

## Doing Things Differently – Acts Chapter 15



As more Gentiles were welcomed into the fellowship of the young Church, the Jewish believers had some big adjustments to make to the ways they thought and acted. Many of them felt that in order to become members of the church, Gentile believers should first be required to adopt the requirements of the Jewish Law, which for men included circumcision. Acts 15 tells of an important meeting in Jerusalem to discuss the matter. The outcome was that, with a few exceptions, no additional requirements were to be placed on Gentile Christians, for, as Peter said, “we believe and are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are.” (verse 11).

This was, however, not the end of the matter, as some of the Jewish believers still found it very difficult to accept that Gentiles who did not observe the Law of Moses as they did could belong to the same Church as themselves. Paul’s letter to the Galatians shows just how heated the arguments could become.

Adjusting to change can be difficult. Our own present situation is in many ways far removed from that of the early Church, but in other ways it resembles it. We have had to make big changes to our forms of worship, closing the buildings we used to attend each Sunday and learning how to use Zoom, live streaming and so on. For some of us this has been a much greater struggle than for others. Not only have we had to wrestle with the technology, we have also had to adopt a new mindset in accepting these digital forms of worship as real and authentic.

Now some churches are planning to reopen their buildings for worship, but that is raising new questions of how we deal with social distancing, face coverings, cleaning and so on. Things will definitely not be the same as they were before lockdown. And as with the Church in the Acts of the Apostles, making changes gives rise to arguments, sometimes quite heated ones!

Some churches, however, have reported that their online worship has drawn bigger “congregations” than their church services used to before the lockdown was introduced. It seems that people who for one reason or another found it hard to walk into a church building on a Sunday are finding that they appreciate being able to join a virtual service. The Spirit is still moving in this new and unprecedented situation.

Acts 15 ends with what the Good News Bible describes as a “sharp argument” between Paul and Barnabas over another matter, which led to their separation. Both men then went off on their own missionary journeys. It is sad when disagreements in the church lead to divisions, but, if we go on seeking His will, God can use even such regrettable occurrences as these to His glory.

**A prayer:**

*Most High and glorious God, enlighten the darkness of our hearts and give us a true faith, a certain hope and a perfect love. Give us a sense of the divine and knowledge of yourself, so that we may do everything in fulfilment of your holy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*  
AMEN (St Francis of Assisi, 1182 – 1226)

**- Rev John Barnett**