

Grace On Trial
Acts 15:1-36
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The title of my message tonight is Grace On Trial. We're going to look at Acts 15:1-35. I want you to follow with me beginning in verse 1, down to verse 5. Luke tells us, "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem," that is, Barnabas and Paul, "they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. 5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed," they were believers in Jesus, "saying, That it was needful to circumcise them," that is, the Gentiles, "and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

One of the hardest things for mankind or for people in general to accept is that God saves us completely by His grace. There's no merits on our part—we don't deserve, we don't earn, we don't merit salvation. The Bible is very clear. Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9 (that verse is going to come back to tie in with so much of what we cover tonight), "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," when he says, "that not of yourselves," it's a reference to salvation, "it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast." It's hard for us to accept that. We all want to earn, we want to merit, we want to deserve...and all religions, apart from Christianity, teach that we do something to go to heaven. You gotta be good. You gotta be confirmed. You gotta be baptized. You gotta take communion. You gotta go to church. You gotta be religious. You gotta do certain things, and then God will kind of see that your good works outweigh your bad works and will let you into heaven. The most common understanding of how to go to heaven or be saved is by my good deeds or by being a good person, working or trying really hard. Biblically speaking, nothing can be further from the truth. The Bible tells us that Christ died for the ungodly. The Bible says there's no one righteous, no not one; and there's no way that anyone can ever, by any means, be good enough to go to heaven, so as we come to this chapter, this is the issue that we're going to be dealing with: What do we need to do to be saved? How do we get to heaven?

The background and setting for Acts 15, as we back up a bit into Acts 14:27, says, "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together," the "they" in verse 27 is Paul and Barnabas. It's the end of their first missionary journey. We came to it in closing last Wednesday night. They've come back to Antioch, and "they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had," notice this, "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles," that's significant, "And there they abode long time with the disciples." Notice, God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas had found themselves going into more Gentile

areas, and more and more and more Gentiles were coming to Christ. Up to this point, a few Gentiles (many of them were proselytes) had already become Jewish to some degree, were devoted to the God of Israel, and had come to believe in Jesus the Messiah; but now lots of Gentiles and pure pagan Gentiles were getting saved. It was kind of bothering the Jews.

You gotta understand their mentality for just a moment, though it's hard for us to put ourselves into their place, but they had the promises of God, the covenants of God, and the laws of God. They knew that God had chosen them. They had the law of God and were working hard, were diligent, and devoted. All of a sudden, Jesus comes—He dies for our sins, rises from the dead, He's the Messiah—and Gentiles start being saved and get to go to heaven by the grace of God. They haven't worked for it, earned, merited, or deserved it. These Jews are like, "We've been working hard for a long time. We've been doing lots of stuff. We've been keeping the law of Moses, and you Gentiles just think you can just waltz right in here, go into heaven, and you don't need to do anything? You don't need to be circumcised, keep the law of Moses, watch your diet, worship on certain days, and follow certain rules? If you think you're going to be going to heaven, you've got to do those things." It was really bothersome for them and upsetting to them, and there's a thousand other reasons why. Of course, the Jews didn't like Gentiles. They despised them, but God, even in the Old Testament (we're going to see tonight), prophesied that Gentiles would be saved. In the Old Testament Gentiles were saved, and now many of them coming to believe in Messiah and being saved; so the Jews were really bothered by this. They had a real difficult time with this. Though God had, "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles," there were certain Jews (chapter 15) that wanted to shut that door and not let Gentiles in unless it was through the door of becoming Jewish, then they could be saved.

Go back with me to Acts 15:1. It says, "And certain men which came down from Judaea," it doesn't say much about who these men were, but they came from Judaea which is a reference to Jerusalem. In this context, when it says "Judaea," which is a region, it's actually a reference to the fact that Jerusalem is the mother church. That's where they came from. These men (let me just give you some insight, and we'll get more as we get down to verse 5) were what is known as Judaizers. You need to understand that term or you won't understand a lot of the New Testament.

What is a Judaizer? These Judaizers were Christians. They were Jews but were telling Gentiles, non-Jews, that in order to be saved you have to become Jews. You have to proselyte into Judaism. How would they do that? By circumcision and by keeping the Mosaic law—the diets and the days. They were basically telling these Gentiles that, "You can't just believe in Jesus and think you're going to go to heaven. No, no, no. You have to become Jews. You can believe in Jesus, but you gotta do certain things."

We meet people still like that today. "Oh, we're saved by grace through faith." "Oh, well you have to be baptized, my friend, and not only baptized but baptized in Jesus' name." And some people get really bizarre, "And baptized backwards and immersed and you can't be baptized face forward and it really matters how you're dunked under the water." It doesn't really matter. I always thought it would be cool to throw people off the pier at Oceanside or something, "In the

name of the Father, Son, Holy Ghost,” and see if they make it back to shore. If you do, you’re saved. If you don’t, well whatever. I’m kidding! People divide over baptism. There are people who say, “You can’t go to heaven unless your baptized. You can’t go to heaven unless you’re confirmed,” or “You can’t go to heaven unless you take communion,” and “You can’t go to heaven unless you join our group. Our particular church is the only church where people are going to heaven. We’re the only true church of the straight gait of the narrow way of the deeper life club of the saints of God in Christ Jesus. That’s the name of our church.” They exclude everyone else, and the list goes on and on and on. “You can’t go to heaven if you listen to R music. If you listen to that music, you’re going to hell, you’re not saved.” There’s just a whole list of things that people put on others—laws, rules, and regulations—that tell them you can’t go to heaven.

The book of Galatians was written about this very issue, and Bible scholars are divided as to exactly when the book of Galatians was written: was it written before Acts 15? Was it written after Acts 15? I think the best guess is (and it’s a guess because we don’t know), based on chronological study in other verses, that it happened before Acts 15. While Paul was spending this “long time,” notice at the end of Acts 14:28, “And there they abode long time with the disciples.” During this time, Paul wrote back to the churches that he just started on his first missionary journey. What was he writing to them about? Standing fast in the liberty where Christ has made you free and not being entangled again in a yoke of bondage. In Galatians 1:8 he said, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” The word is anathema which means cursed to the lowest hell. This is an important issue, so Galatians was probably written prior to Acts 15 or Paul would’ve mentioned the council in his letter to the Galatians, and he did not do that. The gospel is what is at stake.

How is a man saved? Notice at the end of Acts 15:1, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Let me put something very simple and clear for you. Anytime, anywhere, anyplace that someone tells you that you need more than faith in Jesus Christ to be saved, run for your life! It’s not true. It’s not biblical and it’s not scriptural. There are also the cultists that knock on your door. They use the same vocabulary, but they have a different dictionary. “Oh, we believe in Jesus. Oh yeah, we believe that you’re saved by grace, but you also have to work for it, right?” They say, “Does not the book of James say faith without works is dead?” They’re quick to point out that you can’t just say, “I believe in Jesus Christ and expect God to take you to heaven as a free ride. You have to do certain things.” Sometimes their argument might sound logical, and it might be persuasive. You might even be kind of thrown off balance yourself thinking, Well, yeah, maybe they’ve got something there. The Bible is very clear that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. You don’t do anything to save yourself other than trust Christ to save you, and faith or trust is not a work. It’s not you meriting salvation.

These Jewish believers in this context, these Judaizers, were making a big mistake here because the very gospel was at stake—what would be the gospel that they would preach. Would there be now two churches—a Gentile church and a Jewish church? What about those

Gentiles that were led to Christ by Paul and Barnabas? Are they not saved? Are they not going to go to heaven? Whenever God opens a door, as we saw in Acts 14:27, satan tries to shut the door. When God opens the door to the Gentiles and they're being saved, I can promise you that satan is going to come along and try to cause division.

The church has always had these kind of debates and discussions. Wherever you have two people, you have a difference of opinion. If ever you find two people that both think the same on every issue, one of them is not thinking, okay? I mean, even a husband and wife that have been married a long time, they don't always see eye-to-eye in everything. They don't always get along in every area. Christians don't always see eye-to-eye. We don't always get along. It's one thing to discuss the order of service, whether or not we use contemporary worship or traditional worship, whether we wear suits and ties to church or whether the carpet is gray or blue, and whether we meet outside or inside. Those things are non-essentials; even baptism, let's not fight over the mode of baptism. Let's not fight over the kind of music we listen to as Christians or how we comb or cut our hair or the clothes we wear. The Bible says God looks not as men look on the outward appearance, God looks where? On the heart, and He knows the heart. In the church, most church fights and divisions are not over doctrinal issues, they're over petty, silly issues. I heard of one church that split over an argument on what side of the stage to put the church organ, whether it went on the right-hand side or the left, and they split churches. You know, you have the First Church of the Right-hand Side of the Organ on the Stage and the Second Church of the Organ on the Left-hand Side of the Stage. Seriously, this is the kind of silly thing that the church would divide over.

Let me tell you something. When it comes to truth of the gospel and doctrinal truth, we fight over that. We stand on that. I want you to notice in verse 2 that "Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them," in other words, they got in a full-blown argument with these Judaizers. They locked horns big time with these guys. They weren't about to let these false guys come in and snow the people of God in Antioch or to promulgate their false views or false doctrine. I can imagine that Paul was just really upset. They'd been out preaching the gospel of God's grace and now they come along and say, "No, that's not enough. You gotta be circumcised and follow the law of Moses. You gotta have this ritual take place and follow these days and diets in order to be saved." I'm sure that Paul got in their face. You say, "Well, that's not very nice. We need to love one another. We need to have unity in the church." Never does the Bible promote unity at the cost of purity. Purity always comes before unity. If you don't have purity, then your unity means nothing. If you don't have truth, then your harmony and love is a false harmony and love.

This is one of the biggest dangers in the modern church today—we've abandoned truth. We actually have taken on the political correctness and the relativism of our culture into our church where we no longer want to stand for biblical truth. Even the gospel in our very day right now is in jeopardy of being lost, and there's a time to stand and fight for the truth. This is why I said this is so important. We have entire churches and movements that are all about just feeling good. They're not biblically centered. They're not preaching doctrinal truth. It's just happy thoughts and happy feelings, positive thoughts and good feelings, and getting people all

pumped up. The church services are like high school pep rallies or something, and there's no instruction. I think, probably for me, one of the greatest heartbreaks in the last 25-30+ years of my ministry has been watching the decline of people who hunger for sound doctrine in the church and the decline of doctrinal preaching. It's tragic and it's heartbreaking, and for pragmatic reasons to grow a big church, people have compromised the truth and basically give people what they want to hear. Is that not what the apostle said would happen in the last days? That men will not give heed to sound doctrine, "but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables," Paul said to Timothy, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry," because Paul said, "I'm going to be passing off the scene and, Timothy, you're going to have to pick up the mantle. You have to preach the Word.

I have the privilege this next couple of days, my wife and I leave for Washington tomorrow to speak to a group of pastors on the subject of preaching and teaching the Bible and expository preaching and teaching, so if you'll make a note to pray for me the next three days, praying that their hearts would be open and they would be receptive, that they would catch the vision of the importance of preaching the Bible and preaching the truth of God's Word and preaching the meaning of the text.

Write down Jude 3. There's only one chapter in the book of Jude. The third verse says, "...that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." That's what I see Paul and Barnabas doing in verse 2. They're earnestly contending for the faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints the danger that the gospel would be polluted and perverted, and that's a tragic thought.

It was "...determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them," from Antioch, "should go up to Jerusalem," and it says, "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through," these areas. First there was, "Phenice," which was modern Lebanon up toward the Tyre and Sidon area of the coast of Lebanon. Then they came down through Samaria, which again is the center of the land and part of what would be today the West Bank in Israel, and it's pretty much still Gentile territory, so they were "declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren," naturally they did because they're telling Gentiles that Gentiles are being saved by God's grace. The Gentiles are stoked. They're like, "Hey! This is awesome! This is good news!" "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them." They reported their missionary travel and what God had done. This is before the council meeting started in just a couple of verses.

"But," here's the big "but," verse 5, "there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees," now, these Judaizers, maybe not all of them but many of them in verse 5 were clearly Pharisees and believers at the same time, so they came out of the group known as the Pharisees, "the sect of the Pharisees," so they were very strict and very legalistic. They said, "That it was needful to circumcise them," these Gentiles, "and to command them to keep the law of Moses." There's

nothing more important to the Jews than the covenant sign of circumcision. It's so very important to them. These guys were probably sincere, verse 5, but make a note of this: It's possible to be sincere and to be wrong. Sincerity does not justify being wrong. It's great that you're sincere, but you also have to have your facts right, your doctrine right, your understanding of God's Word right. There's a lot of people that are earnest and a lot of cultists that knock on your door. They're good people by that kind of concept of they believe what they're teaching and they're devoted and work hard. Many of them put us, as Christians, to shame; but they're sincerely deceived and they're sincerely wrong. It doesn't mean that's a good thing. It means that they need to be educated and understand that a person can be sincere but sincerely wrong.

What are the issues today? There are many of them. People are saying that you basically have to work to be saved or be good enough to be saved, that you can't be saved just by believing in Jesus Christ. Gentiles can be saved, but only if they become Jews.

Verses 1-5 is the dissension. Secondly, we move in verses 6-18 to the discussion. This is the council meeting that's the heart of this chapter. It says, "And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." This was a heated discussion. It was a heated debate. Do the Gentiles have to become Jews in order to be saved? They considered the matter. "And when there had been much disputing," verse 7, the first to stand up was Peter, "Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And," God, "put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which," Peter says, "neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we," that is, Jews, "shall be saved, even as they. 12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them."

In sequence, first Peter stands up, and then Paul and Barnabas (verse 12) give their testimony. This is grace that is on trial. Now, Peter stands up and gives his testimony. Basically, he recounts his experience in Acts 10 at Cornelius' house. Again, if you weren't here, you need to go back and read Acts 10 when God called Peter to go to the Gentile home of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and share with him. Remember Peter had to have a vision of a sheet come down from heaven with all those creepy animals on it? God had to convince him there was nothing common or unclean. He went to the Gentiles and said, "You know, it's not right for me to be here, but God showed me it's okay, so what do you want?" He preached to them, and the Holy Spirit fell on them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and were all saved. The Jews that were with Peter were all scratching their heads saying, "I can't believe this! God just saved a bunch of Gentiles! This is amazing!" God actually did a divine work. This was Peter's experience. By the way, notice there is no indication that Peter was the Pope in this council meeting, that Peter told everyone else, "This is the way it's going to be. I'm in charge here, and I'm going to speak ex cathedra and this is the Word from the Lord." Peter is

just one of the group. He's an apostle, but he's just sharing his experience there.

Notice a couple of things Peter said that are amazing. He said (verse 9), God "put no difference between us and them, purifying their," that is, Gentiles' "hearts," how? By faith, notice that. By the way, if you want to be ready for a cultist that knocks on your door, understand these verses. Understand what is being taught here. God purified Jews and Gentiles the same way, by faith—no circumcision, no rites, no rituals, no baptism, no good deeds—by faith trusting in Jesus.

"Now, therefore why tempt ye God?" Notice he says (verse 10), "to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" The law was like a weight or a yoke that they couldn't bear. Why would they want to put it on these poor Gentiles? One of the greatest statements made by Peter in all the Bible is verse 11. You ought to underline, highlight, or mark it. He says, "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." That is an amazing statement out of Peter's lips. Peter makes it very, very clear that Gentiles are saved by grace just as Jews. By the way, it's very subtle, but I want you to notice what Peter does in verse 11. He not only affirms the grace of God in salvation, but it's in Jesus Christ, and then when he says, "we shall be saved, even as they," the "we" are Jews, and the "they" are Gentiles. You say, "Well, what's so significant about that?" You would expect Peter to say that they are saved like us—we're Jews. But he turns it around and says, "We, Jews, get to be saved just like they, Gentiles." He's actually putting the emphasis on the Gentiles and that we Jews get to be saved just like they are. Instead of them having to keep the law and become Jews, we're privileged to be saved by faith just like these Gentiles. So, you want to cross reference verse 11 with Ephesians 2:8-9, and you ought to put those to memory.

Verse 12, "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul," and I'm sure that Paul, while Peter was talking, was just chomping at the bit to get in there and to share with them. They said, "...what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Notice that Peter focuses primarily on his experience, and Paul and Barnabas focus on what God has done in their experience.

The third and final one stands up, James (verse 13). "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying," this James is the Lord's half-brother. It's the same James who wrote the book of James in the New Testament (we're studying together on Sunday morning). This isn't the Peter, James, and John. That James has already been beheaded and he's dead and gone. This is James, the Lord's brother, who actually was the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and he's the head of this council meeting. James stands up and says, "Men and brethren, hearken unto me: 14 Simeon," or Simon. It's interesting. He's referring to Peter who had just spoke, but he doesn't call him "Peter" which is his Greek name. He uses the name Simon, or the more Jewish aspect way to say it is Simeon, "hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." God actually said He would come to the Gentiles "to take out of them a people for his name."

What James is going to do differently than Peter, Paul, and Barnabas is to argue from

Scripture. The very important principle here is that experience is great, but it has to be based upon Scripture. You can't just say, "Well, I saw it," or "I felt it," or "I experienced it," or "It happened to me." You have to have a scriptural basis for that, so you have to have the Word of God. He says in verse 15, "And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written," he's quoting from Amos 9:11-12. "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men," he's still quoting from Amos 9:11-12, "might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."

I want to point out three things. In verse 14, he mentions that Christ will come and visit the Gentiles. I believe that this is the Church Age. God sent Jesus, and right now He's building the church made of Jew and Gentile. In verse 16, Christ "will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David," that's at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when He will come as the Son of David, the Lion of the tribe of Judah of David, and He will sit upon the throne. Then, the Millennial reign of Christ, the Kingdom Age, "I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up." We have first the Church, then Christ comes again, the Millennial Kingdom, and the reign of Christ.

Verse 18, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." This kind of brings us to the argument and discussion that went on at that first council meeting. First, Peter, then Paul and Barnabas, and now James stands up and quotes from Scripture. The Bible is always the final authority. That's why you need to know your Bible because this is the final court of appeal. A lot of stuff in the news today about the Supreme Court and the decisions they're working on. Well, this is God's Supreme Court, "Thus saith the Lord." Once God speaks, (holding up the Bible)—this is the mind of the Lord, this is the will of the Lord—then there's no more disputing that needs to go on. There's no more discussion, right? When God says it, we believe it, and that settles it. They open up the Scriptures and James said, "Look, God said He would visit the Gentiles and take out a group for His name. God said He was going to come again and set up His Kingdom. He laid it out from the book of Amos. You might also write down Romans 9, 10, and 11, where you have Israel's election, Israel's rejection, and Israel's restoration because, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." God knows what He's doing, how He's doing it, why He's doing it, and what's going on. God has a perfect plan that through Israel's rejection the door would be open to the Gentiles, and they were like the olive tree where the natural branches are broken off and we, Gentiles, were all wild olive branches grafted in; and we become partakers of the root, the promises of God to the fathers.

Moving through the rest of the story in verses 19-29 we now have the decision that's made. It says, "Wherefore my sentence is," James is still talking in verse 19, "that we trouble not them," that is, the Gentiles, "which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. 22 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 Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: 24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you," these are the Judaizers that came from Jerusalem, and they're saying, "Yeah, we know when they came they troubled you," "with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment," we didn't tell them to go there to teach that.

Verse 25, "It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." He commentaries on Barnabas and Paul, that they had "hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." "We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That," again, they repeat it, "ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication," which is porneia, sexual immorality, "from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well," or God bless you, goodbye. This is the end of the letter. The letter starts in verse 23 and ends in verse 29.

The conclusion and the decision was, (it doesn't say it in exact words) that the Gentiles don't have to be circumcised to be saved. They don't have to proselyte into Judaism to be saved. They can be saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. You say, "Well, why did they put these stipulations on them? Why did they tell them there's a couple of things, though, we're going to ask that you Gentiles need to do, verse 20. First of all, "that they abstain from pollutions of idols," secondly, you abstain "from fornication, and from things strangled," that is, animals they would eat that were strangled (they weren't properly bled), "and from blood." Why did they tell them these things if we're saved by grace through faith? Let me make it very clear, and this is super important. The stipulations and the things that they asked of these Gentiles had nothing to do with their salvation. It had everything to do with their fellowship with Jews. It had everything to do with them fellowshiping and getting along with Jews. It had nothing to do with their salvation.

What they'd asked them to do—no big deal—just don't get involved in idolatry. Don't be involved in sexual immorality; which, by the way, the Roman-Greco culture worshiped sex. They actually worshiped sex. They had sacred prostitutes, and it was part of their culture. They had none of the Christian mores or standards or Judeo-Christian standards for purity in marriage, chastity, and monogamy in marriage that we know from the Bible. The culture was completely just perverted by even our standards today. We're actually diverting back to this kind of standard, by the way. As Christianity loses its influence on the western world, the western world degenerates into this perverted standard; which, by the way, the book of Romans reaches its apex in homosexuality—men with men, women with women. That's actually the place where God gives them over to their perverted, reprobate minds. They can't discern right from wrong. We are not only there, we're going deeper at our time in our nation and in the world. This is

why I'm saying I'm concerned that there's such a lack of biblical truth in the world today, that the church even is weak and impotent because we haven't taken a stand on doctrinal truth.

He says, "You Gentiles, if you want to be in fellowship with Jews, these things are heinous to Jews because they had the law of God. You know, the New Testament wasn't written yet. These Gentiles, when they got saved, they couldn't open the book of Thessalonians where it says, "For this is the will of God," for you, "even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication," or sexual immorality. That's why when you read in some of the letters when Paul talks about sexual sin among the saints, he was dealing with the Greco-Roman culture. It was licentious, I mean, beyond comprehension; and they were getting saved in that culture but continuing in the way that they still lived. Paul said, "No, no, no, no, no. Grace alone saves, but true salvation doesn't leave you alone. It changes you. It changes the way you live and the way you walk, and you now need to be conformed by the Holy Spirit to God's moral laws and moral standards." You can't just say, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I'm saved, and I'm going to heaven," and then just go out and live however you want. If you've been born again, and you've been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, it's going to change the way that you live. You're not going to go to the Temple of Aphrodite or Diana anymore. You're not going to have a harem anymore. You're not going to be doing those things anymore. You're going to be a different person, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

In our culture today, if you get saved it should change the way you live. If you become a Christian and you're still living the way you did before you were "born again," then I question whether or not you were born again, if nothing has ever changed. I know that people change to different degrees—some change rapidly and some change slowly—but there has to be some kind of change. Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Is there any change or transformation taking place in your life? So, he's writing to them saying, "Look, if you want to be in fellowship with the Jews, then we ask you to abstain from these things," but he's not telling them that these are necessary for them to get to heaven or in order to be saved.

They write this letter and give it to the men that traveled, Barsabas and this other fellow that went with Barnabas and Paul, and they take it back to the church at Antioch. In verses 30-35, in closing, we have the response of that decision and the delight back in the home church of Antioch. "So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch," which is their sending church of Syria, "and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle," the letter that we just read, "Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation," or the comfort that it brought them. "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. 33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still." Silas actually would become one of Paul's traveling companions on his second missionary journey.

In closing, notice verse 35. "Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also." They come back. They bring the letter.

The Gentiles hear, and what do they do? They rejoice, right? I mean, what would you do if they brought back a letter that said, "Oh, by the way, it's okay. You are saved. You do get to go to heaven. You don't have to be a Jew in order to get to heaven." You would rejoice.

Judaizers aren't dead. I'm sure that some of you have been listening to this study and you're thinking, Oh man. What's this got to do with anything? I believe, if you're a serious Christian—you're a serious Bible student, you want to know the Bible, you want to understand the Christian life—it's got a lot to do with everything. Basically, how are we saved? How do we go to heaven? What do you do if someone knocks on your door and you say, "I go to Revival." "Oh, that's nice." "I just believe you trust in Jesus, you go to heaven. That's what our pastor teaches, and I'm saved." They start telling you, "Well, you know, you have to do this, too. You have to do this and that." Are you going to listen to them? Are you going to follow them? Are you going to be deceived or led astray? Paul said, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed," anathema.

Have you opened your Bible? Do you know the truth? Do you know what you believe and why? Do you know really what you believe or why you believe it, or are you just kind of like, "It doesn't matter. Everything's fine." Do you know the truth? Has the truth set you free? Are you willing to contend for the truth? Are you earnestly contending for the truth of the gospel? Judaizers aren't dead. There's people all over the place, all the time, "Well, you can't be saved and do that or do this or you haven't done that or you haven't done this."

This is not an issue of Christian liberty, that's another issue altogether. I believe the Gentiles gave up some of their liberty to eat certain meats and to do certain things so that they could fellowship with Jews. By the way, just a little footnote, you talk about cultists at your door? The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that you should not have a blood transfusion based on that statement, "and from blood." When that was written, they had no knowledge of blood transfusions. They didn't know anything about blood transfusions; and in context, it's talking about drinking blood in a ritualistic, pagan worship way. The meat that hasn't been properly bled, the meat that was offered to idols, had to do with their pagan forms of worship. He wasn't talking about a medical procedure at a hospital to get a blood transfusion, yet many of them have died not getting blood transfusions because of this verse, misinterpreted. So, if you say, "Well, you know, these verses aren't really that important." They are important, and people have actually died because they misinterpreted them.

There are several things that took place that's a result of this meeting. Let me mention them quickly and I'll close. First, the gospel of divine grace was reaffirmed. The gospel of God's grace was reaffirmed. It's very clear that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Secondly, the unity of the church was maintained and safeguarded. There weren't two churches—the Jewish church and a Gentile church. Thirdly, the evangelism of the Gentiles could proceed without hinderance. Most of Paul in his evangelism and the churches he planted were Gentiles, and they could continue to grow and follow the Lord. Fourthly, the Gentile churches that had already been established were given encouragement. They rejoiced,

and the future of the church as a whole was guaranteed. What would've happened to Christianity, at this very meeting right here we just read, if they would've said, "Yeah, Gentiles, you have to become Jews to be saved. You have to proselyte into Judaism in order to be saved." There really wouldn't be any Christianity. Christianity would just be a sect of Judaism.

Religion says: Something in my hand I bring. The Gospel says: Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy Cross I cling. Amen? This may not seem like a big deal, but you know the reformers actually died for this one doctrine? They died for this truth in contention with the Catholic church and all of their legalism, rites, rituals, and rules. Christianity isn't a creed. Christianity isn't a rite. Christianity isn't rituals. Christianity is Christ, who died for our sins, was buried and rose again from the dead; and faith in Christ, and only faith in Christ, can save an individual. There's no other way to be saved. If your faith is put into a church, it's misplaced. If your faith is placed on your race or your religion or your righteous deeds and your good works, it's misplaced; but if your faith is placed in Christ alone, you're on the Solid Rock! Amen? All other ground is sinking sand. Jesus Christ is the Rock who alone can save. Let's pray.