

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

When the Christians at Syrian Antioch heard the message from the Jerusalem Council, “they rejoiced because of its encouragement” (Acts 15:31). That message brings encouragement to me as well, for it reveals that you have determined to make one people of all the nations of the world. I praise you today as the God who joins the “tent of David” with the “Gentiles who are called by your name.” Praise the Lord, “who makes these things known from of old” (Acts 15:15–18)!

Today in Your Word

Today you told me about the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. The theological debate which had begun in Syrian Antioch over Gentile circumcision was brought to the church in Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas. The apostles and elders gathered together to consider the matter, and after much discussion, Peter stood up and reminded them of the conversion of Cornelius and his household. He said, “God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8–9). For Peter, the gift of the Holy Spirit confirmed that they had been truly saved *apart from circumcision*. If the council demanded more of the Gentiles than faith in Christ for salvation, they would be “putting God to the test,” that is, questioning his judgment in this matter. Furthermore, they would be “placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples” in the sense that they would be requiring them to seek salvation through law-keeping (Acts 15:10). This was the same burden the Pharisees had placed on the necks of the Jews, and neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear it. I love Peter’s conclusion: “We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” Peter, the one who drew back from table-fellowship with the Gentiles, the one who was rebuked publicly by Paul, this same Peter stood to his feet and gave a stirring defense of the truth of the gospel! What a comfort Peter is to me, for he shows me that I can be redeemed and restored from my mistakes! At this point the assembly fell silent, and they listened as Paul and Barnabas told them what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James did a very important thing. He validated their words by quoting your Word (Amos 9:11–12 confirmed the truth of what they had experienced). This teaches me that *Scripture is the final arbiter of truth*. My personal experiences must be corroborated and confirmed by the Bible. James then recommended that they ask the Gentiles “to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20). This was not an attempt to force the Gentiles to keep the law, but an appeal for sensitivity to Jewish concerns, as well as a reminder to avoid all associations with idolatry. If they would keep themselves from these things, they would do well, and they would further the ministry of the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles alike (cf. Acts 21:20–26).

Reflection

The sharp disagreement that arose between Paul and Barnabas on whether to take Barnabas’ cousin Mark (Col 4:10) on the second missionary journey is a sobering reminder that godly men can have very different opinions on how to accomplish the work of the kingdom. I need to learn from this and seek unity in all things, for Paul later acknowledged that Mark was useful to him for ministry (2 Tim 4:11).

Request

Father, the commands your Spirit gave to the Gentiles are still relevant to me today. Help me to avoid the many perversions of idolatry, and keep me sensitive to the concerns and weaknesses of others. May my life always draw people to Jesus.

Thanksgiving

Thank you for godly men and women who have stood for the truth of the gospel down through the years. I’m so grateful for the heritage that is mine through the faithfulness of your disciples.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: “[Saved by Grace](#)” – Philip P. Bilhorn.

Meditation Verse: Acts 15:11.