

Denominations...Good or Bad?

Acts 15 and 16

***One of those “I am better than you are things”...an “If you don’t play by my rules, you don’t play” things.
Remember when you were a kid?***

Acts 15:1-35

Requirements to Join the Fraternity of Brothers and Sisters of the Royal Order of Jesus Christ (Jews that preached from the Church at Jerusalem)

- ***Be Circumcised according to the Law of Moses/Custom taught by Moses (v.1)***
- ***Keep the Law of Moses/Obey the Law of Moses (v. 5)***

Dispute/Disagreement between Paul and Silas...and the Jews from the Church at Jerusalem.

A group went from the Church at Antioch to the Church Headquarters in Jerusalem...Paul, Barnabas, and some other believers...to get their feelings on this matter.

Outcome: A written message sent to the Antioch Church stating a very positive message...It was not sent by mail...but hand carried. Besides Paul and Silas.

Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas.

A letter without the personal touch could have:

- ⇒ ***sounded coldly official***
- ⇒ ***been taken the wrong way***

“Many a time if a personal visit is paid instead of someone being content to send a letter, much trouble can be avoided.”

The letter contained some decisions the Church Council had made:

- ***Don’t eat meat offered to idols (Abstain from the contamination of idols)***
- ***Abstain from fornication***
- ***Abstain from eating things strangled and from blood.***

By observing these few things, the Church became “One in the Lord”...Jew and Gentile were saved by grace, not of works...The Church of Jesus Christ was based on Faith...not on Fear...based on free grace...not on rigid rules required by man....based on obedience and allegiance...not on programs and religious ceremonies.

So long as a denomination’s requirements are based on “Jesus as the only way.... it is through faith in Him that we achieve forgiveness of sin...and repentance of sin is asked for by the person seeking salvation, that denomination is carrying out God’s gospel plan.

Acts 15:36-41

The first serious personal conflict between Paul and Barnabas.

Paul did not want Mark (John Mark) to accompany them to the churches that had been established earlier.

Decision: Paul and Silas went together...and Barnabas and John Mark went together...to separate parts of the world.

What good things happened because of this disagreement?

- *John Mark was matured in the faith*
- *Paul matured in the faith*
- *The gospel was spread even to the uttermost parts of the world*

When there are disagreements in the Church....Will it hurt the thrust of the gospel or help propel the Word of God to the world?

Acts 16:1-5

Paul and Silas accepts a young man to accompany them...Timothy. Timothy:

- *A young man with a good heritage...good mother and a good grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5)*
- *Paul's Messenger (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:2-6)*
- *With Paul while Paul was in prison at Rome (Philippians 1:1; 2:19)*
- *Called "Paul's beloved son" (1 Cor. 4:17)*
- *Timothy's and Paul's mind was in one accord...Paul said "We are on the same page...his ways are my ways."*
- *Paul was counting on Timothy to continue his ministry when Paul left this world for a better place.*
- *Was not a full blooded Jew...Son of a mixed marriage*

Paul was willing to accept Timothy as a brother...showing that Paul had broken down the traditional Jewish barriers.

Acts 16:6-15

The Holy Spirit leads Paul to go where He leads.

Why not the Roman Province of Asia... (Where the 7 churches mentioned in Revelation were? Why not Bithynia...?)

- *It could have been a word of a prophet*
- *It may have been a vision*
- *It could have been a deep inner conviction*
- *It could have been ill-health...consequence of that "thorn in the flesh."*

Why is this likely? Luke appears on the scene (v. 10)

Europe's first convert ...a lady who sold purple cloth...from Thyatira. A very wealthy woman, Lydia.

Lydia...

- *Reverenced God*
- *Listened to Paul's message*
- *Convicted...and opened her heart to Jesus*
- *Heeded to what Paul said*

Her first reaction...she opened her home to Paul and his friends.

Paul says that Christian character should be always "given to hospitality" (Romans 12:13) and to "practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1 Peter 4:9)

A Christian home should be one with an open door to the needs of the saints.

Arrested, Tested, and Vested...

Acts 16:16-24...Arrested

Arrested for Doing Good.

A girl vexed with a spirit...whom men had been using and abusing in order to gain wealth (used her ability to guide men about their future) was harassing Paul and Silas. Paul was tired of the harassment and saw that there was a need for the girl to be released of the evil spirit. Paul called on Jesus and Jesus loosed her.

Men saw that Jesus had taken away their profit and called on the Roman magistrates to defend the cause of the Roman citizens against a Jew.

Paul and Silas placed in prison...and chained.

Acts 16:25-40...Tested

A Miracle on top of a Miracle...

The chains and prison doors were opened by an earthquake...God's earthquake (miracle).

God is not a partial God....

- *Lydia...upper class citizen saved*
- *Slave girl healed of the evil spirit...lower class citizen*
- *The Jailer....middle class Roman citizen saved...and his house.*

Paul...3 things noted here:

- (1) *He could sing hymns when he was chained in prison....In Jesus there is freedom no matter where you are.*
- (2) *He held no grudges. Paul was willing to open the door of salvation to the man that shut the prison doors on him.*
- (3) *He could stand on his dignity. Being a Roman citizen, Paul knew that scourging a Roman citizen was against the law punishable by death. He did not do this for his sake...but, for the Christians in Philippi.*

We must be willing to stand up for our rights...As a Christian, we must stand for truth....never wavering.

VESTED...Paul was one of those who knew whom he believed and was persuaded that God is able to keep that which was committed unto Him (Jesus) against that day.

Paul was vested in the promise of the believer...He was vested in the Kingdom of God...Promised and to be fulfilled when Paul broke the sound-barrier into heaven's gate...dying, but living. Living with Jesus...vested in faith and security of the believer!

Acts 17:1-9

Everywhere Paul, Peter and the other disciples of “the Living Christ Jesus” went, there would be trouble in camp and disturbance among the people. What does this mean?

- (1) The message of Jesus convicts**
- (2) The gospel is “good news” to them that open their hearts...and “bad news” for the enemies of the gospel**
- (3) When Jesus is preached, hearts must respond..either positively or negatively**
- (4) When disciples share the gospel, Satan responds with his character traits ...he wants to “kill, steal, and destroy.”**

But.....there was a city where the Jews were willing to listen (Acts 17:10-15) In Beroea (60 miles west of Thessalonica), the Jews and Gentiles listened to Paul and Silas tell them the good news....these “men of finer character” than those in Thessalonica, searched the scriptures. The main thing that we see here is that “when people search the scriptures and are willing to listen to their hearts, not their heads, they will come to the right and healthy conclusion.

That conclusion...that heaven is worth the effort and problems we encounter while we are on earth.

Arrested for doing good...Tested for faith...Vested in a “heavenl