevent contention, he did not hesitate to have Timothy circumcised, Acts 16:3. This was not circumcision for salvation, however; it was to avoid giving offense to the Jewish people to whom Timothy would minister. The Law of Love superseded the Law of Liberty.

³ Barnes

Acts 15:2

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them,

These Judaizers probably compelled Paul to think through afresh his whole gospel of grace and so they did Paul and the world a real service. If the Jews, as Paul did, had to believe in Christ, it was plain that there was no virtue in circumcision.⁴

Galatians 2:15-21

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

⁴ Robertson

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

This is the same meeting which Paul describes in Galatians. We see that Titus was with him, and some commentators believe that Luke was there also.

Galatians 2:1-3

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.

And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.”

The word “dissension” is from a basic word **στάσις**, meaning “standing”; (1) as when an existing circumstance remains unchanged; **στάσις ἔχειν** literally have standing. (2) politically, then, for taking a stand, especially fomenting rebellious insurrection, uprising, revolt; (3) so, as sharp dissension or unrest within a community strife, heated quarrel, conflict.⁵

The second word **ζήτησις** is “debate” (KJV: disputation), which might include questioning, controversy, or even confrontation.

they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

It was the church at Antioch who commissioned Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem to get some of these things cleared up.

This was a wise thing to do, to get the key church leaders to meet and arrive at a statement of doctrine. This was the most

important doctrinal issue with which the young church had to deal; it was urgent that they understand divine viewpoint on the issue.

There are several reasons why the Christians, perhaps on both sides of the issues here, wanted to have the matter settled at Jerusalem.

1. Jerusalem would be regarded by them as the source of authority in the Christian church, as it had been among the Jews.
2. Most of the apostles and the most experienced Christians were there. They had listened to the instructions of Christ himself, had been long in the church, and were supposed to be better acquainted with its design and its laws.
3. Those who came from Judea would not be likely to acknowledge the authority of Paul as an apostle: they would recognize the authority of those at Jerusalem.
4. The Judaizers at Antioch might have expected that the decision there would be in their favor. They had all been Jews, and they continued to attend the temple service, and to conform to the Jewish customs. They were willing to refer it to those who resided at Jerusalem

Acts 15:3

And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

The members of the Church provided them with all necessities for their journey.

From the expression **being brought on their way by the church**, it seems that the majority of the Christians at Antioch were still faithful to the truth of the Gospel. Had the Judaizers triumphed, it would hardly have been said that Paul and his fellow travelers were “brought on their way by the church.” (Acts 15:3)

⁵ Analytical Lexicon of the Greek NT

Phoenicia and Samaria

Both lay between Antioch of Syria and Judea; in Phoenicia those that were scattered upon the death of Stephen had preached, and a great number were converted and believed in Christ who were Jews, (Acts 11:19) and in Samaria Philip the evangelist had preached with much success (Acts 8:5,12).

Their course was along the great Roman Road, which followed the Phoenician coastline, and traces of which are still seen on the cliffs overhanging the sea: and thence through the midland districts of Samaria and Judea.⁶

TOPIC: SAMARIA

Many of the Phoenicians had previously been converted to Christianity; for, as Paul and Barnabas passed through they met with many believers: “declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” See Acts 8:15-17.

We cannot be surprised that the Samaritans, who when Philip first “preached Christ unto them” had received the Glad Tidings with great joy, should be ready to express their sympathy in the happiness of those who, like themselves, had recently been “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.”

For a brief study of Phoenician history, see the chapter on Phoenicia in *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, by Alfred Hoerth, Gerald Mattingly, and Edwin Yamauchi, ISBN 0718829883 (Grace Notes course History 600).

Acts 15:4

And when they came to Jerusalem, they were received by the church, and by the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

There is evident unity between the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. The believers in the Antioch church appointed Paul and Barnabas to

meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Upon their arrival at Jerusalem, the missionaries are officially received as equals by the church, the apostles, and the elders.

Paul and Barnabas had been proclaiming the gospel in numerous places, and encouraging the churches; but for this meeting they had to meet in Jerusalem.

James is present; and so is John. Peter had been in prison in Jerusalem, then the Lord led him to “other places” (Acts 12:17); but he has now returned to Jerusalem and taken a position of leadership there.

Paul and Barnabas relate all that has happened to them in their travels among the Gentiles, emphasizing the fact that it was God who worked through them. This is vital information, because the core leadership need to know just how God was enlarging the church, and making it geographically and ethnically more diverse.

Even though most of the church leaders reacted favorably to this report, there was a small group who were adamantly opposed to allowing Gentiles to be in the church without having been circumcised!

Acts 15:5

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

These Christian Pharisees are demanding, in essence, that a Gentile must become a Jew in order to be a Christian. To accept ritual circumcision, and agree to abide by the Law of Moses, is what is required to convert to Judaism.

Paul was a Pharisee, before he became a Christian; and now he faces that same party in the Christian context. These Pharisees are ignoring Peter’s report of the conversion of Gentiles in Caesarea, and the favorable reaction to that of the church of Jerusalem.

⁶ Conybeare and Howson

Now has come the time to resolve this matter conclusively, and to make a decision concerning the Mosaic Law and circumcision, in order to maintain the unity and harmony of the church at large.

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed,

A “sect” is separatist group characterized by loyalty to a certain school of thought, people who have a belief contrary to established doctrine. The word “Pharisee” itself means “separated”.

These Pharisees were Christians, members of the Jerusalem church; but they were hanging on to all the trappings of their former religion. And to some people, Christianity seemed to be a spiritual awakening in Judaism, rather than a new faith.⁷

These Pharisees were representative of extreme Judaism; they were the strictest adherents to the Law of Moses.

Note: non-Christian Pharisees would have nothing to do with Christians, except to harass and persecute them. They would not be discussing church doctrine with them.

TOPIC: JEWISH RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

it is needful to circumcise them

Circumcision has always been a grace principle, ever since Abraham’s time. The Gentile Christians knew nothing about this until the apostles were able to start teaching grace doctrine to them. The Jews, of course, understood the practice of circumcision, but from the Jewish perspective. Over the centuries circumcision had decayed into a completely legalistic function. Circumcision was the key doctrine of the whole “salvation by works” religion of the Jews.

READ Ephesians 2:11ff

⁷ Furneaux, Acts 15.

And this controversy took on a personal form, in the person of Titus, a young Gentile convert. The Jews demanded that he be circumcised.

Read Galatians 2:1-5

Circumcision is the sign of imputed righteousness; righteousness has been credited to us, based on Christ’s death on the Cross, and not on the basis of works. It is the sign that one has believed and is cleansed by the blood of Christ and has God’s righteousness credited to his account. Gen. 15:6; 2 Cor. 5:21.

Romans 4:8-13

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.

Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

You can see how it would have been wonderful to be able to teach the true meaning of circumcision to Jewish Christians, especially, along with the Gentile believers in the Church, such a great illustration of the wonderful principle of salvation by grace.

But it was imperative that the whole idea of ritual circumcision, as a legalistic principle, must be eradicated from Christians' thinking. This is probably the most important decision ever made by the early church leaders.

TOPIC: CIRCUMCISION

and to keep the Law of Moses.

TOPIC: THE LAW OF MOSES

See: Conybeare and Howson, Chapter 7, Controversy in the Church

Acts 15:6

And the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

These were "them which were of reputation", from Galatians 2:2. The leadership; not the membership, of the Jerusalem church. However, the final decree was sent in the name of "the apostles, and elders, and brethren"; so the results of the meeting were known to all the believers.

There were probably several meetings among these men. It was at these meetings that the four requirements for Gentile Christians were formulated and approved (15:12-22).

Acts 15:7

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, you know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

And when there had been much disputing

The NASB and NIS say "debate" and "discussion", respectively, rather than "disputing". The Greek word is *zhithsi* - which usually refers to discussion or debate, although the idea of confrontational disputation can be conveyed by this word if the context shows that the discussion was of that nature. Robertson translates it "questioning". But it's not hard to

imagine that there were raised voices and excited arguing, given that the subject was very closely held Jewish doctrine.

Peter rose up

This is the last time that Peter is mentioned in the book of Acts, although we hear of him later as being rebuked by Paul at Antioch (Gal. 2:10), and of his having made missionary journeys (1 Cor. 9:5).

Verses 7 to 11 give us the substance of his speech to the Christian leaders. The day of Pentecost occurred 17 years before, Paul's conversion was 14 years before, and even Peter's first ministry to the Gentiles was 10 years in the past. So Peter is saying that it is not some new thing that they were discussing here. The salvation of the Gentiles, without circumcision or anything of the Law of Moses, had been settled by God the Father years before.⁸

God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe

It was Peter whom God chose to minister to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:8

And God, who knows the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us;

TOPIC: OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

It is God who judges the heart, as to whether someone's expression of faith is genuine.

At this early stage in the church age, the evidence of salvation was often an outward showing of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, speaking in tongues. This occurred on several occasions, including at Cornelius' home in Caesarea.

⁸ Gloag, Acts 15:7.

Also, Titus had come from Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, so he was living proof that God was accepting Gentiles into His family.

Peter may well have retold the history of the wonderful occurrences at Caesarea, when even Peter himself was struggling with this same conflict between his Judaism and Christianity.

Acts 10:17

Now while Peter doubted in himself (NAS: *was greatly perplexed*) what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

READ Acts 10:1-48

Acts 15:9

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Put no difference – though they had not been circumcised, and though they did not follow the Law of Moses. God made no distinction between Gentiles and Jews; both are saved and cleansed by faith in Christ.

Saving Faith has as its object the Lord Jesus Christ and His substitutionary work on the Cross for man's salvation, John 3:36; Acts 16:31. A belief in any other "plan" of salvation, however strongly and emotionally held, will prove to have been faith in an invalid and useless object, Acts 4:12.

“God purified the hearts of the Gentiles, whereas according to the notions of the Judaizers, it was their bodies which were unclean; but the instrument of this purification was not physical circumcision, but faith.”⁹

TOPIC: FAITH

Acts 15:10

Now therefore why do you tempt God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples,

which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Or, “why do you test God”?

Jesus spoke of the precepts of the Law as “burdens grievous to be borne” (Matt. 23:4), versus the “easy yoke and light burden” of Christianity (Matt. 21:30).

“St. Peter went on to speak, in touching language, of the yoke of Jewish Law. Its weight had pressed heavily on many generations of Jews, and was well known to the Pharisees who were listening at that moment. They had been relieved from legal bondage by the salvation offered through faith; and it would be tempting God to impose on others a burden which neither they nor their fathers had ever been able to bear.”¹⁰

Paul, in Romans 7, describes the absolute impossibility of fulfilling the Law, even with the best of intentions.

The purpose of the Law, in ancient times, and here at the beginning of the church age, was to make it plain that the Law was designed to drive people to Christ. The Law was indeed a heavy burden for Jews to bear; but the Law was useless as a grounds for justification.

cf Acts 7:51-53, Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin.

Galatians 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Acts 15:11

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Saving Grace, namely, the “gift of God, lest any man should boast”; Grace applied to the lost sinner.

⁹ Gloag, Acts 15:7-11

¹⁰ Conybeare and Howson, Chapter VII

The term "Saving Grace" covers the categories of doctrines which deal with all that Christ did for us on the Cross. The general topic of Saving Grace includes salvation and all of the teaching regarding Positional Truth, the dozens of things God does for believers at the moment of salvation. Read the notes entitled Salvation Doctrines for a complete listing of these topics.

We can see that Peter's early conflicts in his thinking have been resolved now. His experience of having to thrash out the differences between Judaism and Christianity, between Law and Grace, was an experience common to all Jews who became Christians. It took decades for the "new" doctrines of grace to become embedded.

That Peter understood "Faith Alone in Christ Alone" from the beginning is demonstrated by his speeches in the early chapters of Acts. Yet, at Caesarea he was confounded by the idea that Gentiles who were not Jewish proselytes could "participate" in Christianity.

Gloag: "Peter's argument is plainly this: circumcision and the observance of the Law of Moses cannot be necessary for the Gentile converts, because God by His [giving out] the Holy Spirit has declared His acceptance of the Gentile Christians ... Cornelius and his company. The argument was conclusive, even if the Gentiles be taken in the most extensive sense, that is, for all who are neither Jews nor proselytes."

Acts 15:12

Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

The words "all the multitude" indicate that many believers were present, not just the church leaders. Verse 13 says "after *they* had held their peace", which makes us think that both Barnabas and Paul spoke on this occasion.

Whatever had been the vigorous debate, or even disputing, the meeting now came to order. At least for the time, the Judaizing Christians kept their silence. The group were very eager to hear about the Lord's work among the Gentiles among whom Paul and Barnabas had ministered.

The missionary apostles would have related their experience in Cyprus and Asia Minor and explain the significance of what happened there. They were not arguing, merely recounting facts – and facts carry more weight than theories.

Acts 15:13

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

When Paul and Barnabas had finished speaking, James was the next to give a discourse.

This was James, the brother of the Lord, who, from the austere sanctity of his character, was commonly called, both by Jews and Christians, James the Just.

Others named James in the New Testament:

- James the son of Alphaeus, a disciple (apostle), one of the twelve.
- James the son of Zebedee, an apostle, brother of John the apostle.

In Acts 12 we saw that James was put to death by the sword by soldiers of Agrippa I.

James the Just was the author of the Epistle of James in the New Testament, the first of the Seventy of Luke 10:1–20 and the first bishop of Jerusalem

Conybeare and Howson:

"No judgment could have such weight with the Judaizing party as his. Not only in the vehement language in which he denounced the sins of the age, but even in garb and appearance, he resembled John the Baptist, or one of the older prophets, rather than the other Apostles of the new dispensation."

“Like the ancient saints, even in outward aspect, with the austere features, the linen ephod, the bare feet, the long locks and unshorn head of the Nazarite,” such, according to tradition, was the man who now came forward, and solemnly pronounced the Mosaic rites were not of eternal obligation.

“After alluding to the argument of Peter (whose name we find him characteristically quoting in its Jewish form, Acts 15:14), he turns to the ancient prophets and adduces a passage from Amos (9:11,12) to prove that Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism. And then he passes to the historical aspect of the subject, contending that this fulfillment was predetermined by God himself, and that the Jewish dispensation was in truth the preparation for the Christian (compare Acts 17:26; Rom. 1:2; Eph. 1:10; 3:9; Col. 1:26).

“Such a decision, pronounced by one who stood emphatically on the confines of the two dispensations, came with great force on all who heard it, and carried with it the general opinion of the assembly to the conclusion that those” who from among the Gentiles had turned unto God” should not be” troubled” with any Jewish obligations, except such as were necessary for peace and mutual good understanding of the two parties.” ¹¹

James requests that the people give him their attention. He is the leader of the church now, so he functions as sort of chairman of the assembly.

It may be that the Judaizers expected him to support the Pharisee’s position, and later they did make wrong use of his name against Peter (Gal. 2:12).

¹¹ ibid

Acts 15:14

Simon has declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

James takes notice of Peter’s speech and agrees with it.

This is an astounding statement, in the circumstances, that God’s people would include the Gentiles. The Jews were certain that they were God’s people, so it would have been quite a wrenching experience to have to assimilate this concept.

James mentions Peter’s experience because through the apostle Peter God first caused the Gentiles to become part of the church. And at the time of his experience, Peter served as leader in the Jerusalem church and was the spokesman for the apostles. James only explained what God had done, and did not say that Peter had commanded any changes.

Witnessing

Ephesians 6:15, And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

We are to be ready at any time to minister the gospel. Note that all believers are included in this command. Every Christian is in full time Christian service, always on the front line.

Even a Christian who doesn't want to fight is in the conflict. A soldier may be untrained or in poor condition and drop beside the road before the enemy is reached. Or he may be killed in the first skirmish.

The primary thrust of evangelism is through the individual. There is a place for those with the spiritual gift of evangelism; but these men can reach only a specialized segment of the population. Individual believers circulate throughout the community in various functions. They have jobs; they belong to clubs; they have certain friends. The principle or witnessing for Christ is that you do it in your own environment.

Preparation implies the ability to fight. Preparation means flexibility and the ability to use God's Word in witnessing. Knowledge of the basic doctrines of salvation is necessary for witnessing (not salesmanship techniques). You need to know about Reconciliation, Propitiation, Redemption, Imputation, Regeneration, and The Barrier, as a starter. You don't have your shoes on your feet without this preparation.

And your feet shod ..."to bind with sandals".

The sandal was the GI boondocker for the Roman army. This is a reference to the foot soldier slogging it out. The infantryman fights with the least glamour and the highest casualties.

While the Greek soldier wore greaves to protect his ankles, the Roman soldier wore a heavy soled sandal which had metal studs on the bottom for good footing on uneven or slippery ground. This shoe was known in Latin as the *caligula*, so the foot soldier was called *caligatus*. Officers wore different footwear.

with the preparation of - etoimasia, refers to full preparedness, being able to march great distances in order, with others, and over a long period of time, to use weapons effectively.

the gospel of peace...

Notes on personal witnessing

- Witnessing for Christ is the responsibility of every believer. Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:15; Mk. 5:18,19.
- The effectiveness and clarity of the believer's witnessing depends, in large measure, on his understanding of the Last Judgment. Sins will not be the issue! The only reason that a person will stand at the Last Judgment is that he rejected Christ during his lifetime. John 3:18; 3:36. All sins have been judged at the Cross, and there is no double jeopardy.
- The basis for the indictment of unbelievers is human good, not sins. The witnessing Christian must make the issue clear.

- Witnessing is impossible apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit. John 16:8-11. And the Holy Spirit must minister to the unbeliever to apply the doctrine of salvation.
- The context for witnessing is that part of the Word of God called the Gospel. 1 Cor. 1:18; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12.
- The dynamics of witnessing depends on the believer's mental attitude. One cannot be an effective witness if he is ashamed of the Gospel, if he does not have the capacity to be occupied with Christ, or if he is not oriented to Grace.
- In Rom. 1:14-16, the apostle Paul says "I am debtor", "I am ready", and "I am not ashamed". A fisherman has a desire to fish. One is not a "fisher of men" without a desire to win souls.
- There are two sources for a Christian's witness: (1) the testimony of his life, 2 Cor. 3:3, and (2) the testimony of his lips, 2 Cor. 5:14-21.
- There is a reward for witnessing. 1 Cor. 3:11-16; 2 Cor. 5:10. Rewards in heaven are an extension of edification; the only things that are rewarded in heaven is what is done on the basis of Grace. Thus, every reward in heaven is an eternal memorial to the grace of God. Grace means that rewards do not reflect any personal glory or merit. It is the Lord who enables us to labor for Him and who provides the divine production in the life (gold, silver, and precious stones).

Fellowship

The "koinonia" of the Church

This material was originally published by Chester McCalley, late pastor of Beth Haven Church in North Kansas City, Missouri.

In Acts 2, the church is born having an initial membership of something more than 3,000 men and women. The life of this group developed in four specific areas, described in

ACTS 2:42. These areas were: (1) Doctrine; (2) Fellowship; (3) Breaking of Bread; and (4) Prayer.

These four areas of fellowship are described in two couplets, that is, doctrine and fellowship are linked together, and breaking of bread and prayer are linked together.

The Greek term for *fellowship* is κοινωνία (**koinonia**). The following is a brief word study on the meaning of **koinonia** as it relates to man. Fellowship with God, as described in 1 JOHN 1 is not included in this study.

Definition

The word **koinonia** carries the basic idea of having something in common. The word is related to κοινή (**koine**), meaning “common”, which we use to refer to **koine** Greek, the original language of the New Testament, which was common to many people at a certain time in history. JUDE 3 speaks of our “common (**koine**) salvation”, referring to a salvation known and shared by all believers. The best way to bring the meaning of **koinonia** into English is to speak of joint participation in something.

Areas of Joint Participation (Fellowship) in the Early Church

Koinonia in Material Things

ROMANS 15:26,27. The word “contribution” is **koinonia** .

2 COR. 8:4, “fellowship”

2 COR. 9:1, “distribution”

GAL. 6:6, “communicate with”

PHIL. 4:15, “communicated”

Note that in each passage there is joint participation in something material - money.

Koinonia in Suffering

PHIL. 3:10, “fellowship”

1 PETER 4:13, “partakers”. Here there is a God-believer participation in the suffering area.

Koinonia in Evil

2 JOHN 11, “partaker”

1 COR. 10:20, “fellowship”

In these two passages joint participation may be had in evil by expressing cordiality toward doctrinal error or by association with idolatry. MATT. 23:30 speaks of **koinonia** in murder.

Koinonia in the Incarnation of Christ

HEBREWS 2:14 shows that Christ became a joint participant with us when He took on a human body.

Koinonia at the Lord’s Table

1 COR. 10:16 says that we have “communion” (**koinonia**) with the blood and body of Christ.

Koinonia in Spreading the Gospel

GAL. 2:6-9 tells how Peter, Paul and other apostles were given the “right hands of fellowship” indicating joint participation in the spread of the Gospel.

Koinonia in Salvation

2 PETER 1:4 says that by the Word of God we become “partakers” of the divine nature.

Koinonia in the Holy Spirit

2 Cor. 13:14 and Phil. 2:1 both indicate a joint participation of the believer and the Holy Spirit.

Koinonia in a Common Effort

Luke 5:10 expresses this where James, John, and Simon are called “partners” (**koinonia**). The joint participation was in the fishing business which they all shared.

Summary

Fellowship in the New Testament means joint participation in some area, defined by context. **In no passage is fellowship presented as a goal or end in itself** - it is merely the by-product of common goals or possessions. The more the believer discovers the salvation common to all other believers, the more fellowship occurs.

Circumcision

One of the first acts of circumcision in the human race involved Abraham.

Genesis 17:6-11 And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

This initial act of circumcision was the seal of Abraham's faith in God's promise of possessing the land. It was the indication that Abraham believed God's word. Abraham separated himself unto the Lord and to the Lord's promise.

Circumcision is, therefore, a sign of regeneration for the Jews. It was to the born again Jew what water baptism is to the born-again believer in the Church Age, a sign.

Circumcision is also used by God as a teaching mechanism, a visual aid to provide a picture of regeneration by faith. The circumcision of male children on the 8th day was an act of dedication by the parents. By this means they declared that they would teach salvation by faith to their

children. They anticipated that their children would become believers.

Col. 2:11-13 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Circumcision is also a picture of positional truth, especially the identification with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

There can be no victory in the Christian way of life without victory over the old life, over the sin nature. This is the application of positional truth to experience.

The Lord also used circumcision as a picture of Israel's restoration to fellowship and service.

READ Joshua 5:1-9

This restoration, by faith, was necessary for the victory the Israelites were about to experience (Jericho) and for the time of rest they were about to enter. There can be no victory over Canaan until there is victory over carnality (Egypt). Circumcision denotes separation from the world and the flesh, self-judgment, yieldedness, dedication, commitment.

Romans 4:9-13 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he

might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Circumcision is a sign of imputed righteousness; it is the sign that one has believed and is cleansed by the blood of Christ and has God's Righteousness credited to his account. Gen. 15:6; 2 Cor. 5:21.

The true significance of circumcision was not in the physical act being perpetuated but in the reasons the ritual was begun in the first place. Circumcision was a sign that something had already taken place, namely, Abraham's salvation.

Circumcision was also a seal. A seal indicates the validity of the thing to which it is attached. It has no significance apart from that which it covers. Circumcision was a seal attached to something valuable, salvation.

During the Church Age, water baptism is the outward sign of an inward faith. Circumcision was the outward sign for the Jews before the Church Age.

Religious Jews tried to make the seal valuable in itself. They attached spiritual value to the act of circumcision, ignoring the substance. They contended that circumcision was needed for salvation, which led to the formation of a ritualistic religion.

Abraham was saved by faith, long before he was circumcised. He is, therefore, the "father of all who believe" because he is the pattern of those who were saved in status quo uncircumcision, whether Jew or Gentile.