

Is Salvation by Law or Grace? Part 4

Acts 15:22-24

1753

The title of the fifteenth chapter verses 1 to 35 simply is, The Salvation Question: Law or Grace? Now the salvation question, law or grace is the crucial issue in this chapter, and it is the crucial issue period. If you were to understand everything about Christianity and not understand the doctrine of salvation, everything else wouldn't do you any good. You'd spend all your eternity in hell going over what you knew, and find it unrelated to the real issue. Salvation is the issue. How a man comes into the relationship to God is the crux of everything.

And in the growth of the early church as it progressed, there became a very significant issue over the doctrine of salvation. And it's not a dead issue even today, believe me. The greatest heresy in the world today is the heresy of false systems of salvation. They are the things that damn people. And in the early church Satan threatened to split and fracture the church and to destroy the whole doctrine of salvation, and that is the issue dealt with in chapter fifteen.

Now let's back up just a minute so we get kind of a running start, as we have been studying the book of Acts we are aware that it is history. It is the history of the church from its birth through its early years, through the growth until such a time as it reached the city of Rome. And as we have studied this history of, we have found that it is unlike some history courses, anything but dead, anything but dull, anything but uh, but antedated. It is alive, it is vital, it is vibrant, it is now, it is today, it is practical. Because you see, the history of the book of Acts projects principles that are timeless. And we have seen as we have studied this book certain principles and patterns and practices which were the genius of the power of the church, and still are the genius of the power of the church. And then on the negative side we have seen problems and we've seen pitfalls that threaten to steal the power, and they're the same ones that we face today.

So what we have here is really a picture that is applicable to every church in every age, a picture of what brings results, and what stymies results, of what pleases God and what displeases God. And really the dominating factor in all that we've studied is the power of the Holy Spirit, isn't it? Were we to trace just that concept we would be here about an hour just going over the verses that say, and the Holy Spirit moved them to do this, or the Holy Spirit came upon them, or they were filled with the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit said to me to do this, or the Holy Spirit indicated that this was wise, etc, etc, it is really the acts of the Holy Spirit.

Now back in chapter 1, this particular history began with the words, "The former treatise have I written unto you, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach." And Luke said, I'm telling you now, what is the continuation of what Jesus began to do. We talk about the finished work of Christ, we don't say much about the unfinished work of Christ. He finished the work of salvation and He only began the work of preaching and teaching, and it's ours to finish, isn't it? And in the first chapter then Jesus gives all of the important equipment to finish the work which He began. And then

in chapter 2, the Spirit comes to empower them to do the job, and you'll remember in chapter 2 the church was born and the Spirit descends, they're baptized into the body they're filled with the Spirit and they go out and they blitz the city of Jerusalem and Peter preaches and three thousand people responded and three thousand were added to the church, and that's the kind of evangelism that's pure, where you get three thousand professions of faith and three thousand join the church, no loss. And then in chapter 2 we saw that the pattern of the early church, they occupied themselves with doctrine, prayer, fellowship and communion, breaking of bread. We saw how aggressive they were in their witness, and then we moved on into chapter 3 and 4 and we saw the ministry of Peter and John as they preached and as they healed, and the wonders of the power of the Holy Spirit began to spread until the people in Jerusalem reacted. And the leaders reacted negatively and they hauled them into jail and they threatened 'em and told 'em to stop preaching, and that only gave them greater impetus and the gospel begin to saturate Jerusalem until finally ready to tear their hair out they said, you have filled all Jerusalem with your doctrine, and they said, humm, that's exactly what we intended to do. And the gospel was spreading. And then in chapter 5 we saw that Satan had to do something because it was going too fast, and so he attempted to infiltrate the church with sin, and he picked out Ananias and Sapphira who were susceptible to temptation and who fell, and he got them to lie to the Holy Spirit and the church was threatened, and God dealt sternly didn't He? The Holy Spirit singled them out of the congregation and God struck them dead right there in front of everybody, and the church was purified instantly and learned a great lesson, that God hates sin.

And when the sin was removed from the church, it began to explode again, in fact it begin to do all kinds of different things, and finally there was even a ministry to widows. And there were various caring ministries.

And then in chapter 6 they had to get organized because the Spirit was doing things and they needed to get frames around what the Spirit was doing, and so they chose men full of the Holy Spirit and put 'em over the business of caring for the needy, and the church was organized.

And immediately after that we begin to focus on individuals. The church continued to spread and we run into a man by the name of Stephen, and Stephen was a fearless man. And Stephen preached Christ, and we got kind of a new feeling because Stephen didn't just preach Christ to Jerusalem Jews, he preached Christ to Hellenist Jews, Jews who lived outside Jerusalem, and we had a kind of a feeling that the church was getting ready to move out, and we were right. But Stephen wasn't goin' carry that message, because Stephen was so fiery that they killed him, they stoned him to death. And standing there at Stephen's stoning was a man by the name of Saul. And Saul picked up the persecution of the church and he began to, to slaughter Christians. And you know what that did? That scattered Christians, and when Christians got scattered, the gospel got scattered with 'em, and they scattered into Judaea, and they evangelized Judaea, and they scattered into Samaria and you remember that Samaria got evangelized, primarily by Philip. And Jesus had said, the gospel will go from Jerusalem to Judaea to Samaria, and it did.

And Paul was really the catalyst in that, on the negative sense. And then the Lord finally thought well, Paul's done all he can do from the wrong side, let's get him on the right side, and so in chapter 9 he stopped him on the Damascus Road, spun him around, turned him into the Apostle Paul and he was selected to evangelize the last dimension of four-fold scope, Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and what was fourth? The uttermost part of the earth, and now He had His man. And then in chapter 10, God used Peter to open the door, and Peter opened the door through Cornelius and company, Gentiles who got saved, and once the door was open then Paul marched right through. And we find the

preparation of Paul, the preparation of the church at Antioch, which was goin' be the church which Paul pastored, and then from there he and Barnabas went out with the gospel to the Gentiles, chapter 13 and chapter 14, they went to Cyprus, they went to Galatia, they not only preached but people were saved, they went back and strengthened the believers and confirmed them and organized them, they returned to Antioch and said, we accomplished the mission. And now the gospel was not only Jerusalem, it was Judaea, it was Samaria, now it was the uttermost part of the earth. And you know what? There weren't only Jews in the church, there were half-breed Samaritans, and there were Gentiles. And the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they might be one, was coming to pass and there was a unity in the church that God had designed, and again Satan said, it can't be, if God wants unity, I want division, and Satan tried to destroy what God was building and chapter 15 deals with the issue, that Satan brought up to try to fracture the church. And like everything Satan ever did to try to destroy the church it had an ultimate end of bringing the church closer together, and making a more positive commitment to the things that were true. The issue of how do you get saved came up and instead of splitting the church, they came up with a positive statement and the church set down for all time the doctrine of salvation, And so we can thank Satan for helping us to solidify our theology. But he's always doing that he must get tired of that.

So in chapter 15 the issue is dealt with, and the issue is the issue of salvation. How is a man saved? To begin with as we studied, still reviewing, we found that uh, of course we know that a man is saved by grace through faith, right? Plus nothing. No law, no ritual, no legalism, no rules bring a man to salvation. Pure faith and the gracious gift of God in Christ that's all. But there were some Jews in Jerusalem who were so super-duper zealous for the Mosaic Law that they could not allow Gentiles to get accepted in the church unless the Gentile first became a Jew. They had such an exalted opinion of Judaism, and it was really an ego trip. The Jews were the only ones that God favored. And so if you were ever goin' come to God, you're goin' have to come to Judaism first. And so you can't just take a, a plain old run of the mill crummy everyday pagan, and make him a Christian, he must become a proselyte to Judaism, and he had to go through circumcision, the whole thing. This group was called the circumcision party, commonly known as Judaizers, that is they were imposing Judaism as the vestibule into Christianity. Remember the little illustration that ya can't get into the living room unless you go through the porch, and the porch is Judaism: and the living room's Christianity, Judaism is the way to Christ. And they were goin' stand for all the ritual and ceremony of Judaism as necessary for salvation. Salvation by works and legalism. Well, this threatened to split the church, and it had to be dealt with, notice the dissension, and we'll review our little outline. The dissension in verses 1 to 5, "Certain men who came down from Judaea taught the brethren, (everything is down from Judaea as we told you, 'cause it's up in the air, altitude wise) and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you can't be saved." Now what is he saying? These teachers are saying that you, you get saved by a physical operation.

First you become a Jew physically, then salvation is available. Now let me tell you something, there is nothing wrong with being a Jew, that's a wonderful blessing of God. But to make Judaism the necessity for salvation is anti-God, is heresy, damnable heresy. They were making Judaism the only way to get saved. This is salvation by law, or by legalism, or ritual. And there are a lot of people today who are doin' the same thing, it isn't Judaism anymore it's if ya do this, and do this and do the other, every system of religion's got their own little deal, but it's the same spirit. Well it became such a serious issue that, "Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them," verse 2. And they decided that they oughta all go to Jerusalem and let the Apostles and elders deal with the question. And you remember that they went on the way, and they went through Phoenicia, Samaria, and they were spreadin' the word about the salvation of Gentiles and everybody was gettin'

all excited about it. They came to Jerusalem, verse 4, "received by the church, the apostles and elders," a formal reception. And then "they declared all things that God had done with them." They told all about Gentile conversion, and that set off the action in verse 5, "There rose up (shot up out of their seats or off the ground, if they were, if they were just sitting cross legged) certain of the sect of the Pharisees, who believed, (this is a part of the Pharisees that used to be Pharisees, now they've plugged into the church, they believe in Christ as Messiah, and they said,) it was needful to circumcise them, (ya gotta go back through all that territory and circumcise every one of those guys) and command them to keep the law of Moses." In other words, their salvation is not legitimate. Now this is what is known as Judaizing. Their salvation is not legitimate, they must become Jews first, and their feeling was, only Jews could come to God. Well, they had been willing to let a few half-breed Samaritans in, and they had been willing to let in Cornelius and company and the Ethiopian eunuch, both of whom were Gentiles, but those guys were exceptions and they were also quote, God-fearers which was a technical term for somebody who had attached himself to Judaism. But to just run around saying, all right, all you Gentiles, come on in, just...they couldn't handle that. And so they wanted to impose upon them Judaism, they wanted to tell them that you can get saved if you become a Jew.

Well the dissension led to the discussion, verse 6. And you'll remember that the discussion was a most powerful presentation of salvation by grace. Now we know the Apostles had already made up their minds look at verse 11, "But we believe (this is Peter talking for them, but we believe) that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." The statements very simple. Salvation's by grace. That's Peter, speaking, we believe for the Apostles, there's no question about that, we believe that salvation is by grace, but he's goin' support that. And there are three speeches to support it, Peter's, that of Paul and Barnabas, and that of James. And Peter is first, and the three of them together, the three speeches, give us six solid reasons why salvation by grace is to be accepted. Reason one, Peter, verse 7, there..."Peter rose up, and said, Men and brethren, you know how a good while ago (and we indicated that maybe ten years ago) God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the Word of the gospel and believe." Period. Who's he talking about? Cornelius.

You know that before when Cornelius was saved, all he had to do was believe, God didn't make him be circumcised. Past revelation then, says Peter, reason number one to believe in grace. Are you goin' bring some new doctrine? Ten years ago God was saving Gentiles by grace, through faith. Second reason, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do you think God gives His Holy Spirit to somebody who's not truly saved? Of course not, look at verse 8 then, "And God who knows the hearts, (in other words God knew if their salvation was real, God wasn't fooled.

You say, well maybe God didn't know they weren't real. God knows everything. And God who knows the hearts, bore them witness, (how did He bear witness to the validity of Cornelius salvation?) giving them (what?) the Holy Spirit, (to Cornelius and his friends, God gave the Holy Spirit which was God's testimony to the, really the validation of their conversion. And it even goes on to say,) even as he did to us: And put no difference between us and them." They have the same Spirit, you remember when the Spirit came the same things happened that happened at Pentecost? So past revelation and the gift of the Spirit show that grace was enough. Thirdly, cleansing from sin, look at verse 9, the middle of the verse, "Purifying their hearts (God purified their hearts, how?

By what?) by faith." That was all God required then. And then fourthly, Peter says, another reason we don't wanta impose law as a way of salvation is it doesn't work. "Now, therefore, why put God to

the test, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Are you goin' make them get saved by law when it wouldn't even do it for Jews? Pretty powerful argument, and the response is in verse 12, "All the multitude kept silence." I guess so.

Then Barnabas and Paul chimed in with their fifth proof that salvation is by grace, and that was the miracles. They declared what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Now listen to this point, it's a powerful one, Paul and Barnabas preached the message of salvation by what? By grace. Why did God do miracles? Miracles were to confirm the message. If God confirmed the message of grace, then the message of grace is the message, right? That's the point.

Then James was last, and he showed that prophetic promise indicated Gentiles would be saved by grace, and he goes through Old Testament prophecies from Amos and brings it to the point in verse 17, "That the residue of men ought seek after the Lord, and all the nations." In other words you can be saved as a Gentile, you don't have to become a Jew. And we went into that very difficult passage in great detail.

All right, so the speeches then gave the discussion very clearly. Salvation was by grace, all the proof was in. And everybody just kept silent, it was an overwhelming argument. And that led to the decision, verse 19 to 29. And here the decision is arrived at and stated, and then restated in the letter, and then taken to the Gentiles. Verse 19, James says, "Wherefore, (that is on the basis of all this discussion, on the basis of all that we know to be so) my judgment is this, that we trouble not them, who from among the Gentiles are turned to God." In other words he says, here's my judgment, let's not hassle them, and the word in the Greek for trouble means annoy. There's no point in tacking on a lot of hassles. Why their salvation is already legitimate, isn't it? The issue is settled. Do not trouble them. They have turned to God.

It's legitimate. Let's not go running up there, making them get circumcised, and making them keep the law, and making them do this. But, you say, well that takes care of the doctrine. Sure does. But it doesn't take care of the fellowship, 'cause there was still goin' be a possibility of real problems. You know it's one thing to say, we all agree on the same doctrine: but it's easy to offend and so this is what's added by James in verse 20, "But, let's tell them, to abstain from pollutions of idols, fornication, things strangled, and from blood."

You know why? Those were things that were very offensive to Jews, weren't they? So we're not talking about how to be saved anymore, we're just telling them that they shouldn't do these things, because these things will irritate the Jew. We can say, yes you're truly saved as Gentiles, we're not goin' add anything to it, but here are a few things you might watch just for the sake of fellowship. And for the sake of reaching unsaved Jews, why? Verse 21, "Because Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day." There are still plenty of Jews who are plugged into Moses.

And there's no sense in running around using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness. There's no sense in running around saying, I'm free, I'm free, I'm free, so I'll step all over you. And what you can't understand I'll flaunt in your face. That's offensive. And remember how we talked about the law of love in Christianity, which says, I don't do certain things because they make my brother stumble. That's what he's saying. He's not talking about how to get saved by not doing that, he's talking about how to maintain unity. So the decision is clear, the doctrine is settled and the fellowship issue. And the law is the law of love, the perfect law of liberty. You ever heard of the law of liberty? Sounds like

a paradox. Perfect law of liberty is love isn't it? The royal law, James calls it. And we went into that in detail. So, the decision then is arrived at, we're not goin, hassle 'em, they're saved, we accept 'em, but we'll be careful in the area of fellowship, not to offend them, and that's showing love.

Well notice verse 22, and we'll pick it up from there. "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas, surnamed Barsabbas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren." I want ya to notice something. Do you realize that there is in that verse something that is very foreign to most church meetings?

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church." You know you...I don't know how many of you have had church background experience but for somebody to come out of a church meeting and say, you know what? Everybody agreed, uhm. People say, oh no, you can't please all the people, no, we might as well forget that. Well, it pleased everybody. They were not only pleased with the decision, they were pleased to send along two of their leaders. I'll tell you something friends, and I'll just digress for a minute. You know why it pleased all of those people? I'll be honest with ya, I think every meeting, in terms of the things of the Lord oughta end up pleasing everybody, you know why? Because the Spirit never disagrees with Himself, are you with me? And if everybody is Spirit filled and Spirit controlled then everybody's goin' come out agreeing. And if somebody doesn't agree then one or the other side needs to reconsider their own relationship to the Spirit of God or their own information on the decision. You know back in chapter 6 in verse 2, when they went to choose deacons uh, most wonderful indication in chapter 6 verse 2, they were, the Apostles wanted to study the Word and pray and so they said, you choose some guys and they'll do that work, "And the saying (verse 5) pleased the whole multitude." You say, that's a different kind of church than I'm used to. Well you know what was the genius...what'd I tell ya was the genius of the early church? They were subject to the Spirit's control, and the Spirit doesn't disagree with Himself. One of the things that I believe in so strongly and have, we've made a part of our ministry here, among our elders is that the elders do nothing, make no decision unless that decision is unanimous. It's unanimous. We may have anywhere from fourteen to eighteen of the elders at a given meeting and nothing is ever done unless it is unanimous, why? Because if it isn't then we do not know the mind of the Spirit or somebody's out of touch with the mind of and the Spirit. So when something is decided to be done here at Grace Church it is because all of us, without exception have decided to do it, because we feel this is the Spirit's direction. I was sharing with a board, another church and they just talking and questioning me about certain things, and they asked, well how do you, how do you have your all meetings and how do you have your voting and of this, and I say, well we don't do anything unless we agree on it. And they said, ohh, we wouldn't get anything done. You don't even have a majority? You just ...you don't do al...and that's I believe Biblical. If there's only a majority then you have failed somehow either to communicate the fullness of the information so that everybody can decide or somebody's out of touch with the Holy Spirit, or everybody's out of touch with the Holy Spirit, except one, or two. I'll tell ya something beloved, that's why I progress in the ministry at Grace Church with confidence, because when something is decided, it is decided not by me, and not by a, a majority vote, and not by two thirds even, it is decided by all or it is not done,

People say, John, why do you think God is blessing? Well I think there are many reasons, one of them is, that we endeavor only to do those things in which we have the unity of the mind of the Spirit. And if there's resistance to it all, we don't do it. And that gives us a great confidence in going ahead. And I dare say, you may be at Grace Church a long time before you ever hear anybody say, well they decided to do this but I'm against it, I pray God that'll never happen. And so this early church

had the unity of the Spirit. Now you may have a group deciding issues: you may have a class deciding issues, those issues if they relate to spiritual issues oughta be decided on the basis of a...total unity. Then you know you have the mind of the Spirit. Or else if there's a wayward individual there, you need to deal with him on an individual basis. Well, that's another sermon. But it's important.

Notice that they chose two men to send along with Paul and Barnabas, it would have been great just to send Paul and Barnabas obviously, but that's their own church they could have gone back and reported, but undoubtedly some of the Judaizers would have accused them of giving a bias report, right? Here come Paul and Barnabas back and they say, hey everybody, we don't have to do it, we don't have to have circumcision, they settled it, and some of the Judaizers who were up there would say, oh right, what would we expect you to say? We expect you to come up here and tell us? And so the Jerusalem Church wanted everybody to know that this was right, so they sent two of their own up there. Paul and Barnabas were two of the five pastors of the Antioch Church, and they sent these two fellas, Judas and Silas, of Judas we know nothing, he's mentioned that's all we know. Obviously not the Judas, two Judas' who are named prior in the New Testament, a different one. And then Silas, of Silas we know very much. Silas, called Silas in the book of Acts is called Silvanus by Paul and Peter, and he was a...he was really the, the guy who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey, he was a citizen of Rome, he was the one who carried the first Epistle of Peter.

He was a very important fellow. So we meet these two, and notice that it says they were chief men among the brethren. Jerusalem sent two of its best, to give a solid report on what the decision was salvation's by grace through faith, plus nothing! You tell 'em that, not just Paul and Barnabas but you tell 'em from us in Jerusalem. That's our commitment. Now notice that it says they were chief among the brethren. The Greek word hegeomon, is an interesting word. It, it is the word for commander. We don't usually think of church leadership as commanders.

It is the word used of the procurator of Judaea, it is the word used of the governor of a province. Keep this in mind beloved, God has always sent in the church authority. The idea that a church can just kind of free wheel exist without authority is all wrong. Or the idea that the church is to be run by the congregation is all wrong. The church...the authority in the church is granted by God to shepherds, under shepherds of Christ. Now let me hasten to say this, I do not believe that there is ever in the New Testament the statement of one man being the chief man. There are always...there's always a plurality. Now when you think of the church at Jerusalem, here in the book of Acts uh, of whom do you think as the head man? You think of James, don't ya? We always say, James, the head of the Jerusalem Church, no. Christ is the head of the church. James was one of the chief men, he perhaps was the guy with the, the gift of teaching and preaching and uh, he also was the one who wrote the letters, so he was maybe the one who could articulate better than others. And you know when people think of Grace Community Church they think of John MacArthur, people say, well uh, your church, well I know you make all the decisions. I don't, I don't, I come back and I go to a meeting, they say well John, while you were gone here's what we did, and I say, well terrific, terrific. So, I don't believe in a ruler in the church, I believe in a plurality of chief men, raised up by God. And that's...you know I praise God for those such men here.

At the end of Hebrews, just to support the point so you don't think I'm in left field, Hebrews 13:7, "Remember them who have the rule over you."

And the word again is the same word that is used here in Acts 15. It means the command, the

authority. Uh, I mentioned in my book on the body that the very important point that when you have a church without strong leadership, without authority, without strong central leadership, then you have nothing but chaos. Class A example, Corinth. In the whole letter of First Corinthians, which is a chronicle of all of the crummy things the Corinthians were doing, and it's just a description of the messed up situation. There is not one mention of a pastor, of an elder, of any leaders. If they were there, they weren't doin' the job. And he finally has to even say in the fourteenth chapter, you prophets, bring your own spirits into subjection. You know they were probably under that deal, well we'll all get together and just let it all hang out and the Holy Spirit will move. Yeah, well ya know what'll happen? It'll just all hang out, period. The church was never designed to be run on a foot-loose, fancy-free we'll let it all hang out and the Holy Spirit will work basis. There have always been men of God set in the pattern of leadership in the church, and not single but plural.

So there is a need for leadership. And chief men is a great indication of the plurality of leaders in Jerusalem Church. There's a terrible danger when a church is run by nobody, there's the same danger when a church is run by one man. I don't know who would ever want that responsibility? Anyway, they get blamed for everything wrong and, be a terrible responsibility, fearful.

Verse 23, in addition to sending these guys along, it says, "They wrote letters by them after this manner:" And here was the letter, this is a...really they're takin' great pains to get this issue straightened out, they're sendin, two of the best men they've got, plus they're writing everything down, just so there'll be no mistake, and the letter says, and I love this, "The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles," don't ya like that? The Jewish brethren to the Gentile brethren. Ohh, there was no division in their minds, there was no schism, just love. The brethren to the brethren. Listen you can't imagine from your perspective in the 20th century, sitting here in a Gentile dominated society, you can't imagine this tremendous impact of just that greeting. The brethren to the brethren, and the apostles and elders thrown in, whoo, tremendous, and what a shot it was to the Judaizers, believe me. We send greeting, interesting word, greeting, only used one other place in the Bible, James 1:1, so it must have been a word that James used and therefore we say James probably wrote the letter, probably wrote it out. Anyway, "greeting unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia."

Now you say, it doesn't talk about Cyprus and Galatia where they founded the churches, well they were extensions of Antioch. They would have been included in the Antioch. And the word Cilicia, you say, well when did the churches get founded in Cilicia? I'll tell ya when, remember when the Apostle Paul was hustled out of Jerusalem 'cause he caused so much trouble? I mean that was when he was a Christian, he brought down so much persecution that the Christians decided that he needed to get outa town. So they sent him to Tarsus, you know what he did? He went to Tarsus for a while and then he took off to Cilicia and founded churches. So they're writing all of the Gentile churches, all of them were getting in on the information. And this is what they say listen. Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us. Now it's interesting that these guys weren't authorized by the Jerusalem Church, they probably didn't even know about 'em, but they did accept the blame for them having come from Jerusalem, They probably pretended to be representatives of the Apostles, anyway, they, "have troubled you with words, subverting your souls." The rest of the verse is not in the best manuscripts, so we'll stop there. Subverting your souls, and the rest of it was picked up from an earlier statement, you must be circumcised, keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment. And that's a true statement, although it doesn't appear in the best manuscripts. Anyway let's stop with this, "troubled you." He says now, some people have come and troubled you. You know what happened? Paul and Barnabas going around preaching the gospel, and dogging

their heels are these Judaizers, and they're going into these Gentiles saying, nope, nope they're wrong, it's not enough you've got to be circumcised and keep all the law. Now I want ya to notice the word, troubled, that is a very interesting word.

It is a different word than verse 19. You remember I told you the word trouble in verse 19 means to annoy or to hassle, it's like a gnat, you know just, just a, just an annoyance, an irritation. Let's not irritate...irritate them by imposing some foolish ritual on them. But here the word is a tremendously strong word, it means to deeply upset, to deeply disturb, to perplex, to create fear. A very severe kind of response. In fact it is used in John 14, the very same word. Remember when Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled." Those disciples were not just annoyed, they were really torn up. He had just announced His death, and they were shaking, they were horrified, they were in terror.

And twice in verse 1 and verse 27, He also said, I'm going to give you My peace, so let not your heart be troubled. It is used in Matthew 14 when they were out on the sea, and they were afraid because somebody was walking on the water and it says, they were troubled and they thought they saw a ghost. And that's not being annoyed, that's being real deep down troubled, Scared. And it's used in Luke 24 verse 37, post resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ which deeply troubled them. So it's used in the sense of physical troubling or troubling circumstances. But it is also used here, notice, they were troubled with words. This word troubled in connection with false doctrine is used in two passages.

Galatians 1:7 listen, he says in verse 6, I marvel you Galatians that you are so soon removed from grace. See what happened to the Galatians? They got the grace message and some Judaizers came along and messed them up, told them about law and legalism and trying to make them become Jews.

Man, you've bought the bill he says, you've bought their message. And some are troubling you. And there the word trouble, this Greek word is used of legalism. Legalism is a strong word. In Galatians 5:10 it is used again, the same way, and here you can see Paul getting mad, he says, "I have confidence in you through the Lord, that you will none otherwise be minded: but he that troubles you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be." Whoever that guy was that messed you up is going to get it. Two times the word is used, both times in connection with Judaizing. The third time it is used, connection with teaching, it is used in Acts 15 and again with Judaizing. This word then, somehow the Spirit of God has separated to show the deep turmoil that legalism brings about when it's imposed on grace. It messes up people. False doctrine is trouble my friends. Legalism is deep trouble. Because when you start tampering with the doctrine of salvation and you destroy grace, you have destroyed salvation and you have damned people.

The second thing it did, not only did it trouble them but it subverted their souls. That word subverting though used only here, I think in the New Testament, is used outside the New Testament for several things. For one thing it is used to speak of going bankrupt. It is secondly used in a literal sense to speak of plundering a town, dismantling it, wiping it out. So it is a word that is applied to robbers and marauders. And he says, you are spiritual marauders, you are going in trying to dismantle the souls of men. These Judaizers, you're trying to bankrupt these people, they are rich with the riches of grace and you're trying to steal them all, and turn them into bankruptcy. So he uses strong language condemning. Believe me people; legalism needs to be condemned, doesn't it?

Now let me give a footnote and then I'm going to quit, pick it up next time.

People say, well John, you can't get so hard on law, legalism, why the Old Testament teaches legalism. It does not. The Old Testament does not teach legalism. You say, but God in the Old Testament always prompted legalism, wrong. God can't stand legalism, Old Testament or New Testament. You say, but, but look at all the law in the Old Testament, oh, God loves law, God hates legalism. God loves law Old Testament, God loves law New Testament, God hates legalism both. Let me show you what I mean. This is important, if you get this you'll get a handle on' principles that will help you to get definition. God always wants obedience, God can't stand legalism. You know what obedience is?

Obedience is doing something for the glory of God. Legalism is doing something for the glory of self. Legalism is I do it because I look spiritual, see? Let me show you the difference between Old Testament and, and New Testament law, first of all, then I'll define legalism. God has always had laws, are there laws in the Christian life? Well of course there are. The perfect law of liberty, the royal law, the law of love, the new commandment I give unto you, love one another, bear one another's burdens, lie not one to another, put away all this, read Ephesians chapter 4 or 5, read Galatians chapter 5, the lust of the flesh, the works of the flesh, all those things are to be set aside. There are all kinds of things that the believers are to do, we are to be obedient. God is not against law. There is law in the old economy, there's law in the new economy. But that isn't legalism. But watch, there's a difference between the Old Testament law and the New Testament. There's a difference between obedience in the Old and obedience in the New, and I'll show you the difference. In the Old Testament, watch this, you obey and you are blessed. You got that? God would say, if you do this, I'll do this. Many times, Exodus 19 verses 5 and 6, don't look it up, I'll just read it to you but it serves an illustration. "Now therefore, if you will obey My voice, and keep My covenant then shall you be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: for all the earth is mine' You shall be a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." If you do this, then I'll do this. "If My people which are called by My name, shall humble themselves seek My face, turn from evil ways, then will I heal their land.

See? If you do this, I'll do this. It's illustrated by the Sabbath.

You work six days and I'll give you the seventh off. Six days and you've earned your rest. Do you know something? The law of the New Testament is the exact opposite, are you ready for this? The law of the New Testament doesn't say, if you do this, I'll bless you. The law of the New Testament says this, you have been blessed with all spiritual blessings already therefore, walk worthy. It's the exact opposite. Old Testament, you do this and I'll bless you, New Testament, I've blessed you so do this. Do you see the difference?

Now, some Christians are going around in the New Testament doing the Old Testament bit. See? I'm going to do this and God will like me better. God couldn't like you any better than He does. You say, well if I do this I'll be blessed. No, no you have been blessed with all spiritual blessing. That would be like a guy saying one man had all the money in the world and he was working to earn a living. There's no reason. Some people are, are trying to make points with God, you already have all blessing. Therefore we say this friends, legalism is an attitude. That imposing on the New Testament the Old Testament kind of law smacks of legalism. That's step one in legalism. But step two is the capper, and step two is the real...puts the lid on the coffin. Step two is, that you not only do New Testament kind of obedience, Old Testament kind of way but secondly you do it for self-glory. You know that's the natural outcome of that? When you start doing things as a Christian to earn God's favor then you're going to start glorifying yourself, you're going to say I did this and I did that, oh, God

must be so happy, God are You enjoying this, see? You know there's a lot of things that are hard to tolerate but the most difficult for me to tolerate is, is supercilious pioucity. You know, self-righteousness, ooh yek! It's terrible stuff.

You say, but in the Old Testament God...no God didn't want that in the Old Testament, God did not want people performing little deals for self-glory. And I mean Isaiah lambasted them chapter 1 just listen, do you want to think...you know in the Old Testament we always think of God's sacrificial system and all this, listen to what God said about His own system, listen to this, 'Hear the word of the Lord, (said Isaiah) To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? (Listen to that, God says that about His own sacrifices?) I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, I delight not in the blood of bullocks, and lambs and he-goats. When you come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Don't bring anymore oblations: your incense is an abomination to Me: Your new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I can't bear: it's iniquity, even the solemn meeting, Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble unto Me: I am weary of bearing them. And when you spread forth your hands, I'll hide My eyes from you; when you make your many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood."

Then He says, go home and wash yourself, make yourself clean on the inside, put away the evil doings. "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

God says, cut out all of that superficial stuff and get down to repentance and I'll clean you on the inside. Even in the Old Testament God couldn't stand self-righteousness legalism. Legalism then is not obedience, legalism watch it, is, is reversing the order in the new economy and doing things to earn blessings, and secondly, and incidentally let me add a footnote to that. You know some people who are the best Christians of all seem to have the most trouble. And if you think by doing 89 little goodies God is going to take away all the trouble umm-umm, you are wrong, wrong, that's Old Testament, sorry about that. But legalism then first of all, is doing New Testament obedience with an Old Testament attitude, and added to that doing it for self-glory. Which is the inevitable result of it. These Jews were hung on legalism. I hope you're not.

You know there are many in our world who are. I was in Rome, what a fascinating place, just loved it, oh, so much history. And among seeing all the other things that you see on the tour you know, and everything we went to the church, I think it was Saint Mary's, I may be wrong, Santa Maria, and uh, they had steps there. And the steps there were the steps that supposedly they had taken from Fort Antonius which was Pilate's place, and they had brought them all the way to Rome, because they were the steps that Jesus walked on. You know the Catholic Church has always venerated relics, all the pieces of the cross and anything Jesus touched and so forth. And so they had these steps transported all the way over years, centuries ago, and they're in this church. And as you go in the church there's a little sign that tells you that as you crawl up the stairs, for every step you crawl up you get one year off purgatory. Now that's a sad thing, believe me people, because those steps were crowded.

They were crowded with people going all the way up and going around and coming and going again. I mean, and I kept thinking about it's a little unfair for people who happen to live in Rome. As opposed to people who happen to live somewhere else in the world and can't get what they need spiritually because they don't live in the right town. I mean if that's, if that's the criterion there's something wrong. But I couldn't help but be overwhelmed with this. Did you know that Martin Luther,

himself, on his first visit to Rome visited the Sancta Scala? Those very steps, Martin Luther did. And he started, he was a, he was an incredulous monk of the old church, you know? And he went through what everybody did, and he got there and he got all the way up to those steps, and toward the top of the stairs he said, in my mind flashed these words, "The just shall live by faith." And he said, I got up and walked out. And you know what? The germ of the reformation was born.

Beloved, you can't get saved by crawling up steps. Martin Luther knew it, and Luther said, and you can't get saved by saying repetitious innumerable Ave Maria's, and you can't be saved by carrying around a picture of a Saint or by having a real piece of the real cross. And Martin Luther from that day on began to allow the seed of "The just shall live by faith," to germinate into his mind till it exploded one day and he slammed on the Wittenberg door his thesis. And it was really boiled down to salvation by grace, didn't it?

I don't know what you're counting on for your salvation but I'll tell you one thing, there's nothing to count on except the work of Jesus Christ which has been done, is offered to you as a gift you just take it and that's all. Obedience will come as a result of it.

Salvation is by grace through faith, that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, why? Because we would all boast.

And so the council settled the issue. I hope you've settled it.

Father thank You this morning for insights into Your Word, God thank You for the free salvation by grace offered in Jesus Christ.

Thank You that the early church settled the issue put it down by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for all time. Lord I pray that there's no one here counting on their self-righteousness, counting on their good deeds, counting on their religious performance, but Father may we know that there's nothing to glory in save the cross of Jesus Christ.

To accept by faith is all that is required, to add anything is to lose everything.

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