

Defining and Maintaining Christian Community

Acts 15:1-21

May 30, 2021

What are the first things? The defining issues? The crux of the matter?

The Issue

What is a Christian? What defines him? What is essential?

Is it faith alone, or is it faith plus something else?

On what basis does God accept me? (Acts 16:31)

Membership requirements in some churches.

Gentiles must become Jews in order to be saved.

Two questions that the Synod of Jerusalem answered:

- 1) What is required of a Christian, to be a Christian?
- 2) Then, what was expected of a Christian, as a Christian?

The Occasion for the Issue

Table fellowship was condemned by Jewish Christians from Jerusalem.

Three Speeches

Peter Speaks

What God had done in bringing Cornelius to the faith.

We are saved, just like they are.

We are righteous because Jesus did the right things.

Barnabas and Paul Speak

What God had done in signs, wonders among the Gentiles.

James Speaks

What God had said

“Simeon,” the most Jewish way of referring to Peter. Why?

Quote from Amos

Conclusion: Not to trouble them

Salvation is by grace through faith; nothing more is required.

Yet, you must preserve table fellowship with all your brothers.

Yet, you must preserve outreach to the Jewish community.

Four approaches to understand these requirements.

First things First, and then Second things First.

- 1) We who are under grace are not to make our preferences, requirements.
- 2) We who are under grace will gladly bend for our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-21).
- 3) The Faith plus crowd are legalists or just confused.
- 4) We often put the law before the gospel, Calvin before Christ, rules before acceptance.