

**Is Salvation by Law or Grace? Part 1**

Scripture: Acts 15:1-12

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Acts chapter 15 is our study for this morning, and again we're going to consider the chapter as a unit and divide it into several parts, and this will be part 1.

The title could be a multiple of things, the church in conflict, uh, perhaps a better title would be, law or grace: question mark. Some have entitled this chapter, for obvious reasons, the Jerusalem council.

And we'll see as we go the possibilities of titling which are really inconsequential here at the very beginning, except as a point of contact.

Now as we begin the fifteenth chapter of Acts, we are in the flow of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the expansion of the church. The Book of Acts records the church's history from Jerusalem to Rome, its early years of expansion, and we are tracing that. As we come to chapter 15 the gospel has by this time spread to the Gentile world, not totally, but beginningly. Paul and Barnabas have accomplished the first missionary journey. The Jerusalem church has already established a beachhead in the Gentile world in the church in Antioch of Syria, and from there, Paul and Barnabas went out to evangelize Cyprus and the area of Galatia in Asia Minor. They have finished their journey returned back to Antioch, and the closing of verse 28 indicates "There they abode a long time with the disciples." Ending off chapter 14.

Now this has been a difficult journey, it has been a record setting journey in the sense that it established a whole new, a whole new avenue for the church, a whole new approach, a whole new ministry, a whole new dimension. That is the invitation to pagans, to Gentiles, to heathen, non-Jews, to enter into the fullness of the church of Jesus Christ, and in all of the attendant blessings promised Israel are theirs, equally, now the Apostle Paul along with Barnabas had not only evangelized, but we saw last time that they had also followed up. That they had taught, that they had organized the church with the appointing of elders, that they had commended the church to the Lord, and then they had returned to Antioch to carry on their ministry as they had begun it there.

Now the fact that Gentiles had been included in the church becomes the fuel for the fire that blazes in chapter 15. It was always a very difficult thing for Jews to allow the inclusion of Gentiles into the church. For the most part, Jews in the early years of the church saw Christianity, and this is important

to note, they saw Christianity only as a sect of Judaism. Christianity had no distinctness from Judaism.

And it's easy to see how they felt like that because in the progress of Judaism, Christianity is only a logical fulfillment. All of the promises to Israel are fulfilled in the coming of Messiah. And so they just uh, came to the place where they were confident that Judaism simply resolved itself in Christianity. And that you could not honestly have Christianity in its purity, unless you were plugged into Judaism. That would be like jumping in a process at the end, and not really going through the process. And so they saw Christianity only as the logical end to Judaism, and for the most part they saw the only way into Christianity as jumping into the Judaism process, and going through Judaism to Christianity. And so the very concept that a pagan could simply jump right into the church, and be equal to a Jew was foreign for most of them, and they could not handle it, As a result of the inability to see Christianity independent of Judaism a conflict ensued, the conflict then is the theme of chapter. 15. Now really it's inevitable that the conflict is going to hit. Because of this basic attitude, that Christianity was sort of the, the uh, the last step in Judaism and that without Judaism you didn't really have the progress to Christianity. It was inevitable because of that, that the presence of Gentiles in the church was goin' start a fire, that the whole issue would come to a head and it would explode and everybody would have to deal with it. We can admit however that the Jews had been somewhat tolerant, in the fact that they had allowed certain of the Samaritans to enter the church, and the Samaritans were half Jewish and half Gentile, and they had perhaps uh' reluctantly let a few Samaritans squeeze in. In addition to that, they had allowed a couple of Gentiles, namely the Ethiopian eunuch, and one other by the name of Cornelius and his entourage, his household. But if you'll remember correctly, you'll remember that both the Ethiopian eunuch, who was a saved Gentile, and Cornelius and his household, who were saved Gentiles, both of those groups were what we call God fearers, that is they had attached themselves to Judaism already. Though they had not been circumcised and gone through all the legal aspects of Judaism, they had at least begun to worship the God of Israel. And so the Jews sort of allowed them in without a lot of hassle, although they didn't understand quite Cornelius and his whole household, they at least allowed for that.

But now it was a whole new ball game, I mean it's one thing to let a Gentile in, who knocks and says I want in, it's something else to go scrambling all over the pagan world, just standing on the side of the street and yelling for all the pagans to come into Christianity. That's a whole different thing, I mean it got to the place where they were afraid they wouldn't be able to deal with it, To just run around the world hunting out Gentiles, and inviting them wholesale into the church, as equals was a mind blowing concept to the...more legalistic of the Jews and a little difficult for them to handle. And in, you know, in deference to these people it seemed a little bit unfair. I mean after all a Jew had from the time of his understanding, at least from the time of reaching the age of accountability and uh, maybe the age of twelve, the official you know, bar Mitzvah and all that. From that time on he had prescribed to him all of the patterns of living, and they legalistically and ritualistically and scrupulously and sacrificially abiding by all of these laws had conformed themselves to a rather strict kind of style. And

here were a whole lot of Gentiles who'd just been swingin' through all their lives, doin' just exactly what they wanted to do, and in one fell swoop they enter into equal blessings with these Jews who have been nailed to the wall, as it were morally all their lives, and they just can't really understand how anybody could have equal rights who didn't live a sacrificial, legalistic, law abiding, subscribed moral life, And really it is a little bit hard to understand, I mean you're goin' say to yourself, I mean this is ridiculous, I mean these guys have been just doin' everything they want, all of a sudden Paul comes along and announces all you gotta do is believe in Jesus Christ, bang, you're in the church, and everything ever promised to Israel through Jesus Christ is goin' to be yours too. It seemed a little unfair. And so they began to resent the Gentiles. They began to resent the fact that they were entering into the church on an equal basis, and without having to subscribe to Jewish law. That they could get away with everything they'd been doing, worshiping idols and all of the moral things that were anti-God and still received...be received by God on an equal basis, it didn't seem fair. And in fact knowing that the Jews were outnumbered by the Gentiles, they could see the foreboding of a whole Gentile church just drowning out Jewish significance. And so the ultra-conservatives saw a trend which they didn't like, and they decided it was time to take a stand against what Paul and Barnabas were doing. They had to put a stop to this Gentile evangelism on a wholesale basis, and at least qualify it some way. Paul and Barnabas then were designated as radicals, they were activists, they were undermining the great traditions of the fathers, they were, they were really destroying the sacred separateness of Judaism, And so they decided to take things into their own hands, did these conservatives, and because they decided to do that they precipitated the first great council of the early church, because they created an obvious problem that had to be dealt with. Now what they really expected and what they wanted as it boils down, and we'll see it here, was they wanted the Gentiles to become Jews first. You know it was as if the door of salvation was opened by grace, but the screen door was legalism, or Judaism. So ya had to go through double doors. I remember when I used to live in Philadelphia as a little kid, they used to...they...they...they had these tenement houses kind of that are just...they're like one after the other and if you're not real careful it's easy to go in the wrong house. You've seen, em, just row after row of these houses. And in those houses, because of the weather in the winter, everybody would build on a little tiny porch, that was about four by four at the most, and it was only to accommodate another door, and you'd go in one door and when it would shut it would take you out of the weather, then you could proceed in the next door.

Some of you have been through all of that. Well that's exactly what they were trying to impose upon these Gentiles. That the door to get to the door was Judaism, that Judaism was the four by four cubical that got you out of the outside, but didn't get you in to the inside. It was sort of no man's land. But at least it was necessary for entry, and so they were going to impose then Judaism on the Gentiles as a way to get to grace. Not Grace Church, but grace divine kind, Now, I need to add another footnote. The question of salvation for Gentiles wasn't an issue anymore, that was obvious. I mean even the Old Testament talked about the Gentiles being saved. And they had seen Gentiles getting saved, that..the question of whether God wanted to save Gentiles wasn't an issue, that was obvious that God wanted to do that, the question was, how did he wanta do it, you see? They had

already acquiesced to the fact that God was goin' save Gentiles, but the question was, how was he goin, do it? What was the mode of it, or what was the method of such salvation, and that became the issue. And friends, that is the issue, how do you get saved? That's the issue of the Jerusalem conference, how do you get saved? Is it by grace alone, or is it by grace and law? Is it by faith, or is it by faith and works? That is the issue of the Jerusalem council. How do you get saved? Believe me, that's still the issue of the church. And that's,,..with all of the sects and insects and everything else that we have within the framework of Christianity, with all of those things the deviated ones are the ones who are adding something to the basic method of salvation. You know it's amazing, and maybe it's because men never get anything for nothing, and the reason they don't is because they're too depraved to give anything for nothing, but maybe because of that it is, it is the longest running heresy in the church, that is, wrong modes of salvation.

That is the thing the church has always dealt with, somebody taking basic grace and attaching something else to it. It's, it's...for some reason it seems very difficult for men to grasp absolutely free grace. It seems impossible for men to understand that they are saved by faith, plus nothing. On the grounds of Christ's perfect work. But the Bible is so explicit in teaching that you're saved by God's grace, through faith plus nothing, that is obviously what the Bible teaches and yet people want to add things. We have a whole world full of legalistic heads, always want to tack on something. I always say, tacking something on to the perfect work of Christ done on the cross, would be like me taking my pencil and going to touch up the Mona Lisa, I mean that's stupid, I'm not even an artist, and it doesn't need touching up. It's a masterpiece. Some people say, oh yes, you're saved by faith, but you must keep the Ten Commandments to hold your salvation. That's Herbert W. Armstrong, the church that's on the radio, Radio Church of God, or whatever it is, Ambassador College. Salvation by...by grace through faith, plus the Ten Commandments, you must keep those to stay saved.

Some say, yes you're saved by faith, but you must be baptized to get into heaven. A little rough on the thief on the cross. The Roman Catholic church says, yes you are saved by faith, and grace saves you, grace and faith, but grace is mediated through the sacraments, so you must take the sacraments, they mediate grace, and you must partake of the Lord's supper for it mediates divine life. And then they say, yes you are saved by faith but the ark of salvation is the church, you must join the church. And so you've got all kinds of people adding on must's, to grace. Like children with crayons scribbling on Rembrandt's, you know?

Some reason man has trouble with free grace. And that's always been a debate. Well this is the cardinal issue of Christianity people, because if we don't know how to get saved then we don't know what basically Christianity is here to tell us, right? If in all of my study of the Bible, and all of my study of Christianity, I missed the right way to get saved: none of it does me any good, right? I mean I do wanta get that straight. I mean I could foul up a little on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I could foul up a little on the doctrine of uh, future things and eschatology, I could be a little off beat on the doctrine of, of ecclesiology, or the study of the church, I could mess up in interpreting a few scriptures, but if I

mess up on the doctrine of salvation, then I'm really in trouble. And I'll spend my eternity in hell tryin' to re-think that doctrine. And so that's basic, and this is the first issue that comes up in the early church for...for council decision. How to get saved?

Is it grace through faith alone, or is it grace through faith plus works? That's a critical issue.

And out of that issue comes the fifteenth chapter. Now I wanta share four things in this chapter, four features, and we'll take two today and two next time. And they just divide the chapter for ya. First there was the dissension, then there was the discussion, then there was the decision, and then there was the development. Let's look first of all at the dissension. Now it says in verse 1, "Certain men who came down from Judaea taught the brethren," that sounds all right, but you know there had been in the church, for a long time and always will be, false teachers. Second Peter 2:1, Peter knew about these guys, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who secretly shall bring in (damnable or) destructive heresies," Now Peter says there have always been, there always will be false teachers. They will be the angels of light, emissaries from Satan to infiltrate the church with false doctrine, damnable heresies.

Heresies that damn people, heresies that destroy. And one of those heresies is the heresy of salvation by grace, through faith plus works.

And that's the one that is dealt with here. So some false teachers arrive, and they are the...really they may well have been Christians, which is amazing. It says, "And certain men," although that's maybe stretching it. "Certain men who came down from Judaea." Everything is down from Judaea, if you've ever been to Jerusalem you know everything else is down, because it's on a plateau, even though this is way north and we would think of it as up. "Certain men who came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you can't be saved." Now that was their lesson. Now this is the imposition of legalism on top of grace. Which if you know anything about Romans nullifies grace. If grace is law, then grace is no more grace. But nevertheless, they were going to impose circumcision on the Gentiles. Now the brethren in verse 1 are the believers at Antioch. a..group...a...little..this is the truth squad, you know? Have arrived to straighten out the saints or the aint's really who aren't saints yet, and they've arrived in Antioch, as angels of light. Really they're ministers of Satan, and they're goin' teach false doctrine, they have no backing and they have no commission from the Jerusalem Church officially, they're self-appointed guardians of legalism. And they've come to Antioch to straighten out all the Gentiles. Now it's very interesting, and it might well be true, some commentators feel that they also followed the path of Paul and Barnabas and visited every one of the cities they had just come from on their missionary tour, and taught the same stuff there, That seems very possible because when Paul wrote the book of Galatians, he wrote the whole book to answer this very same question.

So it may well have been that these guys not only came to Antioch, but that they traced Paul and Barnabas' footsteps, went back to those Jewish synagogues and spilled out all this legalism that you can't get saved unless you're circumcised, which is like saying to the Gentiles, unless you come into the vestibule of Judaism you can't get through the door into salvation. And so the conflict was brewing all over everywhere.

Jews were coming down on Gentile Christians with some very heavy legalism. At this time Galatians was written, before the Jerusalem council, between the close of the first journey and the Jerusalem council, somewhere between chapter 14 and 15 Galatians was written. And it was written back to those churches that they had visited, to straighten out this very heresy. Which leads me to believe that these guys may well have traversed the paths of Paul and Barnabas, if they did that they were pretty zealous, wouldn't you say? If they went to all of that trouble? Transportation in those days being what it was, by foot, everywhere through the Taurus Mountains, the whole bit. If that did happen, and we can't be dogmatic, but if it did they were zealous. Even their journey to Antioch alone gives some indication of their zeal. And along that line, I think they were probably, some of them at least sincere. Feeling that a whole lot of pagans who didn't know anything about Judaism couldn't jump in at the end of a process, they had to come the whole route, including Judaism and the law of Moses. Now here you had a terrible, terrible potential disaster, because this was to impose legalism on the Gentiles, this could have been a...absolutely destructive, it could have created two churches, it could have created the Gentile church who would have maintained their salvation by grace, and the Jewish church maintaining their salvation by law, and you would have had two churches, the very thing our Lord prayed for that they may be what? One would have been violated from the very beginning. And so it became a crucial issue to deal with this. Now this issues, just for your footnotes, the issue of uh, imposing law, being circumcised, is the position that is known as Judaizing. As you study scripture you'll hear Bible teachers and commentators as you read use the term Judaizers or Judaizing, that means to impose upon Gentiles ritual or ceremony or law or legalism that belongs to Judaism. And so these people saw Christianity as a sect of Judaism and wanted to impose it upon them. Now the Apostle Paul of course has got this clear in his head, he's not confused even though he was a Pharisee, even though he was of the tribe of Benjamin, even though he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, though he knew the law, he wasn't hung up on law, he was what we might call a liberated Pharisee. In Galatians 5:1 he said, "Don't be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." We've been set free, remain free. He was liberated. And when he wrote the Book of Galatians he tried to liberate all these people who were gettin' hung up again. Look at Galatians with me for just a minute, Galatians talks about this all through it, but just picking out a couple of verses, just to show ya that Paul was square on the issue, he didn't have any problems. Verse 16 of chapter 2, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law." Now that's pretty straight stuff. Paul writing back to these little groups of Galatian Christians that he has left, who have now been confused and ripped by these would be teachers, and if it wasn't the ones from Jerusalem it must have been some from their own cities who were hung up on the same thing, because by this time the heresy has arisen in every place they've been. And he says to them just as clearly as possible that a man is not justified by the

works of the law, "But by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Now that is clear information. Salvation is by faith.

In chapter 3 verse 11, just in case you didn't get the message, he says, "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident because," even in Habakkuk, in the Old Testament it says, "The just shall live by," what? by "faith. And the law is not of faith."

You can't mix the two. Over in chapter 5 verse 6, this is a clear statement, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but," what's the next word? "Faith." Now you see Paul in his own mind was clear on this issue, it wasn't a problem for him. In chapter 6 and verse 11, "You see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand." The idea here is interesting, this may have been in reference to an eye problem and he had to write large. "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh," ha, they wanta show off their legalism, "they constrain you to be circumcised." So he knew there were teachers doin' this, "they make the issue in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised." But look at 13, "For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh." What does that mean?

That they made glory over the fact that you became a Jew. You see they have an exalted..such an exalted view of Judaism, that the very fact that you had to become what they are to get saved, makes them think they're somethin'. If everybody's gotta come...become what I am to be saved, then I must really be somethin'. Paul says, "God forbid that I should glory in the flesh." That's what he means. I should glory only in what? "In the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for in Christ Jesus (verse 15) neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." So law, legalism, ritual, ceremony, circumcision, the whole thing means nothing in salvation, absolutely nothing. Now in chapter 2 verse 21 of Galatians he kind of gives what might be a summary statement. "I do not make void the grace of God." You know what happens if you add law to grace? You know what you do to grace? You make it void. "If righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

If righteousness is ours through law, then we don't need grace. In other words if I go in to the court and the judge says, you're innocent, go free, I don't need grace, right? I didn't break the law. But if I go in to the court and the judge says, you're guilty, go free, that's grace. And every man is guilty. We've all broken the law, law can't satisfy, we shattered the law, only grace. You can't confuse law and grace, they don't go together, if you add law to grace you don't have grace. If you add grace to law for that matter you don't have law. And so the Apostle Paul was clear, he just simply said there is no connection between the two. Nobody ever got saved by keeping the law all the law did was show you how bad you were, nobody ever was justified by the law, only by grace, and if ya try to mix the two you destroy grace. God wants to confirm every man a sinner and then give him grace.

Well, this is the issue that comes right down to, to Antioch. And there's goin' be a head to head confrontation, Paul had reported to the church that it was really simply. Faith in verse 7 of I?, God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, he didn't see any vestibule of Judaism, just one door, that's all, faith. Well when those two guys hit Antioch, the pot began to boil verse 2, "When therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them." Can't you imagine? I would have loved to hear Paul and Barnabas arguing with Judaizers, just at the weight of argument, must have been a tremendous thing with the mind of Paul and Barnabas pitted against these people who were so know... knowledgeable in what they thought was Judaism. Anyway they "had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." They've gotta solve the problem, Well they really had a fight. It flared. You know, it's easy to see why, here would be...here would come supposed believers from Jerusalem, they all arrive in Antioch and you know what they won't do?

The first thing they won't do is eat with the Gentiles. They call themselves Christians? Here are Gentile believers in Antioch, they won't eat with 'em why? Because no Jew, self- respecting, in the minds of those Jews would eat with a Gentile, who was uncircumcised. They wouldn't go into their homes, to go into a Gentile home was to defile yourself, and I told you before that they believed Gentiles uh, put their abor...aborted children down the drain and thus a dead body really brought defilement on the house, and it was a seven day defilement, so they wouldn't go near it, They wouldn't even eat Gentile food, they didn't believe in the way they cooked it, etc, etc, etc. So here they were at a stone wall, when they arrived. And they wouldn't get at the Lord's table together, you can believe that. And so the whole thing erupted. And you know a guy that you'd expect better out of really goofed up, and it's Peter. In Galatians 2:11 Paul tells us what Peter did, Peter was at Antioch too, at the time that some of these people, whether the same group or not we don't know, but some Judaizers showed up, of the circumcision party, that was the group that believed you had to get circumcised to get saved. "When Peter was come to Antioch," verse 11 of Galatians 2, Paul said, "I withstood him to the face," that must have been quite a confrontation, Peter was no slouch, "because he was to be blamed."

Boy, do you know what he did? Listen to this, "Before certain men came from James," now James sent a group up there, whether James specifically commissioned them or not we don't know, but they came from the Jerusalem Church, "certain men came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles;" old Peter was up there sayin' hey, you Gentiles are in the church, so wonderful to have you all, and he was over at their house eatin', probably, havin' a great time. But all of a sudden here came the separated brethren, "and when they were come he withdrew (from the Gentiles) separated himself, fearing that those who were of the circumcision." You know Peter was playin, politics, he was afraid that some of the real tight narrow circumcision guys would get upset with Peter for eatin' with Gentiles, so as soon as the Jewish people arrived in town, he separated himself. And you know

what? He confused the issue, because, "The other Jews dissembled in the like manner with him, insomuch that Barnabas was carried away with that kind of hypocrisy." Now that's being a Gentile when the Jews aren't there, and then when the Jews show up, you're afraid of getting' a bad name with the circumcision party so ya just cool it see. So the Apostle Paul just really let it all fly, and lambasted Peter good. Verse 14, "When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before everybody."

Who, imagine. "If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compelest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? I mean if you're livin' free and easy like a Gentile, what are ya doin' makin' the Gentiles try to live like Jews when the Jews arrive? hypocrite. You say, apparently the early church dealt with sin rather openly. Yes they did, in fact it even says Timothy that if an elder "sins he's to be rebuked before all, that others may fear also." Well I'm sure that was the point here. Now in Peter's favor, maybe he was trying to pacify the weaker brother, but Romans 14 and 15 hadn't been written yet, I'm not too sure he was clear on that issue. But Paul saw the danger; he saw the wedge that was being driven in. He saw the wedge that was driven between Jew and Gentile, and he really was mad, in fact the whole book of Galatians just kind of exudes a white hot kind of heat. Well Paul was clear, and with Peter's issue and all that had been happening there was a big argument, verse 2 of Acts 15, they had to settle it, and so they decided to go down to Jerusalem. Notice the word, other, certain other. Galatians 2:1 tells us that one of those others, just as a footnote, was Titus.

So they went to Jerusalem, again you have to go up to Jerusalem cause it's up on a plateau, "to the apostles and elders about this question."

Now the leaders of the church were the apostles, they were kind of roving leaders and the elders were the stationary leaders, the leading one of whom was James, the brother of our Lord Himself and the writer of the book of James, So off they went, they were going to settle a great controversy, grace versus works. Verse 3, "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren." They came along through this uh kind of territory that was uh, populated by Hellenistic Jews and Samaritans, who weren't so hung up on the Jerusalem thing, they weren't so legalistic. And when they told them Gentiles got saved by faith. They were happy, they had great joy. These were the converts of...really the by-products of Stephen and the direct converts of Philip, Peter and John and uh, they didn't have any hang ups on legalism, and so they were just rejoicing and they were building support as they went, see, they not only had the Antioch church but now they had Phoenicia and Samaria all agreeing with great joy about the reception of Gentiles into the church purely by grace through faith. Well they got to Jerusalem, verse 4 and we see what happened, "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church." The term received has to do with a formal acceptance. Everybody sort of went through the formalities of accepting them as brothers.

And they allowed them to speak, it says, "They declared all things that God had done with them." And there's that same disclaimer, that is so important in any kind of Christian service, that you don't do it, God does it. Same phrase exactly that they used uh, over in verse 27 of chapter 14, when "they reviewed all that God had done with them." They that gave the glory to God always. I like the fact that it says "they declared all things." That must have been quite a report. Some message, to give 'em everything. The veteran warriors of the cross recited the months and years of victory. Now I'm sure that in their testimony' there was sufficient evidence to verify salvation by grace through faith plus nothing, but when they started givin' all this information the...the circumcision party blew a gasket, to put it mildly. Verse 5, "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, who believed." Christian Pharisees. You say, could you be a Pharisee and a Christian? Sure.

Pharisees were literalists. Pharisees believed in the literal interpretation of scripture. Pharisees believed in a literal resurrection, they had no problem with the resurrection of Christ, consequently, and Pharisees believed in literal actual angels, they were the literalists, they were the fundamentalists of Judaism. It was possible for a Pharisee to be a Christian, it was impossible for a Sadducee to be a Christian.

They were the liberals, they didn't believe in resurrection or angels.

Consequently they couldn't become Christians and still be Sadducees, a Pharisee could. And so "certain of the Pharisees,. these would have been the superduper legalists, Christian legalists, "they rose up and said it was needful to circumcise them," and that wasn't enough, "and to command them to keep the law of Moses." In other words, they couldn't just be saved by faith, they had to be circumcised, go through an actual physical medical operation, and then keep the law of Moses before they could be saved. The whole law they had to do, the whole ceremonial thing. I'm tellin, ya, is it any wonder that the Lord let Jerusalem get destroyed in 70 A.D. And just wiped out the temple so they wouldn't have to hassle with all this thing. They were still unable to disconnect themselves from Judaism, so in 70 A.D. the Lord just let Titus come in and flatten Jerusalem. And then they had no temple to go to. And here we are two thousand years later and they still don't have one. They're goin' get one, during the tribulation, that's goin' be desecrated, then they'll get a wonderful millennial temple, that'll be blessed of God.

But here they were, and they couldn't disconnect themselves, finally of course as I said, God had to destroy their whole temple just to disconnect them from a divine side, pull the plug from there. But anyway, they demanded circumcision and that they keep the whole law. Now this is bigot, bigotry in a sense, and yet it's understandable because this is how they were raised, Now the church had a problem. Great dissension, just building and mounting, and really friends it's the same today. You hate to admit it, I think Christianity now has landed, fundamentally evangelical Christianity knows what it believes, but we still consistently fight the cults and all of the ism's that float around on the

basis of the fact that you must add to grace, works. And they are ,...they are multitudinous, believe me,

Well the dissension lead to the discussion, and this is really the heart of what I want to share with you and then we,ll be done. The discussion, look at verse 6, now Luke didn't keep minutes of the meeting but he did give us highlights, "And the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter." Now here they had conflict, Paul and Barnabas came down and said, people, you won't believe what God did by grace through faith, plus nothing, And they recited everything that God had done, with them, gave Him all the glory. The Pharisees shot up and gave the other side of the picture, they must be circumcised or they can't be saved, and they must keep the whole law of Moses. The whole ceremonial rigmarole. Well, rather than have a public thing out of it, the apostles and elders met privately, and then followed it with a general session. We pick it up in verse 7, "And when there had been much disputing," and the word doesn't really mean fighting, it really means discussing, back and forth, "Peter rose up," now here you have the first of three speeches, given at the council. Peter, Paul and Barnabas and James. All three of these speeches are in support of grace, plus nothing, And they lay down for us, what I think is one of the most monumental passages proving salvation by grace through faith anywhere in scripture. Some have called it the Magna Carta of the Christian Church.

And so listen carefully as we first of all hear Peter, and then we hear Paul and Barnabas and then we hear James. Now just pulling out verse 11 gives us Peter's view. Look at it, "We believe," now he's not speaking for himself only, the elders and the apostles have had a private conference, and out of that conference here is their statement, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Now there's the statement, right? Now are you saved? Grace, that's the only thing you see in there, grace. Which is God's free unhindered, undeserved favor. God saves purely apart from anything you ever did. It is purely by grace, they don't need to keep laws to be saved. Now that's Peter's great statement, Now with that as the proclamation of these elders and apostles, they go about to prove that grace is all that is needed. And I wanta give you what I think is the most weighty evidence anywhere in Scripture. Peter makes several points, Paul and Barnabas add several, James closes it off. First point, Salvation by grace is proven by past revelation, past revelation. Look at verse 7, "Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, you know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and" what? "believe."

Peter says, look backwards, this issue was settled at least ten years ago. You know that God by choice, chose me to go to the Gentiles to preach the gospel and they believed, and that's all God asked, God did not impose circumcision then. So Peter says point number one, verifying salvation by grace is past in, past information, past revelation. The obvious point is, have you come up with something new? That God doesn't even require, which of course is a horrible position to be in, that makes you God and God's playing second fiddle to you. If you've gotta higher morality than God, then where does that put God? He reminds them that the fundamental principle of salvation by faith has

already been settled. In regard to Cornelius, at least ten years before. God didn't require circumcision then, God didn't ask them to be circumcised. And...

and Peter you see is speaking from the standpoint of a Jew. Of,..not only a Jew, but he was the Apostle to the Jews. So when Peter stands up that's a shocking thing for those people, it really is. Peter is identified all along with Judaism, at its very heart and he is the guy who stands up and says, ten years ago God settled this issue. Because Cornelius didn't have to do anything it was simply a matter of believing and that was it, and that settled it, and it was done and that's clear.

You go back to the tenth chapter, and see the conversion of Cornelius.

It simply says, "While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them who heard the Word. And they of the circumcision who believed were astonished." Why? Because here were Gentiles getting saved apart from Judaism, apart from circumcision. The old circumcision party was there ten years ago when that happened, and God didn't ask of circumcision. So proof number one that salvation is by grace, Peter says, is past revelation, you were there. Maybe some of the same circumcision party standing in that place right then were there ten years ago when those men were saved too. And God imposed nothing on them.

Second proof, and this is powerful, the second proof is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Verse 8, "And God, who knows the hearts, bore them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did unto us: And put no difference between us and them," Now hang on to that thought. Peter says, the second proof that salvation is by grace through faith, grace is from God, we simply believe and that settles it, Peter says, the second proof is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let me ask you this, does God give His Holy Spirit to unbelievers? Does He? No. To whom does He give the Holy Spirit? Believers. You say, well maybe God uh, maybe God didn't know they weren't really real. No, Peter covers that, "And God who (what?) knoweth the hearts." Don't impugn the omniscience of God. God knows who's real. They received the Holy Spirit, in fact, they were...the circumcision party was astonished as I just read, when they did receive The Spirit. "God who knows the hearts, (watch this,)"bore them witness." Did you know that God actually gave testimony of the genuineness of their salvation by giving them the Spirit? You know how God gives His testimony that you're truly saved. That's it, by doing what? Giving you His Spirit. That's why Paul says in Romans, "As many as are the sons of God, are led by the Spirit of God." God grants His Spirit to us in, within us and crying through us Abba Father. And so God gave testimony to Gentile salvation by faith alone when He granted His Spirit. They hadn't kept the law; they hadn't done any of those things specifically. They were not circumcised. The gift of The Spirit belongs only to the truly saved, Paul said to the Corinthians, Don't you know that it is your body that is the temple of the Holy Spirit, why? Because you are the saved ones, you are the ones bought with a price. And in Romans 8:9 that classic verse to which we refer again and again because it states something that is so important. In Romans 8:9 it says this, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Unsaved people don't have the Spirit, turn it around, anybody who has

the Spirit is His, anybody who's His has The Spirit. And so believers receive the Holy Spirit, In Galatians 3 verse 14, I'll read you a couple of verses here. He says, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, (watch) in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." There Paul says that The Spirit was given to Gentiles because their faith was all that was needed. And later in the same uh, Book, I think its verse 6 of chapter 4, yes, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit into your hearts," You see? Only true sons receive The Spirit. The fact that they received The Spirit means they're a true son, no difference. You remember in the nineteenth chapter of Acts, uh Paul ran into some interesting guys, who uh, were kind of out of the woods and didn't know what was goin, on. "It came to pass that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper borders and came to Ephesus and found some disciples he said unto them, (uh he was checkin' in on everybody, 'cause he was of course, he or Peter or John were around when the Spirit was sent to the Jews first, and then he was around when the Spirit came to the Gentiles, and certainly in some occasions, and so he says to this group, he says uh,) Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" Are you another group that's gotta be brought in on this thing. And they said we haven't even heard of the Holy Spirit. And then he says, well who are you guys anyway? And they say, oh we're uh, converts to John the Baptist. Oh, no wonder, you don't get the Holy Spirit when you come to John the Baptist. And then he introduces them to Christ, and immediately they were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body. The Spirit came immediately when they believed on Jesus Christ. There was no imposition of legalism on them at all, and the point was simply this, there were devout individuals who believed the Old Testament, who believed in John the Baptist but never had the Holy Spirit. Why? 'Cause they never put their faith in Christ, the minute they put their faith in the Messiah, the Christ they received the Holy Spirit. That's God's way of validating salvation.

That's why the Bible can say, if you're a true Christian you'll be led of the Spirit. Because every Christian, truly saved, possesses the Spirit. So Paul simply says, Peter simply says that the Gentile's salvation is true, because God who knows everything gives testimony when He gave them the Holy Spirit, and watch, "even as He did unto us. And put no difference between us and them." Do you know that they received the Holy Spirit with the same phenomenon that Peter and all the rest did at Pentecost? People always say, why does the, the tongues occur all through the book of Acts? To tie the whole thing together to the same phenomenon. They saw the same thing happening to the Gentiles that happened to them, and this was shocking. God giving the Gentiles His Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1:13 I'll just read ya two more verses. It says this, in whom you also trusted, (or in whom you also are) after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; (watch) in whom also after you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit."

Comes on all who believe, that's all God ever asks. All right, secondly then, salvation is legitimate for Gentiles by faith, as the gift of the Spirit attests.

Third thing, cleansing from sin, and I love this, verse 9, "Purifying their hearts by (what?) faith." Here again Peter says, look, if it's not enough that you've seen past revelation, God didn't require circumcision or legalism, if it's not enough that they got the gift of the Holy Spirit, how about this for truth. They were cleansed from sin.

And watch this one, God does not cleanse people who are not truly converted, right? Does God cleanse the heart of an unsaved individual? Of course not. The fact that they were purified in their hearts by faith, means faith is enough. What else could there be done except purification? When God takes away sin, that's it. If God made them holy that settled it. In Ephesians 1:7 he says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.. See. Forgiveness comes not...you can't earn forgiveness.

I'll never forget a jazz pianist who uh, one time came to a, a meeting where I was speaking, and uh, I spoke on grace, and uh, he came up afterwards and he was just a mess, and he said, I, I've gotta get to God, he says, I've gotta have forgiveness, I'm just ripped up and torn up and all, he went on and on, and he was in bad shape, he was goin' kill himself and everything. And he said today I went to the...to my priest, and I went to the confessional and I told him some really terrible rotten things that have been just eating away at me, and I just gushed 'em all out at him, and he told me to go over and do 35 uh, Hail Mary's to the beads. And I'll never forget what he said, he said, I took the beads and I went over and I knelt at the altar and I did 5 of 'em and I just picked those beads up, and I screamed in the middle of the church and I just threw 'em across the church, and I said, who am I kidding? There's no forgiveness in those, and I walked out of there.

And he said, I've searched all day and somebody invited me here tonight, he says, can God forgive me if He can how do you get it? And what a joy it was to kneel with him and to tell him that all he had to do was receive Jesus Christ, and cleansing and forgiveness was his, and he could forget the ritual and he could forget the ceremony and he could forget the routine and he could forget the legalism, it wasn't a part of it at all. When he had stood up from his prayer, he had the confidence of the Spirit in his heart that he was cleansed, by faith. See? God does not cleanse people from sin, whose salvation is not legitimate, right? That's why when he tried the ritual route he got no cleansing, he had no sense of forgiveness, and that was true of Judaism. The Jews just kept doing more sacrifices without any relief of their consciences. Christ came along and clears the conscience, forgiveness is complete. So Peter says, look, he says they've already been purified by faith, what is law goin' add to that? It's done. Then Peter points out another fantastic evidence, that salvation is by free grace alone.

He says in verse 10, this is the fourth evidence, the law can't save.

And I like this, he says, "Now therefore, why put God to the test, or put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Are you goin' unload law on them which couldn't help us? The yoke, why put a yoke, he says. We haven't even been able to handle that

thing, that burden of law. Notice he says' "Don't put God to the test," or why are you goin' put God to the test, what are you goin' provoke God for? Why do you wanta irritate God? God works out a beautiful grace system, and you're goin' irritate Him by tryin' to stick other things on it. Don't challenge God and don't question God, His decision in salvation is final, don't test God, and don't put a yoke on the neck of those Gentiles that we couldn't even carry. The law was a yoke. Do you know that a proselyte who came to Judaism was said to take on the yoke of the kingdom of God? A big wooden thing they used to put on an ox, I mean the law was a drag, let's face it. He says, why do you wanta put on them something that we can't even carry? Matthew 23:2, Jesus speaking said, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat." In verse ? he says, "And they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders." They just love to weight people down with all the ritual. Listen to what Jesus said, do you like this one? "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, (what's your yoke like, Lord?) and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest. For My yoke is (what?) easy, and my burden is light."

And they were trying to put a burden back on the Gentiles that they couldn't even bear themselves. Why impose on pagans what won't work for you? None of those Jews ever got saved by law, none of them ever got purified by law, none of them ever received the Holy Spirit by law, none of them ever were cleansed by law, why were they goin' impose it on the Gentiles? Verse 11, "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." I mean we're trustin' in faith, what are we goin' put law in them for? We've been in the law gig for years and it never made it, now we've come to faith, and we're goin' put law on them? Not at all, not at all. Let me give ya a last one, and we won't get to the speech of James, we'll take that next time. The last one, in a short speech by Paul and Barnabas. The last great evidence, watch this one. The last great evidence for salvation by grace that we'll talk about is the fact of miracles, by God

Verse 12, well by this time, "All the multitude kept silence," you know why? Pretty tough to argue with that speech, pretty tough, they kept silence, "and they listened to Barnabas and Paul," and you know what they were doing? "Declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." You say, well what is that supposed to mean? Watch this one, God, now get it, does not get involved in confirming by miracles false doctrine. Are you with me? Paul and Barnabas were traveling around preaching salvation by what? Grace and faith. God was attesting to their message by what? Miracles. God...I don't see the Judaizers having any confirming miracles, do you? I don't see God running around with the party of the circumcision confirming their witness by miracles. But everywhere Paul and Barnabas went they preached grace through faith, and you know what happened? They had miracle after miracle after miracle, God was confirming what they were saying. You say, well how do you know they were preaching grace? 13:38, "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." That was their message, grace without law. And you know what? God kept doing miracles to prove

that they were from Him. Do you understand that point? God only confirms true doctrine with miracles. God is not in the business of confirming false prophets. Listen to Mark 16:19, "So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received into heaven, sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, (now watch this) and the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following," God was goin' confirm the truth with miracles, Hebrews 2:3 and 4 says exactly the same thing, God confirmed the message with signs wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. God does not support false teachers, and if God was supporting the doctrine of grace, then the doctrine of grace was correct, right? Fabulous thought.

Let me close with a passage, I'm goin' read it to you, you know it already, Listen to it. Here's Paul, "For by grace are you saved through (what?) Faith: (you say, oh, that's a work faith, no, no.) That not of yourself, even faith is a (what?) gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." You say, oh man! That's terrific, I love the doctrine of grace, who I'm goin' go out and really wing it out, man, I'm just goin' live it up, grace, grace, see? Now watch the next verse. "For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works." You say, oh, you mean works are a part of it? Yeah, works don't save you; works are the result of your salvation. Let's pray.

Father we're thankful that salvation is by grace through faith, and even the faith is a gift from You. For how could we believe on our own? If Thou does not turn our hearts to Thee, Father help us to accept free salvation, not add anything to it, and to rest in the freeness of it. And to know that our salvation is not by works but it is unto good works which You have before ordained that we should walk in them, once we have truly been saved. Bless us even as we close, we pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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