



A CULTURE OF LAW OR GOSPEL? - ACTS 15:22-41

STARTING THE DISCUSSION...

Have you ever experienced culture shock? It can be a really disorienting experience to realize that your natural expectations of how people behave and act towards one another is different from others. The culture of a place defines how people expect to work with and relate to one another. This is true of a country and true of a church. But in a church, there can be a culture of those who relate to one another through Jesus alone or Jesus plus some other issue. Whether it is a certain expectation of how you dress, words that you use, or a particular social stance there are plenty of ways that we can subtly require additions to faith in Jesus. But the declaration that comes from the book of Acts is that it is faith in Jesus alone that unites and binds us together. We are called to have a culture of faith in Jesus alone. That is what unites us, calls us to live with one another and even work with one another when that is difficult.

KEY TEXT: ACTS 15:22-41

²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³ with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words,



unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

³⁰ So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

³² And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. ³³ And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

³⁶ And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." ³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Additional Texts: 2 Timothy 4:11, Colossians 3:12-13, Philippians 2:1-2

UNDERSTANDING THE WORD

1. What is the significance of the list in verse 29? Should we understand this as an addition to faith or as a means of living together? How do we know?
2. What was the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about? What details do we know? Why doesn't Luke record more of this conflict between Paul and Barnabas?



APPLYING THE WORD

3. What “Jesus-Plus” gospels (whether stated or unstated) have you experienced in churches or around other Christians? What sort of barriers did they become to you or others hearing the message of salvation by grace alone?
4. What does this passage teach about one's conscience? What freedoms might you need to limit to keep from violating the consciences of those in your circle?
5. What is comforting about the conflict between Paul and Barnabas and what is instructive for us?

PRAYING & ACTING

1. Share with your group the name(s) of one or two people that you would like the opportunity to share the gospel with in your life. Pray that God would give you opportunities to share and hold one another accountable to be reaching out.
2. How can your Life Group reach out to your community this week? Who can you invite to join your group?

