

Acts  
 “Jesus” The Sequel  
**III.) Chp. 13-28 “Witnesses to the end of the earth”**  
*Chp. 15-18:21 Traditions and the road less traveled (2<sup>nd</sup> trip)*

**15:1-6**

**“There goes the neighborhood” part a**

**I.) Intro.**

**II.) Vs. 1-6 That’s trouble with a capital T**

**I.) Intro.**

Have you ever gone to the ocean and watched children fully clothed who have been warned not to go swimming with their clothes on? They start out rolling up their pant legs and only getting their feet wet. Soon, usually intentionally, they miss judge a wave only to find their pants are now damp up to the knee. From there they figure I’m already in trouble I might as well go all the way. Christian Judaism had for the last ten years been wadding in the ocean of gentile conversion, only getting its feet wet. Cornelius’ conversion had happened 10 years earlier then here in chapter 15 and only a handful of gentiles had gotten saved and most of them had been “*God fearers*”, that is to say converts to Judaism prior to becoming followers of Christ. But Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey changed all of that. Paul’s words of 13:46 declared to the Jewish folks, who refused to turn to Jesus, “*It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.*” Prior to this Christianity was seen as a ***reform movement*** with in Judaism but now that the Gospel was being openly preached and received by the Gentiles it was something more. This council that was convened in Jerusalem was the greatest one ever assembled. At stake were **four theological questions**:

- **How a person is is saved?**

- *Is Jesus' work enough for salvation?*
- *Is salvation by faith alone?*
- *Are Gentile's to be seen as true believers apart from first accepting Judaism?*

All of these questions will be raised and answered by the leadership in Jerusalem.

## II.) Vs. 1-6 That's trouble with a capital T

Vs. 1 To get a better perspective on this chapter you would need to read Paul's letter to the Galatians, (the area he and Barnabas had just come back from). In it we see what was going on as these "*certain men* came from James," (Gal. 2:12). Prior to them coming down, Paul again tells us, that Peter had come to Antioch and would eat with the Gentiles believers, but when the "certain men" came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. Peter's change caused the rest of the Jewish believers to be influenced with this hypocritical attitude so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy (Gal. 2:13). This what led to Paul to withstanding Peter to his face (Gal. 2:11).

Every time Peter came to Antioch he enjoyed the fellowship with them; specifically eating with his gentile brothers and sisters. Ah but when the Jewish believers came with him from Jerusalem then he would not eat with the Gentiles any more. Such action got so bad that it even affected old Barnabas as he too stopped eating with them. Think for a moment how this must have made the gentile believers feel each time this happened. If all this sounds strangely familiar then it's probably because you have experienced it when you were in school or perhaps even in a church, as **CLICKS!** Webster's dictionary describes a "*click*" as "*fitting together or to hit it off*", what can be wrong with that? Nothing until such "*fitting together and hitting it off*" excludes others

from joining in on the fellowship. These “*certain men*” evidently said that James; the Lord’s ½ brother, backed them. However, in verse 24 James assures them that he had, “*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.**” It was all rumors and false statements to push forth their personal agenda and quite frankly their prejudice against gentiles.*

Their actions reinforced their words as these Judaizers just came out and said it to these gentiles in the church, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Simply put **the Judaizers refused to accept the conversion of the Gentiles apart from circumcision or if you will apart from first becoming Jews.** They were not opposed to reaching Gentiles they just wanted to add another step first making sure that Gentiles came under the umbrella of Judaism before they came under the umbrella of grace which was poured out in the blood of Jesus. They were attempting to put a restriction upon the Gentiles that God had not. The Judaizers were saying that they “couldn’t be saved” but the problem was they were **ALREADY** saved!

Hey folks, these kinds of things aren’t far removed from our days from certain groups as they some try to say:

- **Unless you are baptized in “Jesus” name only you can not be saved!**
- **Unless you speak in “tongues” you can not be saved!**
- **Unless you read the “authorized 1611 King James Bible” you can not be saved!**
- **Unless you take “communion in our manner” you can’t be saved!**

I have no doubt that these Judaizers, (both then and now), were sincere on trying to insist we maintain there outside form of religion as a basis of our righteousness before God, but the fact remains they are WRONG! Their problem is not with me it is with God as **It's not that I can't be saved it's rather that I already am apart from their formula that bothers them!** *"It's just too simple man! I mean we had to do all of this stuff to be right with God."* *"And now you come in and just by trusting in Jesus' work on the cross you're saved?"* *"I don't think so!"*

Vs. 2 Paul and Barnabas, (*once Barnabas came to his right mind*), stood up and argued with them over this issue. No doubt Paul used the same words he had used in Antioch of Pisidia where he said, *"by Him (Jesus) everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."* There was a great theological debate going on as they tried to persuade the Judaizers of the truth. Notice **that they could not** just agree to disagree agreeably as this was a matter of salvation.

Several years ago I had a lady write me a question regarding Jesus' words on the cross in John 19:30 **"It is finished."** Based upon her letter I could tell that she wanted to know what I believed the Bible taught was the base of salvation. So I wrote her that I believed that all of our salvation is based solely upon Jesus and that nothing we could do or ever would do could add to this. She wrote me back a very sharp letter in disagreement with my theological position. I wrote her a two-sentence reply:

1. *Then why did God send His only Son to die if it was not enough?*
2. *Lady your problem is not with me it is with God!*

**I'm convinced that the reason why people reject this truth is that offends their pride.**

They just can't accept that they can not do something to help out their case. Further more

if they have spent some time in a religious system trying to WORK out their salvation and then along comes you and me that has simply trusted in Jesus finished work, well that means that what they did and were spending all their time and energy to help God out **is worthless!** Surely all their effort counts for something, at least it makes them “*supper saints*”, right? Nope it makes them goofy forever thinking that they could add anything to what God alone can do!

Vs. 3 We are not told why Paul and Barnabas were chosen to argue this case before the Church in Jerusalem, but they took the opportunity to share with all the Churches along the way what God had been doing in saving the Gentiles. And the response they get from the believers both Jews and gentiles was great joy. Now remember that they were traveling back to Jerusalem with the Judaizers, which must have made for interesting conversation as they traveled.

Have you ever noticed how those that are into religion have no joy and it seems that they want to make sure that they drag everyone down with them?. “*Hey, if we have to be miserable so do you!*” But Paul and Barnabas share how God saved the Gentiles apart from the law and the church rejoices. Folks, there are only two possibilities as we live our lives in Jesus:

We are either going to cause,

- **Joy wherever we go!**
- **Or joy whenever we go!**

Put people in some sort of work based relationship and they will be happy to see you leave. Let me just ask you with regards to world religions:

- How many laughing Muslims do you see?

- How about Buddhists?
- Hindu's?

**Let me put it closer to home:** Do the only smile's we see on the faces of the people in this church occur when it's getting close to the time to leave?

Vs. 4-6 Now we are not told as much here but there were probably several meetings.

- Acts 15:4 Luke mentions a "*missionary moment*" meeting where the Church, elders and apostles received them. The two Guys stand up before the congregation and share "*all things that God had done with them.*" They shared from the perspective of God's work in and through their lives. They shared to the Church of God's faithfulness in spite of circumstances and personal failures, how He had directed them to the right places and people.
- Gal. 2:1-10 Paul records that Barnabas, Titus and himself had met "*privately with those who were of reputation.*" In Gal. 2:9 Paul tells us that those he met with privately were none other then, "*James, Cephas (Peter), and John, who seemed to be pillars.*" The purpose of the meeting was to discuss Paul's theology concerning gentile salvation. The out come of the meeting was that, "*those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles).*" In other words there was no difference in the gospel preached by Peter and the one preached by Paul, they were just called to different people. Paul continues, "*So they gave me and Barnabas the*

*right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”*

- c. Acts 15:5-21 The last meeting took place the next day when they had a general meeting which is recorded here. It appears that the Greek believer Titus became the flash point of debate concerning conversion and circumcision. As the Judaizers tried to compel Titus to be circumcised and he wanted no part of it (Gal. 2:3).

The Judaizers are called “*Pharisees who believed*”; so it seems that some of Paul’s old buddies came against his new understanding of grace and the law. In their opposition they state their case towards Titus and all Gentile believers by saying, “*It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.*” The word “*necessary*” is a word that means **required by the will of God**. Their belief was that circumcision and **keeping the law with its 613 commandments and over 7 volumes of interpretations of those 613 commandments** was absolutely essential for Gentile salvation. They were saying that if you, “*Don’t do these things you can’t be saved!*” No wonder Paul says in Gal. 2:16, in his rebuke to Peter. “*That a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*” Aren’t you all glad that Paul stuck to his guns and didn’t allow the false teaching of salvation by grace plus works to enter into our faith in Christ?