

**Missions In Multi-Cultural America:  
A Study Of Acts 15:1-35**

**M. Rodney Webb**

The culture milieu of the American Christian scene during the latter part of the twentieth century is in a constant state of flux. By revisiting the experience of the early church in its multi-cultural world and how it grows in that world of pluralistic cultures, philosophies, and theological understandings, the American Church is able to prepare, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to win this pluralistic nation for Christ.

The fifteenth chapter of Acts portrays a pivotal time in the life of the early church. Which responds to the challenge of effectively evangelizing a society of diverse cultures through diffusion of the Gospel to the Gentile world. The American Church must rise to the challenge of effectively communicating the gospel in a multi-cultural society. Acts 15 expresses principles which enable churches to move beyond cultural captivity to the broader perspective of becoming kingdom people.

In recent years the alarm bells of evangelical and mainline Christian denominations in the United States are sounding. Growing pluralism of people, philosophies, and theological thoughts are a result of the growing population which seems prepared to embrace anything that might help or give meaning to life. Concern over increasing pluralism evokes responses from Christians ranging from a universal acceptance that all approaches lead people to a supreme being to suspicion of ethnic

Christians who practice their Christian faith differently from the Anglo-western churches. The goal is to embrace differences in methods and practices while maintaining the Biblical truths of what it means to be a Christian.

In their concern about universalism, Christian leaders and educators often speak against pluralism as if it is a negative. While theological pluralism goes against biblical teaching, cultural pluralism gives an added dimension to our society. Cultural myopia entraps the church, crippling the effectiveness of the church's mission.

Christians must be on their guard continually against cultural elitism, or history will repeat itself. In Acts 15:1-35 the Jerusalem Council becomes necessary because there are those from the Jewish Christian group who try to convert Gentile Christians by circumcision rather than by faith in Christ. To be a Christian an individual first has to become a Jewish proselyte. American Christians continually fight the temptation to lapse back into Judaizing tendencies of the first century.

Since the colonization of the United States, pluralism has been a fact of American culture. New languages, religions, and cultural patterns are introduced by early settlers. The big wave of immigration around the turn of the Twentieth Century introduces new cultures to an already diverse society in this nation. American soldiers are exposed to new peoples and cultures as they travel around the world in the line of duty. Large numbers of citizens of third world countries have migrated to the United States in recent years. International travel and communication via satellite changes our world view.

The United States has always been a pluralistic nation in which the Anglo-Caucasian culture predominates. Historically European culture is the strongest influence culturally, politically, economically, militarily, and religiously. A good illustration of this cultural predominance is the Christian missionaries' evangelization of Native Americans. In addition to bringing the gospel to the Natives, missionaries imposed their cultural practices and religious traditions instead of allowing the gospel to be expressed in the culture of the Native American.

Great similarities exist between the American church and the church at Jerusalem. Both are confronted with the need to determine their role in proclaiming the gospel to the peoples of the world.

*The Background to Acts 15:1-35*

In order to understand issues of pluralism in Acts 15: 1-35, other biblical passages, that have a direct bearing on the church reaching different people groups in a pluralistic society, are consulted. The study of these additional scriptures impacts the understanding and meaning of these thirty-five verses. To fully understand the controversy in Acts 15, it is important to comprehend the historical ties that bind the nation of Israel and the church together. Luke shows the connection between Israel and the early church as fulfillment of the messianic promises. This fulfillment is completed with the birth of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Old Testament the writers consistently communicate the role of the people of God in taking His message to the nations. The Hebrew people interpret God's directives to mean that the nations are to come to them to learn of God instead of carrying God's messages to the people of the world. This attitude ignores God's promise in Genesis 12:1-3. God assures Abraham that a nation will come from his seed. In Isaiah 56:6-7 Israel fails to understand when God says His house shall be open to all people.

By the time Luke brings the reader to the fifteenth chapter of Acts, the Church has seen the gospel move to many different people groups. In Acts 2:1-12 Luke shows how the Holy Spirit empowers and equips the believers to communicate the good news about Jesus Christ to people from many different countries. The respondents hear the message in their own regional dialects. From this passage God continues to show His people that they are to move beyond their cultural limitations.

In Acts 6-8 the church elects Greek deacons to minister to the widows and the needy in the church, groups that the Jewish leaders have been overlooking. Seven men are chosen to do the ministry. Stephen, one of the Greek disciples set apart to minis-

ter to the needs of the Grecian widows, was stoned to death because of his witness about Jesus Christ. Philip, a Greek disciple who was chosen to be a deacon, becomes an evangelist. God uses Philip to lead an Ethiopian eunuch to become a follower of Jesus.

The tenth chapter of Acts describes Peter's vision in which God tells him three times not to call anything unclean that God has made. At the end of Peter's third vision, there was a knock at the door of the house in which he was staying. Three Gentiles were at the door asking to see Peter. The three Gentile men were invited in to be Peter's guests. The next day Peter went with the three men to meet Cornelius and find out what was happening. During this encounter with Cornelius, Peter realizes that God is not a respecter of persons but will accept people from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Barnabas comes to the scene by being sent from the Jerusalem Church to the Antioch Church to investigate what God is doing in bringing people to Himself. Upon Barnabas' arrival he sees the evidence of God's grace among the Greeks. He encourages them in their newfound faith. Barnabas goes to Tarsus in search of Saul. He finds Saul and takes him with him to Antioch. During this time both Barnabas and Saul teach the new believers in Antioch.

The Antioch Church sends Barnabas and Saul out as missionaries to Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe where both Jewish and Gentile peoples become believers. After Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch, the church rejoices at what God is doing in the lives of the new believers. Scripture indicates that Paul and Barnabas stay a long time at the church in Antioch.

#### *The Causal Issue for the Meeting in Jerusalem*

In the first two verses of Acts 15, some men arrive in Antioch teaching the brethren that they must be circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses. This teaching creates an explosive situation between the Antioch Church and visitors from the Jerusalem Church. Paul and Barnabas are in sharp debate with

these men from Jerusalem concerning their teachings about circumcision and the new converts. From this dispute Paul, Barnabas and several others from the church in Antioch are appointed to go to Jerusalem to discuss this matter.

Everett F. Harrison in his commentary *Acts: The Expanding Church* points out that the objection does not deal with the genuineness of the faith of the Gentile converts in Jesus but raises concerns about the completeness of their status. For the Jewish community “historically, when Gentiles wished to identify with the congregation of Israel, they were required to be circumcised (Ex.12: 48) to order their lives according to the Mosaic Law, after the fashion of the Jews. Circumcision had been instituted as the seal of God’s covenant with Abraham.”<sup>1</sup> These men from the Jerusalem church have no argument with the reality of the conversion experience of the believers in the Antioch church. Their problem is with the fact that they have not followed the traditional manner of Gentiles coming into the synagogue by being circumcised. When this happens, the new convert then becomes a proselyte Jew. To the Jewish mind circumcision is a prerequisite for a Gentile to become a Christian. The churches outside Jerusalem do not practice the Jewish tradition of keeping the law. The Jerusalem Church forgets that Christ gives a new commandment and that the Christians are to love one another (John 13:34-35). F.F. Bruce brings out in his *Commentary on The Book Of The Acts* this cultural religious issue very clearly when he states “the Jewish Christians feared that the influx of so many Gentile believers would cause a weakening of Christian moral standards, and the evidence of Paul’s Corinthian correspondence shows that their misgivings were not unfounded.”<sup>2</sup> The question these men are asking is how can they control this situation. A large group of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem feel the best way to deal with this issue is to make sure Gentile believers are admitted on terms similar to the proselytes. They become believers first by becoming Jewish, submitting to circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. When the fact-finding committee arrives in Antioch, they are horrified that churches outside of Jerusalem are not keeping these practices. The explosion sets in

motion Paul and Barnabas' confrontation with these men. The church in Antioch requests Paul and Barnabas, along with a few more, go to Jerusalem to settle this issue.

Scholars who have studied the Western Text feel that the Judaizers demand that Paul and Barnabas, as well as others, go up to Jerusalem. The Byzantine text implies that the church in Antioch requests Paul and Barnabas, along with a few others, go to Jerusalem. Some writers express the opinion that Paul goes to Jerusalem at the request of the Antioch church to try to maintain harmony and peace. He desires to prevent the yoke of circumcision and Jewish law from being placed upon the Gentile Christians. His goal is to maintain the teaching of salvation by faith through the grace of God. It is plausible that many of the people still feel that the church in Jerusalem has some authority over the other churches. The issue here is the future of the mission to the Gentiles.

In verse three and following Paul and the group make their way to Jerusalem, a journey that took about a month to complete. They stop at churches in Phoenicia and Samaria enroute to Jerusalem. When these churches hear the mission report that the Gentiles are becoming believers in Jesus Christ, they rejoice. When the Church of Samaria is mentioned, thoughts turn to the fourth chapter of John where the account of the Samaritan woman at the well by Sychar is found. After the encounter of the Samaritan woman with Jesus, she becomes a believer and brings people from the city to hear what Jesus is saying.

Because of their intermarriage with Gentiles, the Samaritan people are not acceptable to the Jewish people. They are acceptable to Jesus. In Acts 1:8 Jesus says to his disciples that they are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Jesus himself states that the kingdom of God is for all people. He points out clearly that God is not a respecter of persons but all who believe become the children of God. At the time of Jesus' ascension, the believers do not fully grasp the picture of God's plans. In the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 19-20, Jesus commands His followers to go and make disciples of all

nations. Jesus commissions His followers to move beyond their own comfort zone to go to all peoples. Support from believers in Phoenicia and Samaria encourages this group from Antioch and strengthens their resolve for what lies ahead in Jerusalem. One clear lesson from this passage is the reality that God is receiving all people into His Kingdom and no manmade customs or prejudice will prevent people from coming to God as far as He is concerned. This truth is something the American Church needs to recognize and put into practice.

*Confronting the Issue With the Jerusalem Church*

Events in Acts 15:4-19 bring to the forefront issues which determine the future of the Gentile mission. The apparent contradiction between Luke's account in Acts 15 and Paul's writing in Galatians 2: 1-10 needs to be considered. Are these passages dealing with the same or different events in Jerusalem? In his commentary on the book of Acts, I. Howard Marshall sets forth two suggestions to explain the differences:

1. The traditional view of the passage is that it is Luke's account of the meeting described in Galatians 2:1-10. The same people were present, the same topic was discussed, and essentially the same principle(that Gentiles need not be circumcised) was accepted. There are, however, important differences between the accounts and some unresolved problems if we regard them as referring to the same incident.

- a) Galatians 2:2 indicates that the meeting in Jerusalem was a private one, while Acts 15:22 suggests a public one. Galatians 2 stresses the part played by Paul himself in the discussion, while in Acts he makes no significant intervention in it; this difference however, could easily be due to the varied perspectives of the two accounts.
- b) More important, Galatians 2 says nothing about the actual conditions imposed upon the Gentiles and might indeed be thought to exclude the possibility of such a happening.
- c) Again, it is arguable that the controversy in Galatians 2:11-14, when certain men from James along with Peter

and Barnabas refused to eat with Gentiles, is incomprehensible after the events in Acts 15.

- d) Paul underlines the fact that his visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1-10 was only his second visit after his conversion, where as Acts 15 is a description of his third visit (the first is in Acts 9:26-29, which corresponds to Galatians 1:18-20; the second is in Acts 11:30; 12:25).
- e) It is odd that the letter from Jerusalem is addressed only to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (15:23) and is not mentioned by Paul in Galatians.

2. The simplest view is to equate the visit in Galatians 2:1-10 with that in Acts 11:30. This solves the decisive problem of the number of visits paid by Paul to Jerusalem; the visit to Jerusalem in Acts 15 is not mentioned in Galatians, most probably because the letter was written before this event. It also accounts for the differences between Galatians 2 and Acts 15; they are describing different events.”<sup>3</sup>

While F.F. Bruce in his commentary on Acts states his view: “that Galatians was written shortly before the council of Jerusalem. This would adequately explain why that epistle makes no allusion to the Council of Jerusalem.”<sup>4</sup> Based on the fact in Galatians Paul makes no reference to a final decision, a strong argument can be made that Paul wrote the Galatians letter prior to the council meeting in Jerusalem.

This is such a major decision that Paul would have referred to it if he had written Galatians 2 after the Jerusalem Council. In reading Paul’s letters to the Church at Corinth, Paul honors James request to observe practices that would not offend these Jewish people so that the church in Corinth would live in harmony and peace and be a strong witness to both the community and to the weaker Christians.

When the delegation from Antioch arrives in Jerusalem, they are warmly received by the entire church. The men from Antioch report everything that God has done among their people. After the report a group from the Pharisees stands to demand that the Gentiles be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses. At this time the apostles and elders meet to discuss this issue.



This discussion takes place before the entire body that are present that day.

It is at this point that some scholars like Lenski and Rackham feel that there is a private meeting between Paul, Barnabas, Titus, and one or two others from Antioch. If that is the case, then Paul's Galatians 2 account is a reference to the private meeting. In this passage the church is obviously present for this momentous conference to determine what is the basis of being a follower of Jesus Christ. Do Gentiles have to continue the custom of circumcision, a barbaric and insulting practice to them, or are they going to be allowed to come to Jesus Christ by faith alone?

After much discussion on the issue, Peter finally stands to address the matter before the entire assembly. Peter's opening statement moves all of the believers back to what had happened to him when he was in Joppa, an experience about which many of them had already heard. The messengers from Cornelius come to Simon the tanner's house where Simon Peter is staying. An interesting side thought is that not many Jews associate with tanners because they handle dead animal bodies, using the skins to make leather products. According to the old law and tradition, when individuals touch a dead body, they must go through a process of purification.

R.C.H. Lenski explains that after Peter addresses the assembled church at Jerusalem, he turns to the Judaizers to appeal to them to recall what happened to him long ago. Peter uses a Greek idiom that shows one reaching back into the past by recounting the olden days forward. It has been over ten years since Cornelius and his house became apart of the family of God.<sup>5</sup> Peter recounts God telling him in a vision to eat unclean animals. It is improper for a good Jew to eat them. Peter argues with God who responds that Peter is not to call anything unclean that God has made. Peter has the same vision three times. That is followed by a knock on the door from a Roman soldier and two servants of Cornelius who have finally arrived at Simon the tanner's house. The three men from Cornelius extend an invitation to Simon Peter to come to Caesarea to meet with Cornelius.

On the next day Peter and the three men sent by Cornelius set out to go to the house of Cornelius. Peter's response upon his arrival indicates he is uncomfortable. Peter reminds Cornelius that it is against Jewish law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile, much less visit in his home. Jewish social custom, reinforced by the Rabbis' interpretation of the Jewish purity regulations, elevates exclusivism from the Gentile world to the level of law. God's intent is not to create a barrier between people. In Peter's vision God teaches him to consider all people worthy of contact. Obviously, Peter's understanding is limited. God intends for him to accept Cornelius as a Christian brother. The wall separating Jew from Gentile collapses. The veil separating people from God and from each other once again is torn asunder by God. The tearing down of barriers between people is a practice which has meaning for Christians in dealing with other Christians, ethnic groups, socially outcasts, and non-Christians for whom Christ died. To Peter's credit he goes ahead and tells Cornelius that God has revealed to him that he should not call anything of God impure or unclean.

After much discussion Cornelius and his household become believers. Peter sums up in Acts 15:8-9 what he had related to the church ten years earlier. "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them for he purified their hearts by faith." (NIV) The listeners are reminded of the events of Peter's life; however, they refuse to apply those happenings to their own lives. "Here were men who would scuttle the whole mission for circumcision and the law of Moses. Their concern was for the institution which would supposedly save a chosen people, not for a human brotherhood in Christ."<sup>6</sup> Dr. Frank Stagg in his book on Acts succinctly says what the emphasis of the defense by Peter was all about, but at the same time the Judaizing group does not want to face the issue. "The emphasis given by Peter is important: God made no distinction between Jew and non-Jew, the hearts of the Gentiles were cleansed by faith and Jews were saved by faith just as Gentiles were. Peter was not only affirming that Gentiles were

saved by faith, but that Jews were saved in the way Gentiles were.”<sup>7</sup> Peter, in his defense of what God was doing among the Gentiles, confronts the real issue of this conference.

In reading Galatians 2 Paul confronts Peter about his fellowship with the Gentile believers. Prior to the coming of the men from Jerusalem, Peter has no difficulty in associating around the fellowship table with the Gentile believers in Antioch. However, when these people from Jerusalem arrive and raise the issue of having social interaction with uncircumcised people, Peter, as well as Barnabas, are led astray and do not associate with the Gentile believers around a meal. After Paul confronts both men, they remember what the real issues are and change their behavior to begin associating with Gentile believers. When Peter now takes a strong stand advocating that Gentile Christians do not have to be circumcised. Peter’s boldness at this meeting is a sign of God at work in removing barriers for the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles. Dr. John Pohill states:

“These were the provisions that marked Jews off from other people-circumcision, the food laws, scrupulous ritual purity. They were what made the Jews Jews and seemed strange and arbitrary to most Gentiles. To have required these of the Gentiles would in essence have made them into Jews and cut them off from the rest of the Gentiles. It would have severely restricted, perhaps even killed, any effective Christian mission.”<sup>8</sup>

In the tenth verse of this chapter Peter poses a couple of significant questions to the group. This interrogation turns the tide in favor of the Gentiles. The first question deals with whether the Jewish Christians are trying to test God with their cultural laws. The second question asks if an unbearable yoke is being placed upon the Gentile Christians. Peter points out that neither the Jews or their parents keep the laws in their entirety. Peter answers his own question with an emphatic no. Peter’s rhetorical response is that salvation is through the grace of our Lord Jesus. Upon rereading this statement in the eleventh verse, Peter sounds like Paul when he speaks. In Galatians 2:15-16 Paul argues in the same vein. Because of this similarity some scholars propose that Luke is putting Paul’s words into Peter’s mouth. It is

my opinion that the issue salvation by faith is so central that the Holy Spirit brings these words to mind to leave them for future generations of Christians.

The image of the yoke in verse ten must not be overlooked. In this passage the figure of a yoke connotes a burden like the yoke that is placed upon oxen at work. Jesus says, in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."(NIV) Peter reflects the common attitude among the Jewish people concerning the burden of the law. Peter's discussion has nothing to do with the ten commandments which God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. Instead, Peter says that the Gentiles do not need to be encumbered with all of the oral traditions and written laws. The role of Jewish law in the life of a Gentile believer is the major barrier between Christians and Pharisees. It is easy to say that these Pharisees should move beyond their practices and rejoice with the new freedom found in Christ; however, there is usually a tendency to stay with familiar practices rather than change. Peter is clear in proclaiming that salvation is by faith. God makes no distinction between Jew and non-Jew. Both groups come to God through faith.

Following a lively discussion, the assembly becomes quiet after Peter's words to them. No one has the courage to challenge what happens at Cornelius' house or the logical conclusions that Peter draws from those events. The missionary Peter tells the assembly that God is moving toward the Gentiles with the gospel. Peter reminds them of the miraculous signs in the life of Cornelius. For once, even the Pharisees are silenced. This is not to say that they remain quiet permanently, but temporarily they are silent.

Barnabas, a trusted leader has been sent out by the Jerusalem Church to the church at Antioch. By allowing Barnabas to speak prior to Paul, the stage is set for Paul to talk about God's work among the Gentiles. The assembled are silent. In spite of their traditions and cultures, the people hear God. Luke shows

his sensitivity to the local climate by recording that Barnabas speaks first. The clear evidence for all, including the Pharisees, is that God blesses and endorses what happens among the Gentiles without the rite of circumcision. "The mind of God in this matter, already shown in the house of Cornelius, had been abundantly displayed in the blessing He had bestowed upon the Gentiles in Antioch and during the recent mission in Cyprus and Asia Minor."<sup>9</sup> It has become obvious neither Peter nor Paul are fighting the idea of abandoning the observance of the law. They demonstrate that believing Jews who observe the law have no special advantage in obtaining their own salvation. What does come out of this discussion is the idea of winning other Jews to Christ by disarming their prejudices.<sup>10</sup>

Somewhere in the distant history of Israel, a statement echoes from Samuel when he goes to Bethlehem to find and anoint a new king for the nation of Israel. As Samuel looks on Jesse's sons, he sees one that has all the physical appearance of a king. God tells Samuel that he does not look on the outward appearance but looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7) This lesson reinforces what the disciples hear from Peter in his discussion about the Gentiles.

Now the congregation looks to James, the brother of Jesus, to speak to this issue. By this time in the Jerusalem church, James has earned the respect and confidence of the believers. He serves in a leadership role in the church. The Pharisees approve of James because they feel that he is one in thought with them since he too was more of a traditionalist on keeping the law. The Pharisees soon learn that this is not the case.

As James begins to speak, he wisely refers back to what Peter has said. James even calls Peter by his Hebrew name, Simeon. Here is a Palestinian Jew speaking and using another Palestinian Jew's name before the Jews of Palestine. James affirms in a summary statement what Peter states earlier. Carefully, James does not repeat what either Barnabas or Paul say, avoiding inciting a possible display of tempers and violent reactions. James quotes Simeon in the fourteenth verse by stating "how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a

people for himself.”(NIV) James unequivocally shows where he stands on this whole issue by quoting Simeon. This phrase is used by the Jewish people to demonstrate their special relationship with God. The term shows that God was “1. Applying to Gentile Christians a designation formerly used of Israel alone and, 2. agreeing with Peter that in the conversion of Cornelius God himself had taken the initiative for a direct Gentile ministry.”<sup>11</sup> James very carefully navigates through treacherous waters to bring about a turning point in the Gentile mission.

The next thing James does is to quote from Amos 9:11-12 to support the reality that God is at work taking from the Gentiles a people. James implies that the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth who is of the Davidic lineage. The outcome is the building of His Church which includes both Jews and Gentiles. The concept that Jesus is the fulfillment of the tabernacle and that He is to build His Church, recounted in Matthew 16:18, comes to mind. Jesus states very plainly, that based on the confession of faith, that He would build His Church.

James uses the Greek text instead of the Hebrew text of Amos. This does not pose a major problem. Some scholars believe that James choose the Greek translation instead of the Hebrew due to the fact that use of the Hebrew text is a point of national pride. The Greek text indicates that both Jews and Gentiles are included in the reestablished tabernacle. This idea is central to the truth that all of humanity, including Jews and Gentiles, belongs to God. After James affirms what Peter says and what God demonstrates in the life of Cornelius, he moves on to the decision that begs to be made so that the church could move on in obedience to God.

#### *Decision To Open The Church To Gentiles*

James, after referring to the Amos passage, now comes forth with his recommendation. He desires to keep harmony within the church while responding to God’s leading. “The purpose of the so-called decree was to ease tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the church. An additional result would be a more favorable attitude on the part of unbelieving Jews toward the Chris-

tian movement.”<sup>12</sup> “For the Jew circumcision was a mark of sanctity and purity, of belonging to God’s people and being acceptable to him.”<sup>13</sup>

James requests that as members of the fellowship, the Gentiles observe the Jewish practices of abstaining from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from meat of strangled animals, and from blood. In the twenty-first verse a part of James’ reasoning is revealed. In most cities of this time, synagogues teach the law of Moses to the Jews and proselytes to Judaism every Sabbath.

After James makes his proposal, the apostles, elders and whole church decide to choose representatives of their number to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas in order to deliver a letter from their church. They choose Judas and Silas along with two other men to go along with them. Upon their arrival in Antioch, the letter is read to the whole church. The church rejoices in the good news. When the party from Jerusalem decides to return home, the church in Antioch sends them off with their blessing of peace.

From this crucial passage several principles can be set forth which empower the Christian church in America to enhance its ability to reach the pluralistic people groups here with the Gospel.

1. Be aware of cultural elitism.
2. Respect the cultural values of people groups we are trying to reach.
3. Adhere to the core of the Christian faith.
4. Remember different cultures need to develop their own worship styles.
5. Disciple the new believers into a lifestyle that does not reflect shamefully on Christ.
6. Have clear understandings even to the point that they are written down if need be.
7. Encourage Christians to reach beyond their own people groups with the gospel.

After the churches in Antioch and Jerusalem went through this turmoil, they reach a satisfactory solution. The Christian

movement takes off and spreads among many different people groups. This is possible when the people of faith are sensitive to God's leading. Christians must guard against allowing their cultural myopia and elitism from blocking their response to God's directions. Just as the church in Jerusalem opened the doors for the Gentiles, may we open the doors to all peoples of the world.

#### Writer

Webb, Malcolm Rodney: Address: North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Parkway, Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176. Title: Manager, Anglo Church Planting Unit. Rodney received a B.A. degree from Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, TN (1966) and a M.Div. degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, TX (1969). He is currently pursuing a D.Min. degree from Tinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL. Rev. Webb has over 30 years experiences as a missionary and mission executive.

#### NOTES

1. Harrison, Everett F., *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 228..
2. Bruce, F.F., *Commentary On The Book Of The Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971). 301.
3. Marshall, Howard I. *The Acts Of The Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980). 244-245.
4. Bruce, F.F., *Commentary On The Book Of The Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968). 298-299.
5. Lenski, R.C.H., *The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 602.
6. Stagg, Frank, *The Book of Acts* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), 158.
7. *Ibid.*, 159.
8. Pohill, John B., *The New American Commentary Volume 26 Acts*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 324.
9. Bruce, F. F., *Commentary On The Book Of The Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 309.
10. Harrison, Everett F., *Acts: The Expanding Church*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 232.



11. Gaebelien, K. E., J. D. Douglas, Montgomery Boice, and Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 John-Acts, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 446.

12. Harrison, Everett F., *Acts: The Expanding Church*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 235.

13. Polhill, John B., *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 26 Acts, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 326.