

## THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JUNE 21ST, 2026 // BOOK OF ACTS

### GRACE (ACTS 15:1-5)

#### "SOME MEN CAME DOWN FROM JUDEA..."

The first missionary journey of Paul was complete, and God had "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27). However, there were Jewish Christians ("Judaizers") who taught that **Gentiles could not be saved unless they became Jewish first.**

- **Being a Christian isn't about submitting to rituals and traditions but submitting to Jesus.**

### THE CROSS IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER

It was difficult for Jewish Christians to grasp that a person could be brought in as an equal without first going through the law of Moses.

- For some of us, it's hard to accept that someone who is born again after a lifetime of rebellion is equal to someone who has faithfully served the Lord for a lifetime (Matthew 20:1-16).

### HIS SACRIFICE WAS PERFECT AND SUFFICIENT

Their argument was, essentially, that Jesus saves but only after one observes the law of Moses. This argument was in opposition to Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:39).

- The author of Hebrews said the law was only "a shadow of good things to come," meaning that the sacrifices and practices of the law were powerless to remove sin once for all (Hebrews 10:1).

### MINOR ON THE MINORS AND MAJOR ON THE MAJORS

Verses 3 and 4 describe how Paul, Barnabas, and some others had traveled 250 miles south, stopping in Phoenicia and Samaria before arriving in Jerusalem to confront this false doctrine.

- There are things that we can agree to disagree on, but then **there are things that pertain to salvation that must be resolved.**

### JESUS PAID IT ALL

Luke tells us it was "some of the Believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees" who stood up in opposition.

- Paul was a Pharisee who had become a Christian. He knew that **Jesus was his salvation and not just there to assist him in achieving salvation through the law** (Galatians 2:16).

### CLEANSING (ACTS 15:6-11)

#### "PETER STOOD UP AND SAID TO THEM..."

Peter was last seen at John Mark's mother's house after being released from prison and avoiding being martyred by Herod (12:12-17).

- Here, Peter speaks up in what is known as the "Jerusalem Council" to weigh in on this question: Is the work of Jesus enough to save those who trust in Him, or must we add our work to Jesus' to be made right with God?

### THERE IS NO "US AND THEM" IN CHRIST

Peter pointed out that God made no distinction in giving them the Holy Spirit and in "cleansing their hearts by faith." God doesn't make distinctions between "us" and "them" (Galatians 3:28).

- There are no religious acts or ceremonies that will purify our hearts. **God gives us new hearts once we come to faith, then He continually purifies our hearts throughout our lives.**

### "PUTTING A YOKE ON THE DISCIPLES' NECKS"

Peter points out that the law was "putting a yoke" on them that even they could not bear.

- They viewed the law through rose-colored glasses and nostalgia. Looking at their history and track record for not keeping the law, they should have welcomed justification through Christ and not been so quick to put Gentiles under the same yoke.

### STUMBLING BLOCK (ACTS 15:12-21)

#### TEACHABLE AND OPEN TO CORRECTION

Verse 7 tells us there was much debate, but when Paul and Barnabas began to speak, "the whole assembly became silent," showing a willingness to listen and be persuaded if they were wrong.

- We are to **use wisdom in who we let speak** into us and then **remain teachable and open to correction**, if needed.

### AFFIRMING WHAT PETER HAD LEARNED

Paul and Barnabas shared with the assembly all that God had done through them for the Gentiles, confirming what Peter said previously: **"If God accepted the Gentiles, should we not accept them as well?"**

- This was a hard lesson for Peter to learn—that **what God has made clean we are not to call unclean** (10:15).

### JAMES AFFIRMS THEIR MESSAGE

Once Paul and Barnabas stopped speaking, James, the brother of Jesus, spoke up in support of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.

- James was a leader of the church in Jerusalem because of his character and not nepotism. James was not even a follower of Jesus until the resurrection when he realized that **Jesus was more than his half-brother; He was Lord.**

### WHAT WAS HAPPENING WAS CONFIRMED BY THE WORD

James said, **"the words of the prophets agree,"** using what was written in Amos 9:11-12 to test this work of God to the Gentiles.

- We are to use what has been written—the Bible—to test all things (1 Thessalonians 5:1). We should **look for supporting scripture before we call something "biblical" and not justify something because it's not mentioned.**

### THE REBUILDING OF THE TABERNACLE

James used Amos's words about David's fallen tabernacle to show that the Jewish people had "fallen down," in the sense that they rejected the Messiah, but **God would rebuild that work in a Church comprised of Jews and Gentiles.**

- When God said the nations or Gentiles (*ethne*) were called by His name, He showed that **the Gentiles were called without becoming Jewish.**

### UNABLE TO CELEBRATE

James pointed out that the Judaizers, who put unnecessary constraints on the Gentiles, were wrong. The Judaizers **were unable to celebrate that others were turning to God because they would not conform to their way of doing things.**

- **We may view other churches as competition if we are unable to celebrate when God calls others to Him in ways that are different than ours.**

### "WRITE TO THEM TO ABSTAIN"

James was essentially saying, "They are turning to God, and we should not cause difficulties for them." Though the Gentiles were not required to convert to Judaism, it was important that **they not act in a way that could ruin their witness among the Jews.**

- Just because we are not under the law of Moses does not mean we are not under the law of love, where we **lay down some liberties.**

*"Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments...are summed up by this commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law"* (Romans 13:8-10).

### SAVED FOR GOOD WORKS (EPHESIANS 2:10)

We sing, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe," meaning that Jesus' sacrifice accomplished what the law and works could never do. Out of gratitude for being completely forgiven, **we are to give our all back to Him.**

- Though we could never repay Jesus for what He has done, **we owe Him our heart and our obedience**, not withholding anything.

### STUMBLING BLOCKS OR STEPPING STONES?

- Are there things in our lives, and in the church, that are stumbling blocks to our brothers and sisters? **Are we creating barriers?**
- Are there things we can do in our lives, and in the church, that provide stepping stones for our brothers and sisters? **Are we building bridges?**