

Week of May 27-June 2

## **AGREE TO DISAGREE?**

**Scripture Reading:** Read Acts chapter 15

You, no doubt, have heard the statement, “We’ll just have to agree to disagree.” It’s usually used when two parties have reached an impasse that can’t be resolved. But, is this a valid solution for a Christian? Doesn’t it detract from God’s desire for unity in his church? Shouldn’t believers be able to work out their differences and come to a healthy resolution? Should and can are two different matters, as we see in today’s reading.

Acts chapter 15 describes two situations where conflict developed in the body of Christ. Let’s take a look at each case in a little more depth.

As the church grew in numbers and more and more Gentiles entered the church, a doctrinal question arose as to the basis on which Gentiles were to be saved. No believer questioned that salvation was through Jesus. The issue was whether Gentiles had to become Jews first (i.e. convert to Judaism and submit to the law of circumcision as an outward sign) before they were eligible to be saved by Jesus. It led to such division in the church that a church council was called in Jerusalem to address the matter. Each party was able to present their case and, then, the final decision was pronounced by James, the brother of Jesus, and leader of the Jerusalem church. The decision, in a nutshell, was that conversion to Judaism was not required of Gentiles. It was a decision with which all parties agreed. Doctrinal purity was maintained and unity was preserved.

Regarding the second issue, Paul wanted to take another missionary journey to check on the churches planted on his previous trip. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along with them but Paul was not in favor. The disagreement became so great that it split up the missionary team of Paul and Barnabas. Paul joined with Silas and took off on his second trip while Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus. They were never able to reach an agreement. So, who was right? Barnabas or Paul? Actually, they both were. They just had different perspectives. Barnabas focused on the needs of the one – Mark needed a chance to recover from failure (Acts 13:13). Paul focused on the needs of the many – he was working with multiple churches and needed a team he could count on that wouldn’t quit if things became difficult. Their different perspectives led to different conclusions and a disagreement they couldn’t resolve. They had to agree to disagree.

So, what conclusions can we draw? In the life of the church, there will be times when conflict will develop. Where doctrine is concerned, there must be unity on the essentials as in the first case above. Where personal preferences are concerned, whether in areas where Scripture is not clear or in the area of personal preferences/perspective, resolution may not be achievable as in the second case above. In those cases, we really do need to agree to disagree but do so in love.

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** Explore any areas where you have agreed to disagree that actually need to be worked through for agreement (i.e. doctrinal essentials). Are there other areas where you have tried to force an issue that really should be an “agree to disagree” issue? Pray for clarity from the Lord and deal with the issues accordingly.

**Take-a-way:** *In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.*

*Rupertus (Peter) Meldenius (17<sup>th</sup> century German theologian)*