



NG Study Guide: Acts 15:22-35 :: “Creating Gospel-centered Community” [2.5.23]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: God has given His Spirit and His word (the Bible) so that we can be followers of Jesus (disciples). Today, we discover the process, purpose and proof of becoming gospel-centered disciples.

Subject: The Jerusalem Council and the gospel

Object: Be gospel-centered disciples

Context: There was a dispute in the early Church in regard to whether Gentiles (non-Jews) needed to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic law to be saved. Paul and Barnabas went from the church in Antioch, Syria to meet with Church leaders and apostles in Jerusalem around 50 A.D. There Peter, Paul and Barnabas shared their experiences of how the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit apart from performance of the Mosaic Law or ritual circumcision. James, the half-brother of Jesus quoted Amos 9:11-12 to prove that Jews and Gentiles were both saved by faith in Christ (the gospel), apart from ritual or performance of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:1-21).

A. Apostolic Letter(s) (22-27)

1. Letters helps us know how to live in community with God and neighbors

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

The apostles and leaders at the church in Jerusalem determined to send leaders from Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas (22). They sent them with a letter from the apostles and leaders detailing the decision of the apostles regarding the conflict related to the gospel and Gentile believers (22-23).

The New Testament is a collection of God-inspired writings, as the Holy Spirit moved through the **writers**, that help us to know how to live in community with God and neighbors, and explains God’s redemptive plan for humanity.

2. How the NT books (apostolic letters) were identified:

- a. Apostolic authority:** The author or source material (e.g. Peter re Mark’s gospel) has apostolic authority.
- b. Acceptance:** The writing was accepted and circulated among the early church.
- c. Authenticity:** The writing is consistent with the doctrine of the other Scriptures.
- d. Alive:** The writing has a God-honoring life transforming call to action.

3. The letter confirms the gospel (23-27)

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— 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.

a. **The gospel is reason to rejoice (23):** *Greetings* (23) is literally “rejoice.” Similarly, when the recipients read the letter they rejoiced in the gospel message (31).

b. **The gospel declares you are made right with God by faith in Christ, not by religious ritual or performance of a moral code (24-27):** the letter refutes the idea that people are made right with God by a ritual such as circumcision or by the ability to keep the Mosaic law (24). Rituals such as circumcision, baptism, and communion are valuable to remind us what God has done for us in the gospel, our covenant relationship with God, and our identity in Christ. Yet, rituals don’t make us right with God apart from faith in Christ. Similarly, God’s commands in the old and new testaments help us to understand how to live in community with God and neighbors; but trying to be moral without yielding to Christ won’t save you.

This was the first time that this written declaration regarding how people are made right with God was declared by the Church leaders. So they made sure to affirm Barnabas and Paul to the Gentile Christians, as *beloved* (25) and *men who risked their lives for the gospel* (26). They also sent Judas and Silas to confirm the content of the letter (27).

B. Some essentials for life in community with God and neighbors (28-29)

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.

1. Be directed by the Holy Spirit: *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit*, reminds us that the apostolic letters are God-inspired (2Timothy 3:16-17). As Jesus’ disciples we are to be empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8).

2. Avoid idolatry: The very first of the Ten Commandments confronts the dangers of idolatry (Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 6:4). We tend to think of carved images, or pagan gods when we hear the term “idolatry.” Nevertheless, anyone or anything that becomes the master passion of your life, where you look for your ultimate sense of contentment and security, is in effect an idol. We are created to worship, and if you don’t yield to God you will worship something or someone else. The problem is idols can’t restore body, mind, heart, *and* soul, **but** God can. **Idolatry is an obstacle to God’s restoration.**

3. Avoid sexual immorality: It is God’s will that abstain from sexual immorality (1Thessalonians 4:3). God created us with sexual desires (See, Song of Solomon), but we are to submit the desire of our flesh to God’s authority. God wants us to limit sexual intimacy to a covenant marriage relationship. Sexual activity outside of marriage keeps people from discovering intimacy and contentment in Christ; and is an obstacle to intimacy with another human being.

4. Be sensitive to others in the exercise of your liberties: The Gentiles were encouraged to abstain from things that were strangled and blood. Jews would drain blood and not consume the blood of an animal (Leviticus 17:14). For a Jew there is an understanding that life and blood are related. This would help people to understand the significance of the cross. Here, the application, relates to creating gospel-centered community. In the Greco-Roman world, animals that had been offered to idols (pagan gods), and animals that were strangled and the blood wasn’t drained, were sold in meat markets. Jews would have been very offended by these foods. Thus to encourage the forging of community and life in common the Gentiles were exhorted not to partake of these foods. We want to be sensitive to others in the exercise of Christian liberty to create gospel-centered community (Romans 14).

C. The process, purpose and proof of gospel-centered disciples (30-35)

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. 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.

1. Process: Teach people to love, learn, and live the Bible.

The church at Antioch rejoiced over the encouraging truth that people can relate to God through Jesus (30-31). Judas and Silas, who had come from Jerusalem, were *prophets who exhorted and strengthened the believers with many words* (32). Prophets communicate truth from God, and call people to yield to God. The reference to *many words* reminds us that there is much to learn about God. They remained at Antioch *for a time* helps us to appreciate that learning to become a disciple is a process that takes time. Then the entourage from Jerusalem returned with

greetings from the primarily Gentile believers who were now united with primarily Jewish believers as the family of God.

Silas, Paul, Barnabas, remained at Antioch, and continued *teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also* (34-35). They were proclaiming the gospel to reach the lost, and teaching *the word of the Lord*, sound gospel-centered doctrine and exhorting believers to obedience and spiritual maturity. There were also many others who were also transmitting gospel-centered doctrine

Jesus connected the process of making disciples with transmitting gospel-centered doctrine, and obedience – teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). We don't seek to obey to earn God's acceptance, but obey because we have been accepted and discovered God's ways are ideal for community with God and neighbors.

2. Purpose: Become more like Jesus so that we live rightly in community with God and neighbors (Micah 6:8)

The purpose of learning, loving and living the Bible is not an intellectual or moral exercise, but as disciples of Jesus we yearn to become more like Him.

3. Proof: Minds are renewed, and people yield to God as an expression of worship (Romans 12:1-2)

Jesus' followers (disciples) are transformed such that they become more like Jesus, and live rightly in community with God and others. We are empowered by God's Spirit and yield to Him as an expression of worship of God (John 4:23-24).

Communion: Our yielding to God is only reasonable in light of all that God has done for us through Christ and His gospel. In partaking of the elements of communion we are remembering what Jesus has done for us.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What would you consider to be some essentials for Christian living?

Q2. Why might abstaining from idolatry and sexual immorality be priorities today?

Q3. What are some benefits of Bible learning that you've experienced?

Q4. What advice would you give to help learn, love and live the Bible?

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is a helpful article regarding the determination of the New Testament books:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/New-Testament-canon.html>.

2. Please watch this great video from the Bible Project, "What is the Bible?" <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/what-is-bible/>.

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Seek to engage a neighbor where you worship who is not connected to a Neighborhood Group and invite them to participate in your NG.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.