

LESSON 8

COMING TOGETHER

ACTS 15:1–35



1 Describe a church conflict about which you have heard. What started it, and how was it settled?



Read Acts 15:1–35, “The First Church Conference” chart, and the following notes:

☐ 15:1 ☐ 15:1ff ☐ 15:2ff ☐ 15:20, 21 ☐ 15:23–29 ☐ 15:31

2 What was the purpose for this council at Jerusalem (15:1, 2)?

3 What process did they use to resolve the conflict (15:3–21)?

4 What did the council decide (15:22–29)?

The church began in Jerusalem, and all of the early believers were Jews or Jewish proselytes. The influx of Gentile Christians was disturbing and threatening. It was not easy for the Jewish believers to accept those they had previously avoided and considered unclean. Because the background of most of these new Christians was Greek rather than Jewish, they had very little understanding or appreciation of the Old Testament rituals. This caused a serious dispute in the church that had to be resolved through a special meeting in Jerusalem. There the issues were raised, deliberations were made, and a decision was reached. The conflict was resolved. Today, hundreds of minute differences and slight shadings of doctrines divide believers. Often, instead of resolving our conflicts, we split churches, start new denominations, or give up in disgust. Is your church known for its love—or its battles?



5 What divides churches today?

6 What process does your church use to resolve serious conflicts?



7 Think of a recent conflict in your church. How would Paul, Peter, and James have resolved it?

8 With whom in your church do you have a personal conflict?

9 How have you dealt with that conflict so far?

10 What can you do to be a peacemaker and resolve that conflict?



A Who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem (15:13)? What role did the apostles play in the Jerusalem council (15:4–29)? Who made the final decision (15:13–21)? What does this say about the apostles' attitudes?

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B How was James's decision a compromise (15:13–21)? When is compromise appropriate in church disputes? When is it wrong?

C How was the decision of the Jerusalem council to be communicated to the other churches and individual believers (15:22, 23)? What are the strengths in how this letter was composed (15:23–29)? How would you communicate a similar compromise to parties in conflict?

D What caused the dispute in the early church (15:1, 5)? Why was the Jerusalem council important? Why was its decision important for the early church? In what ways is the impact of its decision still felt today?

E Why was keeping the law important to Jewish Christians? What was Paul's reason for resisting the effort to force Gentiles to keep Jewish tradition (15:4, 12)? What is the difference between helpful guidelines and legalism?