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Cultivating Wholehearted Disciples of Jesus, who Bring the Kingdom of God. Everywhere.

# Battle for the True Gospel
# Acts 15

**Pastor Steve Holt**

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# Battle for the True Gospel
# The Jerusalem Council
# Acts 15:1-21

**For the first 10 years, the church was largely made up of Jews, and even Pharisees and Priests had gotten saved, but now with the expansion northward into Asia Minor, more and more Gentiles (non-Jews) are getting saved and a massive dispute arises over one question:**

**How does one become a disciple of Jesus?**

- The gospel of grace is at stake.
- The first Ecumenical Council of the Church
- It is the first Reformation! Yesterday was the day over 500 years ago that Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the Wittenberg Door in Germany. This is the first challenge of the doctrine of grace.

**Vs. 1**

- Many Jewish believers had come out of the sect of the Pharisees. The Pharisee Jewish believers were very concerned about who should be included in the church.
- These men were Christians from a Jewish background living in Judea. They are a kind of evangelistic group of self-described men who test the validity of the new believers.
    - They are genuinely excited that Gentiles are becoming Christians, but what should the requirements be?
- Circumcision was the entry to the Mosaic Law. Every Jewish boy was circumcised at 8 days old. For women, it also meant coming under the Mosaic Law fully.

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- There were many Gentiles who respected the Jewish Law and appreciated the morality of the Jews, but they didn't want to be circumcised.

- So, they would go to a Jewish synagogue and sit in a special section and learn. But they were not Jews; they were "God-fearing Gentiles."

- But if they wanted to become a full Jew, they had to first be circumcised.

**Some former Pharisees are saying: Become a Jew first, then become a Christian. Paul and Barnabas are wrong!**

**This is no small issue. This is not a side issue. This is CENTRAL to salvation! If you get this wrong, you get salvation wrong!**

**Vs. 2**

- "No small dissension." Most things we argue about aren't worth it, but on the gospel itself, that's another matter. On many things we can agree to disagree, but this is not it!

**Vs. 3-4**

- Most people are not worried over this. They are just excited about what God is doing with the Gentiles.

- But this issue has to be hashed out because neither side is backing down. We must get this decided.

## The Sect of the Pharisees Was Saying:
## Faith + Circumcision = Salvation

**Vs. 5**

- So, this is the issue of debate! They were Pharisees obsessed with the Mosaic Law, even the most minute detail. (Jesus had a few things to say about the Pharisees.)

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- They are showing their full hand: We are so glad the Gentiles are getting saved BUT we have some conditions: 1) The men must be circumcised and 2) Everyone must keep the Law of Moses.

## Peter Defines True Conversion
## Acts 15:6-11

**Vs. 6-11**

- This is a very contentious conference! This is the key point of Christianity.

**Peter says, "Remember how God used me to introduce Cornelius to faith in Christ."**

- We read in Acts 10-11 Cornelius's story: no man is unclean; they believed, and the Holy Spirit came down. Peter opened the door to the Gentiles.

**Notice what Peter says here: they should "HEAR the word of the gospel and BELIEVE." That is it!**

**Vs. 8-9**

**It's the same way you and I got saved—no different. We also heard the word of the gospel and believed. We put our trust in Christ for our full salvation.**

## The True Gospel:
## By Grace Alone, By Faith Alone, Through Christ Alone

- It was a Pentecost for the Gentiles! It was the same.

- Did Peter ever say, "Oh, by the way, none of this counts unless you get circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law"? NO.

- And God poured out His Spirit!

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- They're not second-class citizens in the kingdom: "No distinction, purify their hearts by faith." Not faith + something

**Vs. 10-11**

- We are Jews and we can't even fully follow the Law?

- <u>This is a yoke! (The Law was called a yoke.) You are going back into bondage</u>?

- This is interesting: we might say, "They should be saved in the same manner we were saved." But Peter says, "We shall be saved in the same manner as THEY are saved!"

- They didn't need circumcision or the Law. We need the same grace! The only way we can be saved is through grace.

- If you were to ask someone, "If you were to die tonight and went up to heaven, and God asked you, 'Why should I allow you into heaven?' what would you say?" most people would answer:

    - Lord, I went to church every Sunday. Lord, I worked at the soup kitchen on Thanksgiving. Lord, I went on mission trips. I gave 10% of my income.

    - There is only one right answer: "I put my trust in Christ and Christ alone. I know that all of my righteousness is just dirty rags judged by Your perfect standards. I stand on YOUR righteousness and YOUR righteousness alone."

        - The only righteousness is the righteousness of Christ.

**Vs. 12-17**

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- In other words, the incorporation of the Gentiles was part of God's plan from the beginning. James is quoting the OT scriptures.

- He could have incorporated Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you…and in you (Abraham) ALL the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- You shouldn't be surprised by what God is doing right now! It was all prophesied.

**These Jewish believers would continue to try to infiltrate the church! Parallel to our passage is the entire book of Galatians, dedicated to this issue.**

**Galatians 1:6-9**
***I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.***

- There is no stronger language in all the New Testament! Normally the Apostle Paul is very comforting. But in this controversy, he is amazed that the church would be so easily confused by "another gospel," which is not another! It is false.

- Anathema/damned is what he is saying! There is no other gospel. Even if it be an angel who brings it, you reject it.

**Galatians 3:1-2**
***O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?***

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The context is first-century Jewish zealots who had embraced the gospel. They believed Jesus was the Messiah. Former Pharisees, they believe in Him. But just believing in Jesus Christ is not good enough.

Yes, they believe in Christ. They believe that you must have faith in Christ. But that's not good enough. **It is faith + something else.**

- Faith + Circumcision
- Faith + The Works of The Law

**Why did they insist that the Gentiles must undergo circumcision?**

- The OT prescribed that if a Gentile became a convert to the Jewish religion, they had a Court of the Gentiles; they were second-class citizens. They are assuming the same thing—that the Gentile disciples should be in the court of the Gentiles—second-class citizens.
    - Paul gets so upset in the letter to the Galatians that he said he wished these Judaizers to be circumcised right out of the church, because they are destroying the gospel.
    - Circumcision meant the blessing and cursing of the Law. God had cut out His people to be consecrated as His own. But they must keep the Law. Lord, may You cut me out of the kingdom if I don't obey the Law just as I have cut off the foreskin of my body.
    - Circumcision negatively was meant to illustrate the curse of the Law if you don't follow it.
- But in the letter to the Galatians, Paul is saying that Christ went to the cross and became a curse for us. He took on the curse of the Law. Circumcision pointed to the cross, where God the Father sent His Son to be a curse for us.

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**What was symbolized in circumcision was actualized by Christ on the cross!**

- God the Father cut off His very Son on the cross, pouring out His wrath for sin. Jesus was literally circumcised for us on the cross once and for all.

- We embrace that by faith. Why are we going back to physical circumcision when Christ has already taken on the curse on the cross? Why are we taking on a debt we cannot keep?

- Why are we taking on the symbol of our salvation, when the symbol is no longer relevant to the actual? Christ has become a curse for us. He has taken on our debt for sin at the cross. It is nailed to the cross.

**Our Salvation is:**
**By Grace Alone, By Faith Alone, Through Christ Alone**

**16th-century Luther in the Reformation**

**This is what the Jerusalem Council was about. This was the core point of the Protestant Reformation.**

**Vs. 18-21**

- So, they decided there were four things that might be helpful, but they have nothing to do with salvation, and they were there to use for the new believers who were coming out of idolatry and a totally pagan lifestyle.

**What a perfect segue into Communion…**

- A sacrifice once and for all—done with bulls and sacrifices, not through circumcision, not through following the Law.

- Jesus says it: “through My blood for the remission of sins.”

- This is My body which is broken for you (in the middle of the Passover). My blood—new covenant.

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**This is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.**

**This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me.**

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