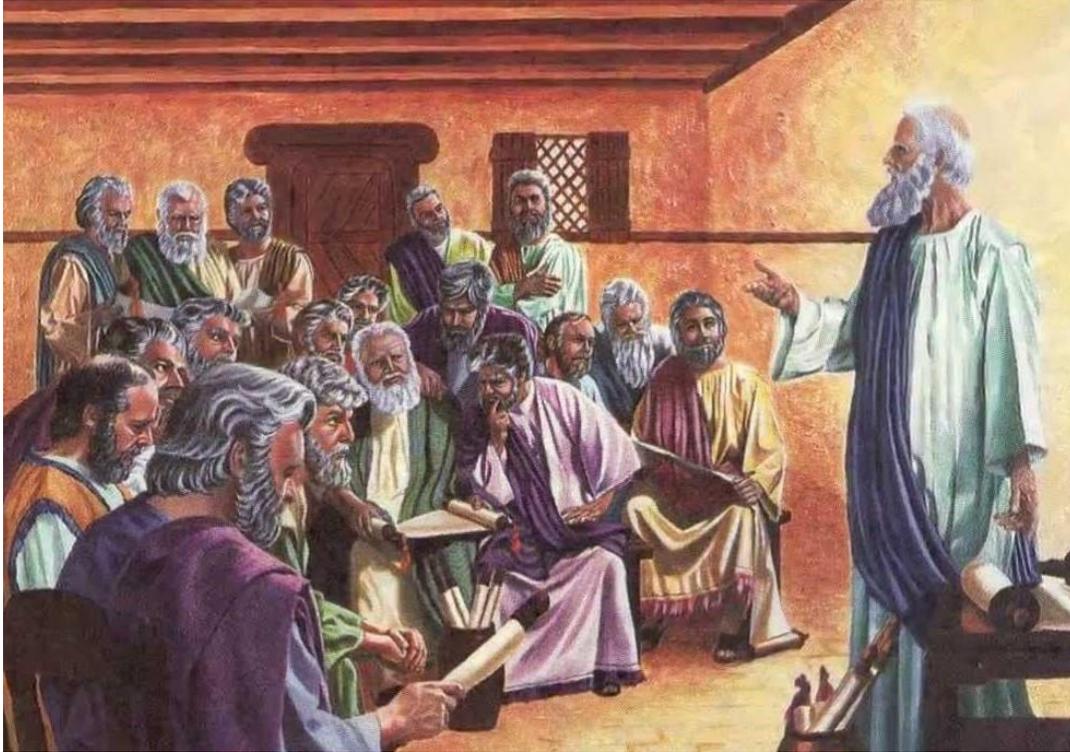


PART 19: GRACE ALONE

ACTS 15:1-35 THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Mike Taylor

www.TaylorNotes.Info/monday



MAIN IDEA

Most of the first Christians were Jews and had spent their whole lives living according to the Mosaic Law. Now Gentiles were becoming believers, so must they become law-keeping Jews first before becoming Christians? What must a person do to be saved? That was the issue at hand.

I. GRACE DISPUTED (15:1-5)

- 15:1 "Certain people" were Judaizers...false teachers who were self-appointed guardians of legalism, teaching a doctrine of salvation by works
- 15:4 No doubt Paul and Barnabas provided sufficient evidence to verify the genuineness of the Gentiles salvation
- 15:5 The "party of the Pharisees" was likely the same group as those insisting that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved (see 11:2)...this implied the keeping of the whole Mosaic Law since circumcision represented a commitment to observe the law

II. GRACE DEFENDED AND DISPLAYED (15:6-21)

A. Peter's defense (15:6-11)

- 15:7 Peter gave his defense by reviewing how God saved Gentiles in the early days of the church without requiring circumcision, law-keeping, or ritual; he referred to the salvation of Cornelius and his household (10:44-48; 11:17, 18).
- 15:8 Peter also reiterates that God gave them the Holy Spirit, thus proving the genuineness of their salvation.
- 15:10 "Yoke" refers to the heavy burden of the Mosaic Law, which was never intended to bring salvation. It simply showed how salvation could never be achieved through works.
- 15:11 This is a resounding affirmation of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

B. The defense of Paul and Barnabas (15:12)

- 15:12 These two men recounted the work of God on their just completed first missionary journey among the Gentiles.
- 15:12 Signs and wonders (see 2:19).

C. James' defense (15:13-19)

- 15:14 The ancient Greek word for Gentiles (it could also be translated nations) is *ethne*. The ancient Greek word for people in this passage is *laos*. The Jews considered themselves a *laos* of God, and never among the *ethne*. For them *ethne* and *laos* were contrasting words. So, it was a challenge for them to hear that God at the first visited the Gentiles (*ethne*) to take out of them a people (*laos*).
- 15:15-18 James refers to "prophets," showing that he could appeal to more than one OT text to defend the inclusion of Gentiles by faith alone (ESV Crossway Bibles 2115, note).

¹ This James was not the apostle James, whose martyrdom is recorded in Acts 12:2. This was the one traditionally known as James the Just – the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55), the brother of Jude (Jude 1), and the author of the book of James (James 1:1).

- 15:19 "It is my judgment." This phrasing implies that James had a position of high authority in the church. He was probably respected as the leader or senior pastor of the church at Jerusalem (Guzik, Enduring Word).

D. Grace displayed (15:20-21)

- 15:20-21 James and the other leaders did not want the Gentiles to revel in their freedom in Christ, which would cause the Jewish believers to follow the same liberty and violate their consciences.
- Though the Gentiles were not under the law, they were encouraged (required?) to lay down their rights in these matters as a display of love to their Jewish brethren. So James proposed that the Gentiles abstain from four pagan, idolatrous practices that were violations of the Mosaic Law so as not to offend Jews:
 1. Abstain from food polluted by idols.
 2. Abstain from sexual immorality.
 3. Abstain from the meat of strangled animals.
 4. Abstain from eating the blood from animals.

III. GRACE DELIVERED AND DESCRIBED (15:22-35)

- 15:22-23 The conclusions reached by the church in Jerusalem are then sent in a letter to the church in Antioch by Paul and Barnabas. Two other men from the church in Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, were appointed to accompany Paul and Barnabas to the church in Antioch.
- 15:24 The Greek phrase "troubling your minds" (NIV) describes the chaos caused by the Judaizers.
- 15:25-29 These verses summarize the conclusions reached by the church council in Jerusalem.
- 15:30-31 These results were gladly received by the church in Antioch. Judas and Silas remain in Antioch for a while, encouraging believers there, then they return to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch.

² Verse 34 is not in the best manuscripts. It reads, "*But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.*" The missing verse has no effect on the context.