



Solving Problems Bring Progress

“When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15:2).

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“So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation(Acts 15:30-31).

“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. 5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. 12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. 13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: 14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord,

who doeth all these things. 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. 19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. 22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. 24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: 25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. 30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation” (Acts 15:1-31).

King Solomon made a salient point when he said “Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but



much increase is by the strength of the ox" (Proverbs 14:4). This implies mess is an essential by-product of progress that needs to be cleared in order to sustain the progress. Paul and Barnabas had made much progress in winning gentile souls to Christ. In this story, we learn the following:

- 1) Success attracts attention, which sometimes generate controversies. The gentiles have responded positively to the message of salvation by grace, but certain who came down from Judaea demanded circumcision as an addition (vs 1).
- 2) After Paul and Barnabas have had much disputation with these people, they took a right decision to consult with the elders at Jerusalem (vs 2). By taking that step, they were prepared to submit to whatever counsel would be provided by the elders. So, the purpose of their consultation was not to get their ideas on the issue endorsed, and if not endorsed, then they would reject the counsel. That would not be the right attitude to take by any Christian seeking counselling, as most do today.
- 3) While on the way to Jerusalem, they shared the gospel bringing "great joy unto all the brethren" (vs 3).
- 4) At Jerusalem they first declared "all things that Go had done with them" (vs 4). There is always place for testimonies.
- 5) Following this a sect of the Pharisees which believed raised the issue of circumcision (vs 5), which prompted the apostles and elders to come together to consider (vs 6).
- 6) After some debates, Peter reminded them of how made choice among the gentiles and encouraged them not to put extra burden on the gentile believers but rely solely on the grace of God (vs 7-11).
- 7) This calmed the congregation down and allowed Paul and Barnabas to continue with their narration of the miracles and wonders that God had done through them (vs 12).
- 8) Following this, James summed up the case concluding "that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them that they abstain from pollutions of idols...." (vs 13-21).
- 9) James verdict and recommendation pleased

the apostles and elders with the whole church (vs 22); who sent letters through Paul and Barnabas as well as sent additional representatives to confirm the content of the letter verbally (vs 23-29).

- 10) In the letter they pointed out that "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things...." (vs 29). They allowed the Holy Spirit to lead in their deliberations and decisions. Whenever the Holy Spirit is allowed His rightful place, believers of divergent viewpoints can come to a unanimous agreement that brings glory to God.
- 11) It is important to note that after their decision, there were no further dispute from the sect of the Pharisees who interrupted Paul and Barnabas' narration with their issues.
- 12) There is one God, One Holy Spirit, One Jesus and One Holy Scripture (Bible), and those who submit to the Godhead will always be able to see eye to eye on thorny issues.
- 13) Once the council meeting was over, the delegation did not delay in returning to Antioch and reporting to the multitude the outcome of their mission (vs 30).
- 14) The resulting effect on them was "they rejoiced for the consolation" (vs 31).

There will always be problems in life and there are right and wrong ways of handling them. Paul and Barnabas took the right step that maintained the unity of the entire body and glorified God. Jesus advocated a similar principle in Matthew 18:15-17 for all Christians, which if followed correctly should lead to solution of problems.

It is important though for all parties to be prepared to listen to one another and weigh the situation with the facts and scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit. Refusal to listen is often the root cause for non-resolution of issues. Ignoring the Holy Spirit, results in hardened positions from either side that become like impregnable walls that create barriers.

When Jesus is at the centre of the church, family or a group of people, they can always resolve issues and live in peace and harmony.