



SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 2023



A Good Argument PART 3

ACTS 15:1-29

THE DIVISION OF THE DISCIPLES

A SERMON BY
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SCAN FOR PHJW
SERMON NOTES

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REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY, SENIOR PASTOR



Date: June 18, 2023

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley

Sermon Title: “A Good Argument” - Part 3
The Division of the Disciples”

Scripture: Acts 15:1-29 (NLT)

1 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.” 2 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. 3 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.

4 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. 5 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.”

6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 7 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. 8 God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. 10 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? 11 We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”

12 Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 When they had finished, James stood and said, “Brothers, listen to me. 14 Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. 15 And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written:

16 ‘Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, 17 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— 18 he who made these things known so long ago.’

19 “And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 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. 21 For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.”

The Letter for Gentile Believers

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.”

SERMON SUMMARY

The sermon series, “A Good Argument: The Division of the Disciples, Part 3,” continues to build on the skills necessary for believers to participate in a good argument. These skills are vital because differences and disputes will arise in every relationship, but the ability to have a good argument will prevent conflicts from being divisive and destructive.

Using the pivotal story in Acts 15, we see a prime example of an argument between the Judiazers and the Gentile Christians from Antioch. Moving the argument to the elders and apostles in Jerusalem, the argument goes forward, and we glean salient lessons from how they approach this argument.

Today’s first lesson is that one can have a good argument by understanding and applying the practice of privacy. In verse 4, the broader church membership, the elders, and the apostles gather together. But when it is time to begin the argument, those assembled are limited to the apostles and elders (verse 6). Pastor Wesley points out that not every argument should be carried out in front of everybody. Some discussions must be kept private for the health of the conversation and the good of the whole. In contemporary parlance, we learned that we should not share *all* of our lives with *all* of the world. Additionally, privacy is different from secrecy. We keep secret things associated with guilt or shame. We keep private those aspects of our lives and thoughts that do not belong in the public eye. Privacy requires a maturity that knows what we should disclose and should not.

Today’s second lesson is that a good argument must be based on God’s word. There is power in Scripture, and data that undergird our views must align with it. Pastor Wesley warned that alignment with Scripture is more than simply quoting the Bible to shore up a point. Any use of scripture must support what is actually *in* the Bible, be consistent

with the context in which it was spoken or written, align with other scriptures, and support the words of Jesus Christ. Further, we are encouraged not to base an argument on a single scripture but instead to broadly understand what the Bible says about a topic. The sermon encourages us to ask ourselves three questions when anyone (including ourselves) quotes scripture.

- Is that what the Bible *really* says, and does what I'm quoting align with the context in which it was said or written?
- What else does the Bible have to say about that subject?
- What does Jesus have to say about this topic?

The ability to engage in good arguments is a vital part of our Christian witness. And our witness, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to live before others so they want to know the Savior we serve. The better we understand how to engage in arguments that do not divide but build up, the better witnesses we will be.

KEY POINTS

1. Good arguments do not divide. Instead, they allow us to discern and discover God anew through dialogue.
2. Pastor Wesley reiterated the components of a good argument presented in earlier sermons. These components are the power of perspective and the testimony of theophany. This week's sermon adds two more components of a good argument: the practice of privacy and the witness of the word of God.
3. Privacy and secrecy are different. The ability to apply privacy is a mark of a mature Christian.
4. God's word is powerful, but it is always interpreted. How we interpret and use Scripture determines whether it blesses or bludgeons others.
5. We need not be intimidated by people who "quote" scripture. Instead, we should ask questions about whether others are using it well.

Village Facilitators,

The Curriculum Team asks you to choose the best questions for your Village.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Since this series began a few weeks ago, have you experienced a theophany (a manifestation of God to an individual or group) in a challenging situation?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever experienced Scripture being used as a weapon against you or a loved one? What impact did that have on you? How has it shaped how you use the word of God?

2. This sermon notes that social media have destroyed the practice of privacy. How has a lack of privacy affected your relationships? How might increased privacy help repair a damaged relationship?
3. This sermon notes that social media have destroyed the practice of privacy. How has the lack of privacy affected your relationships? How might increased privacy help to repair a damaged relationship?
4. As you've grown in your Christian walk, how has your understanding of Scripture changed due to a good argument? What lens do you use now in your scripture reading?
5. Pastor reminded us that "we need the word of God to discern the will of God." How has reading the Bible helped you to discern God's will in small and big ways?
6. One sign of a mature Christian is understanding the difference between secrecy and privacy. What do you think the difference between secrecy and privacy is in your life? Why is an understanding of this difference essential?
7. When was the last time you were in an argument and asked yourself, "What did Jesus say about this?" How can you remember to ask yourself this question when disputes arise?

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

For Individual or Village Study

1. While making a 'good argument,' the apostle James quoted **Amos 9:11-12**. Pastor points to this as an example of not relying only on your opinions, past experiences, or best practices when arguing. It reminds us that there is power in going to the Bible to ensure we align with God's word. **Examine how one of your favorite scriptures can apply to disagreements that may arise with an important person in your life.**
2. All relationships come with arguments. **Matthew 18:15-17** commands us to address the conflict privately with the other person or party. What hinders you from going directly to that person? **Are there other scriptures in the Bible that have helped you to honor relationships through privacy?**
3. Pastor Wesley quoted **Psalms 119:11**, "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against [God]." **What word is hidden in your heart that you turn to amid a difficult conversation/argument? When did you commit it to memory, and why? How has it served you?**