

**THE SPIRIT
EMPOWERED**

CHURCH

The Future of the Church

Acts 15: The Church at a Crossroads

- Jesus-followers were Jewish
- Gentiles started following Jesus
- Judaizers insisted that Gentile Christians be circumcised
- Paul vehemently disagreed
- The Antioch church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem

What Question Did They Need to Answer?

- Surface: Do you have to become a Jew to become a Christian?
- Deeper: What will the future of the Christian movement look like?
- Strong arguments on both sides

Tradition and Caution

- Gentile converts to Judaism had always been circumcised
- Pharisees: Purity is necessary to maintain God's favor
- Jews were excused from emperor worship

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Paul's Argument: Trust Jesus

¹⁹ For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. ²⁰ My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.

(Galatians 2:19-21 NLT)

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The Apostles and Elders Had to Decide

- Will we risk God's wrath and Rome's wrath by allowing Gentiles into our community?

— Or —

- Will we make Gentiles jump through Jewish hoops before they can be Christians?

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How Did They Decide?

- They sought Holy Spirit's guidance
- They remembered Peter and Cornelius
- They remembered God's plan in Scripture

How Did They Decide?

- They remembered Jesus' parting words:
"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere-- in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NLT)
- They agreed that Jesus didn't die for nothing
"We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus."
(Acts 15:11 NLT)

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The Letter to Gentile Believers

²⁸ "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements:..." (Acts 15:28 NLT)

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The Church Followed Jesus

- They chose faith over safety
- Soon things got much riskier
- Jesus sacrificed and so did they
- God brought extraordinary blessings

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Spirit-Empowered Future

- Holy Spirit sometimes takes us where we aren't sure we want to go, but where God knows is best.
- God knows and plans. We trust and follow.

God Knows and Plans. We Trust and Follow.

Me

- An inordinate attraction/warped desire
- A crossroads
- A difficult change
- God's kindness

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God Knows and Plans. We Trust and Follow.

You

- Faith is spelled R I S K
- Holy Spirit issues risky invitations
- Play it safe or walk on water?
- Where could you be safer?

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God Knows and Plans. We Trust and Follow.

Us

- What if our church grows?
- What if our church becomes more inclusive?
- What if Holy Spirit comes even more powerfully?
- Whose church is it?

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We're a Spirit-Empowered Church

- Holy Spirit is wise, loving, and strong enough to lead us into the most joyous and satisfying future possible.
- Will you play it safe or risk following Jesus?

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Challenge

Ask Holy Spirit to give you a risky assignment and then do it and see what unexpected, wonderful things happen.

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