

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 (2nd trip)

15:7-41

“Unity in a disjointed world”

- I.) Intro.
- II.) Vs. 7-18 Sign’s of life, reason’s for grace
- III.) Vs. 19-21 Can’t we all just get along
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I.) Intro.

Last week we looked at the challenge of Gentile inclusion into the Church and whether that was to be by grace or the law, now we move to the Church’s decision and based upon the text we can see:

“THREE SIGNS OF LIFE”

1. Vs. 7b **GOD CHOOSE NOT MAN**: Peter stands up and brings all back to what happened 10 years ago with Cornelius. Look at his words, “*God choose*”, Peter says, “*Hey, guys remember that it was God’s decision to grant salvation to Cornelius apart from circumcision and keeping the law.*” The Judaizers were blaming Paul’s message and Peter says that God that started it long before Paul! Folk’s, “*new birth*” is God’s sovereign act not man’s self effort.
2. Vs. 8-9a **HOLY SPIRIT PROOF OF LIFE**: The proof of salvation was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit not outward circumcision. Paul would say in Romans “*he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*” In Philip. 3:3 Paul says

three things identified all believers as the, “*the circumcision of the heart in the Spirit*”:

- A. “*who worship God in the Spirit*”
- B. “*rejoice in Christ Jesus*”
- C. “*and have no confidence in the flesh.*”

Notice Peter’s words, “*God made no distinction between us and them.*” The Gentiles received Jesus the same way the Jews did, by faith!

3. Vs. 9b **CHANGED LIFE OUTWARD SIGN**: The outward visible sign of salvation, Peter declares, is a “**purified heart**” not a “*circumcised private part*”. Since God had already cleansed their hearts of sins, seen in the way they were now living, what could the law or circumcision add? They were purified “**because**” of their faith, not “**before**” their faith! Far too much of Christianity is trying to reform the sinner instead of seeing the sinner regenerated. One author put it this way, “*We are called to be fishers of men but far too many Christians today are trying to clean the fish before they are caught.*”

Next we read the remainder of Peter’s words, then Paul’s and lastly James as they present:

“THREE REASONS FOR GRACE”

PRACTICE, PERSONAL, PROPHETIC

1. Vs. 10-11 “*Practical*” **LAW AND CIRCUMCISION DIDN’T WORK**: Peter’s argument is that; “*Why would God send His Son to save us if the law worked as far as saving us is concerned?*” In Gal 2:21 Paul says, “**do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.**” Paul also

wrote in Romans, “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.” In Gal. Paul says, “*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*” Look at Peter’s words in verse 11, “*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.*” Peter does not say that the Gentiles ought to be saved as the Jews but rather the Jews as were the Gentiles.

2. Vs. 12 “*Personal*” **IT’S A TOTAL WORK OF GOD:** Next Paul and Barnabas share how, “*God had worked through them*”. The second reason why God worked through grace instead of the law is from a **PERSONAL** perspective. All listened to the miracles that God had worked through them towards the Gentiles. **In other words salvation is by grace because it keeps man from boasting about it.** Paul says in Eph. 2:8-9 “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” **Simply put the WORK of God confirmed the WORD of grace so that man can not boast of something that he did!**
3. Vs. 13-18 “*Prophetic*” **IT’S THE FULFILLMENT OF SCRIPTURE:** The last reason for God using grace instead of the law is **PROPHETIC**. James in verse 14 uses the phrase the “*people for His name*” which had only been used for the Jews now he is using it for all people who come to God through faith in His Son. Amos the Prophet had spoke about how God would restore the nation and that even the Gentiles would seek God’s name, Amos didn’t say that they would become Jews first. James starts out by summarizing Peter’s words by saying that God, “*has been saving Gentiles the way in which He wanted to and didn’t need to ask anyone’s permission.*”

His second point was that this was in perfect fulfillment of scripture. **Folk's the activity of God will always correspond to the Word of God.** In verse 18 **James shows that God confirmed the work of God by the prophetic WORD, so that what God was doing in saving man through faith was seen in the Word of God."**

IV.) Vs. 19-21 Can't we all just get along?

Vs. 19-21 James having dispensed with the most important issue of "*How a Gentile is saved*" concludes with four suggestions for the gentiles who have the freedom and liberty in grace not to keep the law but also the responsibility not to stumble the Jewish believers. In 1 Cor. 8:13 Paul speaks of these things as he says, "*if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*"

1. "*but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols*"
2. "*from sexual immorality*"
3. "*from things strangled*"
4. "*and from blood.*"

A. The first two of these things had to do with how the Gentiles **use to** worship; thus they were to stay away from idolatry and sexual immorality. They were not to merge their **former way of worship into their new way of worship**.

B. The second of these two suggestions had to do with **dietary Jewish laws**. So James says, "*Hey don't eat meat from the temple butcher when you're with your Jewish brother in Christ.*" "*Then make sure the meat has been prepared properly draining the blood out of the meat.*"

James had come down on the side of grace but as Paul would say do not to use grace as liberty to sin or as a license to stumble your brother!

This statement by James and the leaders must be remembered in context as the Church of that time was a mixed lot made up of both saved Jews as well as Gentiles. The Judaizers could not insist upon Gentiles becoming Jews first in order to be saved and the Gentile believers were asked to be considerate of the way they worshiped and ate so as to not offend the Jewish believers and the unsaved Jews who they were trying to win to Christ.

III.) Vs. 22-29 Rules to live by

Vs. 22 The early Church could of ended had not the this bold decision been made. The Church wanted to still minister to the Jews first but refused to slow the progress of reaching the world even if it caused great difficulties from their own nation.

It appears that it was a unanimous decision and all were in agreement, but how is that possible seeing that the two sides were polarized? Verse 28 holds the answer, “**For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us,** *to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.*” It was the Holy Spirit that was directing the matter and His wisdom that over rided a heated issue. Since this was such an important issue it was decide that two men were to accompany the letter to explain specifically its meaning and authority.

- Judas who was also named Barsabas: Judas’ surname “*Barsabas*” means ***Son of rest***. How cool is that? The one chosen to go tell the Gentiles that they were to REST in the finished work of Jesus was named “*at rest*”!
- Silas: This guy was a Greek influenced Jew who was also a Roman citizen. Now Paul is going to head out on his 2nd missionary journey with this fellow.

Sending these two guys with a letter was to back what was written and agreed upon. In doing this the early Church made sure that **the truth was presented two ways:**

- a. In a letter or written form: The folks could pore over the letter and read for themselves the conclusion that was made concerning grace.
- b. Teachers to explain the truth: Vs 32 tells us that this was the reason behind sending Judas and Silas. These guys were to “*speak forth*” the truth contained in the letter.

That is still the most effective way to convey truth, the written word by way of gifted teachers!

The letter (verses 23-29) started with an introduction, which is directed towards Antioch specifically, the capital of Syria, which was in the region of Cilicia. Notice the letter's introduction as it literally says, “*To the brothers from the nations*”. **From there it has three purposes:**

1. Vs. 24 The Jewish believers in Jerusalem wanted to distance themselves from those who falsely claimed that Gentiles need to become Jews first. An apology is made in the words, “*have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls.*” It literally means to “*agitate, to make the heart palpitate*” and “*to plunder, or ravage*”. Those Judaizers had caused the Gentile believers to have a **spiritual heart attack that threatened to rip off their souls!**
2. Vs. 25-27 Secondly, they wanted them to know that all the folks in Jerusalem were in total agreement with their salvation by grace. That is why the letter uses Barnabas and Paul, as well as that Judas and Silas were going to bare witness of this.
3. Vs. 28-29 Finally they wanted them to know that this was a unanimous decision made in agreement with the Holy Spirit and nothing beyond the four things, (*which is*

worded in away more of a recommendation than a command), was to be added to them.

IV.) Vs. 31-41 Agreeing to disagree agreeably

Vs. 31-32 The outcome was four things all of which show personally what grace produces in the heart that the law can not.

- a. Vs. 31a **Rejoiced**: Once they heard that their salvation was secure by God's grace and not mans' works they **CELEBRATED**.
- b. Vs. 31b **Encouraged**: They no longer need to fear that their simple trust in Jesus' work was going to be enough. Instead of fear they could now be **CALM**, as Paul said in Heb. 4:10 "*For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*"
- c. Vs. 32 **Exhorted and strengthened**: The words of Judas and Silas built up the body **CONFIRMING** them in the faith. Once they found out that nothing needed to be added to their faith they were free to grow in God's grace. Folks, a true understanding of grace will always cause you to serve.
- d. Vs. 33-35 **Stayed and remain**: Three times we are told that those who served teaching grace stayed or remained. Simply put grace produces a **CONSISTENCY** in a believer that the law could not ever bring about.

The effects of this letter also produced three other things:

- a. Vs. 36 **It freed up the work of the gospel**: The gospel to the Jews and the gospel to the gentiles were not competing missions they were one in the same but towards two different groups with neither being compromised.

- b. Vs. 40 **It brought about a united effort:** Silas joins Paul when prior to this he would not of, thus making Gentile evangelism more than a by-word.
- c. Vs. 39-41 **It put mission's front and center:** There were now two teams instead of one and reaching the world for Jesus was what both wanted. One author put it this way, *“In the world 9 out of 10 every people are lost. 3 out of every 4 have never heard the way out. 1 out of every 2 can not hear and the Church sleeps on. Could it be that we think there must be some other way? Or perhaps we don't really car all that much!”*

As to the question about the argument over John Mark and who was right. I think you can look at this several ways.

- **Paul:** Looked at it from a **missionary perspective** and said that they could not afford to take the risk of taking immature John Mark. Paul asked and answered the question as to whom he would travel with by the question, **“What can they do for God's work?”**
- **Barnabas:** Looked at it from a **discipleship perspective** and his concern was with bringing along a young believer to further draw them in greater dependence to the Lord. Barnabas always started with an equally important question, **“What can God's work do for them?”**

This is the last mention of Barnabas in the book of Acts as he heads back to the country of his birth with his cousin John Mark and Paul goes with Silas head back to Asia Minor Prov. 27:17 says, *“As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”* When Iron sharpens Iron, **SPARKS FLY!** What was not the will of God was the contention but God used that as well.