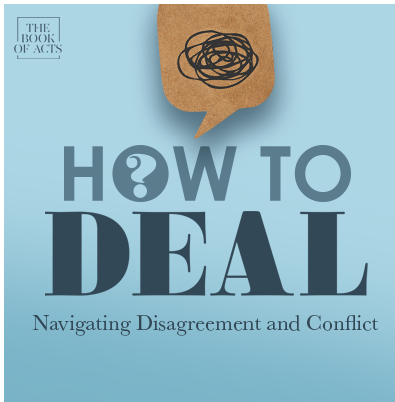




WEEKLY STUDY

How to Deal - Week Two

We continued our How To Deal series with a look at the early church community and a major decision which led to the widespread inclusion of Gentiles into the story of God. Most of us would not be considered a part of this story if it were not for the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. This week, we will discover once again the lengths through which God will go to include the outsider in His story of redemption. Thank God, it is wide enough to include us!

Please note our prayer focus for the week in the box below. Join us in seeing what God will do as we unite in prayer.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for someone you know who feels that they are beyond God's reach. Pray specifically for a sign that God sees them and loves them.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: ACTS 15.1-5 (NIV)

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵ *Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”*

- This was the prevailing question among Jews who were inclined to believe the Gospel. What Jewish laws were still required for Gentiles who were coming to believe in Jesus? Circumcision was an outward sign of covenant for Jews and it was a clear line of distinction between those who were “in” and those who were “outside” of God’s salvation. What are the marks we tend to look for today to discern whether or not a person has received salvation in Jesus’ name? Are they effective and fair markers of salvation? What would others say of the evidence of your salvation?
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- **Prayer Prompt:** ““Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Revelation 7.10)
- *God, I depend on you for my salvation. I know that there is no outward thing that I can do that would cause my salvation. I also know that there are outward signs that show the world that I have been redeemed by the grace shown in Jesus Christ. Help me to depend on your actions and not my own. Amen.*

TUESDAY: ACTS 15.6-11(NIV)

The apostles and elders met to consider this question.⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

- This little speech from Peter set the course for fulfillment of Jesus' commission in Acts 1. This was the moment that the movement would begin to gain traction beyond the walls of Judaism and to the ends of the earth. Peter urged his audience to recognize that Gentiles were coming to the story as people in need of grace, just as they were. Are there times when you have forgotten that it is only the grace of God that has saved you? Where do you see the temptation to claim grace for ourselves and not for others?

- **Prayer Prompt: For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2.11-14)**
- *God, my salvation is a gift of your grace. Forgive me for the ways in which I have claimed it as my own. Swing wide the glimmering gates of your mercy that all might receive your salvation. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: ACTS 15.12(NIV)

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

- This is a beautiful image. A whole crowd that had just been arguing and bickering, came under silence as they heard about the thing that God had just done among people they had never met. Have you ever been stopped in your tracks by an account of God's signs and wonders? Do you have stories of your own that can silence a large crowd if you are brave enough to share them?

- **Prayer Prompt: But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2.4-5)**
- *God, your great mercy is all I need. I want to sit in the stories of your generous, merciful salvation for all of those who believe. Fill me with the gift of story-telling in the way of Barnabas and Paul so that others might come to believe. Amen.*

THURSDAY: ACTS 15.13-21 (NIV)

When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me.¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ “After this I will return

and rebuild David’s fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,

and I will restore it,

¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,

even all the Gentiles who bear my name,

says the Lord, who does these things’—

¹⁸ things known from long ago.

¹⁹ “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

- James quotes the prophet Amos, a tactic which was a powerful connection to the tradition that the “certain people” were holding fast to. Amos anticipated a time when God would address the Gentiles “who bear my name”. The way for the Good News had been prepared long before! Are there unnecessary barriers for people turning to God in today’s world? How can the church open the doors to those who feel like they are outside of God’s redemptive story?

- **Prayer Prompt: These are the ones I look on with favor:**
those who are humble and contrite in spirit,
and who tremble at my word. (Isaiah 66.2)
- *God, give me a heart for those who feel like they are outside of your salvation. Use me to hold the doors open for all who seek you. Amen.*

FRIDAY: ACTS 15.23-29(NIV)

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:²⁹ You are to abstain from

food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

- This is the result of the Jerusalem Council. They sent word, by writing and by mouth, about the implications of the judgment that Gentiles were not subject to all of the Jewish laws in order to be saved. They were, however, called to avoid the pagan activities that had been witnessed by Paul and Barnabas. How do you discern and define the guardrails that God has in place for your life?
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- **Prayer Prompt: It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5.1)**
- *God, you have set me free in Christ, and yet I am yoked to him. May I live into that kind of freedom more and more. Amen.*

SATURDAY: TITUS 3.9-11 (NIV)

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

- The church of Jesus Christ has not been immune to controversies and scandals. This truth has brought us to our knees time and again. But, through God's grace and divine mission, the church still stands as a witness to the Good News of Jesus. How have you seen controversies seem to sidetrack the mission of the church? Where do you see mercy breaking through even the most difficult of quarrels?
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- **Prayer Prompt: A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.**

² **The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge,
but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.**

³ **The eyes of the LORD are everywhere,
keeping watch on the wicked and the good. (Proverbs 15.1-3)**

- *Merciful God, Fill me with grace and wisdom to have the gentle answer that turns away wrath. Amen.*

GROUP DISCUSSION

We heard about the Wesleyan concept of discernment which includes:

Reason- Our God-given intellect is a tool for understanding and discernment

Experience- What we have seen, witnessed, and been formed by

Tradition- What we we been handed from previous generations

SCRIPTURE- The highest authority for Christians

As you consider how God is leading you, and how you are called to interact with the world around you, how might you discern the right way to go using each of these four things?