

Text: Acts 15:13-21 “The Tabernacle of David” or “Things Not So Indifferent” 4/27/2014

Before the Easter season I preached from the first twelve verses of Acts 15 the sermon titled “Grace, Faith, Purification Equals Salvation” I spoke of the dissension that had arisen in the church because there were some teaching that unless the new Christians among the Gentiles were circumcised and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved.

The matter was so serious that it was decided to send Paul and Barnabas up to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders about it. Some of the Pharisees who were Christians also attending the meeting and there was much disputing, and everyone had his say. After much disputing, Peter took the floor, giving his testimony about the conversion of Gentiles, who had received the Holy Spirit just as the others had. Peter counselled the body not to put the yoke of bondage upon the Gentiles that even the fathers had not been able to bear.

Everyone was silent and James the Elder rose to speak, and everyone listened. The account of his address to the body is recorded in Acts 15:12-21

“12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. 13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: 14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. 19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.” (Ac 15:12-21)

I want to speak of three things in James’ speech, which carried the day and resulted in a message to the church concerning the matter. First: the Tabernacle of David; Second: the Wisdom of our Heavenly Father; Third: the Instruction to the Churches.

- I. First: the Tabernacle of David: James first says that what Peter says agreed with the words of the prophets. It shows that the church took the Old Testament seriously. James does not quote everything that the prophets said, for information could be found everywhere. He summarizes, but there are two specific passages that refer to the Tabernacle of David and the calling of the Gentiles.
 - A. Isaiah 16:5. And Amos 9:9-11.
 - B. Two different words are translated “tabernacle”: one means a tent and is used in Isaiah and refers to the tent where the ark was and the tent that David built in the city of David in Jerusalem for the ark until Solomon built the temple. This is where David worshipped.

The other is the word for “hut” and is used at the Feast of Tabernacles to refer to the temporary huts that the pilgrims built to show that they were strangers in the land. This is used by Amos, and is the one that James quotes in Acts 15

- C. Isaiah says that the result of the raising up of the Tabernacle of David would be the subjugation of the Moabites and restoration of kingdom authority, for Messiah would sit in the tabernacle judging and bringing righteousness. Amos says that the result would be the calling of remnant of Edom and of all the heathen, which are called by the name of the Lord. The Amos passage is what James refers to, but does not quote exactly as is often the case in the New Testament.
- D. Taking it all together: James is saying that Messiah would restore true worship and the true Kingdom to David, restoring the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King to Israel house, but in the person of David’s seed, not Levi or Aaron. There is much here, but this is enough.
- E. This confirms what Peter preached at Pentecost: Acts 2:32-36

II. Second: the Wisdom of our Heavenly Father;

- A. “Known to God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”
- B. James is acknowledging that what is taking place is from God, and ordained by God from the beginning of the world. God was not improvising and making up stuff as He goes along.
- C. The calling of the Gentiles was ordained by God from the beginning and was not an afterthought, a plan B, in the purpose and decree of God.
- D. Even Paul was in evident agreement with the conclusions, so they did not contradict what he would write later about the liberty of the child of God. As we will see.

III. Third: the Instruction to the Churches.

Four things were sent to the churches of the Gentiles in order to ease their union with the Jewish churches. They would not be compelled to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, EXCEPT.

- A. First: They must abstain from the pollution of idols. This was not a temporary injunction, for Paul repeats this with great force in 1 Cor. 10:21,22. The bread is nothing, but its association with idols is defiling and must not be eaten. Once the association is brought up, the bread becomes unclean. The eating of the bread and the pollution can be separated. But the worship of idols and the pollution cannot be separated. The Gentiles must turn from idols to serve the living and true God.
- B. Second: They must abstain from fornication, for the true worship of God involves the giving up of the body as a living sacrifice. Just as the worship of idols is not neutral; neither is fornication neutral. It is unclean and abominable in the sight of the Lord. Sex outside of marriage is unclean and abominable, as the Scripture declares from beginning to end.
- C. Third and Fourth I will lump together. Abstaining from blood: including things strangled, where the blood would be consumed with the flesh.

1. This prohibition did not originate with Moses, but with God at the Time of Noah. Genesis 9:1-6 They were binding upon all of mankind.
2. The prohibition was to teach men after the flood, not to engage in the violence and murder that had become commonplace before the flood and had brought the flood.
3. Life was to be valued, and the prohibition of the eating of blood either alone or with the flesh was designed to teach men the value of life.
4. The purpose was to give value to the life of man, for the life of man was to be required even of the beasts. This was incorporated later into the law of Moses but the principle is the same; don't cheapen and degrade life—any life. As Solomon wrote: Pr 12:10 A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.
5. Of the several commentaries I read on this subject, only Calvin had it right in connecting the last two prohibitions to the Rainbow Covenant, which was binding on the whole world. The Gentile world at the time of Christ had become a sadistic, cruel, violent, bloodshedding world much like before the flood, kept in check only by the divisions of the nations
6. Jerusalem is saying to the Gentiles: OK, you don't have to be circumcised; but you have to worship the true God only, use your bodies as temples of God and present them as living sacrifices, and give up your cruel and bloody practices, for God will avenge the blood.
7. Of course, the implications of these prohibitions would be sorted out in the years that followed.
 - a. Distinction would be made between idols and meat offered to idols; The implications of the use of the body and other nuances.
 - b. It would take many years before the abuse of the body, either in rampant sexual immorality, or in rigorous asceticism and celibacy would be determined and the teaching of the apostles would prevail: Heb. 13:4 Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.
 - c. The Christian message of love and kindness and gentleness would curb the violence and cruelty of men and the prohibition concerning blood would pass away, as God had intended from the beginning.

Application: What of this remains for you and me.

1. To be a Christian means to worship the one true God. Question 94 of the Catechism
2. To be a Christian is to offer up the body as a living sacrifice, I am not my own, I am bought with a price Question 109 of the Catechism
3. To be a Christian is to rejoice in life, which is the most blessed gift of God. We are to neither refuse to eat flesh, which is the doctrine of devils, not to live in cruelty and waste of Creation, our own lives, and the lives of our neighbors. Question 107.

I have just scratched the surface on these things, but this is enough for today. God bless you.