

Last week we studied the second Jerusalem council that met to decide whether Gentile believers in Jesus should be told to obey the laws of Moses and be circumcised or if salvation was by grace alone through faith alone. This month is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses on the Wittenberg Chapel door. Two of Luther's themes were that salvation was by grace alone and through faith alone. That was really the matter before the council in Jerusalem. After testimonies from Peter and Paul, the consensus was reached that Gentiles did not need to be burdened with the laws of Moses (Acts 15:19ⁱ).

We are going to go back a few chapters in Acts and look at the letter to the Galatians to see how this issue developed to an urgent need for a decision by the council. In Acts 11:29-30ⁱⁱ, Paul and Barnabas and others from the church in Antioch took a donation to help the Jerusalem church through a famine. I believe that is the time in which Paul first brought up the issue of what was necessary for Gentile conversion. In writing to the Gentile converts in Galatia, Paul endeavored to explain the apostles' stand on faith alone being necessary for salvation, so he wrote of his meeting with the apostles. The traditional belief is that Galatians was written after the meeting of Acts 15. That doesn't fit with the details in his letter, as we will see.

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. Galatians 2:1 The Jews count years like they do days, a part of a year can be counted. Fourteen years could mean just twelve years and a couple of months. The same is true of his three years in Arabia. So this could be as much as seventeen years from his conversion to or as little as thirteen years and some months. I believe it took place during the trip to Jerusalem to deliver funds raised in Antioch for the famine in Jerusalem. We read about that in Acts 11.

² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. Galatians 2:2 The revelation may be referring to the prophecy of the famine (Acts 11:28ⁱⁱⁱ), but Paul also wanted to settle the question regarding Gentile believers. He wanted confirmation of his convictions.

³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Galatians 2:3 Paul brought an uncircumcised Gentile believer with him from Antioch to press the issue. What would the Jewish brothers in Jerusalem do? Would they allow him in their fellowship? They had already acknowledged what God had revealed to Peter, that the gospel should go to the Gentiles (Acts 10:28^{iv}). The Acts 15 meeting was not private, Titus is not mentioned, and the Pharisees in that meeting demanded that Gentiles be circumcised to be saved. This is a different meeting.

⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel

might be preserved for you. Galatians 2:4-5 Paul calls the Jewish believers who had gone up to Antioch to convince the Gentiles that they had to keep the laws of Moses, "false brothers." He described them as secretly slipping in to spy on their freedoms in Christ, and he calls their teaching and effort to bring the believers into slavery. Later in Galatians he'll use the analogy of Hagar and Sarah and refer to Hagar as the slave women who represents being under the law (Galatians 4:25^v). Paul let the Galatians know that the elders of Antioch never yielded to their demands. They never compromised the truth that the gospel of grace is not dependent on obeying the law.

⁶ And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Galatians 2:6-10 Now Paul is referring to that visit to Jerusalem and the private meeting with the apostles. The Pharisees dressed in their fine robes among the Christians seemed like such righteous people. But Paul knew that what makes us right with God is what Jesus did, not what we do (Philippians 3:9^{vi}). Everyone is on the same level at the foot of the cross. We have different gifts, but our importance is not in our gifts or abilities but in Jesus who saved us. The leading apostles did not demand anything of Paul and Barnabas. In fact, they perceived the grace given to Paul and Barnabas to reach out to the Gentiles was like their apostolic ministry to the Jews.

¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Galatians 2:10 All they asked of them was to remember the poor. This is further evidence that the meeting was not the same as the one in Acts 15 which ended with three suggestions that had nothing to do with the poor. Having just brought funds for the needy widows in Jerusalem, the grateful church there asked them to continue to help meet the need.

Paul was explaining this to the Galatians because after this trip to Jerusalem, the church in Galatia was formed. The very same Pharisee false brothers that tried to influence Antioch went to the Galatians and tried to make demands on them. Paul was pointing out the hypocrisy that they never said anything about those demands in front of the apostles, and they even accepted the Gentile Titus in their midst.

Now we go to the beginning of Galatians to see why Paul was giving this account of what had previously taken place in Jerusalem. These false brothers, we'll refer to as Judaizers, had an influence on the new Galatian church. *⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.* Galatians 1:6-7 Barnabas and Paul had taught them about the grace that comes to us through Jesus. They had surely shown them

that we are in a new covenant, not based on our obedience, but on the obedience of Jesus on our behalf (2 Corinthians 3:6^{vii}). Yet, the Judaizers were successful in convincing them of the need to religiously keep the rituals and details of the law if they were to be saved. Paul was saying that they had missed the gospel, the good news. This change was not good news, it was bad news, for it is impossible to keep all the laws (Romans 3:20^{viii}). It misrepresents what Jesus accomplished. What these Judaizers were teaching was a distortion of the gospel.

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8-9 To subvert the gospel by implying that it is something that we merit by our actions is to declare Jesus' work on the cross as insufficient to save us. It puts us back under the old covenant that was supposed to point us to Christ (Galatians 3:24^x). This double pronouncement of a curse shows us how serious it is to add anything to the gospel of Jesus. Of course, we are to be new creatures in Christ and live by the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:13^x). But to imply that we must do anything else to be saved means the cross did not fully meet the righteous demands of God. It elevates man's efforts and downplays the all-sufficiency of what Jesus accomplished on our behalf.

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10 If Paul wanted to please man, he would just conform to the requests of Judaizers and save himself from the persecution the frequently stirred up. Following Jesus and proclaiming grace alone will not make you popular, but if we are to be servants of Christ, that is our message. **Man wants to boast in what he does. Servants of Christ boast in what Jesus has done for us** (Galatians 6:14^{xi}).

Now I hope you can see why the Jerusalem council meeting of Acts 15 was so necessary. This needed to be settled once and for all. What was being done behind the apostles' backs needed to come out in the open. The entire letter to the Galatians was focused on this one issue. That is how important it was for them and for us to understand the wonderful grace of God we have received. That is why Paul will write that there is no condemnation to those who are in Jesus (Romans 8:1^{xii}). As adopted sons and daughters of God, God will not revoke our adoption when we stumble (Psalm 89:30-34^{xiii}). But because we love our Father and all that He does for us, we want to glorify him. That is what Paul wrote at the end of Galatians 2. *¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.* Galatians 2:19-21

Grace does not mean we can do whatever we want (Romans 6:1-2^{xiv}). It means we are now free to be led by the Spirit and live unto God (Romans 8:11^{xv}). We live by the faith

of the Son of God. To try to be righteous through the law is to nullify the grace of God and the crucifixion. In a recent men's study^{xvi}, it was suggested that we daily make the declaration that Paul made, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." We need that daily reminder to cooperate with Christ living in and through us.

Now that we have that important background, let's return to Acts. ³⁰ *So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.* Acts 15:30 The Jerusalem council had officially decided that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone. They simply asked that Gentiles avoid things that were a part of their former pagan worship, food that had been sacrificed to idols, things strangled and blood, and sexual immorality (Acts 15:20^{xvii}). This was not so that they could be saved, but so that their testimony would declare they no longer believed in pagan idols and so as not to offend potential Jewish converts.

Paul and Barnabas and witnesses from Jerusalem went to Antioch to deliver the letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. ³¹ *And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.* Acts 15:31 What a relief it must have been to have the issue cleared up. The cloud of confusion brought in by the Judaizers had lifted. And we should rejoice as well, for by the works of the law no one will be justified (James 2:10^{xviii}). As the hymn declares. Jesus paid it all! All to Him we owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow. Hallelujah. Church, do you realize there is nothing you can do to make God love you more? Nor is there anything you can do to cause God to love you less (Lamentations 3:22^{xix}). That is why we should remove every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us and run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the author *and finisher* of our faith (Hebrews 12:1^{xx}).

³² *And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.* Acts 15:32 Judas and Silas came from Jerusalem as witnesses of the decision. The work of a prophet is to encourage and strengthen (1 Corinthians 14:3^{xxi}). That is exactly what they did with many words. You see, though Paul and Barnabas were there, the work of God in the church can come through guests who bring their own walk with the Lord and things they have learned in their life in Christ. It reminds me of some of the guests and part time residents we have, people like the Pattersons, Bradleys, and Elise from Jamaica. No matter how gifted the local leaders are, we can benefit from those who visit and bring encouragement and help to strengthen us. In fact, it is the grace of God that sends them to us.

³³ *And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.* Acts 15:33 Having fulfilled their mission, they returned to Jerusalem. Silas will return later to join Paul on his next missionary journey.

³⁵ *But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.* Acts 15:35 Antioch was becoming a mega-church. More than likely it consisted of many house churches such as we see later in Rome. An elder or two would oversee each one but all the elders would gather for prayer and direction as we see in Acts 13^{xxii}. Antioch was now the center for world missions, and the mission

was clear: proclaim the grace that is ours in Jesus Christ. The word of the Lord was that God so loved the world that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16^{xxiii})!

We have reached this turning point in Acts where the focus will now be on Paul and his spreading the gospel to the Gentile world. The Jerusalem church said their mission was to the Jews, and yet we find that most of the apostles ended up in Gentile regions and were martyred for proclaiming Christ to places like India, Ethiopia, Greece, Asia, and Rome.^{xxiv} This tells us that the apostles hadn't yet caught the vision of the great commission, but soon they would (Mark 16:15)^{xxv}.

This was such a momentous turning point in the early church that we need to fully understand its implications to our lives. The nature of man is to be in charge and accomplish things on our own. We want to control the earth's climate. NASA wants to stop Yellowstone from becoming a super-volcano. Some think they can legislate righteousness and create heaven on earth. Man seems to think he can do anything, including pleasing God through his own efforts. **The gospel is humbling in that it says you can't do it. Jesus had to do it for you.** You can't be good enough for God nor can you be too bad. That is why Jesus came, to live a righteous life that was completely pleasing to God, and then to freely exchange His righteousness for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xxvi}). When we accept that exchange, we are adopted into the family of God. Jesus takes up residence within us through the Holy Spirit. We can let His life flow through us. That is, as Paul wrote at the beginning of his letter to the Galatians that Jesus gives us "deliverance from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4^{xxvii}).

Even if we have made that priceless exchange, we can go about our lives not realizing the power and grace that are ours to rise above the mundane life of living for our body. We are empowered to live by the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. We can say with Paul, *"It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me."* That is life on the spiritual plane with eternal purpose and value. We can hear the voice of the Spirit and walk with Jesus through each day. We have every good thing in Christ (Romans 8:32^{xxviii}). May God help us to realize the wonder of the grace that we have in Jesus and live it to the fullest. As Jesus said, "I came to give you life, and that more abundantly" (John 10:10^{xxix}).

Questions

- 1 In what ways was the meeting described in Galatians different from Acts 15?
- 2 What was the hypocrisy of Judaizers evidenced in that visit?
- 3 Why was Paul so opposed to the Judaizers?
- 4 What is the point of Galatians 1:10? How does it apply today?
- 5 What verse was a helpful daily reminder?
- 6 Why did the council give the Gentiles the three suggestions?
- 7 What did the prophets from Jerusalem do?
- 8 What is the essence of the gospel?
- 9 How can we fully live it?
- 10 Are you experiencing life more abundantly?

ⁱ **Acts 15:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,

ⁱⁱ **Acts 11:29-30 (ESV)**

²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Acts 11:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

^{iv} **Acts 10:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

^v **Galatians 4:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

^{vi} **Philippians 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

^{vii} **2 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

^{viii} **Romans 3:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

^{ix} **Galatians 3:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

^x **Romans 8:13 (ESV)**

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

^{xi} **Galatians 6:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

^{xii} **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

^{xiii} **Psalms 89:30-34 (ESV)**

³⁰ If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,
³¹ if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,
³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,
³³ but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.
³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

^{xiv} **Romans 6:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

^{xv} **Romans 8:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

^{xvi} Whitall Smith, Hannah, *The Christians Secret to a Happy Life*

^{xvii} **Acts 15:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

xviii **James 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

xix **Lamentations 3:22 (ESV)**

²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;

xx **Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)**

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

xxi **1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV)**

³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

xxii **Acts 13:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

xxiii **John 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

xxiv <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/killing-jesus/articles/how-did-the-apostles-die/>

xxv **Mark 16:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

xxvi **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

xxvii **Galatians 1:4 (ESV)**

⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

xxviii **Romans 8:32 (ESV)**

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

xxix **John 10:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.