

# The Next Evangelism

## Acts 15: 1-11

**1** But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” **2** And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. **3** So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. **4** When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. **5** But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” **6** The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. **7** And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. **8** And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, **9** and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. **10** Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? **11** But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

- I. How do we respond to the changing demographics in the church? (Acts 15:1, 5)
  - A. Statistics in America
    1. In 2008, 1/3 of all children in the US were of non-European descent.
    2. In 2011, 50% of births in the US were children of non-European descent
    3. In 2023, 50% of all children in the US will be of non-European descent. (This is not an immigration-reform related issue, since this statistic reflects birth rates of citizens.)
    4. In 2042, there will be no majority ethnicity in the US.
    5. While in 1900 85% of Christians were European or American, it is projected that in 2050, 85% of Christians will be non-European/American.
    6. The center of Christianity has moved from the North Atlantic 50 years ago to Timbuktu, West Africa, today.
  - B. How do we respond to these changes?
    1. The Jews in the first century wanted Gentile Christians to first be circumcised. They only wanted to accept Gentiles if they became like them culturally.
    2. How do cultures mix? The Melting Pot idea—that we all melt off our cultural uniqueness—is no longer accepted.
    3. The Salad Bowl idea is that each culture is placed in a big salad and mixed together. This idea breaks down when each individual culture is overpowered by the dominant culture, ie, creamy ranch dressing, that smothers other cultural distinctives.
  - C. These changes do not reflect the de-Christianization of America, but the de-Europeanization of American Christianity.
    1. When Dr. Rah went to study in Boston, he was warned of the spiritual deadness of the city.
    2. It turned out that 88 new churches had been planted in Boston in the 10-year period prior to his arrival.
    3. 50% of them were Hispanic, 25% African, and 15% Asian. There is tremendous church growth and vitality in Boston. It is just not based primarily among Caucasians.
    4. Similar statistics are found in most major US cities.

5. How will we respond?
- II. It is God that is changing our communities. (Acts 15:2-4)
- A. Paul described the conversion of the Gentiles as the work of God: "all that God had done with them." (v. 4).
  - B. There was vitality, revival, and renewal among the Gentiles.
  - C. How have we embraced the work of God?
    1. Have we been taught by non-European descendent professors and mentors?
    2. Dr. Rah's daughter studies at a school in Chicago with a student body of 750, with 75 nationalities and 55 languages represented.
    3. Have we prepared our children, our grandchildren, and ourselves to face life in this reality?
    4. If not, we are preparing ourselves or our children for 40-year-old realities, not the current world we live in.
  - D. We should not live in fear of these changes, but embrace that they are from God and respond as the early church did.
- III. The grace of God makes us all equal.
- A. We are all saved by grace, through faith, in one Lord, Jesus.
  - B. No one is higher or lower.
  - C. We don't have to fear these changes, because it is all the work of God.
  - D. The testimony of our love for each other across racial and ethnic lines will be how the world sees our witness.

### Discussion Questions

1. How have we seen cultural diversity in our city? What is our typical response?
2. What is God doing among the non-Caucasians ethnicities in Memphis?
3. What aspects of these changing demographics cause us the most fear?
4. Describe a significant friendship you have with someone of another race or religion. How did the relationship develop? What have you learned from that relationship?
5. How have you experienced the richness and fullness of the body of Christ through ethnically diverse relationships?
6. How did Paul interpret the demographic changes he saw occurring in the early church? How might he interpret the demographic changes occurring in the US today?
7. What steps can you take to move toward people of other ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds for the sake of the Gospel? How might you benefit from that process?

