

Acts 15 How The Apostles Used Bible Authority

What we do and teach in the name of Christ is extremely important.

If we love him we are to keep his commandments and follow His example.

1 Jn. 2:3-6 “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

Teach the truth and the result is salvation.

1 Tim. 4:16 “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

If we teach false doctrine then we contradict God are false witnesses in His name.

1 Cor. 15:15 “Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.”

So we must do and teach what is right.

If we love the truth it will set us free.

Jn. 8:31,32 “Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

32 and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

If we do not we will not be saved.

2 Thess. 2:10 “and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”

How do we decide if what we do and teach is right? To find out let us look at how the apostles decided what was the proper doctrine and practice when a controversy over the Law came up in **Acts 15**.

I. Background

A. Preaching to Jews Only

Was to only Jews at Pentecost.

Acts 2:5 “Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven.”

This was the pattern of the early church.

Acts 11:19 “So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.”

B. Inclusion of the Gentiles

Promised that all who were afar off would have the gift of the H.S.

Acts 2:39 “For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.”

Peter tells how God told Him to go to the Gentiles, **Acts 11:1-18**.

Many Jews were upset at this and never did fully accept it.

Preaching to Gentiles at Antioch and great result.

Acts 11:19-21 “So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.

20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.”

Antioch becomes most prominent congregation after Jerusalem

C. Judaizing Teachers

Many thought the Gentiles had to keep the law as well follow the gospel in order to be saved
Came to Antioch saying you must keep the Law to be saved.

Acts 15:1,2 “And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.”

These greatly troubled and misled those in Asia Minor.

Gal. 1:6-8 “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

They had come to turn liberty in Christ to bondage under the Law.

Gal. 2:1-4 “Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

2 And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

3 But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

4 But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.”

II. The Jerusalem Meeting **Acts 15**

A. Brethren Asked that Paul and Barnabas Go vs. 1-3

1 “And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.”

The false teachers troubled the brethren in Antioch and were opposed by Paul and Barnabas.

They claimed to have authority from the apostles and church in Jerusalem.

“some of our number” **15:24**

To settle the matter the disputants were asked to go to Jerusalem these false teachers claimed to get their authority.

Paul went, not because he had to ask the rest of the apostles what was right, but as an accommodation to the brethren in Antioch.

B. False Teachers Given Chance to Speak vs. 5

5 “But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”

Truth has nothing to fear in an open debate.

Isa. 1:18 “come let us reason together”

Stephen debated with the Jews.

Acts 6:8-10 “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.

10 And yet they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”

False teachers do not have to be unfairly treated but they do have to be opposed.

Gal. 2:5 “But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.”

Paul did not yield subjection to them for even an hour.

III. Use Of Bible Authority

A. The Need for Authority

How is the Question to Be Settled?

Do they agree to disagree with the Judaizing Teachers?

Do each of the elders and apostles give their own opinions?

Do they take a vote? How do you fairly and justly settle the dispute?

1.) Look for a Source of Authority

Moses had to keep to the pattern when building the tabernacle.

Heb. 8:5 “who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “SEE,” He says, “THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.”

God gave authority to Christ.

Jn. 5:26,27 “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;

27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”

All authority was given to Christ.

Matt. 28:18 “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

2.) Stick to that Authority

2 Tim. 1:13 “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

(Strg. 5296) Standard (NASB) Pattern (ASV) Form (KJV)

Thayer's - the pattern placed before one to be held fast and copied, a model; and example, pattern

Arndt and Gingrich - model, example, ...in the sense of standard pg. 848

Vines - used metaphorically to denote a pattern, example pg. 124

This pattern and standard is to be held “fast to” (KJV) or “retained” (NASB)

1 Pet. 4:11 “Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

2 Jn. 9 “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.”

Col. 3:17 “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

“His name” = His authority

Name of the Law = Authority of the Law; Name of the President = Authority of the Pres.

So How is That Authority Established?

B. Peter's Speech - Direct Command **Acts 15:7-11**

Acts 15:7-11 “And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, 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, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

God made a choice - Peter should go and preach. **Acts 11:1-18**

Teach what Christ commands.

Matt. 28:19,20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Peter ordered them to be baptized.

Acts 10:48 “And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.”

C. Paul and Barnabas' Speech - Approved Examples **Acts 15:12**

Acts 15:12 “And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.”

God showed He approved of what they were doing (not circumcising) by giving miracles.

Heb. 2:4 “God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

They are to follow examples of the apostles.

2 Thess. 3:7-9 “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you,

8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you;

9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example.”

Imitate Paul. Follow his example.

1 Cor. 11:1 “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

D. James' Speech - Necessary Inference **Acts 15:13-21**

Acts 15:13-21 “And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me.

14 Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

15 And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT,

17 IN ORDER THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’

18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM OF OLD.

19 Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

21 For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

Quote from **Amos 9**.

Amos 9:11,12 “On that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old;

12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name, “Declares the LORD who does this.”

Gentiles would be called, circumcision not mentioned, they were to come as Gentiles not Jews, and so by N.I. they did not have to keep the Law.

Other uses of necessary inference:

Matt. 3:16 “And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him”

Jesus came up out of the water, so baptism must involve going in the water, so immersion, also John baptized where there was much water, Philip & Eunuch went down into

Jesus taught by N.E.

Matt. 22:31,32 “But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying,

32 ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

God is the God of the Living, God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, therefore they must be living, and there is a resurrection

Mark 9:1 “And He was saying to them, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

Kingdom would come with power.

Acts 1:8 “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Apostles will be given power when H.S. comes, So kingdom est. when H.S. came at Pentecost giving the apostles power. **Acts 2:1-4**

E. The Letter Sent - Silence is Not Permissive

15:24 “Some of our number to whom we gave no instruction.”

They spoke where apostles did not.

Just because it is not specifically condemned does not make it right.

Arguing from silence would allow the binding of the Law.

Arguing from silence would allow:

the sacrifice of a lamb followed by a “Lord’s Supper” of beer and pizza
watching a football game instead of a sermon
and then the C & W dance for evening worship.

Any addition to the word of God, specifically condemned or not, is wrong, no matter the size or intent.

Tradition and teaching of man do not lead to godliness, but destruction.

Mark 7:3-9 “(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders;

4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?”

6 And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

7 BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’

8 Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

9 He was also saying to them, “You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.”

F. The Result

15:30-32 “So, when they were sent away, 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, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.”

The people rejoiced and were encouraged by hearing the truth.

Unity and Fellowship of all the Apostles.

Gal. 2:7-10 “But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised

8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),

9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

10 They only asked us to remember the poor--the very thing I also was eager to do.”
False Teachers did not accept the results, so problems for many years.

IV. Applications

All of this is just a unless academic argument unless we apply it today just as they did then.

A. Doctrines

Gal. 5:4 Fallen from grace if you teach what Judaizers teach.

1 Cor. 15:15 False witness against God if you teach there is not resurrection.

2 Tim. 2:17,18 Go astray if you teach the resurrection is already past.

Why would it be different if you teach any other false doctrine?

B. Worship of the Church

5 acts authorized - any other acts are not.

Instrumental music and many other things are mainly supported by arguments from silence - The “It doesn’t say not to...” defense.

C. Work of the Church

1.) Edification

1 Thess. 5:11-14 Encouragement is an obligation

Acts 2:42,46,47 Example of church at Jerusalem in teaching the members

Result: **Acts 8:4** They all could teach others

2.) Evangelism

Matt. 28:19,20 Spoken to apostles, still true.

1 Thess. 1:6-8 This congregation was instrumental in teaching the entire region.

3.) Benevolence

a.) Cares For Own

Acts 2:44,45 The needy were taken care of.

Acts 6:1-6 Take care of needy widows who are members of the church.

b.) Brethren Elsewhere

Acts 11:27-30 Give to saints in other locations, (only if need at home met first).

1 Cor. 16:1-4 Each sent their money by their own messenger (**Rom.15:25-27**; **2 Cor. 8,9**), no sponsoring churches.

4.) Any addition is wrong as it is not authorized and must come from silence.

Let use the standard of authority that the apostles used so that we may all have the same mind

1 Cor. 1:10 “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”