

About 35 years ago there was a boy in California. I say boy but he was a young man. 18-19 years old. This man had special needs, down syndrome, was function quite well, living on his own.

He began attending Calvary Costa Mesa. He had come from a strict legalistic upbringing. I believe his parents were no longer living at this point.

One day, Pastor chuck got a call that he really didn't want to get. "Did you see in the paper; this young man was dead?"

Well, he had really been struggling in his understanding about God, how a person is saved.

You see, this young man had been struggling with an addiction to cigarettes. At some point, some well-meaning Christian that he had met at church told him that if he was still smoking cigarettes he was not right with God.

So, this terrified the young man. He could not kick the habit. He was terribly bothered by the notion the he would go to hell, that he was not saved. So, under the crushing weight of condemnation and guilt, He jumped off a freeway overpass into on-coming traffic.

Absolutely tragic. Someone had convinced this young man that a non-essential issue was essential.

You see, the good news of Jesus Christ is not, have faith in Christ plus quit smoking = salvation.

Someone had convinced this boy that he was not right with God. The consequences were tragic.

Context:

In our passage today, the early church leaders get together to debate this very issue. Is someone saved grace through faith, through believing in the gospel? Or, are human effort and works required as well?

One of the biggest problems in the early church was the Jewish converts assumed that any non-Jews had to become Jews first to faith in Christ.

Meaning, they thought gentiles must be submitted to the Mosaic laws plus have faith in Jesus.

In other words, to come to Jesus they believed a person had to be circumcised, keep specific dietary laws, observe religious feasts, observe the sabbath, and literally thousands more rules and regulations.

This issue came up earlier in the book of **Acts [11:1-18]** and surfaces again here and is dealt with.

They believed that any non-Jew coming to salvation in Christ must first become a Jew...

But what does God say? Do people need to become Jews first? Does God require man to do works to be saved? Are you right with God here today simply because you believe the gospel or is something else required?

Theme:

God makes no distinction between people. All people are saved the same way, by hearing and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ apart from any works of their own.

CLARIFYING THE GOSPEL

I. V1-5 – DISSENSION OVER THE GOSPEL

A. V1 – BROTHERS FROM JUDEA STATE THEIR CASE

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."

1. **Came down from Judea** – 300 miles, long way to travel. Tells me they are very sincere. These are Christians from a Jewish background. The scholars have dubbed them, “the Judaizers.”
2. **Unless you are circumcised** – Not just a surgical procedure. By this time, the term spoke of being submitted to the whole Law of Moses.
 - The Law, or the custom, of Moses was, simply put, a religion God gave the Jews to follow through Moses as a mediator. Circumcision was one of the rituals required of Jews.
3. **You cannot be saved** – doctrine of salvation issue. This is a big deal. Essentially, they are saying all the non-jew (gentile) converts so far are not really saved. That in fact they must become Jews first.
4. This issue came up back in Acts 10 and 11 – God gives Peter a vision, goes to Cornelius house, defends the gospel in Acts 11
5. Paul has been preaching the gospel. **Acts 13:38-39** – Therefore let it be known to you brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him

everyone who believes in Him is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses.

6. These guys are contradicting what Paul has been preaching. They would say, yes Jesus is the messiah, but you must believe in Him plus keep the law of Moses.

How does this speak to us today in 2019?

There are many religious organizations that are asserting today that some kind of works are necessary to gain or to maintain salvation.

The gospel Jesus, Peter, Paul and the others preached, contradicts those claims.

Two ways this plays out today: Directly implied or Indirectly Implied:

Directly. Flat out teaching that baptism, sacraments, door to door evangelism, being a member of the right denomination, worship on Saturday etc is required for salvation.

Indirectly. This is when a church would say they understand that salvation is by faith alone, but yet the people directly or indirectly imply that certain behaviors, dietary preferences, mannerisms, styles of dress, preference of political party, preference of movie or music styles, styles of worship, etc etc are more “spiritual” than others.

Essentially, some people let their cultural habits, values instilled through upbringing, preferences, opinions, applications, fancies be confused with what makes a person spiritual.

On time for the wedding?

So that's the issue. You must become Jews to become Christians...

B. V2-4 – PAUL AND BARNABAS RESPOND TO THE BROTHERS FROM JUDEA

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. **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.

1. Jerusalem still served as the head church at this time because Jesus' apostles were there. They lived with Jesus so they can settle this matter.

C. V5 - BROTHERS FROM JUDEA STATE THEIR CASE AGAIN

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."

1. These were converts that had come from a Pharisee background.

So what? 2 THINGS

1. SALVATION ISSUES ARE IMPORTANT TO CLARIFY. WHY?

You say, I have problems, marriage, kids, jobs, life and you want to talk theology...

Well, if you see Christianity merely as a way to have a “spiritual” life or as something simply to benefit your life on earth,
Then the issue of salvation is not really a big deal to you.

But, the issue of salvation is truly a huge issue. None bigger...
It effects how you live your life, how you parent, what kind of a spouse you are,

You see, today you understand salvation is by grace through faith **or** you are under the burden of legalism

If you are under the burden of legalism, you are likely defeated, no real lasting joy, peace or security in your relationship with God

You are likely fearful because you aren't sure if you are doing this thing correctly.

You will drive yourself crazy if you think your works are required for salvation because you don't know if you ever do enough

Or, you will become completely critical of others, pointing out people's sins, you will become angry and arrogant, your life will become cold and joyless.

If you are under the burden of legalism, you will put your kids under it too
The damage done to them will take years to undo. Guilt, shame, fear, anger,

But, if you understand that salvation is about what Jesus did for you, not what you do for Him, you have found true rest, the only true lasting peace comes from this place of rest. You aren't on a ladder of works trying to climb to God. You are free from having to prove yourself. You are free from the attempts to earn God's blessing and favor. You simply receive all you need from God based on what He did for you in Jesus Christ.

By faith, you come in to the family of God. By faith, the promises He makes then become yours. The promise to provide for you, that all things work together for your spiritual good, that you can

walk in complete joy regardless of circumstances, you can live without fear, you don't have to be perfect to be valid...

Intensely practical stuff, wouldn't you say?

2. SO WHAT? WE LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT HANDLING DISPUTES

Disputes happen in life. How do you handle them? Here? In your house? At work? With your family?

As Christian men and women in God's family ought to, Paul and Barnabas show humility by going to Jerusalem and not simply shutting these guys down. Paul and Barney knew their doctrine was correct, but they served the guys that just didn't get it instead of burning them.

We see a beautiful picture of being confident in the truth while serving those in love that don't quite get it.

We must be like this too when disputes arise. We must serve one another and stick together. Too many people are just willing to bolt out of relationships today, let it not be so with us.

II. V6-35 – DISCUSSION TO CLARIFY THE GOSPEL

A. V6-12 – PETER'S DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL

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:

"Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago [9-10 Years 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, [*confirmed the fact of their salvation*] by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

1. **V7 - the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe** – underline it in your bible
2. **V9 - and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith** –
 - The Jewish legalists believed that a person was purified by circumcision and obedience to the Law.

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." 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.

3. **V10** – Is a fitting description of legalism. An unbearable yoke. –
 - **Yoke** - The idea of the yoke in that time refers to a learning experience. Jesus had said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me." The reference is to the training yoke of oxen. One side had a smaller yoke for the young ox being trained and a larger one for the older, stronger ox. The trainee learned by keeping pace with the training ox.

4. **V11 - we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved**
- The conclusion of the matter
 - We were not saved by our self-effort to keep the Law. We were saved by grace through faith.
 - Grace – highlight it.
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9** - 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.
 - NLT - 8 God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.
5. **we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they –**
- By hearing the gospel and believing

B. **V13-21 – JAMES' RULING ON THE GOSPEL**

James, Jesus' brother, backs up what Peter said. He uses a prophecy from Amos to ground his position.

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.

1. James was obviously in the position of leadership in the early church...
2. Brothers, Peter testifies, and the prophets agree. This was God's plan all along that the gentiles would be saved.
3. **Application:** James is a good leader. He grounds what he says in the scriptures. Good way to lead a church, your business, your marriage, your home...

So, Peter defends the gospel... James backs up what Peter said and now James gives his ruling on the issue...

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."

4. **V19 - we should not trouble those**— James considers forcing the Law of Moses on gentiles to be troubling them. Don't do it. The issue is settled. The truth has been confirmed. The Law of Moses is not to be imposed on gentiles.
5. V20-21 – But for the sake of the conscience of the Jew converts, avoid meat that has been offered to idols,

- **Polluted by idols** – the taboo wasn't musical style or movies in this day, it was meat bought in a market that had previously been offered to an idol in a pagan worship service. It would have troubled most Jews conscience greatly to eat of it. So, be sensitive to them and don't flaunt your freedom in their face.
 - **Sexual immorality** – Likely has the idea of not engaging in the incestuous marriages and other things pagan cultures did. Not simply talking about fornication, and things like it. Those were a given.
 - **Strangled and from blood** – Kosher food laws. The Law contained rules saying that Jews had to cut the animals throat and bleed it thoroughly before eating it.
6. So, the gentiles are not under the law of Moses but ought to be concerned about unnecessarily offending the Jews. This is what we call the LAW OF LOVE.
- What is said here answers the question: "If we aren't saved by works, does it matter how we act?" Yes, we are to love.
 - Turn to Romans 14 – The law of love states that I lay down my freedoms for the sake of a weaker brother or sister...
 - **John 13:34-35** - A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
 - As Jesus' people we are not bound by the Law of Moses, but we are commanded to love one another as He has loved us... That is

The discussion to clarify the gospel, Peter defends, James backs him up and gives his ruling, Now a letter is written and sent with some brothers to the church in Antioch...

C. V22-29 – A LETTER WRITTEN AND SENT TO THE GENTILES CLARIFYING THE GOSPEL

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.

1. **V24 - Unsettling your souls** is exactly what legalism does.
2. **V29 - You do well** – Not, you will be saved

D. V30-35 – THE GENTILES RESPONSE TO THE LETTER

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. 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.

1. Exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words – The teaching of the Word of God, to build up the body of Christ... Glorious, may the Lord raise up from among us more to do this...

III. APPLICATIONS:

A. HANDLE DISPUTES IN A GODLY WAY

1. V2 – DISENSION AND DISPUTE AROSE OVER DOCTRINE – It's normal. Don't automatically take it as a sign that something wrong is happening.
2. V6 – THEY CAME TOGETHER – They all made the choice to humble themselves to discuss
3. V25 – BEING ASSEMBLED WITH ONE ACCORD – Love and unity in the Spirit held them together.
4. V28 – IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND TO US – The priority was to please God
5. The direct application here is for the church family. These principles can be applied to all relationships.

B. UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL

1. **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** – The Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day.
2. **Ephesians 2:8-9** – You have been saved by grace through faith and this not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works that anyone should boast.
3. **John 3:16** - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
4. **Romans 10:9-11** - that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES ON HIM WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME."
5. He did the work. It takes fear away, it takes anxiety away, it takes pressure away, you are ok because He has come for you. You don't have to find your identity in anything but Him. IN Him you are a son or daughter of God, the creator. If God is for you, how can be against you. This truth is so simple and yet so profound.
6. If you haven't trusted fully in Him, today you can.

C. UNDERSTAND THE LAW OF LOVE

1. Romans 14:11- 14-23 - I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good

be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. 22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

2. **John 13:34-35** - 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Conclusion:

So, the issue is settled...

Christians are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of any kind. God makes no distinction between people. All people are saved the same way, by hearing and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ apart from any works of their own.

NEXT WEEK:

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY BEGINS