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CHAPTER 1

FAITH ALONE IS REQUIRED TO ENTER THE HOUSE OF GOD *(Acts 15:1-35)*

NOTES ON THE TEXT

v. 1. Some people have come from Jerusalem to Antioch. It is clear from verse 24, that they are part of the congregation at Jerusalem. According to them things are definitely going wrong in Antioch, for this congregation has many members who were formerly Gentiles (cf. Acts 11:20, 21). In the past Gentiles could only enter the house of Israel by means of circumcision. But these Gentiles have been brought in through the door of faith. However, the latter way is not sufficient. Circumcision which has been an absolute requirement for centuries (cf. Gen 17:14) up until now, cannot possibly be left undone.

Some troublemakers from Jerusalem, a congregation with practically only circumcised Jewish Christians, intend to teach a lesson to the congregation at Antioch. Whoever is not circumcised will be irrevocably lost and cannot be saved.

v. 2. Paul and Barnabas especially feel addressed by these troublemakers! In their report after the first missionary journey they have spoken of the door of faith (cf. Acts 14:27), and no longer of the door of circumcision. The result is a serious clash (no small dissention). And this is no wonder, for it is a fundamental issue that is at stake.

Does a Gentile need to go through two doors to become a Christian? Does he have to become a Jew first? Is there room for a bit of self-righteousness besides the righteousness Christ has obtained for us? Do we speak of salvation by grace alone, or also by works of the law? This matter is of the utmost importance (cf. HC, LD 11, Q&A 30).

SUMMARY

The congregation of Antioch is disturbed by people from Jerusalem, who attack the true Gospel. According to them, salvation does take place through faith in Jesus Christ, but it is also necessary to keep the OT laws in order to be saved.

In order to publicly expose the troublemakers, a delegation is sent to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. The office bearers there gather together to consider this matter, about which there are also differing opinions in Jerusalem. The apostle Peter reminds the assembly of the initiative God himself took in the case of Cornelius and his household, and how these people were incorporated into the household of God through the door of faith alone.

Paul and Barnabas add to this by recalling God's acts during the first missionary journey. All these acts of God, says the "elder" James, clearly agree with the words of God in Amos 9:11, 12. The coming of Jesus, the Son of David, means salvation for all nations. Gentiles do not need to become Jews first, but subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Apostles and elders decide that no obstacle whatsoever may be put in the way of the Gentiles. However, it should be impressed upon them that serving the Lord also demands a radical break with the idols. This decision carries divine authority. The Holy Spirit himself can be mentioned here, because of his deeds in the past with Cornelius.

This decision, in the form of a letter, is sent along with two delegates. This letter, and the verbal confirmation by these two men, causes great joy. Antioch also expresses this joy by sending these brothers back to Jerusalem "in peace."

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Has the problem of "faith alone" or "faith plus something" only been present in the beginning, or has it appeared more often? If so, give examples.
2. May we deduce certain rules for the co-existence of the churches from Act 15?
3. Is the decision of Acts 15:28, 29 also valid for us? Some people feel that it is only valid for the Jews and therefore consider these prohibitions temporary. If the decision does still have significance, then in what way?
4. In Acts 15 and in the epistle to the Galatians, Paul's visit to Jerusalem is mentioned (e.g. Gal 1:18; 2:1 ff.). Some consider Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1 ff to be referring to one and the same visit (e.g. S. Greydanus). Others do not agree and choose for different solutions. For example, Acts 11:30 (cf. Acts 12:25) and Galatians 2:1 ff. deal with the same visit; or, different again, that Acts 18:22 and Galatians 2:1 ff. refer to the same visit (e.g. J. VanBruggen).

For clarity's sake I have listed the different accounts.

- a. Acts 9:26-30;
- b. Acts 11:30 and 12:25;
- c. Acts 15:1-35;
- d. Acts 18:22;
 - i) Galatians 1:18, 19;
 - ii) Galatians 2:1-10.
- e. (Acts 21:17 ff, Paul's visit after the third missionary journey, is not in consideration.)

It is difficult to say which visit in Galatians matches which one in Acts.

Does i) belong with a.?

Does ii) belong with b., or c., or even d.?

I only go as far as to point out the problem.