

Sept 20, 2026 Leader's Guide
Acts 15:1–29 “It Almost Ended Right Here”

1. Think of a time when you have seen a disagreement handled particularly well - in a family, friendship, church, or workplace. What allowed people to disagree without the disagreement damaging their relationship?

Read Acts 15:1–29

2. (1-5) What exactly is the disagreement facing the early church, and why do you think the issue mattered so deeply to both sides?

This was much more than a minor difference of opinion. Eager to keep their Jewish privilege granted them by Rome to not worship the gods, some Jewish believers insisted that the gentile converts must also become Jews, necessitating males being circumcised and all keep the law of Moses. They added a theological battering Ram - and if you don't you aren't saved. Paul and Barnabas recognized that this threatened the heart of the gospel itself. Yet underneath the theological debate were very real questions about how Jews and Gentiles could belong together as one people. The church is facing a disagreement serious enough to threaten the unity of this remarkable new community God has created.

3. (6-21) How does the church go about discerning what God is doing? What different kinds of evidence do Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and James bring to the discussion?

Notice that they do not begin simply by defending their own positions. Peter points to what God has actually done among the Gentiles; Paul and Barnabas tell of the signs and wonders God has done through them; and James turns to Scripture and shows how this surprising work of the Spirit fits within what God had already revealed. Their discernment holds together the Spirit's present activity and God's revealed Word: they ask both “Where is God at work?” and “Does this fit with who God has revealed himself to be?”

4. Look particularly at Peter's words in verses 7–11. What does Peter say is true of both Jewish and Gentile believers, and why does that matter for the disagreement?

Peter brings them back to the foundation beneath all their differences: both Jew and Gentile are saved in exactly the same way - through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Neither group has grounds for claiming superiority over the other. When our security rests in our moral behaviour, theological correctness, or belonging to the “right” group, disagreement can easily become “I'm right and you're wrong; I'm in and you're out.” Grace allows Christians to disagree while continuing to see one another as equally forgiven, chosen and welcomed in Christ.

5. In verses 19–29, the council refuses to require Gentiles to become Jews, but it still asks several things of them. What do you notice about the balance between freedom and restraint in their decision? What seems to be their concern?

The council protects the Gentiles from having the law of Moses imposed upon them as a condition of salvation, while also asking them to exercise their freedom in ways that make shared life with Jewish believers possible. In particular, the food requirements would help remove barriers that had historically prevented Jews and Gentiles from sharing a table. Christian freedom is therefore not simply about asking, “What am I permitted to do?” It also asks, “How might my choices affect my sister or brother?”

6. Think about a disagreement you presently have with another Christian, or an issue on which Christians around you disagree. What might it look like to “begin with God” and “be rooted in grace” rather than beginning with your own position?

Acts 15 does not suggest that disagreements are unimportant or that truth does not matter. Instead, it gives the church a posture for entering disagreement faithfully: look together for what God is doing, test that against what God has revealed, and remember that everyone at the table stands there by grace. That changes the other person from an opponent who must be defeated into a brother or sister with whom we are trying to discern faithfully.

7. Where might God be inviting you to “lean in with love” - willingly giving up something you are free to have, do, or insist upon for the sake of another person and the unity of Christ’s church?

The remarkable outcome of Acts 15 is not that everyone became the same. Jew remained Jew and Gentile remained Gentile, yet they found a way to remain at the same table. Love sometimes means voluntarily limiting our freedom for another person’s good. That kind of community — where deep difference produces greater love rather than division — remains a powerful witness to the gospel.