

180114 Acts 15

Paul's first missionary journey comes to an end at the close of Acts 14. The trip took them approximately three years. Acts 14 closes with Paul and Barnabas returning to their church home, in Antioch.

Chapter 15 is an account of a critical juncture in the history of the early church - theological debate.

This is a chapter of conflict and argument. Conviction that results in unity, conviction that results in division. Holding tight holds it together, Holding tight causes division.

1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

no small dissension — yes huge argument - uproar

Gospel Accuracy = Truth Matters - act on what you think is correct, rather than truth. - dehydration

though good intentioned - will be leading followers to their destruction -

At stake were the most fundamental, essential elements of Christianity! Was salvation a matter of works or was it a matter of grace and faith?

The group that opposed Paul in this great debate was known as the Judaizers. Judaizers believe you had to become Jewish before you could become a Christian.

Galatians 3:21b-22 NLTIf the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

What must one do to be saved? Nothing more and nothing less than believe.

Gospel accuracy is incredibly important, a "work" polluted Gospel is no longer Gospel, self- salvation, even if it is partial self-salvation is no longer a total gift - devolves into a religion

An accurate Gospel is so important to Paul - He goes to Jerusalem with Barnabas, sent by the church to set things straight.

3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. 4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law

of Moses.” 6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them:

The doctrine of the Judaizers had made it to Antioch - as Paul and Barnabas make their way south to Jerusalem - they are sharing about their missionary trip through Asia/Turkey, and this caused great joy - legalism was and always should be troubling.

Source of this troubling doctrine reveals itself - Brothers, believers, who were Pharisees

“Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us,

Peter reminded them how he had been responsible for the Roman centurion Cornelius coming to faith in Jesus ten years before this.

9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. Were their hearts cleansed by keeping the Law? No. Were their hearts cleansed by going through a ceremony (circumcision)? No. Were their hearts cleansed by adhering to Judaism? No. God cleansed their hearts by faith.

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

Jew and gentile are saved the same way, by GRACE. Both Jew and Gentile must admit they are powerless to save themselves and be ready in humble faith to accept what the grace of God gives!

Salvation is the finished work of Jesus Christ to be received. Not you do, He said it is finished.

Here are 9 helpful diagnostic contrasts (Tim Keller).

1. RELIGION: I obey, therefore I'm accepted.

THE GOSPEL: I'm accepted, therefore I obey.

2. RELIGION: Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

THE GOSPEL: Motivation is based on grateful joy.

3. RELIGION: I obey God in order to get things from God.

THE GOSPEL: I obey God to.... delight and resemble him.

4. RELIGION: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe, like Job's friends that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.

THE GOSPEL: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while he may allow this for my training, he will exercise his fatherly love within my trial.

5. RELIGION: When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a "good person." Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

THE GOSPEL: When I am criticized, I can take it. I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a "good person." My identity is not built on my record or my performance, but on God's love for me in Christ.

6. RELIGION: My prayer life consists largely of petition and only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of my environment.

THE GOSPEL: My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God.

7. RELIGION: My self-view swings between two poles: If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure, inadequate, and not confident. I feel like a failure.

THE GOSPEL: My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever. In Christ I am simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time, neither swaggering nor sniveling.

8. RELIGION: My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work or how moral I am, and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to "the other."

THE GOSPEL: My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for his enemies and who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace, so I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. It is only by grace that I am what I am. I have no inner need to win arguments.

9. RELIGION: Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, my moral record, my personal discipline, my social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, regardless of what I say I believe about God.

THE GOSPEL: I have many good things in my life: family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things is an ultimate end for me. None of them is something I absolutely have to have, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency such things can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.

James' makes some closing remarks are really important. Though the gentiles were not bound to observe the Law of Moses, they needed to understand **they were bound by the Law of Love.**

12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. 13 And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: 14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 16 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.' 18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works. 19 Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,

20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." 22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. 23 They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.

24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment— 25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

30 So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. 31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.

Death Grip on Grace - Holds them together - humility and unity that is demonstrated in this letter.

32 Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. 33 And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. 34 However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. 35 Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

God moving on Silas' heart - He knows all things.

36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.”

Paul was not content to merely plant churches — he wanted to see how they were doing

Dave Guzik — Paul had the heart of both an obstetrician (bringing people into the body of Christ) and a pediatrician (growing people up in the body of Christ).

The driving force of Paul’s next missionary journey was Paul’s deep sense of responsibility to help those believers grow in grace; to encourage those they appointed as elders in every church to lead well; to see how they are doing.

37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

These two men who were dedicated to seeking Gospel unity between Jews and Gentiles could not settle their own differences.

the contention became so sharp paroxysm (pəˈrɒkɪsɪzəm) from this Greek word. It means a sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity. — a severe fit of a disease, attack of fever, esp. at its high point: convulsion

The verb is in the imperfect tense which means a continuing quarrel— ongoing, heated, intense, deep disagreement between them.

Paul focused on the Mission - Battle, Unbeliever - Barnabas on the Man, Brother, Believer

Men are men, and ministry is messy - Proverbs 14:4 Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Importance of Gospel Liberty - Freedom

Most of all the early Christians were Jews, and they were raised following the Mosaic Levitical Law - The Mosaic Levitical Law included circumcision, all the clean laws & ceremonial laws - eat not eat - do not do - touch not touch - then if you were defiled - washing - sacrifices ...

When the Gentiles start getting saved, they didn't adopt all of the Levitical laws, Gospel gave no indication that they had to. But this became the debate - Jew first, then Christian or just Christian

Freedom was on the chopping block - spiritual freedom and cultural freedom

Christianity/Gospel is unique because all other religion are basically advice - here is what you must do to connect to the divine God - eternal life - blessings

The gospel is not advice it is news - about what has been done for you - it is not achieved - it is received as a gift - salvation is not from following a bunch of rules, or by joining a community - working really hard -

All other religions - may be inspiring at first, but in the end they put burdens on you. Peter pointed out that the Levitical Laws were a burden (yoke) that even they couldn't handle.

Grace proclaims, there is no burden required to connect with God. All sin is forgiven, your future is guaranteed.

As soon as you make Christianity, Jesus plus something else, you lose your freedom and slip back into legalism (rule following)

Legalism/religion believes a person is justified through personal sanctification. An unconscious list of clean and unclean activities is created in your mind, bam a Pharisee is born.

Historian wrote about Tertullian becoming legalistic. He ended up ruling out - theater, dancing, cosmetics and perfume - If god meant for you to smell like a flower he would have given you a crop of them on your head.

Cultural freedom was also on the chopping block. Judaizers said that if you want to become a real saved person you need to become culturally Jewish. Follow all their customs and laws.

What was the purpose of the Levitical laws? - all of these ceremonial laws were pictures that pointed to spiritual truth about salvation. If you touched something dead you had to wash and you couldn't enter the tabernacle. Picture of the truth that God is Holy and Pure and we are not.

Powerful picture that said, you can't just walk into the presence of a Holy God, there is a barrier - distance - separation between sinful man and a Holy God. That is not something that humans believe about themselves and God.

What about all the blood and sacrifices, offerings, scapegoat? They all pointed to a substitute solution to the sin problem. Through the suffering and death of a substitute, one can be made clean, purified, atoned. Pointed to the fact that we are all spiritually unclean, and need a savior to come and die for us in our place.

Second reason for the levitical laws was to keep the Jews culturally separate. The Jews alone had the word of God, promises, prophecies, and revelation of God. To keep the word pure, the message of the Gospel intact.

Paul's point was that the Levitical Laws were no longer required, everything that they pointed too and existed for were fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Jesus said, I didn't come to destroy the Law, but fulfill it.

The laws were a shadow and the reality that had come.

Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

If you lose your grip on grace you will fall back into legalism, you will start to turn cultural norms into ways of being righteous and you will lose spiritual freedom as well as your cultural freedom.

Therefore Paul argued and the elders and apostles agreed that the levitical law was no longer required.

Important side note - Many people say that Christians don't follow everything in the bible and they point to leuiticus and say you guys just pick and choose what you want.

As a Christian you have no authority to put aside anything in the Bible, unless the Bible itself says so - then you are not picking and choosing - you are doing what the Bible says.

We must watch ourselves, we all have a tendency to not look at our culture as culture, but as righteousness.

Wedding arrival time, late vs punctual, we all think our culture is better, our culture is right. Marriage and family norms.

Unless you take the Gospel and push it down deep into your heart, you will do the same thing.

Christians ought to be the most culturally flexible people - missionaries - we should realize I am saved by grace - and not look at my personal cultural distinctives and say the I am better.