

Us Versus Them

Setting

Paul and Barnabas traveling through turkey ran into opposition from Jewish believers. It was such a heated debate that they had to head back to Jerusalem to take it up with the Apostles and Elders of the mother church.

What was the pivotal problem?

The role the Law of Moses should play in the life of the Gentile Christians. See vs. 2, 7, 10, 19, 24, 28. Issue decided in AD 49 but continued on another 50 years.

Three laws Jews are dealing with in the first century.

- (1) The Law of God written with His own finger, what we call the Ten Commandments;
- (2) The law of Moses given by God but written down by Moses which dealt with various types of legalities we will be discussing momentarily; and
- (3) The rules of the Rabbis which are their interpretations and applications of the other two laws.

Laws of Moses (603 of them!)

Civil Law In the civil laws there are classifications of murder, what to do with broken vows and contracts, the laws of restitution, to be settled in the court of law. Our judicial system today is built upon the laws of Moses.

Health Laws Clean and unclean animals, quarantining when sick, wearing face coverings when you have a communicable disease, how to handle issues of blood and other bodily fluids, leprosy. Health laws for the human race ages ago still apply to the human race today.

Moral Laws adultery, incest, homosexuality, mediums and witchcraft, stealing, honoring God's name, sabbath, what to do with disobedient children and false prophets, and other laws which expanded on the Ten Commandments. Moral laws are moral laws for everyone of all time.

International Laws How to relate to Gentiles, or people of other nations

Laws of Giving For the poor, to the temple and priests – tithe. NT tells us the laws of giving still apply in the NT era and today.

Ceremonial Laws Priests and sacrifices and temples and feasts including the ceremony of circumcision. What goes, and the NT bears this out repeatedly, are the ceremonial laws. Jesus, had come so they no longer needed the replica. Addressed in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Hebrews, and Revelation. Also addressed by Matthew, John and throughout the book of Acts.

And so on...

The solution of the Jerusalem Council: to recognize the requirement of keeping the ceremonial laws of Moses was removed from the Gentiles. They were optional, not required.

How did they come to this understanding? Acts 15:6 (instruction manual for navigating troubled waters.) "Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter." 1) They got together and 2) deliberated the matter together.

Acts 1:7 begins Peter's testimony, followed by the stories of Paul & Barnabas from their missionary journeys (Acts 15:12) and finally summed up by James, the brother of Jesus (Acts 15:19-21)

Four stipulations from Moses that apply to Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:28, 29)

- Leviticus 17:8, 9 - Prohibition on sacrificing to Idols
- Leviticus 17:10-12 - Prohibition on eating blood
- Leviticus 17:13-15 - Prohibition on eating strangled animals
- Leviticus 18:1-26 - Prohibitions against various forms of sexual immorality

So the Apostles searched the scriptures to help them understand what to do with the situation before them and they found their answer in the Bible.

1. They met together
2. They talked it out
3. They listened to testimonies of God's activities around and through them
4. They studied their Bibles
5. And they did one more thing - prayed. "It seemed good to the HS and to us..."

Acts 15, law of Moses, not the law of God.

- The law of God is for all people of all time everywhere.
- The law of Moses is of a very different nature than the Law of God, especially those laws of Moses we call ceremonial laws or Levitical Laws—regulating the temple and its services, the priests and the sacrifices, the feasts and circumcision.

There is one further problem with adhering to the Law of Moses. It generates a kind of "us versus them" attitude. Acts 15:1, 5. "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' "

"You cannot be saved" - the language choice of judgmental people. Can any man say that of another human being? Did Adam keep the law of Moses, or Enoch or Abraham, Isaac or Jacob?

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." (Acts 15:5)

The Pharisees believed it was their role to command people to keep Moses Law when no such command existed. It takes a superiority complex to do this. To command "them" to keep a law they themselves could not keep. Instead of seeing some as more special than others, it would be well for us all, like God does, to desire all men, Jews and Gentiles, to be saved. And to believe what Peter taught that salvation comes to all freely who believe.

Acts 15:8, 9 – "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."

If the Holy Spirit makes no distinction between different people, then neither should we.