

The Gospel of Grace
A Defense of Salvation by Grace Alone

Acts 15:1-21

The Question of Salvation

- ❖ The Church in Antioch faced questioning about the requirements for salvation.

Acts 15:1, "But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

↳ The Bible contains not only the doctrine of salvation, but it also explains how the church taught the foundation of our salvation.

📖 *Galatians 1:6-9*

- ❖ A necessary conflict for the sake of the Gospel.

Acts 15:2, "And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question."

↳ Paul and Barnabas engaged in a debate to clarify the means of salvation and justification.

Jude 3, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

↳ Together, the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch were instrumental in doctrine for the early Church.

Acts 11:22, "The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch."

The Process of Clarification

- ❖ Barnabas and Paul were appointed to go to Jerusalem to resolve the conflict.

Acts 15:3, "So, being sent on their way by the church, they pass through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers."

↳ Their report brought joy to the disciples who heard their testimony.

↳ God provided salvation to the Gentiles through the gospel regardless of their ethnicity or background.

Acts 11:18, "When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.'"

Acts 15:4, "When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them."

- ❖ In Jerusalem, some believers insisted that Gentiles needed not only to be circumcised but also to follow the law of Moses for salvation.

Acts 15:5, "But some believers who belong to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.'"

↳ The source of this doctrinal controversy was coming directly from the party of the Pharisees, who had observed the law for years without a transformed heart.

Matthew 23:27, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness."

Matthew 15:8, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me..."

↳ Their obedience to the law of Moses, along with their ethnicity, gave Jews a sense of status.

📖 *Galatians 2:11-14,*

Doctrine Meets Evidence

- ❖ Leadership requires understanding; it was vital to hear the arguments before giving direction.
Acts 15:6, "The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter."
 - ↳ The controversy was so profound and crucial that the apostles and elders appointed a leadership meeting to consider this matter.
- ❖ This dissension required a long debate.
Acts 15:7a, "And after there had been much debate..."
 - ↳ Even though Gentiles were accepted in Christianity, the controversy remained: What was the basis for their salvation?
- ❖ Peter testifies that he was reluctant to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and yet it was God's will for them to be saved.
Acts 15:8-9,
- ❖ The law was a yoke that was impossible to bear for Jews and Gentiles.
Acts 15:10-11,
 - ↳ Peter concluded that holding to the law as a condition for salvation was to test God.
 - ↳ Gentiles, along with the Jews, were saved by grace, and not by the works of the law.
*Galatians 2:16, "yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."**Romans 3:20-24,*
- ❖ Paul and Barnabas' testimony provided confirming signs of grace.
Acts 15:12, "And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles."

Affirming Grace

- ❖ James' final word after the matter had been heard was to confirm the grace of God for salvation.
Acts 15:13-21,

Endnotes:

- ♦ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.