

Trouble Winds a Blowing Acts 15:1-5

At this point for several years, Gentiles had been brought to faith in Christ and were being welcomed into the church. Luke is at pains to record this, often with the resultant rejoicing. **Cf. 11:18; 11:20; 11:23**

All that was sporadic and piecemeal. What occurred under Paul was different. It was purposeful, audacious, and systematic. Soon the trickle became a torrent. **Cf. 13:46; 14:1, 27.**

How would the Jewish leaders handle this? In theory, it shouldn't have been difficult at all. The OT prepared them for it. **Cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 2 & 60.**

What questions would it raise for the rest of the body? It was probably assumed Gentiles would be circumcised and come under the Mosaic Law, becoming essentially Jews. Instead, they were (1) baptized bypassing circumcision (2) retaining their former ethnic and racial identity and not embracing Mosaic strictures, let alone becoming Jews. This raised important foundational questions:

1. **The incident in question. vv. 1-5.** The joy and sense of gospel attainment was swiftly disrupted by those Paul would later refer to as 'troublers' (This reflects the South Galatians theory. The events recorded in Galatians largely reflect this incident. **Cf. Gal. 1:7; 5:10.**) They were Pharisees (v. 5), zealous for the law (21:20) and had organized into pressure groups (Judaizers). They were probably not against Gentile inclusion but it must come under the Jewish umbrella giving Israel a continued sense of primacy.
 - a. **They made two charges:** Salvation was not possible apart from circumcision. (v.1) The Law of Moses was binding on Gentiles. (v.5) This struck at the foundation of Christian faith. Must Moses complete what Jesus began? Was Christ' work sufficient?
 - b. **Paul saw the critical nature of the issue with unique clarity. (vv. 2-4)** His indignation increased when the issue rose high enough to cause Peter to equivocate and many were caught up in the inconsistency. **Cf. Ga. 2:11-14.** He saw that it wasn't some Jewish practices at stake but the gospel itself.
 - i. Is the sinner saved by the grace of God alone, through faith in the finished work of Christ alone?
 - ii. Are we saved through a mixture of the work of Christ plus our own good works and religious performances? Cf. Acts 13:38-39; Ga 5:1-6
 - iii. Is Christianity a sect of Judaism or is it truly a multi-national family? What is the role of the Mosaic Law under the New Covenant? **Cf. Ga. 3:19-29**(The

law had three divisions and three functions: rule of life, heart mirror and restraint for sin)

- c. **Antioch called for a church council. v.2b.** Several observations are worth making here.
- i. The importance of doctrine. Doctrine is critical to the health and well being of the church. **Cf. Gal. 1:6-9; Eph. 4:14-16; 1 Tim. 1:3-7.**
 - ii. The importance of contending for right doctrine. **"No small dissension and debate..." Cf. Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 1:3-7, Jude 1:3-4.** How glad we can be that they didn't share the modern disdain for debate and distaste for contending.
 - iii. The structure of the church. It is representative, independent, connected and has plurality of elders but is not hierarchical.
 - iv. The importance of councils. The councils can be a great means of clarifying doctrine, ending controversy and promoting peace in the church. **Illustr. Chicago council on inerrancy.**