

The First Church Council
Message 7 in the series, "Faith under Fire"

"While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.' Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone's joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted." Acts 15:1-3 (NLT)

1. There will always be people in your life who try to discredit the work you are doing.

"When David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking to the men, he was angry. 'What are you doing around here anyway?' he demanded. 'What about those few sheep you're supposed to be taking care of? I know about your pride and deceit. You just want to see the battle!' 'What have I done now?' David replied. 'I was only asking a question!' He walked over to some others and asked them the same thing and received the same answer." 1 Samuel 17:28-30 (NLT)

"When Jesus had finished telling these stories and illustrations, he left that part of the country. He returned to Nazareth, his hometown. When he taught there in the synagogue, everyone was amazed and said, 'Where does he get this wisdom and the power to do miracles? He's just the carpenter's son, and we know Mary, his mother, and his brothers — James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. All his sisters live right here among us. Where did he learn all these things?' And they were deeply offended and refused to believe in him." Matthew 13:53-57 (NLT)

"When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, 'The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.' So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue." Acts 15:4-6 (NLT)

2. The goal in conflict is not to win the argument — it is to resolve the issue.

"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." James 1:19 (NLT)

"Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish." Proverbs 18:13 (NLT)

"Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions."
Proverbs 18:2 (NLT)

"At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: 'Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.'" Acts 15:7-11 (NLT)

3. You can say the right things and still send the wrong message if your actions don't line up with your words.

"But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward,

when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, 'Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions?'" Galatians 2:11-14 (NLT)

"Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. When they had finished, James stood and said, 'Brothers, listen to me. Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: 'Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine. The Lord has spoken—he who made these things known so long ago.' And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.'" Acts 15:12-21 (NLT)

4. When the early church faced its greatest conflict, the Jerusalem Council resolved it with one ruling principle — honor one another.

Jews were instructed — do not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

- No circumcision — the central issue that sparked the entire council
- No requirement to keep the full Law of Moses
- No Jewish dietary laws (Kosher) beyond the four basic rulings
- No observance of the Jewish Sabbath
- No observance of Jewish feasts and festivals
- No Jewish purification rituals or ceremonial washing

Gentiles were instructed — honor Jewish practices since they would be doing life together.

- **Abstain from food sacrificed to idols.** This honored Jewish believers who would have been deeply offended by anything connected to idol worship. It said to the Gentiles — your freedom is real, but honor your brothers and sisters enough to lay it down.
- **Abstain from sexual immorality.** This honored the holiness of God and the dignity of every person. Sexual purity was not just a rule — it was a declaration that people are not objects. Honor God with your body. Honor others with how you treat them.
- **Abstain from meat of strangled animals.** This honored Jewish dietary sensitivities that were deeply tied to their faith and identity. It was a practical act of respect — a way of saying, we see you, we value you, and we will not unnecessarily offend you.
- **Abstain from blood.** Rooted in the sanctity of life, this ruling honored both the Jewish tradition and the broader understanding that life belongs to God. It was a reminder that honor for God begins with honor for life itself.

Note: None of these four rulings were about earning salvation — that had already been settled. They were about how to live together in a way that honors God and honors one another.

"Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."

Romans 12:10 (NLT)

"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."

Colossians 3:12-14 (NLT)

Tommy Green • 09-20-26 • tommy.green@gracefm.org