

The Church of the Holy Apostles;
A Bible Study on the Book of Acts
Based upon the Homilies of St John Chrysostom (SJC)
Study Guide – October 14, 2015, Acts 15.13-35 - Homily 33

Prayer before reading of the Holy Scriptures: Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things which are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all holy, good and life giving Spirit, always now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Chapter 15 v. 13-17 *And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'*

James, the Brother of Our Lord, was the Bishop of Jerusalem, and had jurisdiction even though Peter was the leaders of the Apostles.

“Simon had declared....and the prophets agree...” Argument is made from the “old” and the “new” prophets.ⁱ Notice the great orderliness and humility of the proceedings. SJC “No word speaks John here, no word the other Apostles, but held their peace, for James was invested with the chief rule, and think it no hardship. So clean was their soul from love of glory.”

The “Kingdom of David” does in fact now stand – The Church. It was FOR THE GENTILES that the Kingdom exists now as the Church.

Chapter 15 v. 18-21 *"Known to God from eternity are all His works. "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, "but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*

“From all eternity...” Nothing new. God eternally planned for the Gentiles to enter the Church

James AS Bishop, with authority, gives the conclusion inspired by the Law to give confidence to the Jews. SJC

“Since then they had heard of the Law, with good reason he enjoins these things from the Law, that he may not seem to make it of no authority. And (yet) observe how he does not let them be told these things from the Law, but from himself, saying, It is not that I heard these things from the Law, but how? We have judged.”

The bodily self-control was “necessary” to avoid the great potential of evils for the flesh.

Chapter 15 v. 22-29 *Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" -- to whom we gave no such commandment -- it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.*

The Apostles to not merely enact the law, but send witnesses to verify the decision to avoid accusations against Paul and Barnabas.

“And to us...” This was not a ruling from ‘on high’ but a consensus of those gathered. SJC “Then to show that they do not act despotically, that all are agreed in this, that with deliberation they write this— It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send men of ours whom we have chosen Acts 15:25— then, that it may not look like disparagement of Paul and Barnabas, that those men are sent, observe the encomium passed upon them— together with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.”

Nothing was said about the those who taught wrong, but the facts. There was no need to ‘beat a dead horse.’

Since the Law was burdensome and ultimately was not a success to change lives, only “these necessary things” were included. Nothing extra, nothing argumentative etc. SJC “See here a brief Epistle, with nothing more in it (than was needed), neither arts of persuasion (κατασκευὰς) nor reasonings, but simply a command: for it was the Spirit's legislating.”

Rules not found in the NT, but still have authority. SJC “For these things the New Testament did not enjoin: we nowhere find that Christ discoursed about these matters; but these things they take from the Law.”

“Strangled and blood” refer to murder – See also Genesis 9.5

Even Saint Paul had to change!!!!

Chapter 15 v. 30-35 *So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.*

The teaching continued in Antioch both by Paul and Barnabas AND Judas and Silas. This shows the unity of the Apostles and the doctrine is not from one person, but the Church.

Teaching on “How to Treat Heresy” – (see Homily 33, p 210-211)

1. It is impossible that some evil does not coexist when good work is taking place.
2. Proof of something being true IS that people twist the truth to meet their needs
3. The existence of different Scripture interpretations requires discernment
4. Only spineless people blindly accept something
5. Ignoring the truth ‘just because’ of many interpretations has no place in the Church.

Life Application Challenge – (Homily 33, p 211) NO MORE EXCUSES!

“Then let us not make pretexts and excuses, and all will be easy. For, to show you that all this is mere excuse, answer me this: Do you know what you ought to do, and what to leave undone? Then why do you not what you ought? Do that, and by right reason seek of God, and He will assuredly reveal it to you.”

ⁱ Here we should note that Saint John Chrysostom considers Simon to be Symeon (see Luke 2.29-32) who held Christ in his arms. It is more properly known as Simon Peter who was present. EITHER WAY, it remains true since a “new” prophet was verified by the “old” prophets.