

Lesson #3-33***The First Church Council***

Acts 15:1-18

**Key Verse:**

On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

Acts 15:11

The Point:

The will of God can only be revealed when we listen to one another, to our faith tradition, and to the story of the Bible.

Linguistic Context

- The Greek word “*kaí*” at the beginning of v. 1 can be translated in many ways: then, and, but. A translation of “but” may better help set up the change in direction marked by this story: we are moving from successful mission trips to trouble within the church at “home” in Jerusalem.¹

Common Misunderstandings

- While the characters in today’s passage seek to discern and quote the voice of God, the passage does not encourage careless claiming of God’s voice. “It should not become a means for letting people claim special insight into God’s intentions for the purpose of overwhelming the minority opinion (or, for that matter, the majority opinion).”² Instead, readers must recognize the multi-faceted ways in which the conversation ensues: through listening and dialogue with one another, with tradition, and with Scripture.
- The issue in today’s story is not just about tradition versus innovation. As the careful reader will learn, the spirit of the circumcision tradition was about inclusion into the life and work of God. The question in today’s story is about delivering the promise of God to the world, when in fact “this was what the ‘tradition,’ at its best was actually about all along.”³
- We must not read this story with the assumption that the Jewish law represents flat legalism and traditional Jewish theology sees God as a legalistic God. In fact, “Jews knew that God is gracious and forgiving.”⁴ Following the law, then, was not a requirement for salvation but a mark of identity as one of God’s faithful.⁵

¹ William H. Willimon, *Interpretation: Acts* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 128.

² Willimon, 132.

³ N.T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone: Part 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 41.

⁴ Willimon, 131.

⁵ Ibid.



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