

Is Salvation by Law or Grace? Part 2

Scripture: Acts 15:13-18

Code: 1751

1973

We're continuing our study this morning in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. In Acts chapter fifteen, we have the great record of the council of Jerusalem. The church faced its first crisis on a church wide basis, and it was the crisis of what is the doctrine of salvation? Some were trying to teach that a man was saved by grace plus works. Others were believing that a man is saved by grace alone. And so the conflict ensued. The conflict was resolved in the council of Jerusalem. The record of that resolution is in the first 35 verses of Acts 15, and so those 35 verses need to be taken as a unit which we have done. We began with Part 1 last time, Part 2 this time, Part 3 next time.

Now as we approach this chapter, we come really to the concept of grace. Now grace is a word that is basically essential in Christianity.

In fact more than anything else the term grace is inimicable or belongs to Christianity. All other religious systems in the world, all other ethnologies, all other systems of approach to God whoever God may be in their own system, all of them are based upon deeds or acts or works of men. There are certain things that a man goes through and because he does those things God approves of him and he reaches a certain level of approach. To God. Whether it be uh, some...something as, as rather simplistic as uh, one act entrance or whether it be something as complex as a very complicated religious rigmarole that goes on periodically, month by month, week by week or day by day, all systems of religion are for the most part built on works. You do something and God responds to what you have done, by approving of you. You make an offering uh, you appease a god somehow, uh, you go through a ritual, uh, you subscribe to X number of ethics that are set forth by certain teachers of this god. Whatever it is most religions are based upon the deeds that the individuals do, which that god approves of and if those approving uh, deeds out weigh those disapproved, you're in. And that's what makes women in India throw living babies into the Ganges River and watch them die. That's one way they can appease the god who then will look favorably on them, and so it goes. But in counter distinction to that, Christianity exists singularly in the religious world, as offering a salvation which absolutely has nothing to do with what you do, what you have done, or what you will do. The salvation that is offered in Christianity stands apart from every other system, as a pure grace salvation.

And grace might be defined as this; it is God's free salvation, offered to men on the basis of what Christ did, and apart from what they might do. I'll say it again; it is God's free salvation, offered to men

on the basis of what Christ did, and apart from what they might do. I am saved not because of anything I deserved, not because of anything that I did, not because of anything that I am, but because of all that Christ is, and all that He did, which I only believed and God accounted to me His salvation. Now grace then, is the free effort on God's part to save men. But to show you the limits of grace or the limitless character of grace, better, God did not just offer grace to save you, but grace goes so far that God wanted to make you like His Son. He wanted to conform you to Jesus Christ. You see, that's the character of grace that knows no limits. You see, God can't just say okay I have the grace to save you but don't expect much more. You know His grace is unlimited so that to tap His grace initially is to tap His grace eternally and to its limits, it can't come in doses it comes all together or not at all. In fact in Hebrews 10:10 it simply says, "By one offering Christ perfected forever them that are sanctified." In other words, the grace of God offered in salvation makes you absolutely perfect. For somebody to come along and say, yes, of course grace does make you perfect, but you need to add such and such, is ridiculous.

What could you add to perfection? If grace makes you perfect, that settles it, You can't add anything to perfection, all you would do would be mess it up and wind up with imperfection. If something is perfect, you take your hands off. And grace perfects forever, the one who comes to Christ, and so we add nothing to grace. It is absolutely free, and it is absolutely full. Now when you experience the grace of salvation that's only the beginning, then you move secondly to what Paul describes in chapter 5 of Romans as the grace in which we stand. Having been saved by grace I live in grace, and then that grace is expanded to conform me to Christ, you see God can't limit His grace, the ultimate end of my salvation is I'll be like Jesus Christ. And you know something? Watch this one, here's a beauty, I haven't done one thing to deserve it, not before, not during, and not after. It is pure grace.

God designed to conform me to Jesus Christ, totally and freely apart from anything I could ever or would ever do and don't you see how glorious grace is? You see to understand that grace is just God letting me get saved and I didn't deserve it, that's only the beginning. Grace is God letting me be like Jesus, when I didn't deserve it. Now that is what Christianity offers, Christianity doesn't say do this, do this, do this, do this, and if you get enough points you'll get this. Christianity doesn't, doesn't say that at all, Christianity says, simply believe what He has done, and I'll conform ya, says God to the very image of Jesus Christ forever. You can't add anything to perfection people, can't be done. Now you say, well that's simple enough MacArthur, that's what Christianity's all about? That's what Christianity's all about.

But you know it's amazing, that even within the confines of Christianity people misunderstand grace. They misrepresent grace and even fight grace. Men always wanta tack works on free grace. Which you see just ruins what it's all about, I mean if, if a person comes to you and says, you know uh, say they came to me for the sake of illustration, said, John, I, I, I love you and I want you to know that, and uh, I just ...I just want to show you how much you mean to me, and they give me something, let's say they give me something worth uh, \$20.00. And this is a wonderful thing you know, and I say' oh

my' thank you so much, but you don't have to do that. I know I don't have to do it, I do it be, because I love you, I just wanta love ya, and I, I just wanta give it to ya, And ya say, well, well now, no-no, no-no, I can't allow you to do that. No?, let's see, \$20.00 at \$4.50 an hour, which is going rate, I could probably give ya about 3 hours etc, good labor, do you have weeds to pull? I, I'm goin' come over and uh, what about painting, cleaning windows uh, and the guy, well no, no. You know what you do, you're doing nothing but corrupting the love that is th-ta is trying to be given to you freely, do you see? The guy would say, will you leave me alone? You know? If you're goin' foul it up, give me back my gift.

I'll give it to somebody who wants to be loved. You see? Now that's how salvation operates. If you wanta mess up what God's tryin' to do, that's...you can mess it up, but you'll forfeit grace. God does not want ya to say, well God uh, okay I'm goin' do all my little things now, hhhhh, I know You did this for...will ya let Him alone, let Him love ya? And don't add anything to salvation, it's all grace it's free grace, what you add to it corrupts it and eliminates it. It ceases to be a gift, it ceases to be free, it ceases to be grace. But you know it's amazing what people wanta add, well you've gotta get baptized or you gotta do this, or you've gotta do that. And my wife was in the hospital this week and I was reading a magazine that was in there, it was telling that you...that salvation really included giving a tenth, and that you had to make sure that you didn't violate the law of the Sabbath, and it went on about certain other things you know, and all of these things were part and parcel of being a Christian. Now you have to do this, this is God's standard to be accepted. People running around trying to do things, trying to pay God back for a love gift, by giving Him labor.

Which does nothing but restrict the flow of love and eliminate the freedom of His gift of grace. Well that's what people are trying to do, and that's what happened in the early church. You see, here God was offering free salvation to Gentiles, and the Jews were running around saying, no, you can't take it freely you must be circumcised and you must obey the law and the ceremony and you've gotta go through all the rigmarole, the hocus-pocus, see. And so you see there was a basic issue here. The basic issue of how does a man get saved? I mean is grace enough, or are we goin' believe the circumcision party or the Judaizers running around trying to corrupt grace with works, which is correct? And that's the issue that really comes to the fore in the fifteenth chapter. Now you'll remember that the Lord said in Matthew 16 "I will build My church."

And you know when Jesus sets His mind to do something, He does it. And He went on to say, "And the gates of hell will not (what?) prevail against it." No, the gates of hell themselves will not prevail against the church. I'll build it and that'll settle it. It'll be built. Well He started in Jerusalem which was fine with the Jews, they loved that.

The ones who believed did, and then He moved to Samaria and some of the half breed Samaritans were getting saved and that was rough to handle.

Because the half breed Samaritans were despised by the Jews, the Jews believed in the purity of Judaism, and keeping the Hebrew stock, you know, and these Samaritans would intermarry with pagans, and they were really despised, and here they were getting saved and the Jews were having a terrible time justifying this and allowing this. But they did worship the God of Israel and they were sort of plugged into Judaism, and so it was so...it was sort of tolerable. But then a couple of, a couple of absolute radicals came along, a couple of characters named Paul and Barnabas. And they had the gall to go runnin' around all over the Gentile world, just offerin' salvation footloose and fancy-free to every Gentile who wanted it. And the result was a whole bunch of Gentile congregations poppin' up all over the place. And this was too much, they just couldn't handle this, they didn't think it was fair that a Gentile could live the way he wanted to live and just come divin' in at the end and grab the Messiah and it was all great and he was an equal, they couldn't handle that. And they wanted to make sure those Gentiles became Jews first, and so they made, like we told ya last week, Judaism the vestibule to get into Christianity. And really Paul said to the Galatians he said uh, they did it because they wanted to glory in your flesh, it was an ego problem. They loved being Jews and they wanted to feel that they were the only ones who could get to God, so that anybody who got to God had to come through them. You see they had that kind of a, of a nationalistic ego, they wanted every Gentile to have to become a Jew to get to God. And so they started pushing off legalism in verse 1 they traveled all over the place and they even went to Antioch and they said to the Gentiles, except you're circumcised, except you have a physical operation, you can't be saved. Now this is ridiculous, this is laying legalism on them. Now it's so obviously an invalid point, to us who understand grace, but you see in that day and age it was a real issue. Because the Jews loved Judaism, and rightly so it had been granted them by God Himself. And all of the ceremony and all of the ritual of Judaism, and all of the symbolism and all the significance of it had been part of the days and weeks of their lives for all as long as they'd lived. And they had subscribed to all of this stuff and here came Gentiles jumpin' in and they got equal Messianic blessing, they got equal fellowship, they got equal rights, they got equal everything and they hadn't been through what the Jews had been through. Plus there was the ego factor, that they just thought it would be good if Gentiles had to become Jews, that'd show those Gentiles. So it became a problem, and these Jerusalem Jews who were known as the circumcision party or who are, became known as Judaizers, trying to impose Judaism on others, started traveling around messin' up the minds of the Gentiles. And they even went to Antioch, boy you know you gotta have a lot of gall to go right into the territory of Paul and Barnabas with heresy. I mean, you know hassling with Paul would not be an easy thing. So the heresy that they were teaching, and it may have been that they even hit the areas where Paul had established churches in Galatia, so they had messed up the whole Gentile Christian community with this doctrine that you had to do somethin' to get saved, you had to be a Jew first, you had to get into Judaism and go through all that routine, salvation by grace, yes plus works. Which was ya see that was like earning the wages to pay for the gift a guy just gave ya, which is spurning the freedom of his love. And so the heresy arose. The question is simple, how do you get saved? And it's gotta be answered. Because people, you can't mess up on that one. That's the cardinal issue in Christianity, if you know everything else, you don't

know how to get saved you've missed it all.

How is a man saved? How are Gentiles saved? Do Gentiles have to become Jews, or can they be saved as Gentiles? That's the issue.

Now, the section is divided into four parts. We saw last week the first part which was the dissension. In the first 5 verses we saw the brewing dissension. And the Jews and the Gentiles were arguing about the fact that you had to be circumcised, and they were right up there in Antioch arguing with Paul and Barnabas. They believed that there had to be a badge, a physical thing to, to make valid salvation. And you know this is what goes on in religion today, I don't know if you've read much about Hinduism, but in Hinduism there is a thing called the sacred thread and uh, there is a ceremony called the ceremony of upanayana, which means something like initiation, and in the ceremony of upanayana the inductee is given a sacred thread' when he receives that sacred thread, the Hindus say that is the mark of the new birth.

I mean can you imagine anything as ridiculous, as saying your life is transformed when you go to your upanayana and get a piece of thread.

But you see that is the extreme to which the works routine goes, that's no different than right here. If...now you just imagine this, if what they said was so, can you imagine the confusion of trying to get that done in every Gentile church? Goin' around circumcisin' everybody. I mean what a ridiculous....I almost said operation, but what a ridiculous difficulty. I mean that would be a...that would be a horrible thing, get all the Gentiles to show up at some clinic or somethin'. I, it doesn't even make sense. And then to assume, then to assume from that, that that makes salvation genuine. Boy, wouldn't Satan love, love to get people to buy the doctrine of works, so that they can be satisfied in their minds that they please God by doing some little thing, that they've done in their own flesh and they have missed the whole point of salvation. Satan loves salvation by works, And so the question was law or grace, and the argument got hot in verse 5, they even came to Jerusalem and the Pharisee Christians or would be Christians got up, and said, they have to be circumcised and they have to keep the law of Moses.

Ya gotta do the do's and don'ts the don'ts. Well the dissension led secondly to the discussion, and the discussion was just masterful. And there are three men that dominate the discussion, Peter, Paul and also Barnabas of course was there with him, and James. And as they speak, they give the answer to the problem, and it's really great. Look at verse 11 and you'll see what their answer was, and here's the Apostles' creed on salvation, "But we believe that through (what?) the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Even like Gentiles. That's their statement, we believe that salvation is through what? Grace. That's it. That is the statement of the Apostles, now they had had a pre council session, and they had...they knew this already, they didn't need to have to take a vote, I mean this was already known. They simply stated their faith, that it is grace, plus nothing.

But they're goin' support that. And the first guy to ring out with support is Peter, and he gives four points, and I gave 'em to ya last week, just mention them, He said, salvation by grace is evidence by past revelation, verse 7, he says, a long time ago, ten years probably, "God made a choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and (what?) believe." Now he says, look, he says, where did you ever get this idea of works? Ten years ago God was saving Gentiles by faith. All they needed to do was hear the gospel and believe. So past revelation verifies grace is all. Secondly, the gift of the Spirit. Verse 8 "And God who knows the hearts" God knows who's really saved, "bore them witness," testified to their salvation, giving them the Holy Spirit, just like He did to us. And put no difference between us and them." In other words, only saved people get the Spirit. They got the Spirit, Now if God gave 'em the Spirit that means they were truly saved, apart from circumcision apart from legalism.

Third thing, God forgave and purified them. Verse 9, "Purifying their hearts by (what?) faith." You see, Peter says, look, how can you introduce works now? Ten years ago God saved Gentiles by faith, cleansed their sins, and gave 'em His Holy Spirit. Is this a new doctrine you've got? You got some further word? Then he adds another powerful point, and that is the inability of the law. Verse 10, he says, "Therefore why put God to the test, to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Look he says, why put legalism on them, it didn't even work for us? Legalism didn't save us, it was a pain, it was a terrible yoke, why do you wanta hook them up to that thing? "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved." Are we goin' put law on them as a way of salvation? What's he saying? he's saying we've been...we lived under law a long time, it couldn't save us, now we believe we were saved by grace are we goin' put law on them? Peter's argument was really potent, believe me, 'cause at the first of verse 12 it says, "Then all the multitude kept silence." The argument ceased. And then Paul added another evidence, "Paul and Barnabas declared what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Paul preached a grace message, right? And God attended his message with miracles, you know what that means? That means God approved of his message, right? And if Paul preached a grace message that means God approved of grace, and Paul was simply saying, look people, God has already attested to the validity of the grace salvation by the miracles that have attended our preaching. The Judaizers had no miracles accompanying their information.

Well then James speaks, incidentally Paul's argument was pretty shocking because verse 13 says, "And after they had held their peace."

They were silent again. Uh, Peter and Paul had taken the wind out of their theological sails. Now we come to James, and James adds the sixth proof of salvation by grace. I call it prophetic promise. Prophetic promise, this is the sixth proof of salvation by grace. Prophetic promise, and it goes from verse 13 to 18. Now this is a difficult portion of scripture, and what I'm goin attempt to do this morning is just to share with you what I see here, the best I can. Uh, you all know my limitations, and I know

them and I, I, it is very difficult to interpret this passage, simply, I mean, I should say to be dogmatic about its interpretation because it could go several different ways, as to what he's saying and the use of the Old Testament verses, and so without being strongly dogmatic, let me go ahead and state what I believe, in the same way that I state everything, just as if it were true, and you'll have to trust me. But it's a difficult passage.

In verse 13 it says' "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken to me." Folks, I got somethin' to say. James is goin' talk. Now what he says here is simple on the surface, it's the interpretation of it and how it fits the sense that becomes difficult. Let's look at verse 14, James speaks; "Simeon has declared," now Peter just got done talking, that's just the Hebrew equivalent of Simon and it's giving him his name. He has just "declared that God first did visit the nations (or the Gentiles) to take out of them a (name a) people for His name." Now Simon just told you that God saved Gentiles that God desired to take out a group of people from the nations. And then he goes on, "And to this agree the words of the prophets." Now stop right there. He says look, Peter just gave you a speech, and in it he reminded you that God designed to, to visit the Gentiles and take out of them a people, and he began with Cornelius and they all knew that, and Cornelius' household. Now he says, if you're all uptight about Gentiles getting saved, have you forgotten that, "to this agree the words of the prophets." This is not any foreign thing.

You see the Jew always saw everything so provincially, he always saw everything only in terms and frames of Judaism. And the whole concept of Gentile salvation, watch, the Jew saw as Gentiles coming to Judaism, and once they'd become proselytes, then coming to Messiah, you see? And so the idea of Gentiles just plain old getting saved, without having to become Jews was something these Judaizers could not understand. And so he says, Peter just told you that God first visited the nations and took out a name, a people for his name. Now he says, to that agree the prophets that God was goin' do that, that He was going to actually save Gentiles, while they were still Gentiles, not having them become Jews first, And of course the reaction would be, what prophet ever said that? And so he says, "as it is written." And he quotes Amos 9 verses 11 and 12. Now he quotes it loosely, uh he quotes not the Hebrew version but the Greek version of it, the Septuagint, and he quotes it loosely. And he adds a word here and there of commentary as the Spirit of God helps him to, to give really what is an explanation of what Amos means. Now watch, "After this I'll return, build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down: and I'll build again its ruins, and I'll set it up. That the residue of men (now who's that? Gentiles) might seek after the Lord, and all the nations, (who call upon or) upon whom I call, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." Now stop there for a minute and I'll try to untangle all this. This prophecy basically says' that Gentiles are goin' get saved verse 17, the residue of men are goin' seek the Lord, and all the nations. What does that mean? That means that whenever this salvation comes, that it will be coming from all the nations, all the Gentiles. Now what does that mean? Listen to this, it means that Gentiles can get saved as Gentiles. They don't have to become Jews first. Do you see anything in verse 17 that says the residue of men shall seek after Israel? The residue of men shall seek after the nation Israel. And all the nations on whom I

call, is that referring to the fact that these nations have to go through Judaism? No, God says, I call them directly to myself. Do you see anything in 17 about circumcision? Do you see anything about keeping the law? Do you see anything about becoming a proselyte? It isn't there.

Yes, verse 16 Israel's to be established, verse 17 the nations will also be saved, as nations. Now stay with me on this. This is a millennial prophecy, There's no question about the fact that this is talking about the future kingdom. And he's saying this, there are two parts to the kingdom, Israel's restoration, we believe that, don't we? That when the Lord returns and sets up His kingdom Israel's goin, reign in the kingdom, right? And that's verse 16, I'll return, build the tabernacle of David, which means the nation of Israel, I'll build it again, I'll set it up, Israel restored, as Israel. But also in the kingdom the residue of men are goin' get saved, verse 17, Gentiles are going to be saved as Gentiles, while they're yet Gentiles. You see if Gentiles had to become Jews to get saved, then only Jews could get saved. Ya got that one? If Gentiles had to become Jews to get saved, then only Jews could get saved and verse 17 wouldn't make sense. Cause Gentiles couldn't come to Christ directly, they'd have to go and become Jews first.

But the fact that the Jews will be rebuilt, verse 16 and Gentiles will still come, verse 17 indicates the Gentiles in the kingdom will be saved as Gentiles. Now let me give ya a footnote, in the kingdom Christ is goin' return and set up His kingdom. You say, well how do Gentiles get in the kingdom? Well, remember this. You remember the judgment of the sheep and goats in Matthew 24 and 25? When Christ returns He's goin' judge the living Gentiles. The Gentiles who have mistreated Israel, given evidence of not believing in Christ, are goin' be cast into fire.

But the sheep, those are the goats, but the sheep Gentiles, the Gentiles who have believed in Messiah are going to inherit the kingdom, they're goin' come into the kingdom. So you've got living Gentiles goin' into the kingdom. Now those Gentiles are goin' have children in the kingdom, and of their offspring thousands, millions of Gentiles are goin' be born in the kingdom. Now they're goin' have to get saved just like everybody else by believing in Jesus Christ, right? But it's goin' be those Gentiles, incidentally all of 'em will not be saved, there's enough of 'em to have a worldwide rebellion at the end of the thousand years, you remember when Satan is loosed, and leads 'em in a worldwide rebellion? But many of those Gentiles will be saved, and watch people, the point is this is, they will be saved as Gentiles. In the kingdom, and this is so important, just get this, watch, if Gentiles can get saved in the great and glorious kingdom as Gentiles, why are you so hung up that Gentiles are getting' saved in the church age as Gentiles? That's his point, I think. Now if you're goin' try to verify this by some commentary you won't find it. But I think this is what he's saying. That's the only way I can understand the use of the Amos prophecy. And there's no reference to their becoming Jews, circumcision, ceremonial law, none at all.

James is trying to show that they don't have to be, and I think that's how he uses the Amos passage.

And incidentally we know from many other passages, he could've used a lot of passages, but he...The Holy Spirit wanted him to use that one.

But he could've used Isaiah 11:10, let me just read...don't look 'em up, let me just read this, the fact that Gentiles are goin, be saved, "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, (Christ) who shall stand for an ensign of the peoples: (watch) to him shall the nations (or the Gentiles) seek," During the kingdom Christ is exalted and the nations will come to Christ. Gentile salvation in the kingdom. Over in chapter 60th, of Isaiah and I think it's verse 5, talking about the same thing he says, "The forces of the nations (or the Gentiles) shall come unto Thee."

And he's talking about Zion where Christ will be reigning. They'll come to Christ as Gentiles, they don't have to become Jews. And then the last, chapter 66 of Isaiah and the twenty third verse, listen to this, "It shall come to pass that, from one new moon to another, from one Sabbath to another' shall all flesh come to worship before me saith the Lord." You see, they're goin' come as they are. Don't have to become Jews. All flesh, Gentiles, nations, heathen. Now that's all he's saying. Verse 14, "Simeon has said that God did first visit the nations, to take out a people for his name." Now we agree, we never saw that in the Old Testament, we didn't see the church, we didn't see the salvation of Gentiles happening first before Israel's restoration, we didn't see that. But don't get hung up on that, because if God's goin' save Gentiles as Gentiles in the kingdom, it's no big deal that He's doin' it that way now, see? I mean God's not goin' impose Judaism on them in the kingdom and that'll be the time when Judaism is reigning, and Judaism is ruling, and Judaism is where it's at, and if He doesn't even mind they're not Jews then, He sure doesn't mind now. Verse 17, just a note there, it says in the King James, "And all the nations, upon whom My name is called." Which is the hard way of saying' who are called by my name. All the nations whom the Lord calls are goin' come to Him as they are. That's the only requirement. And let me add a footnote for you, if you've got a frame of reference for this good, if you don't it's all right, you won't miss it. We've told you that everything that's goin' happen in the future kingdom has a, a prefillment or a limited fulfillment in this mystery age of the church. For example, in the kingdom Christ is goin' reign, right? But now He reigns in our hearts. In the kingdom there's goin' be peace, but now there's peace in our hearts. In the kingdom He'll pour out His Spirit on all flesh, in the church age the Spirit indwells the believer. You see everything in the full character of the kingdom is in a limited sense seen in the church. Now if there is full Gentile salvation then without Judaism, can't we see the allowance of Gentile salvation now during the church age, without Judaism. So it fits beautifully the character of the kingdom. Well there's another interesting feature here, I just can't leave this for a minute, and that's in verse 16. And I...as I studied this I thought well, why does he put verse 16 in there? Because that's the thing that confuses you. If he just went from the fact that Gentiles are goin' get saved, verse 17, and to this agree the words of the prophets that the residue of men might seek, he went right to verse 17 that'd be great. And the big hang up is what's verse 16 doin' in there? Why does he say, after this I will return and build the tabernacle of David, fallen down and build again its ruins, and set it up? What does that have to do with Gentile

salvation? I think it's important. And one of the important reasons I worked on all week, the other one came to me as I was preaching in the first service, so I'll share it with you. That's one of the fun things about preaching, you just don't know what's goin' happen, you know. But you know one of the reasons that I...as I thought about it, one of the reasons that I think that this verse is here, is to show them that God has not set Israel aside, in Gentile salvation. You see what happens inevitably today in, in the big debate in theology is that you have on one pole dispensational theology which says, God still has a plan for Israel, you have on the other pole covenant theology which says, God has forfeited all of His plans for Israel, and resolves everything in the church, Israel is set aside. And so the debate goes, And you know the worst thing I could imagine would be to announce to Israel that they have nothing left, that God has taken away all the promises, my, if that's true then God's promises to Israel aren't good and if they aren't good then God doesn't keep His word and if God didn't keep hHis word to Israel, I'm not too secure in what He's promised me. God said to Israel, you'll have a kingdom and you'll reign with Me, and you'll be restored, and you'll be rebuilt, and you'll be in your land, and you'll have a kingdom, and beloved if that doesn't happen then God's word is suspect, and if God's word is suspect at one point, it's suspect at all points. And so I believe verse 16 is in there because those Jews needed to know they were not being replaced, by Gentiles. Yes, it is true God first did visit the nations, to take out of them a people for his name, yes but, after this, "I will return and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and build it again it's ruins, and I will set it up." You know what that is? That's God's promise that in the midst of Gentile salvation, in the midst of the history of the church God has not forgotten Israel, And we believe that God is goin' set up a kingdom for Israel, in the future. You know even...people say, well when they crucified Christ they forfeited, not so, Peter said in his sermon, you killed the Prince of life, he turned right around and said, and you're still the sons of the covenant, same chapter. If all we have to do is announce to the Jews that they get the curses and we get the blessings, that's a pretty sad message. And so I believe he wants to confirm in their minds that God hasn't set 'em aside. You see, they were thinking in their minds, boy, the Gentiles are goin' take over. This free thing offered to Gentiles...we're goin'...they're goin' take over. He says, yes, Peter told you there's going to be a Gentile church, but after this, God's not finished with Israel. And so that's the first reason, he wanted them to know that God wasn't through, and you wanta know something wonderful? You can study the Old Testament and the New Testament and you'll find that the promises of Gentile salvation are all the while connected to the restoration of Israel. And if you're goin' be a covenant theologian you gotta get your scissors out, and you gotta cut one verse off from another, worse than that you gotta cut sections out of some verses, because you'll find in some of the Old Testament prophecies in the same verse the promise of Israel's restoration and the promise of Gentile salvation, they go together, they don't cancel each other. Just because I believe in the restoration of Israel doesn't mean I don't believe in the church, just because I believe in the church doesn't mean I believe in the cancellation of all Israel's promises. So, he put, I'm sure, I'm sure James quoted that verse just so they would know God hadn't changed His plans. Now there's a second reason, and this is really wonderful.

They felt very strongly that they had Old Testament grounds that a Gentile had to become a Jew. And you know what they used as their Old Testament grounds? Zechariah chapter 8, and I'll show you Zechariah 8, because I think it's worthy of our careful attention, just for a moment. Zechariah 8 verse 20, it's the next to the last Book in the Old Testament. Now listen to what it says, Zechariah 8, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: (and he's talking about the kingdom) It shall yet come to pass that there shall come many peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities." Isn't that great? That's Gentiles, isn't it? During the kingdom Gentiles are coming, to get saved. "And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Let's go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also." Here comes a whole gob of Gentiles coming to Zion, to meet the Messiah. "Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and pray before the Lord." Notice, it doesn't say they have to become Jews they're just goin' come as Gentiles, but watch verse 23, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts' In those days shall it come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew." Do you know ten to one Gentiles are goin' come. There are goin' be ten Gentiles hangin' on the skirt of every Jew. What for? "Saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." Now you know how the Judaizers interpreted that passage? That you've gotta become a Jew to go with the Jew to get to God, do you see? They interpreted the holding the skirts, as becoming a Jew. It did not mean that at all. What it meant was they were simply the messengers. Can't ya see the glories of the kingdom when every Jew is sort of...is draggin' ten Gentiles into Jerusalem? That's what it simply means. In the tribulation God seals a hundred and forty four thousand out of what nation? Out of Israel, to be His witnesses. In the kingdom, whose skirts are people hangin' on to when they're coming to Messiah? The Jews. In the early church who was it that carried the gospel to Israel? The Jews. Who was it that carried the gospel to Samaritans? The Jews. To the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas. Jews. God has always chosen, chosen Jewish servants. And God still in the future is going to use Jews. But you see they thought that meant you gotta become a Jew to get there, and what it simply meant was the Jew will be the messenger to bring the Gentile, and God will accept him as a Gentile. And so you see they were right in a sense it was true that Gentiles needed to come to Messiah, and the Jews had to be instrumental, but let's face it, Paul and Barnabas had a pile of 'em hangin' on their skirts. I mean they sure fulfilled the prophecy in part. They didn't have to become Jews, they were just goin' be led in by Jews and in the kingdom beloved, in the kingdom God is going to use Israel as His messengers to bring people to Messiah, that's what it's saying. And so he puts verse 16 in there to show that this passage hasn't been violated. You see, some of them might have said, hey, wait a minute, all this Gentile salvation, Zechariah says they're goin' have to come through us. What happens to us? So he says, "After this I will return, and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down: and I'll build again its ruins, and I will set it up." In order that, .The residue of men might seek after the Lord." What do you mean? God has to rebuild Israel, why? Because it is they who are going to be His witnesses, in the kingdom. It says in order that, houns, that means that in order that, is just exactly what it says. Jews are goin' be set up, the nation set up in order that they might bring the nations to the Lord. So he puts the verse in there to remind them that God's plans haven't been changed, that

they are right, there is a sense in which they are necessary to Gentile salvation in the kingdom, that as messengers and that alone. And I think the key to the interpretation is verse 18, "Known unto God are all His works in the beginning of the age." God hasn't changed His plans. He's still goin' restore Israel, you're still goin' hang your skirts down there and carry ten Gentiles on into the King, that's not changed. God just has an initial plan, Peter told you about first, to gather out a people to begin with, we just didn't see that plan, but let's face it gang if the Gentiles can get saved as Gentiles in the kingdom, it's no big deal that they're gettin' saved as Gentiles now. Well I'll tell ya in my mind, that is a powerful argument. The kingdom represented everything Jewish, that's the thing Israel dreamed of, and if in the kingdom Gentiles could still get saved as Gentiles, it was certainly no problem for 'em now. And even though they didn't see it, they should have understood its possibilities.

James simply says, believe it, the prophets agree, Gentiles can get saved as Gentiles in the kingdom, they oughta be able to get saved as Gentiles now, without becoming Jews. And God hasn't changed His plans, you'll still be in the kingdom and they'll still hold your skirts, but that doesn't mean they'll become Jews it only means you'll be the messengers. It's one thing you know to be led to Christ by a Jew, it's somethin' else to become a Jew first.

One other footnote, and uh, that's just a chronology, I've hinted at it. Here's one of the most important dispensational portions of scripture because it gives us the chronology of God's history, you ready for this? Verse 14 the first thing, God's goin' visit the nations and take out of them a people for His name, that's the calling of the church, isn't it? What follows that? Verse 16, "After this I will return."

What follows the calling out of the church? The return of Christ. What follows the return of Christ? The restoration of Israel, I'll build the tabernacle of David, what follows all of that? Gentile world salvation, verse 17, There ya have eschatology, you wanta know what the order of events in the future is, there it is. I can't understand why people come along and say, God's through with Israel. There it is there goin', "After this (after this) I will return and build the tabernacle of David." Notice the return of Christ follows the calling out of the church. And this is our faith. All right, so there's the dissension followed by the discussion, and boy, what a powerful weight of evidence.

Listen we've gotta believe in grace because its past revelation shows it to be true, we've gotta believe in grace because some people believed, and that's all they did and they received the Holy Spirit. They believed and they were cleansed of sin. We've gotta believe in grace because a lot of people had law for a long time and it didn't work. We've gotta believe in grace 'cause Paul preached grace and God attested to the truth of his message by miracles. And we've gotta believe that Gentiles can be saved as Gentiles without being circumcised and without going through some religious uh, ceremonies, because they will be in the kingdom, and if they will be in the kingdom it's certainly all right now. I'll say that's a conclusive argument, for grace. And so James states his summary, and I love this. We've seen the discussion followed the dissension, and now here's the decision Listen to the decision, it goes through verse 19 but we won't even get into that 'cause we're goin, stop in a minute. Verse 19,

"Wherefore, (on the basis of all this) my judgment is," now I love that statement because that's a authority. You know James probably represented authority in the church, and in, of course in the design of God there's, there's authority in the church, there's authority everywhere, in the home, everywhere. And James stands as one who speaks with authority, because he uses the emphatic I am saying, this is my personal judgment, which is interesting, because it speaks of his authority. "My judgment is this, that we trouble not them, who from among the Gentiles are turned to God." Now he says, my judgment is don't hassle the Gentiles, and the literal word trouble means to throw something in the path of somebody else that annoys them. Here the Gentiles were tryin' to walk the path of grace, and the Judaizers were in the bushes throwing rocks at their feet, see. He says, don't hassle them anymore. The way is the way of grace. Hallelujah I can say for that. That's all God requires is grace, this beloved is the safe guarding of the fundamental principle of Christianity, salvation by grace. That was the decision; it's by grace nothing else. But you know somethin? Built into that decision is a real danger, because outta that place some of those Gentiles could have gotten the information, hey you Gentiles grace! All you need is grace! And whamo, they could have taken that liberty and run with it.

And you know what would have happened? They would have left a trail of strewn Jews all over everywhere. Whose consciences would have been defiled, who would have stumbled and tripped and fallen all over everything they had done. That, that decision, listen to me people, that decision only took care of the doctrine, and that wasn't gettin' at all of the issue. There is a doctrinal issue but there's also a fellowship issue, right? It's one thing to say to a Jew, we're free, it's grace, the ceremonial law is over, it's another thing to say, we're glad to have ya for dinner I hope ya like your pork chops. Why? Because maybe that Jew is not yet liberated in his own conscience from a lifetime of Mosaic Law, and that would only offend him and make him sick. So James is wise, and he knows that Gentiles who are so free, and have lived such a free loose life anyway could take this principle of grace plus nothing and just run wild, and so James comes back with some principles that do not have to do with doctrine, but they have to do with fellowship, and beloved let me tell you something, works has nothing to do with salvation, works has everything to do with fellowship. By what I do, I either allow for fellowship with you or I restrict it. You know there are some things that I might do, but I, and enjoy and I could do them, I'm free to do them in grace, but I don't do them, why? Because I would offend some of you and if I was to offend you I would therefore cut off my ministry to you. Now I'm not goin' tell ya what they are, because then you'd be offended even though I don't do 'em, thinking that I'd wanta do 'em. Well, I'll tell ya one of 'ems wearin' a tie, you know, I mean I'd like to be able to preach, you know I'd like to come up here and just wear my T-shirt that says, grace is where it's at, and just...you know? Preach. And let...but you know what happens? Some of you wouldn't hear anything I said. You...that would bother you a lot, and so, I mean there's nothing in the Bible that says I have to wear a, a monkey suit like this and dress like I...but I do it, and I do it because it allows me the liberty to minister to you. And this is, this is a simple thing it'll only illustrate the fact that you know real fellowship is brought about by the kind of self sacrificing love that says, what I do I do with you in mind. Whenever you hear a Christian say, oh, I don't care what they think, I'm goin, do what I wanta

do, that's an immature I'll do that even though I'd enjoy it because it might offend a weaker brother. Now you see this is where fellowship comes up, so immediately and just to introduce it verse 20, he says, we're goin' write you a letter, now we know salvation's by grace but fellowship has some basic uh, features that need to be considered. Abstain from four things; pollution of idols, fornication, things strangled, and from blood. Why? "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him." You know why? Because there are still Jews in every town reading the law of Moses. And if you start doin' all kinds of different things that are offending the law of Moses you're goin, wipe out your testimony in the face of unbelieving Jews and you're going to offend believing Jews who are not mature enough yet to understand their liberty. And they're "being read in the synagogue every Sabbath day." There's a saturation of Mosaic information, and if you people who call yourselves Christians live in all violation of this blatantly and overtly you're goin' cause all kinds of problems in Jewish evangelism, and secondly you're goin' offend young Jewish Christians who don't yet understand their liberty.

There's no need to violate these things just for the sake of freedom, that is what the Bible calls using your freedom as a cloak of maliciousness, you see. Yes, salvation is by grace alone but fellowship demands some things. Let's look at these very quickly. What does it mean to abstain from the pollutions of idols? Well that's a food regulation. You might come over to dinner and you'd come over to Mr. Gentile's house, and you're a Jewish Christian, brand new Christian family and the Gentile folks had you over for dinner, and they brought out the most lovely roast beef, oh man, was it terrific. And you know, you just ate that roast beef and loved every bit of it, all the blood had been drained off properly and it was great see. And it was all fixed in the Jewish fashion, wonderful roast beef, and you say do you know, Mrs. Gentile Christian where do you shop? Terrific roast. Well, I'll tell ya, there's this little place at the back of the temple to Diana, they have the greatest meat, and prices, terrific. You know what happens? All the Jewish people get retroactive stomachache. You say why? That's meat offered to idols. You know what the pagans used to do? They'd bring food and they'd offer it to the idols, the priests would take it, eat what they needed and sell the rest out the back door at the little local priest butcher shop. And when you shopped there you were buying meat that had originally offered to idols. Now that's no big deal unless you happen to be hung up on that. Now in First Corinthians chapter 8, the Apostle Paul deals with this issue, I'm just goin' read this passage to ya and we're goin' consider the principle in detail next time. But Paul says in First Corinthians chapter 8, oh look down at uhm, he's talking all about idols, verse 1, and "Now as touching things offered unto idols." That's what he's goin' talk about, the things, the meats that have been given to idols and then sold out the back door, the surplus. He says in verse 4, now "an idol is nothing." I mean let's face it, it's a ver, to begin with the idol doesn't mean anything, it's no big deal whether you eat the meat or not, right? That's a stone thing, there's no god there's only one God. But verse 7, "There is not in every man that knowledge." You see not everybody understands that. Not even all the Gentiles understand that. Not even all the Gentiles understand...the unsaved Gentiles think that's meat offered to idols. And what happens if a Christian Gentile eats meat that's been offered to a false god, that another Gentile worships? He's not going to understand the separateness of Christianity, is he? And so it could offend Gentiles as well as Jews, and Jews of course hated idolatry so much they couldn't

tolerate anything offered to an idol. A Gentile when he

saw a Christian eat something offered to an idol might assume that Christian was still worshipping that idol. So it was bad from all the ways around. Now he says, it's no big deal really, I mean if ya wanta get right down to the real truth of the thing, and an idol is nothing anyway, but some people don't understand that. Verse 7, "For some with conscience of the idol." Some thinking this idol is something, they "eat a thing offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak, is defiled." They have guilt and they're hung up because of what they've done. Now in fac...and the real truth of the matter is if we don't eat or we do eat it doesn't make a lot of difference but verse 9 watch, "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." You know something? If a it's goin' offend somebody, don't do it. Verse 12, "When you sin, you sin against the brethren and you wound their conscience, you sin also (against whom?) Christ."

Paul says, okay, if meat makes my brother offend, I'll eat no meat as long as the world stands, I don't want to offend my brother. You wanta know what that is? That's maturity. When you as a Christian live your life so that you will not offend another believer, you have arrived at a level of spiritual maturity. People say to me sometimes, John do you do this, do you do that? And I say, no. They say' why don't you do it? I say well, basically I don't do it because I feel there would be some believers offended by it, and I desire to do those things which shall build the believer, not cause him to stumble. Second thing he gave them as a principle, not only abstain from pollutions of idols, but from fornication. You know the whole of Gentile worship was involved with sex. Prostitute priestesses, the whole thing was just one big orgy. And he says to them, you know one thing that you Gentile Christians are goin' have to do, is absolutely stay away from every single thing that smacks of the sexual idolatry that you came from originally. You see in Leviticus 18 God gave such a strict set of laws about marriage, about sexual relationships, this is never to be violated. And you know one of the things that just really just was so hard for Jews to understand was Gentile fornication, sexual sin, everything from bestiality to homosexuality and everything in-between is included in the word "porneia" fornication. And a Jew couldn't tolerate any of that, 'cause God had given such straight, stiff, stiff guidelines, and so he says to those Gentile Christians, you're goin' have to cut off anything that even smacks of it. They may have...they may have not done it, but they may have participated in things where it was being done.

Or they may of in some proximity attached to anything like it, stay away. You say, well John, that's not really an issue of uh, fellowship, that's a moral issue. Sure it's a moral issue, but it's also an issue of fellowship. Paul, uh, Paul deals with it as a moral issue in First Corinthians 3. In First Corinthians 3 he says, don't do it.

Fornication isn't for the Christian, any kind of sexual sin violates God's law, and when you join yourself to a person sexually, outside of marriage it says, you take the members of Christ and you join them to the members of a harlot. Now here's another one, when you do that you've made

yourself one with that harlot and you are one with Christ, you have joined Christ to a harlot. Sexual activity is to join Jesus Christ illicitly, now think about that whenever you're tempted to do that. And so he says in the next verse in First Corinthians 3:18, "Flee fornication." Run. Would you drag Jesus into that? Now there Paul deals morally with it. Here James deals strictly on the basis of fellowship. It's wrong, yes, but it's also offensive, to Jews to have anything to do with that. Then be careful what you eat, stay away "from things strangled," why? Because the Jews had to have all the blood drained out. They believed the life of the flesh was in the blood, so it was a sacred thing, they wouldn't touch it, they wouldn't eat it, and so anything that was killed by strangling would still have the blood in it. The blood had to be let out, and so don't eat anything strangled; it had to be wounded where the blood could be drained.

And then don't drink blood. Gentiles drank blood, did you know that? And in their pagan ceremonies, they drank it, couldn't imagine anything worse, but they did. And so he says for the sake of fellowship, follow some principles. Now do you see what we're seeing here? This is so beautiful. You can't take grace and run with it. You can't say oh, I'm saved by grace, I don't have to do anything, everything is perfect, and then just take off and stomp all over everybody. You're saved by grace unto good works. Listen beloved, works have nothing to do with that. Did ya get it? Salvation, they have everything to do with fellows we'll talk more next time.

Father thank You for our time this morning and getting into this.

We thank You Lord that what we do is important, because it does affect others. That Lord You've given us the responsibility to nurture each other, to build up the body and Lord, God we would pray that we would never do anything to offend others. Father, there may be some in our congregation this morning who've never come to Jesus Christ through grace, oh, may they receive the free gift. Lord there may be other Christians who've received the gift of grace, but who are sinning and offending and wounding and causing believers to stumble and who are living in sin, whether the sin of fornication or some other sin that is offensive, Father we pray that You'd deal with their hearts. God help us to restrict our lives in the beautiful self sacrifice of love that others might be strengthened rather than wounded, and that we truly might be one in Christ, we pray in His name, Amen.

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