

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for July 26, 2015

The Instruction by Peter
Acts 15:6-11

Acts 15 records the debate regarding the role of the Old Testament Law for the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas opposed the men of Judea who came to Antioch and taught that circumcision and the Law of Moses were obligations for the Gentile believers, leading to a meeting with the church in Jerusalem.

1. The conference of apostles and elders (15:6)

The Jerusalem church was now led by the apostles and elders with a multitude involved in the debate of this issue (cf. 15:12, 22). The importance of the issue of how the Gentiles would participate in the church required the agreement of the leaders in Jerusalem for the sake of the unity of the church.

2. The cleansing of the Gentiles (15:7-9)

Peter makes the central concluding argument based on his own ministry to the Gentiles in Acts 10 with the ministry to Cornelius. This same group had earlier listened to Peter's report and accepted it (Acts 11:15-18).

The inclusion of the Gentiles into the church was God's sovereign choice, not man's decision. The timing of God's choice was from well before Peter's ministry when the fact of Gentile inclusion in the kingdom of God was revealed in the Old Testament (cf. Acts 15:17).

God knows the heart. When anyone thinks they know the heart of others, they become tempted to render unrighteous judgments based on their own legalistic standards.

Peter compared the giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles with the giving of the Spirit to the Jews, both from God's gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The key point of this section is that the Spirit of God would not have been given to the Gentiles unless they were completely accepted and cleansed apart from circumcision or the Law (Acts 10:44-45).

3. The consequence of the Law (15:10)

People are guilty of putting God to the test when they presume that there will be no consequences to their wrongdoing (Luke 4:9-12; Acts 5:9). Those believers from the sect of the Pharisees were guilty of thinking that their wrong teaching was acceptable to God.

Yokes were used as restraints to keep animals in line for plowing. The primary use of the term yoke in the scripture is as a metaphor for burden (cf. Matthew 11:29). When restraints are placed on people, they become burdensome, which is why Jesus condemned the Pharisees for the burdens they put on people (Luke 11:46).

Our efforts to direct people to obedience mistakes the ministry of the Spirit with the ministry of the yoke. If you view the Christian life as a burden, you are not following Christ (Matthew 11:29-30; 1 John 5:3).

4. The conclusion of grace (15:11)

The conclusion is not simply that the Law is burdensome, but that it is unnecessary in the era of grace (cf. John 1:17, 2 Corinthians 3:6).

Peter's statement compares the way of salvation for the Jews with the way of salvation for the Gentiles, not vice-versa. This shows that the Jews are also under the grace of the Lord Jesus, not under the Law of Moses (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34).

May our ministry be built upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, not upon the works of the Law of Moses.