



SUNDAY, JUNE 25 2023



A Good Argument

PART 4

ACTS 15:22-35

THE DIVISION OF THE DISCIPLES

A SERMON BY
REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY
@PASTORHJW



SCAN FOR PHJW
SERMON NOTES

   @alfredstreetbc | www.alfredstreet.org

#TheDivisionoftheDisciples | #WeAreAlfredStreet

REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY, SENIOR PASTOR



Date: June 25, 2023
Preacher: Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley
Sermon Title: A Good Argument: Part 4 - The Division of the Disciples
Scripture: Scripture: Acts 15: 22-35 (NLT)

22 Then the apostles and elders together with the whole church in Jerusalem chose delegates, and they sent them to Antioch of Syria with Paul and Barnabas to report on this decision. The men chosen were two of the church leaders—Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas. 23 This is the letter they took with them:

“This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings! 24 “We understand that some men from here have troubled you and upset you with their teaching, but we did not send them! 25 So we decided, having come to complete agreement, to send you official representatives, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We are sending Judas and Silas to confirm what we have decided concerning your question. 28 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: 29 You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.”

30 The messengers went at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter. 31 And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message. 32 Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke at length to the believers, encouraging and strengthening their faith. 33 They stayed for a while, and then the believers sent them back to the church in Jerusalem with a blessing of peace. 35 Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch. They and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord there.

SERMON SUMMARY:

In the fourth and final installment of the sermon series, “A Good Argument,” Pastor Wesley reviews the steps necessary for a good argument. Recapping the prior three sermons, he reminds us that a good argument requires the following:

- The witness of God’s word;
- The testimony of theophany (a manifestation of God to an individual or group);
- The practice of privacy; and
- The power of other perspectives.

This week, we learn a fifth step: surrender to the Spirit.

Acts 15:25 reports that the controversy between the Judiazers and the Church at Antioch is now resolved. This verse highlights that a good argument is settled when decisions are aligned through and with the Holy Spirit. We learn that the only way to know if our decisions align with the Holy Spirit is through a time of discernment and prayer. In essence, if we are going to have a good argument, we must be willing to pray individually and **with** those engaged in the dialogue. Prayer is the key to alignment with the Spirit.

The sermon illustrates a sequence of events (disagree, dialogue, pray, surrender) through the actions of Paul in Acts 15. He notes that Acts 15:25 reports that all discussion partners were in complete agreement (*i.e.*, “*having come to complete agreement*”) with a list of four particulars (see verse 29). However, when we compare the fourth resolution (do not eat meat sacrificed to idols) with Paul’s instruction to the Church at Corinth (I Corinthians 10:23-30), we discover that Paul **is not** in total agreement. With prayer and Spirit-guided alignment, we find peace and strengthen the unity of the body of Christ.

To achieve alignment, we must surrender to the Spirit. We do this by praying, putting whatever it is in God’s hands, trusting God to work all things for good, and surrendering to the will of God. Paul illustrates these points as he, through the power of prayer, aligns with those in Jerusalem, even though he disagrees with at least one point.

May we remember the lessons learned in this series and find ourselves as architects of good arguments. As believers, we can be examples by showing that having good arguments promotes unity.

KEY POINTS:

1. One of the greatest obstacles to the unity of the disciples was the internal debates and disagreements that sought to tear them apart.
2. Being addicted to being right can kill relationships, families, and churches.
3. Like the disciples, we must learn to disagree but not become divided.
4. When we pray and surrender to the Spirit, we can align with others, even if we are not in total agreement.
5. When difficult situations arise, one can rely on the formula: argue, pray, and trust God.
6. We must be careful of people who will argue with us but won’t pray with us.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTION:

In Acts 15:29, instructions were given to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols. However, according to I Corinthians 10:25-26, Paul did not agree with this. Yet Paul offered his support for the final agreement in Acts 15:25-27. Have you chosen to “agree to disagree” to present a unified front? If so, please share your experience.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. In this last installment, we receive the final ingredient needed to have a ‘Good Argument’; the ability to *Surrender to the Spirit*. Have you ever found surrendering to the Holy Spirit difficult? If so, please share.
2. James was credited with forging an agreement between the church at Antioch and the church at Jerusalem regarding the need for Gentiles to be circumcised. Have you ever helped resolve a disagreement between two opposing parties using any of the components of a good argument learned through this series?

3. Do you agree that there may come a time when you have to learn to *'let it go'* for the benefit of the relationship? Have you ever *"let it go"* for the benefit of a relationship? If so, what did you gain from this decision?
4. Jesus prayed in Matthew 26:39, "**Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done.**" Have you prayed this "Lord's Prayer" during a disagreement? How did praying this prayer help?

For Individual or Village Study

SPIRIT WORK:

Using the principles of a 'good argument,' think about a time you had unresolved issues with someone (a family member, friend, sibling, or co-worker) and journal what you may have done differently. If led by the Holy Spirit, reach out to that person. If you cannot (for any reason), write a prayer in your journal.

"CAN I PUSH IT?" QUESTION:

In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays that his disciples would be one, "*I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*" How can the Church keep Jesus' commandment when we are divided on issues of racial injustice, sexuality, class, and politics?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you wish to review the curriculum guides of this powerful sermon series, please go to https://www.alfredstreet.org/village_curriculum_guides/.