

A large group of men in robes, likely the Council of Nicaea, gathered in a grand hall with a cityscape in the background. The men are depicted in various poses, some with hands clasped in prayer, others in discussion. The scene is set against a dramatic sky with a bright light source, possibly the sun or moon, creating a sense of divine presence. The architecture features classical columns and arches.

The CHURCH Series

Church Unity

Introduction....

- Chapter 15 is a very important moment in the first few decades of the Early Church.
- If they made the wrong decision here, the Christian Church would have had its first major split and may have delayed its own progress by many more decades.
- Let us look at 7 lessons we can learn from this chapter.



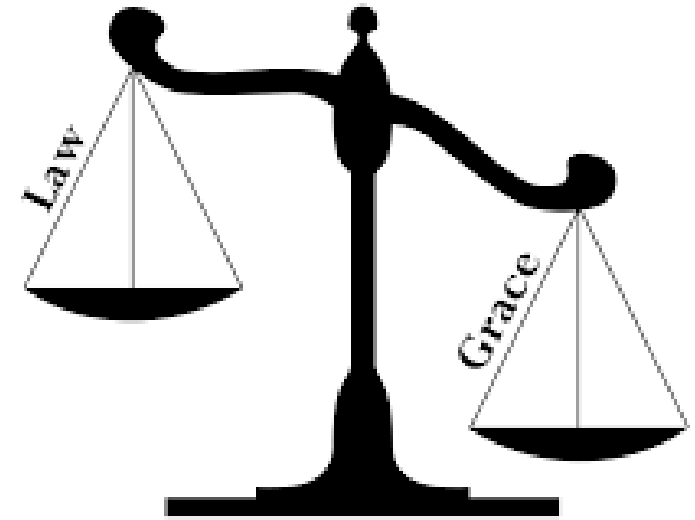
Disputes...

- *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. Vs 1-2*



GRACE versus LAW

- The chapter opens with a disagreement between Jewish Christians from Judea and Paul and Barnabas
- regarding whether Gentile converts must observe Jewish laws, specifically circumcision, to be saved.
- Peter emphasizes that salvation comes through grace, not through adherence to the law.
- He recalls how the Holy Spirit came upon Gentiles, just as it did upon Jewish believers, without requiring them to follow all Jewish customs.
- **Lesson 1:** This teaches that faith in Jesus and God's grace are central to salvation, not adherence to any specific cultural or ritualistic rules. The early Church embraced diversity by valuing faith over law.



Unity in Dialogue

- *6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.*
- *7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them....vs 6-7*
- The apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem to discuss this issue openly, recognizing the importance of both unity and inclusiveness in the Church.
- **Lesson 2:** Rather than splitting over differences, it's beneficial to come together, discuss, and find solutions.
- Disagreements handled with openness and respect can ultimately strengthen a community.



Power of Testimony...

- 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.... Vs 7*
- Peter shares his experience with Cornelius (a Gentile), showing that God does not discriminate. Paul and Barnabas also testify to the miracles and signs among Gentiles
- **Lesson 3:** Testimonies and shared experiences help to build understanding and trust.
- When faced with decisions, especially regarding inclusion, listening to others' experiences and God's work through them can provide clarity and direction.



Scripture – The Arbiter

- *13 And after they had ^[c]become silent, James answered, saying, “Men and brethren, listen to me:*
- *14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.*
- *15 And 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 ^[d]LORD who does all these things.’*
- James, the leader in Jerusalem, references Scripture, quoting the prophet Amos to show that God’s plan has always included Gentiles.
- **Lesson 4:** Scripture can offer timeless wisdom and perspective, helping to guide difficult decisions. It’s valuable to consider the scriptural foundation of practices and principles, especially in complex matters of faith.



Middle - Ground

- *29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual^[1] immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well vs29*
- James proposes a solution: Gentiles should not be burdened with the full Jewish law
- but should abstain from certain practices particularly offensive to Jewish believers (like idolatry and certain dietary laws).
- **Lesson 5:** Compromise allows diverse communities to coexist peacefully.
- Being sensitive to cultural differences—while upholding essential truths—can foster unity without sacrificing core beliefs.



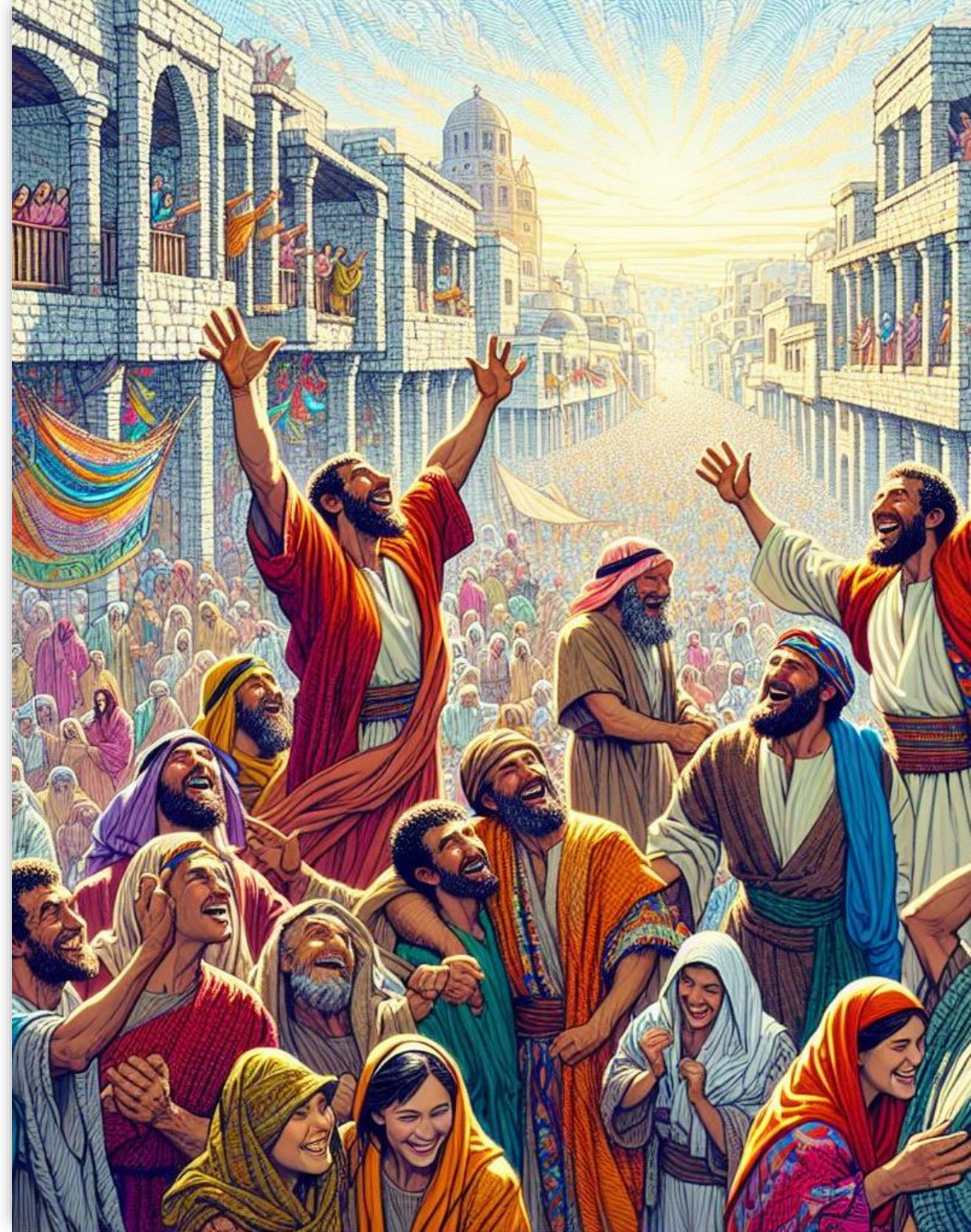
Write It Down...!

- *They wrote this letter by them:*
- *The apostles, the elders, and the brethren,*
- *To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:*
- *Greetings.*
- The apostles send a letter with Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas to communicate the council's decision,
- clarifying that Gentiles do not need to follow the entire Mosaic law to be saved.
- **Lesson 6:** Good communication helps to prevent misunderstandings.
- Thoughtful, clear communication fosters trust and encourages people during times of transition or change.



Encouragement....

- *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.*
- *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.*
- Judas and Silas stay with the church in Antioch to encourage and strengthen the believers, affirming the message.
- **Lesson 7:** Providing encouragement and support to those who may be confused or struggling with changes helps to build resilience and maintain unity. The church is not just a place for doctrine but also for mutual support.



Prologue...

- *36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.”*
- *37 Now Barnabas ^[m] was determined to take with them John called Mark.*
- *38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work*
- *To Be Continued Next Week....*

