

Acts 15 is about believing God

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BIG SANDY, Texas—When our specific congregation formed in 1995, we continued on a journey that led us to a deepening understanding about God's relationship with believers.

Previously, many of us placed too much emphasis upon the binding opinions of church leaders. Those decisions were binding upon us only because we gave the leaders that power over us.

Individuals who overemphasized the power of church leaders even used scriptures to support their approach. One such section of scriptures is found in Acts 15, when the apostles and elders made a proclamation after meeting in Jerusalem.

Many people used these verses from the New Testament to explain their opinions that church leaders established doctrine for God at that time in history and that church leaders can establish doctrine for God in the present.

But did the church leaders really establish doctrine at that time? Or did they merely recognize the truth that God was demonstrating?

The ideas mentioned in this article are not meant to encourage people to condemn believers who still place too much emphasis upon church leaders, or to condemn all church leaders.

On the contrary, maybe this article can help a person (even an apparent church leader) to see a glimmer of truth about the subject.

- Church leaders are supposed to be helpful servants, and not overlords (1 Peter 5:2-3).
- Church leaders have no dominion over the faith of believers, but should be helpers of their joy (2 Corinthians 1:24).
- Church leaders have the opportunity and responsibility to direct people to God and to the word of His grace (Acts 20:32).

Following is a simple test with seven questions. Each question has two options. Choose the answer that most accurately reflects the truth about the circumstances surrounding Acts 15.

Question No. 1: What happened in Acts 15?

- a. The apostles decided truth for God.
- b. The apostles confirmed the eyewitness reports of what God was doing (Acts 10:44-48).

Question No. 2: Why did some saints believe that circumcision was required for salvation (Acts 15:1)?

- a. They followed Baal.
- b. They believed Genesis 17:1-14 and Exodus 12:43-50.

Question No. 3: Had God given any indication that He might adjust His administration of circumcision?

- a. No. Either the apostles decided for God, or God made a rash and spontaneous decision.
- b. Yes. Deuteronomy 10:16, Deuteronomy 30:6 and Jeremiah 4:4 all mention circumcision of the heart. Of course, we have the advantage of hindsight.

Question No. 4: When did the decision about salvation being offered to the gentiles become apparent to the apostles?

- a. The decision became apparent to the apostles when they made the decision for God.
- b. Peter saw the effects of God pouring out His Spirit on the gentiles (Acts 10:44-48). Paul and Barnabas also saw the effects of God pouring out His Spirit on the gentiles. The other apostles heard the eyewitness reports from Peter, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:6-29).

Question No. 5: Should the eyewitnesses have waited for a pronouncement by church leaders before accepting what God was doing?

- a. Yes, they should have ignored what they saw God doing and waited until authorized leaders confirmed what God was doing.
- b. No, they should have believed what they saw God doing.

Question No. 6: What should the eyewitnesses have done if the group of men announced a different decision about circumcision?

- a. Believe the interpretation and proclamation of the apostles—even when it was wrong.
- b. Believe God.

Question No. 7: What would God have done if the apostles had announced a different decision about circumcision?

- a. God would have changed His mind about the gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit and would have revoked His Spirit from the gentiles.
- b. God would have continued His will, even if people did not recognize it or accept it.