

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 15 as we continue our study through the Bible and the book of Acts.

And as we saw last time, Paul's first missionary journey comes to a close and it was a very fruitful journey. They traveled some 700 miles by land and some 500 miles by sea, and now they returned to the church in Antioch in Caesarea, the church that sent them out on this journey.

And there in Antioch they shared with them all that God had done, how He opened the door to the Gentiles. As we closed last time this is what we were told, "**Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.**"

And they are not only sharing these things, but they are also being refreshed, staying in Antioch for maybe 1 to 2 years before beginning their second missionary journey!

Now for the problem. You see, for some of the believing Jews, seeing Gentiles getting saved and not keeping the Law of Moses, not being circumcised was a very big issue. They did not believe you could be saved if you did not keep the Law of Moses!

And as much as some may feel that this is a thing of the past, it is not. We are dealing with these very same issues in the church today. We see it with Roman Catholicism, with the Hebrew Roots movement and-so-on. And in reality, every religion has this works mentality except for Christianity where Christ finished the work and is seated at the right hand of the Father!

And I realize that some feel that this is much to do about nothing. I don't, and I will explain. Let me share this with you and then I will comment on why this is so dangerous. We are told,

The story is told that, on a snowy January day at the turn of the century, a crowded passenger train steamed its way from Chicago to St. Louis. At one of many stops along the way, one of the travelers observed a young mother board the train with two small children in tow. "Please, sir, I need to get off at the city of Beaumont," he heard her say to the conductor.

The passenger, taking note of the overworked conductor, approached the young woman and said, "The conductor is busy. No doubt he'll forget you want to get off at Beaumont. I've been on this train a hundred times. I'll make sure you get off at the right place." Several hours later, as the train decelerated, the man made his way to the young mother and said, "This is the spot. Here's where you want to get off." Thanking him, she gathered her children and went out into the blizzard.

Half an hour passed before the conductor called out, "Where is the woman who wants to get off at Beaumont? It's coming up in five minutes."

Horrified at what he heard, the man said, "What do you mean? Beaumont was the last stop we made."

"No, sir," replied the conductor. "The last stop we made was to pick up water at a tank in the middle of nowhere." And both men instantly realized that the woman and children had been sent off the train to their deaths.

- Jon Courson, Jon Courson's Application
Commentary – New Testament, pp. 730-731

Knowing where you are going is a matter of life and death and specifically, eternal life with the Lord or apart from Him!

And here's the thing. We can disagree on the gifts of the Spirit being for today or just for the first century church. We can disagree on the timing of the Rapture of the Church. But if we mess up on the doctrine of Salvation then we are in serious trouble, it is deadly, and Satan knows that and thus, he attacks this doctrine just as he was doing in the early church. We have not learned the lessons and thus, many have succumbed to this false teaching of adding works to salvation!

Make no mistake about it, this is the longest running heresy in the church, people tampering with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, trying to work their way into heaven!

And maybe the reason is that this precious gift that God has given to us makes it hard for us to believe that it is a gift and that we don't have to work to obtain it. Jesus said in John 6:29 regarding what work we need to do to get into heaven, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.**"

Did you see that? The work that God requires of us to be saved is that we believe in Him! There is no work that we can do to add to the **FREE** gift that God has given to us. If we did add anything, then it would not be a **FREE** gift!

Remember what Jesus said from the cross of Calvary, "**It is finished!**" So, if something is finished, if the work for our salvation was completed, how can you add something to it if it is already complete? You can't even though people try and that is a dangerous thing to do!

And yet, it does not stop them from trying, does it? People will tell you that you need faith plus baptism to be saved, and yet, the Scriptures don't teach that. Other will tell you that it is faith plus keeping the 10 Commandments, and yet, the Scriptures tell us that we fall far short of doing that! Others say it is faith plus the Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, but again, the Scriptures don't teach that!

This is such an important topic today, how a person is saved. And the reason it is so important, like I have said, is that if we don't get this right, not only are we in trouble, but so are those who we are witnessing to because we have given them a false Gospel!

And as Gentiles are getting saved, the Gospel message is spreading to the uttermost parts of the earth, and in comes Satan to cause confusion, to cause doubt, to bring in a false teaching of a salvation based upon grace and works!

How in the world is the church going to handle a situation like this? We don't have to guess because they hit it head on as we will see. Make no mistake about it, if you don't deal with false doctrine, like a cancer, it will destroy the body. And many today allow friendships, they don't want to rock the boat or cause any trouble, they don't want people to leave the church, so they ignore the false teaching, and, like I have said, the results can be devastating!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Acts chapter 15, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word. And if you are struggling in this area, listen carefully to what the early church did, the conclusions they came to and don't try to ignore it or downplay this issue, Grace and Law do not mix, not at all!

ACTS 15**VERSE 1**

So these so-called Jewish Christians, I don't believe they were Christians, called Judaizers, they mixed Law and Grace together, came from Judea to Antioch and they brought their false doctrine with them. They were teaching that Gentiles can be saved but they had to become Jews and they had to submit to the Laws of Moses, to the Jewish rituals and of course, circumcision!

And this was a huge conflict in the church and these Judaizers were stirring things up even more. One writer put it like this, "It was one thing to accept the occasional God-fearer into the church, someone already in sympathy with Jewish ways; it was quite another to welcome large numbers of Gentiles who had no regard for the law and no intention of keeping it."

(Williams)

Remember when Paul was in the city of Antioch in Pisidia, and the message he brought to the Gentiles in Acts 13:38-39 went like this, "**Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.**"

Paul's message, the Gospel message is that man can only be right with God on the basis of what Jesus has done and not what man has done, the good works that he does! And these Judaizers came in, and I am sure they were slick in their presentation, they sounded so good, and yet, it was a false teaching and that false teaching brought, as we will see, "**dissension**" or discord in the church there in Antioch in Caesarea.

Now we need to understand that these false teachers with their false doctrine were not saying that you don't need Jesus. What they were saying is that you needed to add to Jesus works, the Law of Moses to be saved! This was, and it is a heresy!

Now some of may be taken back by that. But think this through and don't let your emotions get in the way. If you add works to your salvation, works to grace, then it is no longer grace but works, and God owes you heaven! Foolishness!

Listen to the warning that Peter gives to us in II Peter 2:1-3, **“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”**

Did you see that, **“deceptive words.”** These false teachers will use fancy words, they will show you the Hebrew and the Greek to sway you to believe and they speak with authority and sadly, many listen to them instead of the clear teaching of the Word of God! Keep in mind that Satan used the Word of God to deceive Eve in the Garden of Eden and he tried to use it against Jesus, but Jesus put him down by using the Word of God against him!

The whole letter to the Galatians was about these Judaizes and the false doctrine they were bringing into the church and Paul did not embrace them or ignore them, but he hit them head on. He said in 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.”**

Notice that Paul is saying that the those who are following the Law of Moses for their salvation, adding works to Grace, they are turning away from Christ and not drawing closer to Him. I am amazed when I hear people say that when they are following the Law they feel closer to Jesus! How can that be when the Law just shows you how far from God you really are!

And Paul really hits them hard and some may feel that what he is saying is pretty harsh, and some would even say unloving, that he was wrong, but he is not. Think about it. If you knew someone was involved in false doctrine or was a false teacher, and you really cared for them, would you ignore what they were believing in?

Some would, and some do but it just shows that you don't love them. Keep in mind the words that these false teachers use are deceptive, they are good. But Paul says for those who are believing this, who are following this false doctrine, **“let him be accursed.”**

Paul is cursing those who are bringing in this false teaching, he is not embracing it or ignoring it!

John MacArthur gives us some insight on these destructive, these dangerous teachings. He tells us, “The most destructive dangers to the church have never been atheism, pagan religions, or cults that openly deny Scripture, but rather supposedly Christian movements that accept so much biblical truth that their unscriptural doctrines seem relatively insignificant and harmless. But a single drop of poison in a large container can make all the water lethal. And a single false idea that in any way undercuts God’s grace poisons the whole system of belief.”

Exactly! Now think about this. The church is growing, Gentiles are getting saved along with Jews and I think we can just imagine how Satan wanted to take advantage of this situation.

First, he wanted the false doctrine of righteousness by works to succeed. But even if it didn’t, Satan wanted a costly, bitter doctrinal war to completely split and sour the church. This may be the greatest threat to the work of the Gospel yet, seen in the Book of Acts.

VERSES 2-3

Notice what this false doctrine, this false teaching brought into the church. It brought conflict into the church to the point where the church in Antioch felt they needed to settle this matter and they sent Paul and Barnabas with other trustworthy men to Jerusalem to speak with the apostles and elders about this matter.

Make no mistake about it, the heart of a true shepherd will be to protect the sheep that God has entrusted to him. And it may mean that people will come against the shepherd for taking a stand against false doctrine, but a true shepherd will not let that sway him from speaking forth the truth to protect the sheep. They will expose the false doctrine because of the love they have for the sheep!

And I love the fact that as they are going to Jerusalem they are still sharing their faith, encouraging people with the Good News of Jesus Christ and it brought great joy and it always does to those who receive the truth!

VERSES 4-5

Now, even in Jerusalem a group of believing Pharisees still were holding onto these things of the Law and I guess it is hard to let them go when you have been brought up all your life that you must keep them. But circumcision doesn't save you – Jesus does! God wants us to circumcise the foreskins of our hearts not our flesh, to be sensitive to what He is saying and not hard-hearted!

I believe that these Pharisees are different than the Judaizers we read about in verse 1 of Acts chapter 15. The reason I say that these Pharisees were believing Pharisees is because it says that they “**believed.**” And the Greek word that is used here is, PISTEUO, (pist-yoo'-o) and the idea behind this word is as follows. “to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing), i.e. credit; by implication, to entrust (especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ).”

So, I believe there is a distinction between these Pharisees and those Judaizers. You see, you can't add anything to your salvation, you have done all that you could, and the reality is, the only thing you added to your salvation is your *SIN!* So, they did not see these things as a means of salvation but in obedience to the Lord and, as we will see, that was still wrong!

John MacArthur put it like this,

“The Pharisees of verse 5 are different, however, since the text describes them as having believed. They did not argue that circumcision was necessary for salvation, but that believers were still obligated to keep the law. To them, circumcision and keeping the law were not a means of salvation, but obedience required after salvation. They were still committed to the ceremonial law, which had been set aside in Christ.

They were much like the weaker brothers of Rom 14:1-10, who held to dietary laws, rituals, and sabbath codes for conscience’s sake. They were convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah who died for their sins and rose from the dead.

That, however, did not immediately cause them to forsake keeping the Mosaic law as a way of life. They were genuine Christians but had not yet realized the liberating truth that the ceremonial and ritual shadows of the Old Covenant had passed away (Col 2:16-17; Heb 8:13).

- John MacArthur, Acts 15:5

And Lenski summarizes this for us as he wrote, “To add anything to Christ as being necessary to salvation, say circumcision or any human work of any kind, is to deny that Christ is the complete Savior, is to put something human on a par with him, yea to make it the crowning point. That is fatal. A bridge to heaven that is built of 99/100 of Christ and even only 1/100 of anything human breaks down at the joint and ceases to be a bridge. Even if Christ be thought of as carrying us 999 miles of the way, and something merely human be required for the last mile, this would leave us hanging in the air with heaven being still far away.” (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 593)

Just keep in mind that there were in Jerusalem those who came down from Judea and the believing Pharisees as well as many others here at this meeting.

VERSES 6-11

This was a very important question because it was attacking the heart of the Gospel, how we are saved, by grace alone or by grace plus the Law! And think about it. Is the work that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ done for us enough to save us as we trust in Him or must we add works to His work in order for us to be right with God? You see, a salvation issue that has eternal consequences!

And there was some dispute between them about this issue and then Peter stood up and began to speak. And please note what Peter is saying here.

He starts out by saying that God sent him to the Gentiles, to the house of Cornelius some ten years earlier, in around 39 A. D.

What is his point? It is simple. The work that is happening now with the Gentiles is nothing new for God has opened the door to the Gentiles some ten years earlier!

We might not think much of this, but his point must have sent shock waves to those who still believed you need Christ and you need to become a Jew to be saved, as Peter says there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, we are all saved by faith in Jesus!

Paul made the same argument in Galatians 3:2-3 as he wrote, “**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? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?**”

In other words, if the Law does not save us, if we were not saved by the Law in the first place, why would we go back to the Law to live by? It would make no sense because Jesus has finished the work and if we go back to it, we are offending God! Peter put it like this, “**why do you test God?**”

He then goes on to say that these Gentiles were saved by the “**purifying of their hearts by faith.**” Did you see that? ***BY FAITH*** and not ***BY THE LAW!*** You see, there was no need to be purified by submitting to the ceremonies found in the Law of Moses because they were not only saved by faith, but they are also purified by faith and so are we!

And Peter continues on with his argument against the Law. He tells them the reality that the Jew’s themselves couldn’t even keep the Law so why place that burden upon the Gentiles, it won’t save them!

And all they had to do was look back and do a survey of their history, the history of the Jewish people. When the nation was born at Mount Sinai, they broke the Law by worshipping the golden calf. That was their start. And you can read of all they did after that and then come to the end of the Old Testament history and you will see that they still broke the Law by disregarding the Sabbath and marrying pagan women! (Nehemiah 13)

And Peter makes a powerful conclusion as he says in Acts 15:11, “**But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.**”

That is a very important statement by Peter because the way he would normally put this thought is like this, that the Gentiles are saved just like the Jews are, but that could be confusing, and the Holy Spirit spoke through Peter to make it abundantly clear!

Please understand that some Jews still held onto the belief you needed Jesus, circumcision and the Law to be saved, you needed to become a Jew! Peter is saying, “***No, we are saved by faith in Jesus just as the Gentiles are! We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and not by the works of the Law!***”

VERSE 12

As Peter finished then Paul and Barnabas shared what God had done through them in reaching out to the Gentiles with the Good News of Jesus Christ!

What I like about this is that even though there was much dispute among them regarding this issue, they were willing to listen and be persuaded if they were wrong to change their views!

And for Paul and Barnabas, they share the fact that many miracles and many wonders were worked through them among the Gentiles.

Again, we might not think much about that but when you look at what Paul said in Galatians 3:5, **“Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”** it makes sense!

When Paul and Barnabas were preaching among the Gentiles the Gospel of Jesus Christ there were many miracles and wonders that were done. And the point is this. God did not confirm false doctrine with miracles but the truth. Thus, these Judaizers didn't have anything to confirm what they were saying, no miracles to confirm their false doctrine!

Thus, *“Since God has accepted the Gentiles, shouldn't we?”* And, of course, the answer is that they did need to accept them!

VERSES 13-21

Notice that it is James who is the head of the church in Jerusalem, and not Peter. And this James is the half-brother of Jesus who believed after the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is also the one who wrote the Epistle of James. And the judgment that James makes is that Peter is right, God is saving Gentiles!

And then James quotes out of Amos 9:11-12 and he is speaking of the Millennial Kingdom where Jews and Gentiles will come before the Lord. Why did James say this?

To let the Jews know that the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church, into the Kingdom did not mean that God was done with His plan for Israel, they too will be part of the Kingdom Age!

Also, in the Kingdom Age Gentiles will not have to become Jews to be saved, and thus, they don't today! Gentile salvation as well as for the Jew is by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ!

And in Acts 15:18 we see that God knows all things. In fact, He knows the beginning from the end and thus, prophecy is one of those things that show us that He is God. The Bible is over 25% prophetic in nature and thus, if these things did not come to pass, it would be easy to show that He is not God, the Bible is not true. But these things have and are coming to pass just as God said they would.

And then James comes to his conclusion in verses 19-21 of Acts chapter 15. And please understand that these are not matters of the Law but of fellowship.

James said that we are not to trouble, lay the burden of the Law on the Gentiles.

And please understand that James is not contradicting himself here. But isn't this a form of legalism? Was he not now putting them back under the Law? No, not at all!

These are not matters of salvation. That issue had already been settled. But this advice had to do with *fellowship* between Jewish and Gentile believers, as I have said. While obedience to these instructions was not a condition of salvation, it was certainly of great importance in avoiding sharp divisions in the early church.

The first issue is ***THINGS POLLUTED BY IDOLS!*** And in Acts 15:29 we see this explained as food that had been offered to idols. This did not bother Gentile believers, they had the liberty to eat these foods, but it may be a stumbling block to Jewish believers.

The next issue is ***SEXUAL IMMORALITY!*** This was something that was practiced by the Gentiles, all kinds of sexual immorality and thus, James wants them to know that God wants them to control their desires and do what is right!

Then, they were not to ***EAT THINGS STRANGLED OR BLOOD!*** And this goes back to Genesis 9:4, the covenant that God made with Noah. These last two, to abstain from things strangled and blood was a dietary law, and once again, as not to offend the Jewish believer, don't practice these things so that the fellowship between Jew and Gentile would grow. (Leviticus 17:10-14)

Thus, as I said, this is not dealing with salvation, but more of a fellowship issue between Jews and Gentiles and a moral issue.

And I think what James says in Acts 15:21 sums it up, why they should do these things. James wrote, **“For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”**

In other words, there were Jews in every city who had always been taught that it was wrong to do these things that James warned against. It was wrong not only to commit immorality but also to eat food offered to idols, meat from strangled animals, and blood. Don't destroy the fellowship because of the liberty you have in Christ!

VERSE 22

Not only did this please them, but they sent representatives to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas to show this is what the church in Jerusalem has said and not only because Paul and Barnabas said it.

Now think about the wisdom, the godly wisdom they had in doing this. They sent two Jewish men from Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas. In other words, these Jewish men along with the letter they are carrying from the church in Jerusalem should help them to understand that it is all about grace; it is all about Jesus and the work that He has finished for us! The Jews were recognizing the salvation of Gentiles into the faith, not by the Law through works, but by Grace through Faith!

VERSES 23-29

Notice what this letter has in it and what it does not have in it. As you can see, this letter did not contain a big list of do's and don'ts here.

And notice who was leading what they were doing. In Acts 15:28 we are told, **“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.”**

You see, the Holy Spirit is involved here. Then why do we see so many add so much to the gift of salvation? Because the Holy Spirit is not involved along with the Word of God like it was here in Acts.

The result is that many are saying you have to be baptized to be saved, you have to speak in tongues to be saved, you have to dress a certain way to be saved, you have to keep the Law of Moses to be saved, and-so-on!

Wrong! That may be their agenda, but it is not God's! Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus!

And so, this letter is sent to the church in Antioch to bring Jews and Gentiles together and not to lay a heavy burden on the Gentiles in regard to their salvation. Again, fellowship is the issue!

Now look at what this letter did for the church in Antioch. Everett F. Harrison points out five things that were accomplished. He wrote,

The gospel of divine grace was reaffirmed.

The unity of the church was safeguarded.

The evangelism of the Gentiles could proceed without hindrance. Most of Paul's churches were founded after the council and they were Gentile churches.

The Gentile churches that had already been established were given encouragement (Acts 16:4-5).

The future of the church as a whole was guaranteed.

- Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*, p. 239

Wouldn't it be great if that could be done today? And in reality, it could if you have spirit filled people who are guided by the Word of God come to the conclusion of what God desires and not what they desire!

Tragically, I do not see this practiced often in the church today and that is not a good thing!

Now notice how the people in Antioch respond to this letter and the brethren who came with this news.

VERSES 30-31

Make no mistake about it, the Law is a heavy burden upon people because they can't live up to it. But when the church in Antioch read this letter it brought them great comfort and joy! That is what grace brings, great comfort and joy into our lives!

It is as Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:16-17, "**Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.**"

We don't deserve grace, but God freely gives to us this gift and that is really what grace is all about. We will never deserve what God has given to us!

Let me illustrate it like this, what the Law does and what grace does in our lives and you will see what a comfort it is to receive the grace of God. We are told,

A duck hunter was with a friend in the wide-open land of southeastern Georgia. Far away on the horizon he noticed a cloud of smoke. Soon he could hear crackling as the wind shifted. He realized the terrible truth; a brushfire was advancing, so fast they couldn't outrun it.

Rifling through his pockets, he soon found what he was looking for - a book of matches. He lit a small fire around the two of them. Soon they were standing in a circle of blackened earth, waiting for the fire to come. They didn't have to wait long.

They covered their mouths with handkerchiefs and braced themselves. The fire came near - and swept over them. But they were completely unhurt, untouched. Fire would not pass where fire already had passed.

The law is like a brushfire. I cannot escape it. But if I stand in the burned-over place, not a hair of my head will be singed. Christ's death has disarmed it.

You can be burned in the fire of His judgment as you stand in your own righteousness, which are like filthy rags.

Or you can enter into His glorious presence by receiving His righteousness into your life by faith.

You see, the judgment that was due us He endured for us and we don't deserve this gift that God has for us and that is why it is called grace! May we not forget that!

It is as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:8-9, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.**"

That is so clear and the only way you can miss what Paul is saying here is because you don't want to see it. It is by grace and not by works. Never has been and never will be by works or Christ died in vain!

And thus, like these believers we rejoice, and we are encouraged by what God has done for us!

VERSES 32-35

Silas, also called Silvanus, stays in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

What did they do there? They were teaching and preaching God's Word and also others were being raised up to assist in the work, God was moving and wherever God is moving, there is great joy!

Again, this was a great threat against the church and what God was doing in these Gentile areas. And the truth came out strong, a salvation by grace. Yes, Satan tried to bring in a heretical teaching but that was thwarted by men of God who were in tune to the Word of God and led by the Holy Spirit!

And out of all this the church grew and was strengthened because it dealt with this false teaching that had come into the church and they removed it before it had time to grow and destroy the work that God was doing!

Make no mistake about it, there has always been and there will always be only one way of salvation and that is by grace through faith in Jesus!

VERSE 36

Here we see that Paul is preparing for his second missionary journey. He wants to go back and visit the brethren in Asia Minor, the ones he ministered to on his first missionary journey. He wants to see how they are doing and encourage them in the faith.

Yes, Paul brought the Gospel message to people and many came to saving faith. And for some, that is where it starts and where it ends. But that is not what we are called to do, just bring the Gospel message to people. We are also to train them up once they come to saving faith and that is where much of the evangelism that is done today is missing out, the teaching of these new believers in the things of God. For many, they witness and then they leave, and it is up to the individuals to find a church and good luck with that!

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”**

The command that Jesus gives to us is very simple, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”** Because He has the authority, we are therefore commanded to go! It is by His authority that He sends us. It is by His authority that He guides us. It is by His authority that He empowers us.

And notice where we are to go! To all nations and make disciples. Interestingly enough, this word, **“go”** is a participle and should be translated, **“As you are going . . .”** What does that mean? It means that as you are going to work, as you are going to school, as you are going to the store, as you are going to the neighbors, wherever you are going you are to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news, with others. We are to be going out, not staying in but it truly speaks of just everyday living, wherever you go share the light of Jesus!

And you are to make disciples of them. Please understand that when you share your faith that is not the end of your responsibility, that is only the beginning. You are then to take them under your wing and teach them the things of God. They are babes in Christ and they need to be feed and if you shared your faith with them then you need to make disciples of them as well! Many don't do this today, they share the Gospel and move on but that is not what Jesus is saying here.

The second thing that Jesus tells us to do is to baptize them. Now please understand that this baptism is not for salvation but identification. You see, they are already saved because they have received the Gospel message, they have repented of their sins and asked Jesus to be Lord and Savior of their lives. Once they do that, once they come to Jesus then they should be baptized!

The whole idea of baptism is that it is an outward showing of an inward reality, you are telling the world that you are a Christian, the old life is buried in the waters of baptism and you have come up new in Christ. To me that speaks volumes that immersion is the most appropriate mode of baptism, not only because the Greek word behind it means immersion but even more importantly because that is the only mode that symbolizes burial and resurrection.

And I love what it says here, that Jesus is with us until the end of the age, until we go home to be with Him! Don't forget that fact! Don't let the enemy discourage you or make you feel you are on your own.

That is what Paul and Barnabas are going back to do. He wants to see how they are doing and to help them to continue to grow in the Lord! That is what any pastor should desire. To teach the people that God has entrusted to them the things of God, to mature in the faith by giving them a diet of sound doctrine or healthy doctrine, the Word of God!

It is as Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-16, **“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

You see, knowing the truths of God found in the Word of God will help keep you from being tossed to and fro with the winds of false doctrine that will blow through the church, and they have, and they will! Don't set your sails up to be tossed all over the place, but keep your feet upon the Rock, Jesus Christ and allow the Spirit of God along with the Word of God to guide you!

VERSES 37-41

So Paul tells Barnabas, his companion and co-laborer in Christ to pack his bags, it is time to go. And I am sure the excitement grew, and Barnabas was ready to go, and he wants to take his nephew John Mark along with them.

When Paul hears the name John Mark he became very upset. You see, on their first missionary journey John Mark was with them, but for some reason, maybe he was scared, maybe he was homesick, we don't know for sure, but he left them there and returned home. In Acts 13:13 we are told, **“Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.”**

Since John Mark left them the first time, probably making it more difficult for Paul, Paul was not going to let him come this time and take another chance that he would leave again. Paul's confidence level with John Mark was zero!

But Barnabas was determined to take John Mark; he wanted to give his nephew another chance. And this dispute over John Mark continued between Paul and Barnabas until they separated with violent emotions!

Now here is something that may be shocking. Two godly men have a dispute. That would never happen, would it? Of course it would and it does, sadly. And please understand that this dispute is not over doctrine but over a brother in the Lord who bailed on them last time, didn't finish the work.

The thing I want you to notice is that God took a bad situation and used it for good. Barnabas and John Mark went to the area of Cyprus, so Paul and Silas went to Syria and Cilicia, entering Galatia from the opposite direction and thus, the start of Paul's second missionary journey primarily to Greece, covering Acts 16-18:22. And we will see the start of this in our next study in Acts as the Gospel message continues to move forward!

But look at what we see here. Two men, both Christians, brothers in the Lord, who allow conflict to divide them, cause division among them. Paul, Mr. Evangelist had a passion for the lost, he wanted to see people come to Jesus, truly a soldier in this battle for souls.

And then Barnabas, Mr. Encouragement, trying to build people up, encourage them in the work of Christ, never giving up on people, wanting to see their faith grow!

Thus, as you look at these two men and what they did, what they allowed to happen, who was right and who was wrong in this confrontation? Here is the answer you have been waiting for. Paul was right, the Gospel message needed to go forward! Hang on for those of you in the camp with Barnabas. You see, Barnabas was right, encouraging, edifying believers is important!

And as much as they both were right, they both were wrong in their actions and attitudes! Now you are probably thinking, “They both can’t be right. That is a cop-out!” Let me ask you this, does the Bible say who was right and who was wrong in this confrontation?

No, the Bible doesn’t say who was right and who was wrong, but it does show us that two godly men, both with good causes to fight for, can allow the flesh to overtake them and divide them. They let their feelings get in the way!

Again, if this was a doctrinal issue, then it would be clear cut on what is right and what is wrong. But it is not, and it is more of a matter of ministry, how you are to do it I guess, and with what people you want to do ministry with!

And as right as both were, they also were wrong, as I have said. You don’t see them praying about this situation, just the argument and the division. Barnabas could have been in submission to Paul, as he was leading this missionary journey. And Paul could have been more sensitive to what Barnabas was saying about John Mark. Thus, through prayer the Holy Spirit would have guided them to do the right thing!

Now if this is all we read regarding this confrontation we may come to the wrong conclusion. You see, there was reconciliation between Paul and Barnabas and Paul and John Mark. They were, down the road, able to humble themselves and put away their differences for the greater cause of Christ! Yes, they did leave in anger, they parted in a bad way, but then there was a healing that took place.

What a great lesson for us to learn. Heal those relationships with your brothers and sisters in the Lord. There are things we are not going to agree on, but if it is not a doctrinal issue, why argue?

Remember grace, the grace that God has extended to you and may you extend that grace to others as we continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!