

Acts 15:1-35 Don't Get Derailed

Today we are jumping back into our study in the book of Acts - Chapter 15

A) Remind you of something we have seen in the book of Acts

B) Joining us for the first time - catch you up to speed.

C) The book of Acts tells the rather amazing story of how a 120 group of ordinary people:

1) blue-collar workers, tax collectors and a few women

D) Were a part of the largest and strongest move of God in the history of the world.

The story is really quite remarkable.

A) After Jesus had resurrected, he gathered with his ragtag group of disciples on the side of a MT

B) and said, "OK, your job is to spread this message and make disciples for me in every country in the world."

C) Then they watched him ascend into heaven -

D) Take the gospel to the whole world - make disciples of people in every nation. - **BIG TASK**

E) Never has a larger assignment been given to a less qualified group of people.

But by the time we get to Acts 17 - probably about 15-20 years into the story

A) This group of ragtag followers of Jesus are known as the group who turned the world upside down

B) So how did they do it?

1) They depended on the power of the Holy Spirit

2) They taught the word - shared the gospel

3) They planted churches

Everything started in Jerusalem

A) Then - spread to Judea - after persecution hit they were scattered - Samaria

B) Then some take the gospel to the Island of Cyprus

C) Then others - no names - Syria - a church gets planted in a city called Antioch

D) The church in Antioch send Paul and Barnabas out - they go into Turkey - Acts 13-14

At the end of Acts 14 - we find Paul and Barnabas coming back to Antioch after their 1st missionary trip

A) They come back to be refreshed and refueled

B) That is when the church encounters a problem that had the potential to derail the church

C) What happens here in Acts 15 has the potential to cause a drift the church would never recover from

Living here in SoCal and near the Ocean we are familiar with riptides - been in one

A) Jr. High Newport beach - pulling into the Jetty - had to be saved by the lifeguard -

B) THAT GUY! so embarrassing

C) The interesting thing about riptides - is sometimes they are really noticeable - POST A SIGN

D) Other times they are subtle, you don't really know you are drifting

Suddenly you look up - and nothing on the shore looks familiar - don't see friends / family

A) Your Chair or umbrella is no wear in sight

B) Or worse yet - you have drifted so far out from the shore - no longer touch -

1) not strong enough to get back in - need rescued

C) If what are reading about here in Acts 15 was not handled correctly - MAJOR DRIFT

D) It wouldn't have been long before the church no longer recognized where they were.

E) They would have lost sight of the Cross - lost sight of Grace

1) They would have found themselves far away from the true message of the gospel

Outline for Today

- **The Potential drift V.1-5**
- **The steps to get re-centered V.6-18**
- **The Direction forward V.19-35**

The Potential Drift

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. 4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

V.5 tells us this Potential Drift - was instigated by former Pharisees who had come to Jesus

A)These were guys who like Paul himself had come to Jesus out of being Pharisees

B)These are well meaning guys - who were off in their theology

1)Their basic message was this: if gentiles really want to be a saved they need to also convert to Judaism

C)By being circumcised and seeking to follow the law of Moses.

D)Circumcision or the cutting away of the flesh of the foreskin of a male

1)Was the identifying mark that God made with Abraham and his descendants

E)It would be the mark that separated the Jewish race from the rest of the world.

1)Hebrew babies were to be circumcised with they were 8 days old.

At the time one might have thought it was a weird practice –

A)Especially if you were an adult Gentile seeking to convert to Judaism –

B)But we know today that it has health benefits of circumcision

C)This is an another example of God looking out for his people

1)long before modern medicine discovered the wisdom in God's logic.

So these well-meaning believers – had come to Antioch a Church that was predominantly Gentile with this message.

A)Believing in Jesus is not enough – if you really want to be saved – you need to add Circumcision.

B) Now imagine the horror of that revelation - especially to the Gentile adult Males

1)No amnesia in those days

C)These guys break out their knives- Sharpening their blades who wants to go first ?

Makes you wonder if all the new member classes in these churches were filled with women and children

A)The men were like - ah honey I'll pass - I will wait in the car - you and kids have fun

B)So this is the trip that these men were laying on these gentile believers

C)This the problem that had the potential to derail everything that God had built up to this point

² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them – **NLT disagreed arguing with them VEHEMENTLY**

No small dissension and dispute: means this was intense –this a was heated conversation ! Yelling

A)On the one side you had these former Pharisees -

B)on the other side you had Paul and Barnabas

1)Champions of grace - just got back from seeing many gentiles come to faith in Jesus

C)So things are heating up in Antioch

Pause here to say: what these former Pharisees are doing doesn't surprise me

A)We all enter into faith in Jesus carrying some baggage.

B)Examples: I have met many Christians who grew up in homes - no dad - or a lousy dad.

C)Big time father issues and because of that they have the hardest time relating to God as their father

Seen others who were saved out of a lifestyle of addiction

A)Saw what it did to their lives - or maybe it was prevalent in their families life - destruction

B)Their strong conviction is a real Christian should never ever touch a drop of Alcohol.

C)And I have seen people who got saved out of religious backgrounds - Catholicism or similar

They grew up thinking that God stuff is all about the Do's and Don't following rules and regulations

A)Then they get saved and it is hard for them to shake some of that religiosity

B)That was the case with these Pharisees and others in the church

1)they grew up in a culture that stressed circumcision and following the law of Moses

C)The ceremonial law of Moses consisted of 613 Jewish laws that they followed -

1)Circumcision was one of them.

D)But the danger of this message was this - they were essentially saying the Cross/ Resurrection was not enough

Listen any teaching that tells you that what Jesus did was not enough - you need to add to the work of Jesus Christ

A)That teaching needs to be rejected - you need to run from that teaching.

B)This teaching had the potential to send the church drifting into legalism and confusion

C)So Paul and Barnabas are arguing with these men

D)Someone suggest - we should take this dispute to the Leaders the Apostles in Jerusalem -

1)So they travel there.

#2 The steps they take toward getting everyone re-centered

A)They travel to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles

B)The Jerusalem Council - Peter is the first to speak

⁶Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

⁸So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, ⁹and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Remind you - they didn't have the NT to draw on for this discussion

A)They didn't have the book of Galatians - they didn't have the book of Romans / gospels

B)They had to go off of their experience - what God was doing.

C)Their experiences would validate what the HS would later have them write in the NT

1)Today we use the NT to validate our experiences

Peter shares his experience of seeing Gentiles get saved - JUST LIKE US.

A)V.7 - They heard the gospel preached

B)V.7 They believed – The gospel was embraced through faith

Romans 10:17 "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Ephesians 2:8-9

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."

V.8 They received the Holy Spirit.

A)New Mark: not a mark on the flesh – cutting away of the flesh circumcision

B)The new mark of their conversion God gave them the Holy Spirit

1)Dwell in our hearts thru faith

C)Filled with the HS and baptized by the HS - just like us

V.9 They were purified by faith just like us.

A)Note: They were purified *because* of their belief, not *before* their belief.

B)Your need to today: Saved! –

C)Hear the Word

- Embrace it – faith – believe –
- Receive the Holy Spirit –
- Purified – Justification - made right with God

D)Peter concludes - So why would we put a yoke of bondage on them that we ourselves couldn't keep?

1)Makes no sense

Peter is being honest - "I don't know about you guys, but I never felt like I was keeping them all,

A)And I was born a Jew.

B)So confusing - I could hardly keep 'em straight... How far was I allowed to walk on the Sabbath again?

C)Were we allowed to eat llama meat? How about turkey bacon?

Peter is stating what every Jewish person who was honest felt - I couldn't keep all those laws.

A)Paul would later point out in the book of Galatians

B)The purpose of the law was NOT to produce righteousness in us.

1)The purpose was to show us what the standard was

C)So we would realize - we couldn't measure up

D)We needed a righteousness from God that was apart from the law - Came through faith in Jesus

So Peter's message - Guys we are all saved the same way! -

A)Faith in the work of Jesus - not our works

B)Next up to the stand was Paul and Barnabas

¹²Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

C)Their argument it was Obvious God has been moving among the Gentiles -

1)seen it in Miracles signs and wonders

D)Evidence of His heart toward them - love for them

After them - Then James takes the floor

A)More silence - this is James the brother of Jesus

B)He was a pillar of the church and the moderator of the assembly considering this all-important dispute.

C)James was pretty hard core- "James the Just" because he was so upright

1)Camel Knees - spent so much time on his knees in prayer

D)I imagine that the hopes of the Pharisaic sect rose as James stood to speak.

1)If anyone of the church leaders shared their Zeal and discipline it was JAMES.

¹³And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men *and* brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

¹⁶ 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up;

¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'

¹⁸ "Known to God from eternity are all His works.

James points to Scripture Through this combination of passages taken mostly from Amos 9:11-12,

A)James was saying that according to the OT Scripture God's people would consist of two concentric groups.

B)At the core would be Israel (the tabernacle of David) and gathered around them would be

C)The Gentiles (the rest of mankind), who are also called by God.

D)James is pointing out that it was always the heart of God to bring these groups together

Then he utters this powerful statement V.19

¹⁹Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God.

NLT - “And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

A)This is such a powerful statement that we also need to take heed to today.

B)We need to be very careful that we are not making it difficult for people who want to come to Jesus

1)By laying unnecessary trips on people who want to come to Jesus.

C)We in the church have been guilty of laying trips on people who show interest in Jesus

1)making people feel that they need to clean up their act before they can become a Christian.

But the message of the gospel is come as you are.

A)You come to Jesus as a person who recognizes they are a sinner and they need a savior.

B)Jesus accepts you - he begins a work in you on the INSIDE - in your heart

1)that will eventually affect you on the OUTSIDE the way that you live.

C)But today the church can come across in a way that makes people think they need to believe a certain way -politically to follow Jesus

Or we can make people think they think a certain way on social issues to be a Christ follower

A)Or they need to believe and follow a certain standard of morality in order to be saved.

B)Or you need to dress a certain way or only listen to certain kinds of music

1)The list goes on and on

C)My friends we have to be so careful that we are not putting forth the idea

1)That people need to believe exactly like we do on those sorts of things in order to be saved.

D)We may not say it that directly - but if that is what we are implying by our actions

E)We are doing the same thing that these guys were doing -

1)making it difficult for people who are turning toward Jesus.

Those of us who have been walking with Jesus need to remember this:

A)When we first came to Christ - we didn't know everything that we know now.

B)We didn't believe and think the same way about everything that we do now.

C)But Over time as we grew in Christ - studying the word

1)The word of God was renewing our hearts and minds - changing our worldview

D)We were Gaining a Biblical worldview

1)happens the more our hearts and minds are being transformed by the HS / Word

E)We need to allow that process to play out in the lives of others as well.

So James says I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God.

A)Then #3 he gives the direction going forward

20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. 23 They wrote this letter by them:

From: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Here is the letter charting the way forward that was to be read in all the Jewish synagogues

Greetings.

24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have **troubled you with words**, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no such commandment (Not sent out by us they came to you in no official capacity.)

—25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send **chosen men** to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who 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 necessary things: 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.

If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

The Response: Imagine the anticipation

³⁰ So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.

#3 The Direction going forward:

A)The Holy Spirit and the leadership of the church said there were 4 things the Gentiles needed to follow

B)One was Moral and the other 3 relational issues
1)One had to do with Purity and the other 3 had to do with Love toward their Jewish bros/ sisters

C)Start with the Moral issue - they were to Abstain from Sexual Immorality

D)Now Why did they focus on this moral issue and not things like lying, murder or stealing.

Well things like lying stealing and murder were moral issues universally regarded as being wrong

A)Not going to get much push back on those issues any in culture throughout man’s history

B)But a wide range of sexual beliefs and practices were commonly accepted in that culture

1)Just as they are becoming more accepted in our culture today.

In that culture as is in our culture today the common thought was this:

A)What you do with your body and who you do it with sexually is up to you - your business

B)They had a very broad view of what was sexually acceptable

C)But God who designed sex and created it to be enjoyed

1)has always been very clear in his word that sexual intimacy was to be reserved for marriage alone

⁴Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. Hebrews 13:4 CSB

A)God has always seen the sexual union as this sacred and Holy thing between a husband / wife

B)The sexual union is not just a physical union but it is also a spiritual and emotional union.

C)But the Devil is always seeking to take that which God says is Holy and Sacred - set apart - special

1)And make it common. Or even Dirty

D)The Devil has succeeded in doing that with Sex

So today people down play the beauty and holiness of the sexual act. - No big deal

A)Just two bodies coming together - just a physical thing.

B)God wants us to see sex as so much more than that

1)It is a Beautiful and complete union - of the heart spirit and body - between a husband /wife

C)So God tells unmarried people to abstain from engaging in Sex -

D)But he tells married people to not abstain - 1 Corinthians 7

Sexual immorality is any sex outside of marriage

A)God says - Abstain from that

B)Now you might say: But my girlfriend and I love each other - live together

1)We think God is ok with us having sex because we are committed to one another - love each other

C)God calls that Fornication - calls it sin

You might rationalize - I think it is ok for me to carry on this extra marital affair

A)God knows my spouse doesn't fulfill me and I think he wants us to be happy - he is ok with it

B)You call it a fling or an affair - God calls it adultery and it is sin

C)One might say: I think God is ok with me being in this same sex relationship - we are committed

1)We even got married

D)God calls it Homosexuality and says it is a sin.

And a person might argue with me and say: Well Pastor Rob that is not very loving or affirming

A)Do you realize that being loving and affirming are not necessarily the same thing.

B)Being affirming is saying - I am going to affirm you in your decision no matter what it is. - affirming

1)But that is not loving

C)If I affirm you in your decision to do something that is going to be harmful to you -

1)That is not LOVING AT ALL.

D)You say- I am going to drink some poison today - and I affirm that - Go for it

1)I affirm your right to do what you want to with your body.

Or if my grandson wants to play with a rattle snake and I am like go for Josiah - affirm your desire

A)He gets bit and dies - you would probably have me arrested. NOT LOVING - SICK

B)But you say - come on Pastor Rob - drinking poison or playing with a rattlesnake is not the same

1)As being in a loving relationship with someone of the opposite sex or same sex. - Not a fair comparison

C)Your right it is not the same: Might be worse - here is why?

1)Drinking poison and playing with rattlesnakes will only Kill you physically

D)Living in a sexually immoral relationship - any sex outside of marriage - Can Kill you spiritually

E)It has eternal ramifications - those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God

1)I am not saying that - God does

Please understand - I am Not trying to be mean - I am being loving by telling you the truth.

A)Let me just say this: I have great empathy toward people who battle with same sex attraction

B)I don't understand that struggle - but I know it is real - I have talked to people - that struggle

1)People who love Jesus -

C)But I can't affirm a lifestyle that Jesus says is sinful.

I believe in the Power of Jesus to help people who struggle with same sex attraction -

A)Over time Jesus can change those desires in the same way - he changed our desires for sinful things

B)Or he can give you the power to live a celibate life to the glory of God

C)And as a church we are committed to helping people through that process of transformation

So the Moral word to the Gentiles was abstain from Sexual immorality

A)That was about their relationship with God

B)The other 3 things they were to abstain from had to do with their relationship with others.

1) their Jewish brothers and sisters

V.28 They were to abstain from things offered to idols from blood and from things strangled

A)What was this all about ?

B)In the Gentile pagan world - when they were sacrificing to idols

1)Part of the meat from the animal was consumed on the altar

C)Part of it was cooked and eaten - and part of it was taken and sold in the marketplace

1)Get a great cut of meat at a great price - meat offered to an idol.

But too many in the Jewish World to partake of meat offered to an idol -

A) was the same as being involved in idolatry itself - That was their conviction

B) V.20 they believed the meat was polluted by idols or Contaminated by idols

1) So they avoided such meat -

C) Now Paul would later write about this in 1 Corinthians 8-10 Christian Liberty

Paul would say there we know that an idol is nothing but a piece of stone or wood.

A) So eating meat offered to an idol is not a big deal - not idol worship

B) But if your Jewish brother or sister has a strong conviction about that - you abstain -

C) It would be better for you to forfeit your liberty than run the risk of stumbling or offending - bro!

D) Paul's teaching and the point here in Acts 15 is that Love always trumps liberty

To flaunt my liberty in the face of my a believer who doesn't share that liberty is the opposite of love

A) And to try and force my liberty on someone who doesn't have that liberty is not loving at all

B) So the principle here for the gentiles was one of walking in Love toward their Jewish bros/sis

C) What about Blood and things strangled? What was that about?

1) Similar thing - also a theological implication

In Judaism as is in Christianity - Blood is sacred and important symbolic implications

A) Leviticus 17 Blood is sacred - Life is in the blood

B) God taught that without the shedding of blood no forgiveness of sins

1) Adam and Eve - sinned - God shed blood - cover

C) Passover - the blood of the lamb on the doorpost - protection from death

1) Pointed to the cross = the blood of Jesus

On the day of Atonement the High Priest would take blood from the sacrifice - Mercy seat

A) Priest would have blood put on right ear - right hand right foot - hear / do / walk covered

B) So to the Jews Blood was a sacred part of their belief system -

1) Jewish Christians saw the connection to Jesus

C) But in the pagan gentile religions blood wasn't sacred at all.

D) An animal that was strangled didn't have the blood drawn - from it

E) Pagans would eat blood raw organs and even drink blood in their rituals

So the admonition to abstain from blood and things strangled

A) Was essentially encouraging the Gentiles to adopt a higher view and regard for blood

B) To see the spiritual implications for blood - 1) Don't take it lightly -

C) Again was connected to living with a greater sensitivity to their Jewish bros / sisters

D) V31 when the Gentiles read this - they rejoiced - - YAY don't have to be circumcised

E) This seemed reasonable to them - made sense -
1) Heart to walk in Love

This would be the way forward for the church to avoid getting derailed

A) There could be grace for these original guys who were spreading this teaching

B) But not so much after this: - Paul would later write these words to the church in Galatia

1) When men were coming through that region spreading this same teaching circumcised to be saved

C) Paul would write - I wish that those who are teaching that would just castrate themselves

D) Talk about being honest and graphic

Paul was not trying to be gross or like some today who say something for shock Value -

A) No Paul was illustrating the seriousness of taking anything and adding it to the finished work of Jesus Christ

B) Any theology or believe that says that what Jesus did at Calvary - was not enough
1) NEED TO BE REJECTED

C) So this was the way forward - V.32-35 Men were sent out to spread this message

32 Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.
33 And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.
34 However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.
35 Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Now a few weeks ago we looked at the last part of Ch. 15 in our study in Acts 14 - Failure... finale

A) John Mark - left - not going to revisit that today

B) But I want to end our time today by considering 3 things that we need to watch out for as a church
1) And Individually -

C) 3 areas where we can be prone to Drift from the truth.

#1 The Drift from a passion for outsiders to pacifying insiders.

A) Here is what I mean by this- After we have walked with the Lord for a while - lose sight of the mission

B) To See lost people come to Christ!

C) We think the church is only about meeting our needs

1) So we view church from the perspective of our preferences

D) That is when we start complaining about things like the Music is too loud -

1) why can't it be more traditional

E) Our Music should relate to the culture that we are living in - Worship but also a tool

Your Sermons aren't deep enough Pastor Rob -

A) The focus of my teaching is not directed only at you who have been walking with Jesus 20 yrs

B) Been walking with the Lord 20 yrs you should be mature enough to go deeper on your own

C) I am trying to make this understandable for those who are brand new - those who are not saved
1) You are good at making complicated things simple. Try really hard at that / never compromise truth

D) Children's ministry - Fun and Bible -
1) Youth - Fun and Bible based.

We have a passion for those who are outside -that will trump pacifying those insiders

A) I would hope you would appreciate that heart and mindset

B) This year we have seen over 100 people make decisions to follow Jesus in our services

So first Drift we need to avoid is The Drift from a passion for outsiders to pacifying insiders.

A) #2 Drift is from Grace to Law - we start putting our convictions on others

B) We end up with a definition and standard of Christianity that is not Biblical
1) We run the risk of drifting into legalism

Which results in the 3rd drift we need to avoid

A) A focus on external conformity instead of internal transformation

B) Performance based acceptance mentality

C) That essential says You are loved and accepted by Jesus based on your performance

D) reading - praying - witnessing God loves you more

Note this church: Nothing can change you STANDING with God

A) But there are things that can change your INTIMACY

B) I am MARRIED - Nothing I do changes that standing -

C) But the more we communicate - share our hearts the more INTIMACY IS BUILT up / grows

D) The same thing is true spiritually