

**Acts 15:1-6, 36-41 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup>Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup>This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. <sup>3</sup>The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. <sup>5</sup>Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” <sup>6</sup>The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

<sup>36</sup>Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” <sup>37</sup>Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, <sup>38</sup>but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. <sup>39</sup>They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup>He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

## 44-15-01-Embracing Christian Conflicts

disagreement, unity, discipleship, dedication, the Church  
Acts 15:1-6; 36-41

Jesus uses a variety of plans and people to build His Church.

**INTRODUCTION:** (text as Scripture Reading)

–If Jesus *isn't done yet* and is *still working* in believers, why are there conflicts among Christians, as seen in Acts 15? Didn't Jesus promise, “**I will build my church**”? Yes! But we see here and elsewhere in the NT that **HOM.idea**. Before exploring these 2 Christian conflicts in Acts 15, let's look at the way God led believers in the past, especially how He led Jesus, the human Incarnation of Himself. Let's look first at...

**I. Why God's Leading Might Appear Mysterious to Us**

A. Limited human knowledge and reasoning often asks God, “Why?”

1. His response?– Isa 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (This is obvious to anyone studying creation.)
2. If God knows everything about everything, and we don't, there's just one proper attitude for His followers: trust and obey.

B. God's higher wisdom logically calls for faith's trusting obedience:

1. God led Israel in the desert by a cloud– Num 9:21-22, Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. (God didn't explain why, but if faith is following infinite wisdom, no explanation is necessary.)
2. Even Jesus followed His Father's leadings with no explanations:
  - a. It was seemingly inconsistent when He told his brothers in John 7:8-10, “You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come.” Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. (This wasn't being dishonest but obedient!)
  - b. Jesus learned to watch and follow His Father the way Israel had followed “the cloud”– John 5:19, Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”

**TRANS: Jesus builds His church using various plans and people.** He doesn't have to explain *His plans for us to trust His wisdom*, even if those He's using are *in conflict*. It's often so obvious that He chooses to work in people like ourselves, who are still *in need of growth*. This is...

## II. Why Incarnation Is Not an Arrival but a Journey

A. This was true for Jesus! [In Luke 2, at age 12, He was already hearing His Father's voice. So, on a trip to Jerusalem, He *stayed behind* with teachers in the temple, telling Mary and Joseph who found and scolded Him, "*Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?*" Why is that all we hear of Jesus for the next 18 years! Because He immediately heard more words from His Father, probably something like, "*Hold on, Son, not so fast! Next time, listen more carefully!*"] We know this to be the case, because:

1. After this— v.51a, he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. (God probably reminded Him, "Honor your parents.")
  2. This event showed that Jesus was on a learning journey— v.52, And Jesus grew **in wisdom** and stature, and in **favor with God** and men.
    - a. *Christ's Incarnation* included growing mentally and morally, just as we do! Even pleasing His Father wasn't automatic!
    - b. He was *still learning when He struggled in Gethsemane— Heb 5:8*. Although he was a son, he **learned obedience** from what he suffered.
    - c. The Cross proved that He had perfectly learned to trust and obey — Phil 2:8 (ESV), And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming **obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross.
- B. Jesus said, "It is finished," but *He wasn't done yet!* In union with us, He's entered our own incarnational journeys of personal learning. (That's why He calls us to take up the cross and follow Him.)
1. The heart of His Incarnation is a *humbling of Himself by laying down His life as a human*, in order to **save and serve others**.
  2. His indwelling presence brings *His serving heart* into us:
    - a. As a corporate extension of His Incarnation, we are *learning to grow* "in wisdom" and in "favor with God and men," just as He did!
    - b. His presence in us brings *His attitude of sacrificial service*, so we can be "obedient to the point of death" by taking up "the cross."

**TRANS: Jesus is not done yet!** He's still serving others by *dwelling in us*, and as Paul says, *working as us!* Why does Jesus call us to a *death to self-will?* So that we can *learn obedience* by listening *carefully and trustingly* to Him, as He did to His Father. Jesus no longer inhabits just

*a single personality in a specific culture*. He's *living all over the globe in a multitude of diverse individuals*, each with specialized plans to fit their specific personalities and dispositions. **He's using a variety of plans and people to build His Church.** But if, by short-sightedness or immaturity, we don't recognize this reality, then we won't understand...

## III. How God Is at Work in Conflicts Like Those in Acts 15

- A. Church conflict between Jews who kept OT law and Gentiles who didn't was resolved **not** by a policy of either/or but of both/and.
1. Peter's words guided the Jerusalem council— v.11, it is through the **grace of our Lord Jesus** that we are saved, just as they are. (Focusing on custom instead of *Christ* invites *conflict, disputing, and division*.)
  2. Note the council's decision— v.28. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements...
    - a. The Holy Spirit lays down certain essentials do maintain *unity*, but a rigid uniformity blocks Christ's plans for the Church!
    - b. By preserving Jewishness, Jesus kept the Church's door open to Jews, yet He opened an even wider door to Gentile diversity.
- B. Jesus probably had a both/and plan in Barnabas and Paul's conflict over taking Timothy on this 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. (However we explain their separation, Jesus was surely at work in both of them.)
1. Knowing that Mark needed patient, nurturing care, Jesus led Barnabas to serve as a mentor to help his nephew Mark *grow*.
  2. Jesus put Silas with Paul's firm, resolute personality on a path of *harsh persecution* that might have foiled Mark's faith a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.
  3. Barnabas was right: Paul later found Mark to be *a true Christian worker*, but Jesus knew that Paul wasn't the one to disciple him.

## CONCLUSION:

—When there's Christian conflict, *prayerfully embrace its mystery* and trust Jesus to handle it. Recognize that He Who sees the *bigger picture* has a **variety of plans for the variety of people He uses to build His Church**. The only uniformity He leads us in is *His law of loving others*. —Remember: after Jesus told him his future, Peter pointed to John, and asked, "*What about him?*" In John 21:22, Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." He tells us the same, "*Don't worry how your brother's being led. Follow Me!*"