

Moses and Christ?

Acts 15:1-11.

Sunday morning, February 13, 2011.

I. The nature of the conflict.

- A. It involved certain men who came from Judea; from the surroundings of Jerusalem, to Antioch in Syria where Paul and Barnabas were ministering once again to the folks in what had become their home church.
- B. Paul and Barnabas had been commissioned as missionaries to the Gentiles to whom they had preached a grace and faith-in-Christ based and circumcision-free gospel. Now they had come back to the church in Antioch, and they had reported far and wide all that God had done with and through them among the gentiles, and how “God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” Acts 14:27.
- C. These brothers were from the Jewish sect of the Pharisees (vs. 5), known for their strict adherence to the law of Moses. They had come to faith in Christ, believing that He was the promised Messiah, but they did not believe Christ had come to fulfill and replace Mosaic customs. After all Christ was the Jewish Messiah and it were the Mosaic customs that set the Jews apart from all other nations.
- D. As such they believed that there was something seriously wrong with all these new Gentile converts who had not even been circumcised, and most of them were ignorant about Mosaic customs.
- E. To press their concerns they come to Antioch which was a hotbed of these new uncircumcised converts, and when the issue is going to be addressed by the apostles in Jerusalem they press their concerns there as well.
- F. The unfolding of this conflict; putting Moses and Christ each in their proper place in redemptive history, is the heart and soul of the book of Acts, and of many of the epistles.

There were three kinds of people in the Jewish / Christian community:

- 1. Jews who made a choice between Moses and Christ and went with Moses. These were the unbelieving Jews.
- 2. Those who made a choice between Moses and Christ and went with Christ along with the Gentiles who embraced Christ, never having known Moses. These were the mature Christians in the school of Paul, Barnabas, and Peter in our passage.
- 3. In between were a whole lot of Jews who, in varying degrees, believed that Jesus was their Savior, but that their Jewish traditions certainly helped, or were necessary, and should by not be abandoned, and that the Gentile believers should be taught them; at least circumcision which set them apart from the unbelieving pagan world.

II. Working toward a solution.

- A. Things in Antioch were at a stalemate; neither these Jews, nor Paul and Barnabas would be moved from their position. Now what would they do?
- B. We should take note of two things:
 - 1. What did not happen; this is most significant!
 - First, no church split happened; a great effort was made to preserve the unity

- of the young infant church, and the Lord owned and honored this effort.
- Second, There was no supernatural revelation given at this important junction of the life of the Church; No sheet with clean and unclean animals was let down in the assembly, as had appeared to Peter prior to his visit to Cornelius, nor did anything along these lines happen. Why not? Especially, “why not,” in an age where supernatural manifestations were fairly common. We would certainly expect one here, but to no avail. Instead we are made to look at what was done; and what was done, was done, so that the church going forward down the ages might have a pattern to address the many other issues she would face.
2. What was done to resolve this difficult matter.
- The matter was referred to a general assembly of the Church in Jerusalem, and the church in Antioch sends a delegation: Paul, Barnabas and certain others. Other churches may well have done the same.
 - In Jerusalem the assembly was convened by the apostles, and first, time was allowed for much discussion among the delegates; even animated and heated discussion, for our text uses the word “dispute.”
 - Then the apostles make three presentations to the assembly the substance of which had been the subject matter of the disputes. This was done so that all the delegates might hear the same thing.
 - Peter was the first to speak; he related his visit with Cornelius. Next were Paul and Barnabas; they related what God had done on their missionary journey. The substance of both speeches was anecdotal. Then James speaks, and he puts all that has been related in a Biblical framework, quoting from the prophet Amos.

III. Two powerful reminders from Peter.

- A. That Moses constitutes a yoke “which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.” Why?
- It is because the law continually points out to us our uncleanness and sinfulness, and nothing ever gets resolved because there is a continual need for new sacrifices, making the worshipper look for a better and permanent solution.
- B. “We believe...(he speaks for the other apostles) that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we (Jews) shall be saved in the same manner as they (Gentiles).” This statement must have stunned the assembly, for the mindset of these Jews was that Gentiles could be saved even like the Jews, by becoming Jewish; but Peter is saying that Jews can be saved by becoming like the Gentiles. (By putting their faith in Christ alone.)

IV. Two applications:

- A. What is the ground of your acceptance with God? Our hearts, like the Jews, want to contribute part of it; we want to have something to boast of. Good works; good looks; talented; a good upbringing; a good country or family; etc.
- B. What is your ground for understanding the message of the Bible? Is it between you and the Lord? Or is it between you and the Lord in the context of the Lord’s people? See Ephesians 3:17-19 and 1 Tim. 3:15.