

SERMON FOCUS: Do not impose artificial standards on believers.

SERMON FUNCTION: The hearer will recognize his/her own biases against other Christians.

BACKGROUND:

When we left off two weeks ago, Paul and Barnabas had just finished the first missionary journey and returned to Antioch after establishing churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They're back at the church in Antioch of Syria (the notable Antioch) and it appears that Jewish believers now will be the source of some trouble.

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 15:1-35 CSB

1Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved.” **2**After Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this issue. **3**When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they brought great joy to all the brothers and sisters.

4When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. **5**But some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”

6The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter.

7After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you are aware that in the early days God made a

choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe. **8**And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he also did to us. **9**He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. **10**Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? **11**On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are."

12The whole assembly became silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. **13**After they stopped speaking, James responded, "Brothers, listen to me. **14**Simeon has reported how God first intervened to take from the Gentiles a people for his name. **15**And the words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written:

16After these things I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.

I will rebuild its ruins
and set it up again,

17so that the rest of humanity
may seek the Lord —
even all the Gentiles
who are called by my name —
declares the Lord

who makes these things **18**known from long ago.

19Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God, **20**but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood. **21**For since ancient times, Moses has had those who proclaim him in every city, and every Sabbath day he is read aloud in the synagogues."

22Then the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, decided to select men who were among them and to send them

to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers. [23](#)They wrote: “From the apostles and the elders, your brothers, To the brothers and sisters among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.

[24](#)Since we have heard that some without our authorization went out from us and troubled you with their words and unsettled your hearts, [25](#)we have unanimously decided to select men and send them to you along with our dearly loved Barnabas and Paul, [26](#)who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [27](#)Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who will personally report the same things by word of mouth. [28](#)For it was the Holy Spirit’s decision — and ours — not to place further burdens on you beyond these requirements: [29](#)that you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you keep yourselves from these things. Farewell.”

The Outcome of the Jerusalem Letter

[30](#)So they were sent off and went down to Antioch, and after gathering the assembly, they delivered the letter. [31](#)When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. [32](#)Both Judas and Silas, who were also prophets themselves, encouraged the brothers and sisters and strengthened them with a long message. [33](#)After spending some time there, they were sent back in peace by the brothers and sisters to those who had sent them. [35](#)But Paul and Barnabas, along with many others, remained in Antioch, teaching and proclaiming the word of the Lord.

INTRODUCTION:

2.5 million acres of the United States is on fire. We are in year 2 of an actual plague. Our twenty-year occupation of Afghanistan is ending in spectacular failure. And there’s a hurricane hitting the gulf coast today. And our nation seems more intent than ever to double-down on our sins. What’s the church

doing during all this? According to social media, we are arguing over closings, masks, vaccines, and politics. Arguments within the body of Christ are nothing new. That's what our passage is about today. Today, we're going to see four ways that I should relate to my fellow Christians: I should not add burdens to my fellow Christians, I should not reject fellow Christians, I should not offend my fellow Christians, and I should encourage my fellow Christians.

MESSAGE:

1. I SHOULD NOT ADD BURDENS TO FELLOW CHRISTIANS
 - a. (15:1) Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved."
 - b. They got this from their religious upbringing. This was how people converted to Judaism.
 - c. The circumcision was not the "big" part of this requirement. It was the adherence to the whole Mosaic law, which even those faithful born Jews have not been able to do.
 - d. Different religious groups have tried to add requirements to being a Christian over the years. Some examples: No drinking, smoking, drugs, caffeine, playing cards, dancing, listening to certain types of music, prescribed clothing, and hairstyles. These things are based on man's interpretation.
 - e. Now, we are told that no real Christian would vote a certain way, would wear (or not wear) a mask, would (or would not) get vaccinated, or close a church to prevent people from getting sick. Again, these are man's interpretation of things.

2. I SHOULD NOT REJECT FELLOW CHRISTIANS
 - a. People like these men from Judea, who were following the letter of the law, would have separated themselves from those who were not

circumcised because they were considered unclean.

- b. They would not have even observed the Lord's Supper with them.
- c. (Gal 2:11-14) But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. **12**For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. **13**Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. **14**But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, "If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?"
- d. Even Peter was guilty of separating himself from fellow Christians.
- e. We must not fall into this trap. If someone is accepted by Christ, he must be accepted by us as well.

3. I SHOULD NOT OFFEND FELLOW CHRISTIANS

- a. (15:29) That you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.
- b. Why these things? These are the things that would have been particularly offensive to the Jews.
- c. These things would have been akin to participating in idolatry. These were also things that could be easily avoided in order to not offend their fellow Christians.
- d. How can I avoid offending fellow Christians? I can't always, but I am expected to try.
 - i. What I say?

- ii. What I do?
- iii. What I wear?

4. I SHOULD ENCOURAGE FELLOW CHRISTIANS

- a. (15:30-32) So they were sent off and went down to Antioch, and after gathering the assembly, they delivered the letter. When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Both Judas and Silas, who were also prophets themselves, encouraged the brothers and sisters and strengthened them with a long message.
- b. The Christian life is difficult. We are meant to encourage each other to abide in faithfulness.
- c. We gather strength from each other. If we're busy focusing on ways that we disagree with our fellow Christians, we are not living as Christ expects.

CONCLUSION:

The body of Christ is being separated now in even more ways than ever. It seems that every disagreement results in a new denomination, a new church, or a new batch of followers on social media. But we have to remember that the central message is Christ. His virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, and resurrection from the dead. What will you do about the truth of Christ today?

FOUR QUESTIONS:

- 1. What do you hear God saying to you?
- 2. What keeps you from doing that?
- 3. If you were to do that, what might be a good first step?
- 4. Who are you going to tell?