

STUDY NOTES

The Acts of the Apostles

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH (Spring 2016)

WWW.NEWCITYPHX.COM/SERMONS - BRIAN KRUCKENBERG

The following content is based on the message “A Doctrine of Community” spoken on 05/22/16 by Brian Kruckenberg at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis of the message but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these Study Notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective communities.

THE SCRIPTURE

ACTS 15:1 *But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”*

⁶The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

¹²And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me.¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree.....¹⁹Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them.²² Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

²³with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.²⁴ Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them 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 themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

³⁰So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.³¹ And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.³² And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.³³ And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

HOW THE DEBATE AROSE IN ANTIOCH THAT LED TO A CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM

In this story we see deeply-held traditional convictions being confronted by the spread of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit. Some of the Jewish Christians insisted that circumcision, in strict obedience to the Jewish law, was necessary for **salvation**. However, the Holy Spirit already made it clear that the Gospel is for everyone, not just for people who convert to Judaism. Gentiles are able to be saved, and being saved isn't about fitting into an old tradition.

- *What do you think needs to happen in order for someone to be saved?*
- *In what kinds of ways do Christians think that people have to look like Christians before being welcomed into our community?*

THE DEBATE IN JERUSALEM

In verses 6-10 Peter stands up and reminds them/us that the Gentiles can now be saved because it isn't about the outside, ritualistic rules and law, but about the heart. Even the Jewish people had learned on occasion that God looks on the heart. (Deuteronomy 30:6) However, they tried to put an old yoke (laws) on the Gentiles that didn't belong there. In verse 10, Peter even reminds the conference that they themselves couldn't live up to the old yoke. (It is important to note that Peter did not urge the Jewish Christians to stop living by the law. It was a cherished heritage. however, the law and heritage **could not save them or others.**)

Christianity is a change of heart and belief with changed attitudes and actions that reflect the internal change.

We always forget what following Jesus is really about. We always stray from the core truths. When we forget this, we not only get off mission, but we also tend to fail.

It is the message, not the medium, mode, or methodology, that is sacred.

- *What is the heart change God is asking from us?*
- *What do we begin to focus on when we stray from the Gospel?*
- *What yokes do we put on Christians today?*
- *Talk about some of your own experiences--yokes that were placed on you, or yokes that you placed on others.*
- *In Matthew 11:30 Jesus says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. How do you believe that? Or how do you not believe that?*
- *Does our outward change matter at all? If so, then how?*

RELATIONSHIP & COMMUNITY: THE FINAL SOLUTION, AN OFFICIAL LETTER SENT TO ANTIOCH

The decision on this matter was final. The apostles wrote a letter (verses 22-29) freeing everyone from outward requirements of salvation because **salvation is through faith in Jesus.**

The letter did urge the Gentile Christians to abstain from four things:

- 1) from food offered to idols;
- 2) from the meat of strangled animals;
- 3) from blood; and
- 4) from sexual immorality

These are all things which were prohibited in Leviticus. As we have seen, the first three things are declared clean in Acts 10. However, the Jewish people weren't ready to abandon their tradition. **In order for the church to move forward, people would have to share meals together and build community.** This is why the Gentiles are told to abstain from these four things--in order to keep fellowship with their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Fellowship, not morality, was the issue at the Jerusalem Conference.

Food and sex come naturally to everyone, so both of them bring people closer together. Godly sex brings two people together, and sharing a meal should bring people together.

- *Why do you think sharing a meal brings us closer together?*
- *Both the Jews and the Gentiles sacrificed for each other. How can you go out of your way to build relationships with others?*
- *Who are you sharing table fellowship with? Or who do you think you should share table fellowship with?*

The fourth prohibition that the Jerusalem Conference included in their letter was for the Gentiles to abstain from sexual immorality. Paul repeatedly brings this up in his letters that he sends to churches later in his ministry. Sex brings two people more intimately together. However, sexual immorality not only divides two people, but it divides community.

- *What does sex outside of marriage do to community, specifically pre-marital sex or adultery?*
- *How does any type of pornography or sexual fantasy divide community?*

GOSPEL TURN

In the Genesis 3, Adam and Eve ate of the fruit in the Garden and we sinned. We were fractured with God, each other, and creation. However, Jesus came and offered his body as food and his blood as drink to get us back into community. **When we place our faith in Jesus, he unites us not as Jews, not as Gentiles, but as Christians.** We are not defined by the color of our skin or our ethnicity, but our belief in Jesus Christ!

- *Take a moment to reflect on how God chose to extend table fellowship with you through Jesus.*
- *If we believe that life comes through the body and blood of Jesus, how should that shape our view of others?*
- *How can we, as a Community Group, build stronger community with each other*
- *How can we build strong community with our city?*
- *Pray with each other about how you can unite with others in communion with Jesus*