

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for July 19, 2015

The Issue of the Law of Moses
Acts 15:1-5

Acts 13-14 records Paul's first missionary journey when, for the first time, churches were established in areas apart from a synagogue. This development led to the disagreement about the role of the Old Testament Law among Gentile churches. The issue was not one of acceptance of Gentile believers into the church, since this had been done by the Jerusalem church in Acts 11:18.

1. The controversy in Antioch (15:1-2)

The men who came to Antioch from Judea, and who taught that the Gentiles must be circumcised, were part of the Jerusalem church (cf. 15:24).

This issue of the Law and the Gentiles was not that salvation came through keeping the Law, since salvation is by faith not works, and the message of the forgiveness of sins through faith alone in Jesus Christ was taught (Acts 2:38).

Circumcision predated the giving of the Law as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14). The Law of Moses instructed the Gentiles to be circumcised (Exodus 12:48-49).

This great dissension and debate tells us that Paul strongly disagreed with the idea that Gentiles should be instructed to obey the Law of Moses.

The "certain others" were most likely those from Antioch who disagreed with Paul (cf. "certain others" in 15:5). The church in Antioch considered their participation to be important in order to achieve unity in the church by making sure their view was fairly represented.

2. The communication in Phoenicia and Samaria (15:3)

The 300 mile journey to Jerusalem brought Paul through Phoenicia, the home of the descendents of the Canaanites, and through Samaria, the home of the descendents of the northern kingdom of Israel.

They expressed great joy because of the development of churches in entirely Gentile regions with believers that had no necessary commitment to Judaism.

3. The consultation in Jerusalem (15:4-5)

As usual, Luke emphasized the role of God in the ministry.

We can see that this issue of the Law of Moses involved the whole church in Jerusalem (cf. 15:12, 22).

Acts 15:1 speaks to what Gentiles must do; Acts 15:5 speaks to what the church must do in ministry to the Gentiles.

Paul, a former Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), taught on the role of the Old Testament Law in the life of the Christian in Romans 7:1-6 (cf. Romans 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:1-11; Galatians 5:1-4; Hebrews 7:12).

We are under the New Testament “law of Christ” (Romans 8:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2; James 1:25, 2:8, 12). If we fail to understand this, we will not only fail to enjoy the freedom that we have in Christ, but we will also hold others to obligations that the Lord has delivered them from.

May we resist any compulsion to live under the yoke of the Old Testament Law instead of the liberty of New Testament grace.