

Acts 14:21-28

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22 confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. 24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: 26 And thence sailed to Antioch [of Syria], from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. 27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. 28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.”

Introduction: Paul Goes Back To Spiritually Confirm The Souls Of Those Whom God Had Just Called To Salvation

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“We have come as far as verse, well let’s go back to verse 19, we’ve really come as far as verse 21. **“And there came”** now as Paul is at Lystra, and is refused, him and Barnabas the worship of those that were there, thinking they were Zeus and Hermes, now catching up to them, traveling over 100 miles, **“there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. (verse 19)** and I believe that he may have been. **“Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he roes up,”** and remarkably to me, **“and came into the city:”** I’d have moved to a different city, this city is a little hostile, **“and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when he had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many,”** or made many

disciples **“they returned again to Lystra,”** about 20 miles, **“and to Iconium,”** about 40 miles, and back again to **“Antioch,” (verses 20-21)** at least 80 miles. And again, we read those figures, just imagine doing that on foot, imagine what’s involved. Paul had come as far as, if you see up there, the thing’s dying [his laser pointer], there as far as Derbe [see https://www.bible-history.com/maps/maps/map_pauls_first_missionary_journey.html]. That would have been the shortest journey to come back to Antioch where he began, overland, but instead after having been stoned, he goes back to these areas, back to Lystra where he was stoned, then back to Iconium, and then back to Antioch, and we’re going to see back down to Perga, this area, and then over 350 mile journey back to Antioch [of Syria] where he began. There he is in Derbe, the shortest route is to go overland back to where started, but instead he went back to Lystra, back to Iconium, back to Antioch [of Pisidia], then about 3600 foot above sea level, back down to sea level here, and then about 307 miles back to Antioch in Syria where he began. So, we have, so we have this interesting journey, we read it quickly, we can’t imagine what it was like just to make this journey overland as they go. It says as they go, they’re **“confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (verse 22)** Listen, these are brand new believers, he’s in some areas just a few days, there are those that have turned to Christ, he leaves a fledgling church, brand new group of believers. Look, they don’t have a New Testament, these are Gentiles, most of the are not familiar with the Old Testament, just imagine that [not totally true, as most of these Gentiles were *God-fearing Gentiles* who had been attending in the synagogues Paul had been witnessing in, they probably still had access to Torah scrolls within the synagogues they came out of], Paul leads them to Christ, the church begins, in some of the areas there were some from the synagogue that would have brought some of the verses of the Old Testament to bear on this new fellowship. But Paul, instead of leaving this area overland that have been so hostile, he goes back to Lystra where he had been stoned, then back to Iconium, then back again almost 100 miles to Antioch, and he goes back to confirm the souls, to see them again, no doubt then haven’t got a phone call or a fax or an email that he was on his way back. No doubt surprised to see him so soon, coming back, reiterating the truths they had spoken to them, speaking to them about the truths of Jesus Christ, confirming the souls, making disciples, no doubt they asked many questions, being Gentiles, of

this newfound faith and of monotheism, of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [whom these God-fearers would already be familiar with], and of the virgin birth and of Christ's ministry in the area there of Judea, and no doubt some of the conversations must have been amazing. But in that he was confirming their souls, he was exhorting them, that's pushing them forward, encouraging them to do this, to continue in the faith, and what a rough sketch they had of the faith. Interesting again, at this point in the history of the Church, there was much power of the Holy Spirit, there was much reality of his presence, there was much reality of spiritual experience by God's grace, and the doctrine of the Church, it's forming, they're embracing the truths that will become the foundational truths and doctrines of the Church. Today we have all of the doctrine lined up, we have the other side, we have everything, and so often so little reality in our spiritual experience, so little sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit as he would lead us and speak to us. It's interesting for me to watch these fledgling churches as Paul goes back and speaks to them of the things they had been assured of, continuing in the faith. He's in the area of Galatia, remember in the first chapter of Galatians, he said **'I'm so shocked that you're so soon removed,'** he said to the Galatians, **'from the gospel of grace to another gospel, which is not another gospel, it's a perverted, a deformed gospel.'** They weren't denying Jesus, but what happens is the Judaizers will come there and say *'Jesus is necessary, but you need Jesus and circumcision, or Jesus and the dietary law,'* and Paul would say **'that isn't the gospel that I preached, which is the gospel of grace, and you're being so easily removed from the gospel of grace,'** something that we have to watch in our own lives, particularly as young Christians, because we're used to working for everything in our lives. And we come, and we hear these great words of faith and of redemption, of grace, of the things that we have so freely in Christ, and we're not used to anything in life coming to us that way, anything. And Paul says **'I'm amazed,'** and he said **'but though an angel from heaven, anyone else, comes and preaches another gospel, let him be anathema, let him be eternally damned,'** Paul says. So he encourages them **'to continue in the faith, and to understand'** **"that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."** (verse 23b) between now and then, I don't know about you guys, I'm looking forward to entering into the Kingdom of God. Now, I have a feeling it's not going to go the way I want it to, which will be *'teach Bible studies, sing songs and get Raptured.'* I'm not into "the much

tribulation,” the *thelypsus*, the *Tribulation*, *Tribulum* in the Latin again, the threshing sled that was drug over the wheat to separate the wheat from the chaff, the *thelypsus* in the Greek, which is remarkable in its tribulation, it’s troubling, the word that he uses.

Paul Ordains Elders In Every New Church Before He Leaves

So it says **“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” (verse 23)** Now are these “elders” two or three weeks old in the Lord? Two months in the Lord? These are babes in Christ. **“when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting,”** they were serious, they were seeking the Lord, **“they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” (verse 23)** and then they left them, in faith. Imagine that, brand new churches, brand new men, they were fasting and praying, saying ***‘Lord, which of these men will care for your Bride, which of these men have spiritual potentials, spiritual gifts?’*** imagine what they had to do to make these decisions in so short a time, and then commend them to the Lord? Trust them to the Lord, without some of the advantages that we feel like we have today. **“And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.” (verse 24)** that journey down to the coast, over 100 miles. **“And when they had preached the word in Perga,”** which is the city by the coast they hadn’t preached at on the way into the highlands, **“they went down into Attalia:” (verse 25)** where the port was, **“and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.” (verse 26)** no doubt, having time to think, Paul and Barnabas, imagine the conversations they had sailing the Mediterranean there, over 300 miles back to Antioch.

*When Paul & Barnabas Get Back To Antioch In Syria They
“Rehearse All That God Had Done With Them”*

They sailed to Antioch, **“from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.”** Now imagine, they were commended by this church to the grace of God, they had been fasting and praying, chapter 13, verse 2, certain elders, certain teachers, certain prophets, and the Holy Spirit said **‘Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the ministry I have called them.’** Then it says **‘Then being sent forth by the Spirit,’** the Spirit sent them, literally **‘the church released then under the unction of the Spirit,’** then it says **‘the church commended them to the grace of God.’** And you think of this journey, first to Cyprus, then Elymas the sorcerer, the things that they encountered, leaving there and coming to the area of Antioch (of Pisidia), way up into the highlands there where the people got angry and they gathered certain prominent women and leaders in the area, and began to threaten them, and they shook the dust off of their feet, they came to Iconium, and when they were at Iconium they found out that the people were gathering stones together and were going to stone them, this is the grace of God they were commended to, then they fled for their lives, and they came to Lystra. And in Lystra they [the unbelieving angry Jews] finally caught up with them, where Paul was stoned, and I believe left dead or left for dead, I think his description of that in 2nd Corinthians is that he was caught up to the 3rd heaven in that circumstance. And then from there, he goes back through these cities again, this journey, he comes back with lumps, he says **‘I bear in my body the marks of Christ,’** he came back a little bit more beat up than when they had left. And it says **‘they returned to Antioch from whence they had been commended to the grace of God.’** I don’t know about you guys, I’d like the grace of God to look a little bit different in my life than that. I don’t want to be commended to the grace of God, and then less than a year later be called lumpy for the rest of my life. Interesting, they had traveled over 700 miles on land and over 700 miles by sea, and had been away over a year on this journey, remarkable, remarkable journey. **“And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.” (verses 27-28)** from probably the fall of 51AD to the spring of 52AD, we’re not sure exactly what it means when it says “a long time” but they abode a long time there.

*As Individuals We Need To Pray For Open Doors To Preach
The Gospel, Reach The Lost*

And they talk about how God had opened the door to the Gentiles. **1st Corinthians 16** tells us this, Paul says **“there for a great door and effectual is open unto me, and there are many adversaries,”** talking about the opportunity to preach the Gospel, **‘a great door and effectual with many adversaries.’** In **2nd Corinthians** he says **“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s Gospel, and a door was opened unto me, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus”** and so forth. Open door, but he says he found no rest there. **Colossians chapter 4**, he says this, (my eyes are going bad) he says **“With all, praying also”** asking for prayer, prayers of the saints, **“that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.”** So here’s Paul saying **‘There was a door opened with many adversaries, there was a door opened and I had no rest in my spirit, there was a door opened, now I’m in bonds.’** You know, this is interesting, if Paul the apostle needed an open door to effectively share the mystery of Christ, certainly we need an open door. On the individual level, with your friends and your family, look, how much time do we have left? Are you watching the news? Are you, we should not only be watching the news today, we should be anticipating the news. There are some things in the Middle East right now we should be anticipating, if we have any sense at all of what’s going on. How much time do we have left to share? How important it is to share with friends, with relatives, maybe those that we’ve put off sharing with, maybe those it seems hard to get to. As individuals we need to pray for an open door. If Paul needed an open door, we need an open door. Paul says in **2nd Corinthians** **‘that the God of this world, who has blinded their minds, would be removed, so that the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ might shine into them.’** The god of this world has blinded the minds of friends and relatives and so forth, and you share with them the Good News, you think, *‘Who wouldn’t respond to this, logically, forgiveness of sin, fulfillment, internal peace, and inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away,’* you think of the promises that we have in Christ, and you share them with somebody whose miserable, you know, sometimes taking drugs, their family’s falling apart, they’re drunk, just miserable, and you say *‘You know, do you want the peace and the joy, and the hope that you have in*

*Jesus Christ?’ and they’re like ‘ehh, let me think about it, don’t try to ram that down my throat.’ They wouldn’t say that if you were giving them a T-bone steak, they wouldn’t say ‘don’t try to ram that down my throat.’ And Paul says, **‘The problem is, the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe, and we need an open door to share the ministry of Christ on an individual level.’** In the city, just think of the opens the Lord has given us, with the four Harvest Crusades we’ve been able to have here, the outreach that we did last, just this past Saturday, 3,500 bags of groceries in Kensington and North Philly, just remarkable doors have been given to us. You guys should remember to pray for Aaron down in West Philly, the church is growing, incredible things are happening. Be praying for Mark Abrams in North Philly, with the things that are going on with the Calvary there, be praying for Buddy Osborn in Rock ministry, incredible doors that are opening. God has given us an open door into urban Philadelphia, that is a hard door to crack open. And what a wonderful thing to see what he’s doing, besides all of the other things that God has given to us. We should continue to pray that that door will open wider and wider. And Paul comes back to the church (in Antioch of Syria) with Barnabas, they gather the church together, and everybody must have been spellbound, listening to them, *‘And ya, we got to this place, they threatened to stone us, and we were running, we got out of there, we got to Lystra, and then a lame man was there, he was lame, and Paul said I could just, I knew in my heart, God told me this guy’s got faith to be healed, and I spoke to him, he got up, the guy had never walked, he was lame from his birth, he had no strength in his legs, and his legs snapped, crackled and popped, he sounded like a Rice Crispy box, he got up and he walked, and everybody freaked out, and they thought we were gods, in fact, they thought Barnabas was Zeus and they thought I was Hermes,’* I’d rather be Zeus than Hermes, I don’t know about you guys. They must have sat with raptured attention listening. I don’t know what Paul recounted, when he was stoned at Lystra, did he tell the church...*‘I laid there, was I in the body, was I out of the body? but I saw things that were unspeakable, I was caught up to Paradise.’* Imagine the things he must have shared with the church, and then the journey back, an open door to the Gentiles, how many that had seen saved, the wonderful things that went on, **“and there they abode long time with the disciples.” (verse 28)***

Acts 15:1-41

“And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and *of* the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. 5 But there arose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; 9 and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. 12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. 13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: 14 Simeon hath declared how God at first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who

doeth all these things. 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. 19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20 But we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. 22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabbas, and Silas, chief among the brethren: 23 and they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: 24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment: 25 it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. 30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 *which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. 32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*. 33 And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. 35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. 36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and* see how they do. 37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who

departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; 40 and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.”

Introduction: “And Certain Men Which Came Down From Judea Taught The Brethren, And Said, Except Ye Be Circumcised After The Manner Of Moses, Ye Cannot Be Saved.

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“Chapter 15 says “**And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.**” (verse 1) whenever you come from Jerusalem you come down, even if you’re going up. Now we’re in Antioch, they came from Jerusalem to Antioch, over 300 miles, they taught the brethren and said “**Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.**” now this was the early Church. If it was the Church today *‘Except you tithe! you cannot be saved.’* In these days it was **‘Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved.’** You have a problem, it’s the early Church, again, there are misbelievers and there are disbelievers. There are, amongst the Jews, those who have genuinely come to Christ as Saviour, but they haven’t parsed out their theology from Judaism, they’re thinking *‘I’m completed now, I’ve now come to Christ, but he’s the Jewish Messiah, and yes we need to continue to follow Moses, yes, circumcision should still be in place, the law of sabbath should still be in place, the dietary laws,’* and they weren’t separating out from that the grace of God. And this begins the whole process of the Judaizers that will follow Paul and plague him in the churches, and it leads to this conference in Jerusalem, which is very important to us, we’re going through there this evening, it’s going to be 11 years before we get back to

Acts chapter 15, so this is probably the last time we're going to be here together, and these are foundational things for everything that we believe. Here are these guys, we can't tell whether they are genuine believers or not believers, I would tend to think that some of these men are genuinely believers, they're misbelievers and not disbelievers, and they're saying **'Except these new Gentile converts'** and they're there at Antioch, that wouldn't be very good news to me, **'except you guys be circumcised, you can't really be saved.'** That's not the Good News, that's the bad news. Now, think of what they're saying, they are tampering with the most sacred thing in human history, in heaven and in earth, in time and eternity. Paul, Peter, the apostles, James, they're all realizing that Christ came and died for our sins, and that we are saved through faith by grace [Romans 4:1-3]. They're coming to terms with those things, and here is Paul and Barnabas, having gone through all of the Gentile territories, jeopardized their lives, been stoned and beaten and so forth, and now here all of a sudden when they get back to Antioch, the church is rejoicing, certain brethren, certain men come from Jerusalem and say **'well, these Gentile believers, here at Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, everywhere, they can't really be saved,'** it doesn't say they can't be holy, doesn't say they can't follow Moses, it says **'they can't be saved.'** And there's the crux of everything right there, the liberal, the legalist. These are legalists, the liberal, constantly taking away from the Word of God, the legalist constantly adding to the Word of God. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, that's the legalists, adding to the Word, the Sadducees taking away from the Word of God, it goes from Genesis 3, when Satan questioned the Word of God, all the way to the end of the Book of Revelation, where it says **'anybody who adds to these words or takes away from them, big trouble there.'** And here, they're challenging the message that Paul is preaching. [Comment: recent historic studies, Oskar Skarsaune, *In The Shadow Of The Temple*, Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, show us the early Church, from Judea throughout Asia Minor, was still sabbath/Holy Day-observing, simply because it was their days of worship, because 99 percent of those being called by God through Paul's evangelism were coming out of the synagogues, both Jews and *God-fearing Gentiles*. But these Judaizers were something else altogether, the Temple still existed, and they wanted all new believers to become practicing Jews as well, following as much of the ceremonial law as possible, which outside the Temple area in the Diaspora would have included circumcision and little else, maybe the dietary laws as well, it's hard

to say, we weren't there. As Oskar Skarsaune brings out, the sect of the Pharisees were already on a mission to the synagogues of the Diaspora to push ceremonial purity within them, even before Christianity came about. This Pharisaic "mission" was running headlong into Paul's evangelical mission – and both of those "missions" ended up meeting and clashing within these same synagogues (see *In The Shadow of the Temple* pp. 121-122).]

*After These Judaizers Stir Up Major Contention And
Division In Antioch – The Church At Antioch Send
Barnabas & Paul To Jerusalem*

“When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.” (verse 2) now here's Luke's description “had no small dissension and disputation with them,” there wasn't a word that made it big enough, so he said “it wasn't small” and he uses two words to describe what “it wasn't enough.” There was dissension, there was division, and in that division there was disputation, they're disputing, they're arguing with each other, and he says “that process wasn't a small one, it was a big one.” When Paul and Barnabas, and this is heated, had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined then, the church at Antioch, that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them **“should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.” “And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” (verse 3)** now they're going overland there, we don't have all the way down to Jerusalem, but they're going from Antioch there, down to the area of Phenice and then Samaria, hills north of Jerusalem, to go to Jerusalem. And as they go through Phoenicia and Samaria they are declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, **“and they caused great joy unto all the brethren”** because there's many Gentile believers in those areas, those in the area of Samaria, Phoenicia, they're rejoicing as they're hearing of those who are being saved by grace in the Gentile world.

The Jerusalem Conference Begins

“And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.” (verse 4) Now Paul says this in Galatians, when he talks about going up to Jerusalem, he says, **“Then fourteen years after, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me, and I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them the gospel which I preached among the Gentiles,”** and he says this, **“but privately, to them that were of reputation, lest by any means I should run or had run in vain.” (Galatians 2:1-2)** Paul said *‘When we first got up there, we talked privately with some of the Church leaders,’* so he says (in Acts 15) **“when they were come to Jerusalem,”** verse 4, **“they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared”** Paul and Barnabas **“all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” (verses 4-5)** and no doubt, again, these Pharisees are in the church, having turned to Christ. Paul again describing this in Galatians says, when he came up with Titus, **“But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you.” (Galatians 2:3-5)** Here he says, there was then this argument, *‘and there were those saying it was needful for them to be circumcised, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’* Now, back to Galatians, let me read further, he says **“But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me”** these Pharisees **“: God accepteth no man’s person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: but contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles;) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that**

was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen (Gentiles), and they unto the circumcision. Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.” (Galatians 2:6-10) So we have Paul then describing this conference in Jerusalem. Verse 6, “**And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.**” now that’s a good thing, the Church is not rash, it’s not just screaming and fighting, they all come together now, the leadership, to talk about these issues, to consider it, and to find out. Now see, there was to be a balance now, between grace and responsibility [law, i.e. the balance between Law & Grace]. You know, the Jewish believers are stumbling, ‘*You mean, you just tell them they’re just saved, just by faith and grace, they don’t have to do anything, they can just live however they want?*’ no there’s got to be some balance here. No, there’s got to be some balance here, ok, we’re not righteous by keeping the law, we don’t have to keep the law, but certainly the Gospel should effect our behavior and the way that we live, so, where do these issues, where do we find balance here? So it’s a good thing that they’ve come together to consider this matter. “**And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago**” about ten years before this now, “**God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.**” (verse 7) now by the way, I’ll just quickly read, it’s interesting, Peter doesn’t get to finish this sermon, I’m sure he had at least a five-point sermon, he made one point and then the Holy Spirit interrupted (going back to Acts 10:43-44), it says, as Peter’s winding up his first point he says “**To him**” to Jesus “**give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And those of the circumcision which believed were astonished,**” (Acts 10:43-45a) So just as Peter gets to the truth of remission of sins through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit then falls on this Gentile gathering, a Gentile Pentecost, and Peter now is reiterating what took place, he said ‘*it was a good while ago, you know, God made the choice that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.*’ “**And God**” he says “**which knoweth the hearts,**” that’s both comforting and sobering, isn’t it? Psalm 139 says he knoweth our thoughts afar off, the Hebrew is “he knows our thoughts in their origin,” he knows our

hearts, that's great when we're saying *'You know, I wish I had more time to pray, I wish I wouldn't get irritated in traffic, Lord, I wish I was nicer to my wife before I left today, or my husband, Lord I wish I had more time to spend with my kids in devotions, Lord, I wish I took my time in your Word, I wish I had more time alone with you,'* he knows our hearts in all of those things, that's a good thing. But he also knows our hearts when we're talking to somebody, and while we're talking to them we're thinking *'If you don't stop talking to me blood is gonna start running down my ears.'* Or somebody's saying something smart to us, and you're thinking *'If you did this to me before I was saved I would knock you right on the ground,'* you know, he knows our hearts. It's wonderful on one side of the coin, because he knows our struggle with being what the Spirit is leading us into. And of course, he knows that our hearts are desperately wicked, as it tells us in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 17:9). So, he's sovereign, and that's woven in here, their theology is being woven into these discussions. He said **"God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;" (verse 8) 'God, knows the hearts, knew they believed, and in the middle of my point the Holy Ghost fell on them.'** **"And [he] put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."** (verse 9) notice this, **"purifying their hearts by faith."** it's the only way for that to happen. **"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (verse 10) 'Why tempt ye God?'** That's a very sobering challenge for Peter to make to this authoritative gathering in Jerusalem, and to these that would bring a yoke of bondage on the Gentile believers, **"why tempt ye God?"** Where Jesus said the same ***'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'*** Peter says to this gathering, ***'Why tempt ye God?'*** that's fairly sobering. **"To put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear."** (verse 10) Peter watched Jesus in a constant contest with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, he watched him in a constant contest with those who were arguing, by the way, their tradition over the Word of God. You know, things from their own writings, the rabbinic writings, and putting them in place of precedent over the Word of God. Peter and the apostles had watched Christ dismantle that kind of legalism, and the yoke of bondage that they had borne, their fathers unable to bear, and he heard Jesus say ***'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'*** And Peter says **"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon**

the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” (verses 10-11) he doesn't say *'They shall be saved, even as us,'* he says *'We shall be saved, even as they.'* Look, they're going to work through this here. Yes, faith has works, James will say that, **'Look, you're going to tell me about your faith? Let me see the evidence of it in your life. Don't say you believe and there's no evidence.'** They're not saying that, they're not throwing away the moral law [which basically is the 10 Commandments, which by the way Jesus brought to it's spiritual intent in Matthew 5:17-48], what they're going to do is they're going to parse out the ceremonial law [which Paul did in Hebrews chapter 10], and they're going to realize the moral law has not passed away, adultery was still wrong, theft was still wrong, idolatry was still wrong [he just mentioned three of the 10 Commandments, the early NT churches of God throughout Judea, Syria and Asia Minor were basically keeping the 10 Commandment law of God for the first 300 years of its existence]. It was the ceremonial law that was no longer being enforced upon these believers. [Comment: I've been struggling to understand the balance between Law & Grace ever since I started this website, having come from a legalistic Sabbath-keeping Church of God, and then having spent 10 years attending a Calvary Chapel, and then being given permission from wonderful pastors like Joe Focht to transcribe his sermons for this site. Pastor Chuck Smith said himself (describing how differing parts of the Body of Christ see and understand the doctrine of Law & Grace) said *'It's like one group sees it like a triangle, and another like a circle, whereas God with the whole picture and complete understanding sees it as a cone, which incorporates both the triangle and circle within it's construction.'* Pastor J. Mark Martin, one of the most grace oriented Calvary Chapel pastors I know within the Calvary Chapels has given an awesome picture of the redemption we have through the blood of Christ, but he came close to describing how the law part integrates into the grace part, where he stated that when one comes to Christ and receives the Holy Spirit, God imparts within the new believer and all believers *"new wants and desires"* replacing the worldly wants and desires of the unsaved, worldly fleshly desires. I instantly recognized his description as fitting God's description of the New Covenant, which he gave to us in **Jeremiah 31:31-34** and Paul repeated in **Hebrews 8:6-13**, where God says he will **"write his laws in our minds and upon our hearts."** I also came to see his three

sermon piece in Romans chapter 3 in no way canceled out a booklet I condensed for a Sabbath-keeping Church of God about the Covenants of God, which shows how the New Covenant perfectly modifies and upgrades the Old Covenant, and in no way cancels the laws of God, for it is the laws of God, basically the 10 Commandments, which become our new “wants and desires.” David perfectly demonstrated this God-infused desire in Psalm 119. See <https://unityinchrist.com/romans/Romans3-34-25.htm> and <https://unityinchrist.com/whatisgrace/whatisgraceintro.htm> (for some very good explanations of Law & Grace, and the Biblical balance between the two for the believer.) Read these, as well as <https://unityinchrist.com/newcovenant/TheNEWCOVENANT.htm> and see how both explanations blend and are harmonious (with the exception of the “days of worship” dichotomy that exists between the two groups). Law & Grace is not an easy subject to understand or explain, and anyone who believes it is, is a novice in the Word, is all I can say. If you genuinely see the Law of God, whether the OT 10 Commandments, with Holy Days, and maybe even dietary laws, as God’s Holy Spirit infused new “wants and desires” in your life, you’re not a legalist, and likewise, if you see what has been termed the NT law of Christ, 9 of the 10 Commandments, as God’s Holy Spirit infused new “wants and desires” in your life, then you too are not a legalist, but a Christian believer. If you think, in either case that people **must keep the Laws of God or else!** then you are a legalist, and have missed what the grace of God is all about, for it is about God writing his laws in your heart and mind, giving you a new set of wants and desires that replaces the worldly desires we were born with. Grace is not performance based, for Jesus through his shed blood has bought us and redeemed us and justified us. That blood sacrifice has bought and paid for our salvation, the works were all his. And it is by the very works of the Holy Spirit within us which write his laws within our hearts and minds. Our obedience, then is God-powered, we can’t take any credit for it. Any of you Calvary Chapel pastors who read this, drop me a line in the Guestbook, and let me know if you think I’ve come close to the truth here.]

James, Half-Brother Of Jesus, Renders A Decision

“Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God

had wrought among the Gentiles by them.” (verse 12) and we don’t know how long they spoke, and notice **“what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”** “As they,” it tells us earlier, “confirming the word of grace.” God gave signs and wonders to confirm the word that was being preached, it wasn’t like what we see today in so much of the Church, people trying to use the Word to confirm the weird stuff that goes on in their ministry, it was the opposite, the Word was being preached, and genuine miracles were happening to authenticate the message that was being spoken. And Paul and Barnabas said **‘God wrought these things, we didn’t do it, we were preaching the Word, preaching grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and God, not us, was granting signs and wonders to confirm that word. God wasn’t angry at us, God wasn’t saying we’ll add a little circumcision to this...’** he said **‘No, we were preaching the grace of God, and miracles began to take place, God confirming, God confirming the word that we were preaching.’** Verse 13, **“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:”** first it was the Judaizers who got to present their argument, the believing Pharisees, then Peter, then Paul and Barnabas get to speak, now James. **“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:” (verse 13)** so there’s some order here now, things are settling down, “James answered,” now James seems to have a prominent position in the Jerusalem church, this is not James the brother of John [whom Herod killed], this is James the half-brother of Jesus Christ. Same mom, different Dad, you know. The younger brother of Jesus Christ, it was Jesus, and James, and Joses, Simon and Jude, who wrote the Book of Jude, and sisters, plural, we don’t know how many, and then Joseph and Mary. It was an interesting family, listen. There are those that try to say that James, Simeon, Joses and Jude are Joseph’s from a previous marriage, that they were actually older half-brothers of Jesus Christ. That comes from the bishop of Salamis in the 3rd century, and nobody talked about it before that. Tertullian tells us that James, Joses, Simeon and Judas are the uterine siblings of Jesus Christ, that he was the oldest. James was born next, then Simeon, Judas, we have the list there, so that there’s at least then five boys in the house, imagine that, and at least two girls. There’s at least seven kids and Joseph and Mary, that’s nine people. We know that when Joseph and Mary came to dedicate Jesus, in Luke chapter 2, they offered two turtledoves, and the law said that you would offer a lamb,

but if you were too poor, you could offer the turtledoves. So Joseph is a carpenter, how successful we're not sure. But we know they were struggling financially to the point where they offered turtledoves instead of lambs. Jesus, when he came into the world, didn't say *'I want to be an only child, I'm gonna need time to study and get ready for my ministry. I want a decent home where I have kind of a little library off to the side where I can get all boned up on the things I'm gonna have to argue with the Pharisees.'* Isn't it interesting, he comes into a home, born first certainly, of Mary, conceived of the Holy Ghost, and then after that, half-brothers and sisters, James next, Joses, Simeon, Jude, sisters, that's a crowded little house. That means the boys were probably in bunk beds in one room. Imagine what it was for the younger brothers to grow up with Jesus as their older brother. I think, what a remarkable experience. James, is called James the Just by the early Church, even the Jews in Jerusalem venerated James because of how righteous that man was. James, kept the Law, to certain degrees, not because he had to. James receives the nickname *'Old Camel-knees'* because they say he prayed at least 8 hours a day on his knees. His knees became deformed. When he was martyred they said they had to struggle to straighten out his legs to get them into the sarcophagus. 8-hours a day he spends alone, listen, with his older brother, with his older brother. We're told that after the resurrection of Christ, James comes to the faith, Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians 15, and imagine then what it was like for him. Imagine what it was to think *'My older brother was God! I thought he was just some goody-two-sandals all the time, you know, I got tired of hearing my mom say 'Why can't you be like your older brother?' Well I know now.'* But just imagine, James knew what made Jesus chuckle, James understood his sense of humour. James knew what his favourite colour was. James knew if Jesus said *'I love the way begonia's smell,'* James knew what his favourite food was, James knew the glister in his eyes, the smile on his face. James now is looking past that face into the face of Jehovah-God, and spends 8-hours alone a day with an older brother. Where else would he want to be? **"If any man lack faith, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not," 'he won't scold you, go to him, I know who he is, ask.'** You have to understand who James was to understand his Epistle. There are over 50 imperatives in his Epistle, every other verse just about is in command-mode. Nineteen times he uses the word "brethren" in his Epistle. It's not legalistic, he harks back to watching Jesus with the Pharisees, Sadducees,

hypocrites, James has no time for hypocrisy in worship, for hypocrisy in lust, for hypocrisy in action, for hypocrisy in the tongue, because he remembers all his brother confronting, and he's telling the Church, **'you do this, you do that, you seek God, you ask for wisdom, you keep the Word, don't blame God when you're tempted with lust, commit yourself to him.'** **'Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is to remember orphans and widows in their affliction, and keep yourself unspotted from the world.'** You just go through and you realize just the influence in his life, and how much of the Lord's heart is in the imperatives, the challenges, they're so straight forward, they're so simple. And James was no doubt greatly respected and had come to a prominent position even amongst the apostles. There's something about him. And James now, **"And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:"** Old Camel-knees, **Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name."** (verses 13-14) by his grace, how he did that, the Gentiles, you know, to take out a people, that's a process that's going on. Luke chapter 21 tells us about "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled. Romans chapter 11 tells us about "the fullness of the Gentiles being gathered," we're getting to the edge of all of that, very interestingly. In fact, the remarkable things that are happening in Islam now, around the world. And so many of them, dreaming dreams and having visions, and so many that I wonder if it's a fulfillment toward a greater degree of **"your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams."** I know that in the Muslim world, those that are discovering the love of Jesus Christ, believe that this is the last great ingathering to the point that it will cause jealousy amongst the Jews, and then the Rapture is going to happen. [Comment: Now Calvary Chapels believe in the Rapture interpretation to pre-millennial prophecy, whereas other groups don't. As Paul said, when it comes to prophecy, we're looking through a darkened glass. It may happen that way, or it may not. If it does, I'll be happy. Or if the Philadelphia era believers are "raptured" to a place of safety during the tribulation, I'll be happy. We can all back up to Revelation 3:10 and know the servants of Jesus will be protected from the tribulation, that much is absolutely certain, because Revelation 3:10 is a verbal promise of Jesus Christ, recorded by John the apostle.] I know that's what's believed and held, and how wonderfully he loves the Muslim people, and how dramatically and miraculously he's gathering them in, the Gentiles. **"Simeon hath declared how God**

at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” (verse 14) The Jews just wanted to take them out, God wanted to take them out for himself. **“And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,”** (verse 15) now he quotes Amos, but he doesn’t just say what Amos had to say is the fulfillment of our meeting here today, what he’s saying is, **‘Look, the prophets spoke of this, Isaiah spoke of it, it’s spoken in the Psalms, spoken of it in Hosea, spoken of it in Amos, the prophets in the Old Testament spoke about the fact there would be a gathering in of people that were not my people, of the Gentiles being gathered in.’** He said we shouldn’t be surprised, **“And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men”** that’s beyond Israel **“might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”** (verses 15-17) “even” is the idea “all of the Gentiles that would be gathered in.” and **“known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”** (verse 18) We shouldn’t be surprised, God is just fulfilling his word. Now James, if you misinterpret his Epistle, Luther thought it was so legalistic it shouldn’t be in the New Testament. No, what James is showing, is the greatest measure of grace here, saying, **‘What are we doing, we can’t do this to them, God said in the Old Testament that he may gather out of the Gentiles a people for himself. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. He’s not surprised at this, we shouldn’t be surprised at this either.’** Verse 19, **“Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:”** (verse 19) He doesn’t say *‘They need to do this and they need to do that,’* he’s not legalistic, **“that we trouble them not, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:”** **‘but there will be something that we ask of them,’** **“But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.”** (verse 20) “pollutions” plural “of idols” plural, and from “fornication” *porneo* that’s any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage, from “things strangled,” they’re not bled out, they’re just strangled, they have the blood in them, “and from blood.” Now look, what James is going to do is this, he’s breaking down the partition wall between the Jew and the Gentile. As the New Testament moves onward, Paul will say **‘Look, I dare**

not do anything that makes my brother stumble. I dare not eat anything that would cause him to stumble or turn away,’ but Paul says in Corinthians ***‘We know that these idols are nothing, there maybe demons there, but it doesn’t mean anything.’*** He says, you go to somebody’s house and they put a T-bone on your plate, say grace and eat it, don’t say *‘Hey, is this from the market place where they worship idols?’* he said *‘don’t do that, just be thankful and eat the T-bone, before you find out, fast as you can.’* And he says ***‘But, if you know there’s idolatry involved, then you’re in a place where you have to stand down, because you don’t want to cause division between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers.’*** [And I might add, we in the greater Body of Christ ought to exercise the same caution and love toward the Sabbath-keeping and Messianic Jewish believing parts of the Body of Christ.] So, this short outline that’s given to the Gentile believers is relative to this whole issue in Jerusalem, where there was a stumbling block between Pharisees that believed, and Jewish believers and Gentile believers that seemed like that they had every liberty in the world, and the Jews couldn’t handle that. James says ***‘Let’s not trouble them, but we do need to ask of them certain things,’*** he says, ***‘so let’s write unto them that they abstain from pollutions of idols,’*** or all kinds of fowl things, fornication being one of them that took place in idolatrous worship, it was unclean, sexual impurities certainly was important to the Jews, I mean, adultery was a capital crime, they took this seriously. ***‘From things strangled, that had not been bled out from blood,’*** all of that would bother them, there’s no mention of keeping the Sabbath or of tithing or of circumcision or of baptisms particular to Jewish ablutions here, ***‘these things.’*** ***“For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.” (verse 21)*** His point is, if the Gentile believers out in the Roman world, would stay away from these things, it’ll be good, because in every one of those cities there are places where men are teaching the precepts of Moses, and if the Gentile believers don’t stay away from these things, there never will be unity in the Church, ***“For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.” (verse 21)*** [Oskar Skarsaune says in his *In The Shadow of the Temple*, p. 170, *“In the light of this, the meaning of the “apostolic decree” becomes clear: the Gentiles need not become circumcised Jews in order to be fully accepted into the people of God, but they are required to keep those commandments of the Torah which are obligatory for Gentiles*

living among Jews. Among these commands, special emphasis is laid on those related to table fellowship—in other words, the decree is specifically aimed at the unity of mixed congregations. The Jewish believers are asked to recognize their uncircumcised brethren as belonging fully to the new people of the Messiah, while the Gentiles are asked to respect the sensitivities of their Jewish brethren and not violate the Torah commandments valid for Gentiles living among Israelites.”]

Chosen Men And Letters Were Sent Back To Antioch With Paul & Barnabas

“Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:” (verse 22) and Silas who will become Paul’s partner on the 2nd missionary journey. Now this is just wisdom, they decide if they just send Paul and Barnabas back, and Paul and Barnabas come back to Antioch and say ‘*Hey, we only have to keep just these few things, let’s start here, let’s do this right,*’ they said **‘Let’s not do that, because there’s going to be controversy, let’s send chosen men, respected, from the church in Jerusalem, to go back and ratify that fact that these are our conclusions of the church in Jerusalem.’** This is what they said, **“And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:” (verse 23)** “send greeting unto the brethren,” interesting, the only other place in the New Testament you have that phrase “greeting”...is in **James chapter 1, “James, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting,”** Here’s James writing in Jerusalem in Acts 15, he says **‘And they wrote letters by them; The apostles, the elders, the brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: “Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:” (verse 24)** False teaching today, so much of it

centered around Jesus—and, *‘you have to come to genuine faith in Jesus Christ—and do this, you have to come to faith in Jesus Christ—and do this. You have to believe in Jesus Christ—and wear a tie,’* I don’t believe that for a moment. **“to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you”** notice this, **“with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,” (verse 25)** isn’t it interesting, James, who people think is so legalistic, **“with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (verse 26)** Just think what it was like for James, the half-brother of our Lord, to hear Paul and Barnabas talk about going through Gentile territories, being beaten, stoned, but not turning back, sharing the love of his older half-brother, with the Gentile world, how he must have been touched by these men. He himself had not been out on journeys that difficult. **“Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.” (verses 26-27)** *‘We’ve sent these brethren from the church here in Jerusalem to ratify what we’re saying.’* **“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;” (verse 28)** that’s amazing, isn’t it? ***‘It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us’*** ...James will write his Epistle, ***‘Wisdom from above is first pure, and peaceable, it’s easily entreated, it works out the right way, it’s peaceable.’*** Sometimes people say *‘How should I know, should I do this? Should I do that? I don’t know what the Lord wants, because the Bible doesn’t say ‘Move to Georgia, you know.’ So what am I supposed to do?’* One of the things I would say to you is, do you have a peace about it? The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, do you have a peace about it? If you’re not sure, you can wait a little longer, you can pray a little longer, wait till you have a peace. Don’t move and then look back over your shoulder, when you’re in trouble, saying *‘Lord, was that you that told me to do this?’* Wait till you have a peace, and have some assurance, because if you’re in his will there’s going to be resistance anyway, then when the difficult days come, you can look back and say *‘Lord, you told me to be here, so whatever’s going on, you anticipated, you knew it.’* **“It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;” (verse 28)** You know I wish that some of the mainline denominations, when they have their big conventions and convocations to decide *‘should we ordain homosexuals? Should we accept homosexuality as a viable*

alternative lifestyle in the Church? Should we ordain? Should we let people live together and have sexual relations before marriage? Is it ok to promote abortion or not, is choice politically correct and something that we should tolerate?’ I wish instead of sitting around for days arguing with each other, I wish *they* would be able to say **‘It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.’** Because we can live with that, we can live with that, you can live with that, **‘it seemed good to the Holy Ghost.’** That’s the way the early Church made decisions, that’s our model.

James’ Letter Is Received In Antioch

“it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that you abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.” (verse 28-29) not “you shall be saved,” he’s talking to those who are already saved, “you shall do well, this is a good start, this is what we’ve prayed about, this is what the word we’re going to send you, with Paul and Barnabas who are coming back with Silas and Barsabas. We’re not telling you that you need to be circumcised or you need to keep the sabbath, or you need to keep the law of Moses, what we’re telling you is, stay away from idolatry [which in the spirit of that, is keeping the first 3 of the 10 Commandments], stay away from blood, those things that would stumble your Jewish brethren, stay away from sexual immorality [the 7th Commandment], stay away from any foods that are offered to idols and so forth. If you do these things, you do well. And we know in Galatians, then they told Paul to remember the poor, which Paul said **‘We were eager to do.’** **“So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together,”** so the church in Antioch is a big church, I hear too many people today say they don’t believe in big churches, I do. Anyhow, **“and when they had gathered the multitude together they delivered the epistle: which when they read, they rejoiced for the consolation.” (verses 30-31)** now I guess that was good news to these Gentile men that lived in Antioch. But they rejoiced for the consolation they received, knowing now we’re in step with the Jerusalem church,

we're in step with the apostles, we're in step with James and Peter, we have their blessing, we can move forward without keeping the law. And notice **“And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.” (verse 32)** So, Jerusalem and Antioch reconciled here, and these men staying on there. We can read three more verses. **“And after they had tarried *there* a space,”** we're not sure what that time period exactly was, **“they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.” (verse 33)** back to Jerusalem, the church released them, **“Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.” (verse 34)** notice, it pleased him, God's calling, it pleased him. I mean, God's calling should be a blessing. Some people say, *'I hate the call, if I say Jesus anything he'll send me to the Eskimos, I just know it.'* We have this strange idea if we give God our whole life, he'll make us do something we hate. I don't think so. I don't think so. He's given us idiosyncrasies and characters and spiritual gifts, and he'll bring us into alignment with the things he has for us. It says here, **“Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” (verses 34-35)** what a great church, no wonder that was a big church, what a great church that must have been, Silas is there, a prophet from Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, what an interesting picture. I'll read to you one more thing from Galatians, it tells us **“But when Peter, Paul says “was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles:”** he was eating pork roll, Italian sausage, then these guys came from James, **“but when they were come, he withdrew”** it means *“to trim your sails,”* interesting, it's a fisherman's or word of those who were at sea, **“and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.”** their walk *orthopodao*, they didn't walk straight-footedly, this was not a walk that was spiritually mature and healthy, they were limping. Before these guys came from James, Peter's there partying, *'Ya, I'll take some gabgolo there, and put some, ya, that's good, O ya, pork shoulder, I'm ready,'* and then these guys come from James, and they start to draw back and pull themselves back under, this is after, this is after, Jesus said to Peter *'It isn't what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, it's what comes out from his heart,'* this is after Jesus

lets down a sheet down from heaven and says *'Here, kill and eat...don't call anything unclean or common that I've called clean,'* this is after, Peter's at the Jerusalem conference, and says **'Why lay a greater burden on them, than we or our fathers were able to bear,'** here's Peter, he's an apostle, but he's still human, and when these brethren come from James, because James it seemed maintained the dietary law, were told in Church History, that he was a vegetarian from his birth. We don't know if that's true, but that's what the Church Fathers say. So James was just an austere, it seems, just a very interesting man. And when certain came from James, it says Peter began to draw back, insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away. **"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"**...[transcript of a connective expository sermon on Acts 14:21-28 and Acts 15:1-35, given by Pastor Joe Focht, Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia, 13500 Philmont Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19116]

Related links:

Audio version: <http://resources.ccphilly.org/SPM611>

1) Comment: Concerning Pastor Joe's explanation about Paul's confrontation with Peter at Antioch, given the cultural background of the early Church, God having used Paul to witness to Jews and *God-fearing Gentile* attendees within the synagogue system throughout the Diaspora, the early churches would have been Sabbath/Holy Day observing, and probably dietary law following. But the Jews from Judea would not so much as eat with a Gentile at the same table, having nothing to do with "what" was being served. So in Antioch where Peter was feasting, there were probably two tables laid out, Jewish and Gentile, within the same hall, and Peter and Barnabas were feasting at both tables, which culturally would have both been loaded with clean food. But the Gentile side of the body of Christ likes to slam Jewish and Sabbath-observing Church of God denominations for their choice of days of worship and Jewish

dietary practices which follow Torah, so they interpret this as Peter eating *pork rolls*, which is culturally not a proper interpretation of what Paul is saying in Galatians, considering what kind of Gentiles were making up the early church congregations, even in Antioch of Syria. Paul is calling Peter out for first eating at the Gentile table, which there was nothing wrong with, until James' brethren showed up, then he hightails it over to the Jewish table. It's not about unclean food verses clean food, but about not eating at the same table with Gentiles by Jews. In reality, there only should have been one big table, with them all feasting at it.

2) This whole chapter brings up the subject of Law & Grace, which in my estimation no one Christian denomination has properly defined. Some have come closer than others in that perfect definition. For believers the blood of Jesus Christ has paid for our salvation, that's it, apart from any law-keeping, it's a done deal. Paul in Romans and Galatians and here in Acts makes that perfectly clear, and Paul was trained at Mount Sinai by Jesus himself right after his conversion, so Paul's teaching on Law & Grace would be Jesus' own teaching. ***But what part does the Law of God play in our lives? That's the BIG question.*** We're sanctified once and for all by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon accepting him as our Saviour. But what part does God's Law play in our Christian walk? To view some good explanations, some of them coming from Calvary Chapels, one good Baptist one, and a Messianic Jewish one, log onto: <https://unityinchrist.com/whatisgrace/whatisgraceintro.htm>. It thoroughly describes the subject of Law & Grace. Law & Grace, as I said is a very difficult subject to discuss, and way too many denominations, Sabbath-observing as well as Sunday-observing, like to use their interpretation of it to severely beat up the other group. In the interest of the unity which Jesus himself called the end-time body of Christ to achieve, this must stop (see <https://unityinchrist.com/prophets/Zephaniah/Zephaniah1.htm> to see the pre-Incarnate Jesus' call for this unity in the Body of Christ).

3) The Messianic Jewish version of early Church history from AD30 to the early 300s AD shows a somewhat different view of the early churches of God Paul was founding throughout the

parts of the Jewish Diaspora he was reaching by hitting and witnessing in all of their synagogues throughout Syria, Cyprus, and Asia Minor. Again, to view this study, see <https://unityinchrist.com/history2/index3.htm>