SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Acts

Chapter Fifteen, Verses 1–41

Saved Through Grace, Just Like Them — a council in Jerusalem, a yoke no one could bear, a letter of freedom, and two good men who could not agree

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Men from Judea tell Gentile believers they cannot be saved unless they are circumcised; the apostles and elders meet in Jerusalem, Peter answers that "we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they," and James finds the answer already written in Amos — then Paul and Barnabas part ways over John Mark. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Luke's key words.

THE PASSAGE

Acts 15:1–41

dispute · grace · Scripture · letter · parting

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Five movements from a dispute in Antioch to two missionary teams

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"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials …"
— Acts 15:28

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Acts 15:1–41

Saved Through Grace, Just Like Them — The church settles how a man is saved — and then learns how saved men live together

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Acts 15 in 5 movements, in Luke's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the passage so you can see where Luke is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word — R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle — MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ACTS 15:11

"But we believe that ☆ we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, △ in the same way as they also are."

† Before the Passage

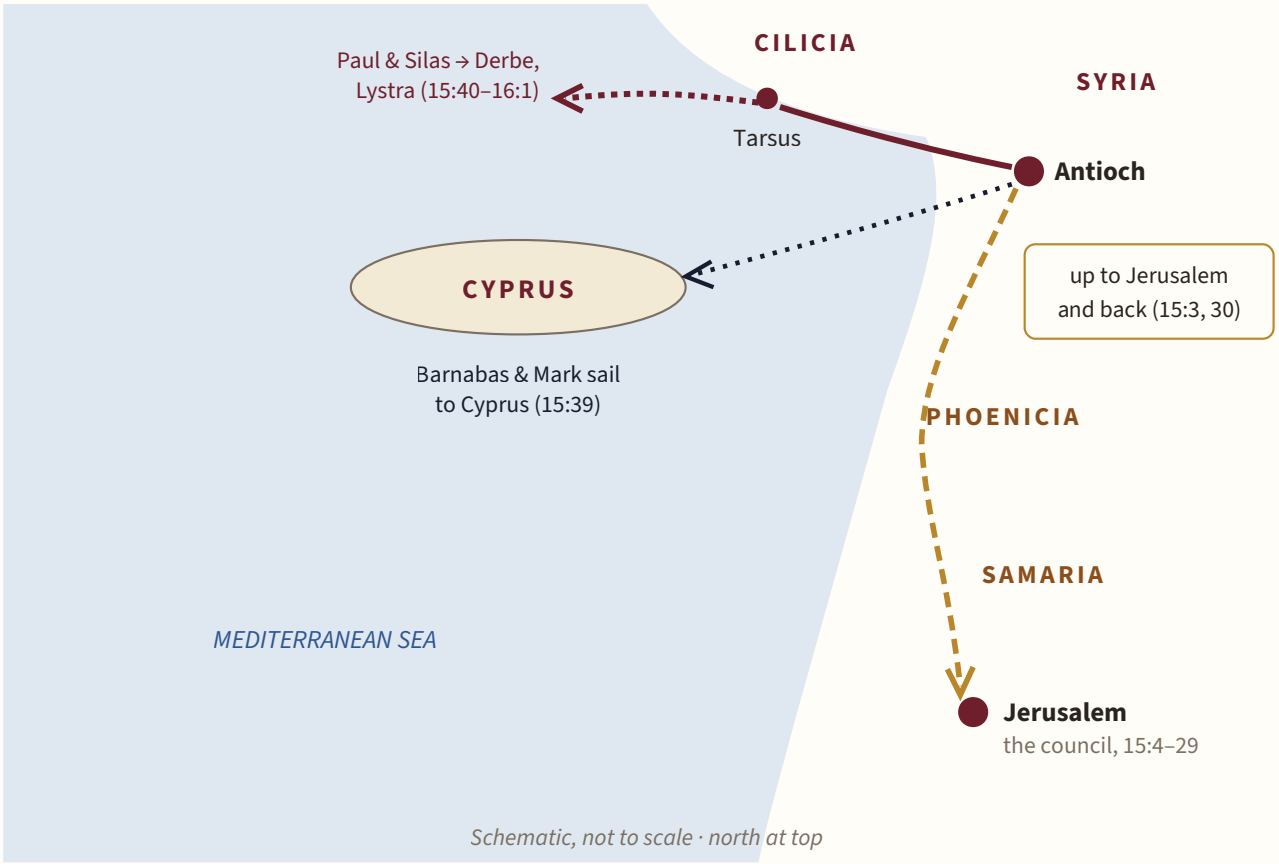
Acts 13–14 told the story of Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey — Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe — and their return to Syrian Antioch, where they reported "all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27). Gentiles were believing in large numbers without becoming Jews first. Chapter 15 is the church's first great test of what that means. It sits almost exactly in the middle of Acts, and it decides the shape of everything after it.

The question was not small. Guzik: "This was not a side issue; it had to do with salvation itself – how one is made right with God." For centuries a Gentile who wanted to belong to Israel's God was circumcised and took up the Law of Moses. Now some men "from Judea" (v1), and believers who had been Pharisees (v5), insisted the same must be true of Gentiles who believed in Jesus. Henry: "It is observable what a mighty stress they laid upon it." Paul's letter to the Galatians fights the same battle: "a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 2:16).

Peter had already seen God settle the question once, at Cornelius's house (Acts 10–11): the Holy Spirit fell on uncircumcised Gentiles while Peter was still preaching. James, the Lord's brother, now leads the Jerusalem church (12:17), and he will bring the prophets to the table. The road from Antioch to Jerusalem ran down the coast through Phoenicia and inland through Samaria — the very places where the gospel had already spread (8:5; 11:19).

The council does two things, and it helps to keep them apart. First it answers how anyone is saved: by grace, through faith, the same way for Jew and Gentile (vv7–11). Then it asks how Jewish and Gentile believers will eat at one table, and it asks the Gentiles to avoid four things that would offend their Jewish brothers (vv20, 29). The chapter ends with a hard, honest note: the two men who carried the gospel to the Gentiles cannot agree about John Mark, and the one team becomes two.

FIGURE · ANTIOCH, JERUSALEM AND THE PARTING



Follow the gold road down from Antioch through Phoenicia and Samaria to the council and back; then see the one team become two — Barnabas and Mark to Cyprus, Paul and Silas overland through Cilicia.

I
MOVEMENT

ACTS 15:1–5

Unless You Are Circumcised

Men from Judea add a condition, and the church sends the question to Jerusalem

[1] *Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* [2] *And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.* [3] *Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.* [4] *When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.* [5] *But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."*

ACTS 15:1–5

"nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."

GALATIANS 2:16

στάσις

STASIS · "DISSENSION" · G4714

A standing apart — a faction, a commotion, even an uprising; the interlinear glosses it "commotion." Luke pairs it with *zētēsis* (G2214), "debate" or "discussion," an argument where both sides search for an answer. The NASB says "great dissension and debate" (v2); the KJV, "no small dissension and disputation." Paul and Barnabas did not keep the peace by keeping quiet. Some questions are worth a fight, and this one — what a man must do to be saved — was one of them.

ἐπιστροφή

EPISTROPHĒ · "CONVERSION" · G1995

A turning around — the noun form of *epistrephō*, to turn. This is the only place it appears in the New Testament, and it is the news Paul and Barnabas tell all the way down the coast: "describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles" (v3). James will use the verb in verse 19 — "those who are turning to God." The whole dispute is about whether a Gentile's turning to God is enough, or whether he must also turn into a Jew.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik presses how serious the question was: "This was not a side issue; it had to do with salvation itself – how one is made right with God." Quoting Williams, he notes how hard it was for some Jewish Christians to accept Gentiles who did not keep the Law. He explains why converted Pharisees led the push in verse 5: "If the Pharisees believed anything, they believed one could be justified before God by keeping the law." They wanted two things of Gentile believers — circumcision and the whole Law of Moses — and Paul and Barnabas would not give an inch.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul preached Acts 15:1–21 at St. Andrew's Chapel on 7 November 2004 under the title "The Judaizer Threat." The sermon is published as audio, not text, so this box reports only Ligonier's own summary of it: Sproul addresses Paul's answer to the first-century Judaizers, who promoted a works-based view of salvation, and he frames the gospel as under attack down the centuries from "those seeking to add or take away from the truth that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone." For Sproul, Acts 15 is the Reformation's question asked in the first century.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry is sympathetic to the false teachers' upbringing but not to their claim. Their zeal came partly from habit — "the prejudices of education are not to be overcome all at once" — but to make circumcision a condition of salvation was another thing: "it is common for proud impostors to enforce their own inventions under pain of damnation." Paul and Barnabas were right to resist: "Such has been the difference in all ages between bigotry and moderation." And he warns young churches: "Those that are ever so well taught have need to stand upon their guard that they be not untaught again, or ill taught."

II
MOVEMENT

ACTS 15:6–11

Saved Through the Grace of the Lord Jesus

Peter remembers Cornelius: no distinction, hearts cleansed by faith, and no yoke

6 *The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.* 7 *After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.* 8 *"And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;* 9 *and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.* 10 *"Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?* 11 *"But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."*

ACTS 15:6–11

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

GALATIANS 5:1

ζυγός

ZYGOS · "YOKE" · G2218

The wooden bar laid across the necks of oxen so they pull together. Jewish teachers spoke gladly of "the yoke" of the Law; Peter calls it a yoke "which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (v10). Jesus used the same word for His own: "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30), and Paul for the slavery of going back under the Law (Galatians 5:1). The question is never whether a man wears a yoke, but whose.

καθαρίζω

KATHARIZŌ · "CLEANSE, PURIFY" · G2511

To make clean — the word for cleansing lepers and for declaring foods clean. It is the word the voice used to Peter on the rooftop: "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (10:15). Now Peter applies it to Gentile hearts: God cleansed "their hearts by faith" (v9). Circumcision touched the body; God had already done the deeper work in the heart. Spurgeon preached a whole sermon on these four words in the KJV: "purifying their hearts by faith."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik follows Peter's argument from experience: God, who knows the heart, gave the Gentiles the Spirit and drew no line between Jew and Gentile. "Peter showed how the heart is purified: by faith, not by keeping of the law." The yoke Peter refuses is one Israel itself never carried well. And the last line turns the Judaizers' logic upside down: with Boice, Guzik notes that Peter, a Jew, "would normally have said it the other way around" — not that Gentiles are saved like Jews, but Jews like Gentiles. "Christians are not only saved by faith; they are also purified by faith."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Faith Purifying the Heart" (15 April 1877, on 15:9) begins with Peter's own experience at Cornelius's house, where the Spirit came before any rite: "Faith alone did it." "Their faith purified them directly." He asks the council's question in one line: "Now, if the Spirit put no difference between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, why should the church do so?" Faith works on the heart by changing what it loves — "Faith changes the current of our love, and alters the motive which sways us" — and so he refuses any return to law: "Still must we refuse to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry admires the way the council worked — "They did not give their judgment rashly, but considered of this matter" — and he insists Peter spoke as one member among many: "He did not in the least pretend to any primacy or headship in this synod." Peter's case is simple. God accepted the Gentiles by giving them the Spirit; the Law would only burden them, for "The ceremonial law was a heavy yoke; they and their fathers found it difficult to be borne"; and grace is the one road for all: "There is not one way of salvation for the Jews and another for the Gentiles."

III
MOVEMENT

ACTS 15:12–21

The Words of the Prophets Agree

Barnabas and Paul report, and James reads Amos: a people for His name from the Gentiles

12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and
wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered,
saying, "Brethren, listen to me. 14 "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from
among the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,
16 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS
FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, 17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY
SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' 18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES
THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. 19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are
turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things
contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. 21 "For Moses from
ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

ACTS 15:12–21

"In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this."

AMOS 9:11–12

FIGURE · HOW THE COUNCIL DECIDED

HOW THE COUNCIL REACHED ITS ANSWER · ACTS 15:1–29

THE QUESTION vv1–5	PETER vv7–11	BARNABAS & PAUL v12	JAMES vv13–21	THE LETTER vv22–29
"Unless you are circumcised … you cannot be saved"	what God did: the Spirit given, hearts cleansed by faith	what God did through them: signs and wonders	what God said: "the words of the Prophets agree" (Amos 9)	"it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"

HOW A MAN IS SAVED
"through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they" (v11)
no yoke of the Law laid on Gentiles

HOW SAVED MEN LIVE TOGETHER
four "essentials" (vv20, 29): idols, fornication, strangled things, blood
love for Jewish brothers at one table

Read left to right: a question, two reports of what God had done, and the Scripture that agrees with it — then notice the two separate answers, one about salvation and one about fellowship.

σκηνή

SKĒNĒ · "TABERNACLE, TENT" · G4633

A tent or booth — the word for the wilderness tabernacle, and in Amos 9:11 the "booth of David," a humble hut where a palace once stood. By Amos's day David's house was falling; by James's day no son of David had sat on a throne for six centuries. God promised to raise it again. James quotes the Greek form of Amos, which speaks of the rest of mankind seeking the Lord (v17), and says the Gentiles' coming is exactly what the prophets expected.

ἐπισκέπτομαι

EPISKEPTOMAI · "CONCERNED HIMSELF, VISITED" · G1980

To look upon, to come and see about — the KJV's "did visit." Zacharias used it of God sending Messiah: "He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people" (Luke 1:68). Now James says God "first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people (*laos*, G2992) for His name" (v14). *Laos* was Israel's own word for itself as God's people. Guzik quotes Marshall on the paradox: Gentiles called God's "people."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that the room went quiet and listened: "This shows that even though there had been much dispute, these men were all of an honorable heart." James, recognized for his character more than his family tie (Bruce), grounds the decision in the Bible, and Guzik quotes Stott that councils carry no authority unless they agree with Scripture. On Amos: "In the passage James quoted (Amos 9:11-12), it actually says that salvation will come to the Gentiles." He reads the rebuilt tabernacle as the church: "Now God wanted to rebuild that work, focusing on a church made up of both Jew and Gentile." The four abstentions are love, not Law.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry also reads Amos of the church: "The church of Christ may be called the tabernacle of David," fallen and "cast down, but not destroyed." Verse 18 shows God was never surprised by the Gentiles: "Whatever God does, he did before design and determine to do." James's advice is pastoral wisdom: "Great care must be taken not to discourage nor disquiet young converts with matters of doubtful disputation." The four abstentions ask Gentiles to respect Jewish consciences while the old ways fade: "We must therefore give them time, must meet them half-way."

IV
MOVEMENT

ACTS 15:22–35

It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit and to Us

A letter of freedom, two trusted messengers, and a church that rejoices

22 *Then it* ↻ *seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them*
to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the
↻ *brethren*, 23 *and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the* ↻ *brethren who are elders, to the*
↻ *brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the* ↻ *Gentiles, greetings.* 24 *"Since we have heard that*
some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,
25 *it* ↻ *seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas*
and Paul, 26 ◷ *men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 27 *"Therefore we have sent*
Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 *"For* △ *it seemed good to*
the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you ▤ *no greater burden than these essentials:* 29 *that you abstain from*
things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves
free from such things, you will do well. Farewell." 30 *So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch;*
and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 *When they had read it,* ☆ *they rejoiced*
because of its encouragement. 32 *Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened*
the ↻ *brethren with a lengthy message.* 33 *After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the*
↻ *brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.* 34 *[But it* ↻ *seemed good to Silas to remain there.]* 35 *But*
Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.

ACTS 15:22–35

"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."

1 CORINTHIANS 8:9

ἔδοξεν

EDOXEN · "IT SEEMED GOOD" · G1380

From *dokeō*, to think or seem: the language of a decision reached, used in official decrees. Luke opened his Gospel with it — "it seemed fitting for me as well" (Luke 1:3). In this chapter the NASB has "seemed good" in verses 22, 25 and 28 (and in the bracketed v34). The striking one is verse 28: the Holy Spirit is named first, as the One whose mind the church had found, and "us" second.

ἐπάναγκες

EPANANKES · "ESSENTIALS, NECESSARY THINGS" · G1876

An adverb, "of necessity, necessarily" — here used as a noun, the things that cannot be left out. Its only New Testament appearance. The council lays on the Gentiles "no greater burden (*baros*, G922) than these essentials" (v28). The word answers the Pharisees of verse 5, who had said "it is necessary" to circumcise. What was truly necessary was far smaller than they thought — and none of it was a condition of salvation.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik sees the letter as keeping salvation by grace while asking Gentiles to show love to Jewish believers. With Pierson, he notices how naturally the council speaks of the Holy Spirit as a fellow counselor in the decision. He notes that Judas and Silas went too, to report the same things by word of mouth. And the decision held: "They all agreed!" For Guzik the matter is closed for good: "Therefore, the issue is settled here in the infancy of Christianity, and for all time." Salvation is by grace through faith, not by grace plus the Law.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry admires the letter's humility: the apostles include the elders and brethren, disown the troublers ("to whom we gave no instruction," v24) and praise Barnabas and Paul as men who had risked their lives. He draws a rule for every church: "Church-rulers should impose only necessary things." The letter comes with kindness rather than threats, and the church in Antioch is comforted and strengthened by it. He also notes Silas, who chose to stay on in Antioch — and so was on hand when Paul needed a partner.

V
MOVEMENT

ACTS 15:36–41

Such a Sharp Disagreement

Paul and Barnabas part over John Mark, and one mission becomes two

36 *After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."* 37 *Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.* 38 *But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.* 39 *And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.* 40 *But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.* 41 *And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

ACTS 15:36–41

"Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service."

2 TIMOTHY 4:11

FIGURE · JOHN MARK'S STORY

JOHN MARK: FROM "DESERTED" TO "USEFUL"

Acts 12:25	Acts 13:13	Acts 15:37–39	Colossians 4:10	2 Timothy 4:11
Barnabas and Saul take Mark along	Mark leaves them returns to Jerusalem	sharp disagreement; Barnabas takes Mark	Mark is with Paul, "cousin of Barnabas"	"he is useful to me for service"

Luke does not say who was right (Guzik) · "a fault on both sides" (Henry)

Two teams went out instead of one — Barnabas to Cyprus, Paul and Silas overland — *and the young man who quit became, years later, a man Paul asked for by name.*

The quarrel of 15:39 is not the end of Mark's story; follow him forward to Paul's last letter, where the man who deserted is "useful."

παροξυσμός

PAROXYSMOS · "SHARP DISAGREEMENT" · G3948

Our word "paroxysm" — a sharpening, a provoking, a fit of temper. It appears only twice in the New Testament: here, of Paul and Barnabas, and in Hebrews 10:24, where believers are to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds." The same sharp edge can cut or spur. The result in Acts 15 was that they "separated" (*apochōrizō*, G673) — the interlinear glosses it "departed."

ἐπιστηρίζω

EPISTĒRIZŌ · "STRENGTHEN, CONFIRM" · G1991

To make firm upon, to prop up. Strong's lists four New Testament uses, all in Acts, and each is the work of a travelling teacher among young churches: "strengthening the souls of the disciples" (14:22), Judas and Silas who "strengthened the brethren" (15:32), Paul "strengthening the churches" (15:41), and again in 18:23. Even after the quarrel, Paul's first care is the believers. The parting did not stop the work; it doubled it.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik refuses to take sides where Scripture does not: "Luke did not give us a clue as to who was right and who was wrong in the dispute between Paul and Barnabas." But he will not call it harmless either: "There could be no way that both Paul and Barnabas were each walking in the Spirit on this issue." His best guess is that the fault was shared — "Either Paul or Barnabas – probably both – had to get this right with God and each other" — and that God was at work in both camps: "Probably God had a work to do in both of them!"

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry sets the two stubborn positions side by side: “Barnabas was peremptory that he would not go with Paul unless they took John Mark with them,” and “Paul was as peremptory that he would not go if John did go with them.” His verdict is even-handed: “I doubt there was (as usually there is in such contentions) a fault on both sides.” Barnabas let kinship sway him — “it was Barnabas’s fault that he took this into consideration” — while “perhaps Paul was too severe upon the young man.” Yet God turned the parting into the spreading of the gospel to more places.

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From the fallen booth of David to one people in Christ

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old;”

AMOS 9:11

“nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

GALATIANS 2:16

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

GALATIANS 5:1

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

EPHESIANS 2:8–9

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;”

ROMANS 10:12

“But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”

1 CORINTHIANS 8:9

> *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*
>
> GALATIANS 3:28

> *"Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service."*
>
> 2 TIMOTHY 4:11

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik, quoting Stott, ties the four abstentions to the laws for foreigners living among Israel in Leviticus 17 and 18 — rules for sharing life together, not for earning salvation.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one council. Guzik walks the argument and refuses to pick a winner between Paul and Barnabas; Sproul (from his sermon's published summary) sees the Judaizers' error as the one the Reformation fought; Spurgeon preaches the heart cleansed by faith; Henry draws counsel for church leaders and quarrelling friends. Guzik and Henry read Amos 9 of the church; others, including Ed, read "after these things" as pointing ahead to a restored Davidic kingdom for Israel as well.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · The question	Not a side issue — salvation itself; Pharisees believed in law-keeping.	(sermon summary) the gospel attacked by those adding to faith alone.	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	Proud impostors threaten damnation; bigotry versus moderation.
II · Grace, no yoke	The heart is purified by faith; Jews saved like Gentiles.	— (no transcript available)	Faith alone did it; why should the church put a difference?	No primacy for Peter; one way of salvation for all.
III · James and Amos	An honorable council; Amos promises Gentile salvation; a church of Jew and Gentile.	— (no transcript available)	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	The tabernacle of David is the church; meet young converts half-way.
IV · The letter	The Spirit as fellow-counselor; "They all agreed!"; settled for all time.	— (no transcript available)	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	Church rulers should impose only necessary things.
V · The parting	Luke gives no verdict; probably both were wrong; God at work in both.	— (no transcript available)	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	A fault on both sides — kinship in Barnabas, severity in Paul.

ACTS 15:1–41 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **Some questions are worth a fight.** Paul and Barnabas had "great dissension and debate" (v2). Guzik: "This was not a side issue; it had to do with salvation itself." Peace bought by adding to the gospel is not peace. GUZIK
- **Saved Pharisees can still think like Pharisees.** The pressure came from "the sect of the Pharisees who had believed" (v5). Faith in Jesus does not erase a man's old instincts overnight — Henry calls them "the prejudices of education." HENRY
- **God has already shown His hand.** Peter's argument is history: God gave the Spirit, made no distinction, cleansed hearts by faith (vv8–9). The church did not invent Gentile inclusion; it caught up with what God had done. THE TEXT
- **Jews are saved like Gentiles.** "In the same way as they also are" (v11). Peter turns the question around — the Gentile way, by grace through faith, is the only way, even for a Jew. GUZIK
- **The question is whose yoke.** *Zygos* is the Law's heavy bar in v10, Christ's easy yoke in Matthew 11:30, and slavery in Galatians 5:1. Spurgeon: "we refuse to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." THE GREEK
- **Faith cleans the heart, not just the record.** Spurgeon: "Faith changes the current of our love, and alters the motive which sways us: this is what is meant by purifying the heart." SPURGEON

- **Experience must be tested by Scripture.** Peter and Paul told what God had done; James showed that "the words of the Prophets agree" (v15). Guzik, with Stott: a council has authority only when it agrees with Scripture. THE TEXT
- **Necessary is smaller than we think.** The Pharisees said circumcision was "necessary" (v5); the council laid on Gentiles only a few "essentials" (*epanankes*, v28), for fellowship, not salvation. Henry: "Church-rulers should impose only necessary things." HENRY
- **Good men can disagree badly.** Guzik: Luke gives no verdict, but "probably both" were wrong. Henry: "a fault on both sides." The church did not hide the quarrel, and God used it to send out two teams. GUZIK
- **A quitter can become useful.** The young man who "deserted them in Pamphylia" (v38) is, at the end of Paul's life, "useful to me for service" (2 Timothy 4:11). Barnabas, the son of encouragement, saw something in him. THE TEXT

† Questions for the Table

1 **What do I add to Jesus — a habit, a rule, a performance — and quietly treat as necessary for being right with God?**

Unless you are circumcised … you cannot be saved.

15:1, 5; Gal 2:16

2 **Peter said God "made no distinction between us and them." Whom do I treat as a second-class believer because of his past or his background?**

God, who knows the heart, gave them the Spirit too.

15:8–9; Rom 10:12

3 **Where am I still carrying a yoke "which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear"? What would it mean to put it down and take Christ's?**

We refuse to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Spurgeon).

15:10–11; Gal 5:1; Matt 11:29–30

4 **The council tested experience by Scripture. When I make a big decision, how do I make sure the Word, not just my feelings, has the last say?**

With this the words of the Prophets agree.

15:12–18

5 **The Gentiles gave up some freedoms for the sake of Jewish brothers. What liberty might I need to lay down so that a weaker brother is not tripped up?**

Church-rulers should impose only necessary things (Henry).

15:20, 28–29; 1 Cor 8:9

6 **Is there a Paul–Barnabas split in my life — a broken partnership or a man I wrote off like Mark? What step toward peace can I take?**

He is useful to me for service.

15:37–39; 2 Tim 4:11

Acts 15 settles forever that a man is saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus and nothing added — and then shows how that grace makes room at one table for very different men. It does not pretend the church is perfect: two good men fall out. But the gospel goes on, and the young man who quit gets a second chance.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) completed his *Commentary* himself through the Gospels and Acts. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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