



ACM BIBLE STUDIES

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Record of the Beginning of Jesus' Reign

Chapter Fifteen

INTRODUCTION

"Christ died for the ungodly."

Rom. 5:6

"... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Rom. 5:8

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eonian life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Rom. 6:23

"... the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."

Rom. 7:12

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

Rom. 7:22

"... that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to flesh but according to spirit."

Rom. 8:4

THIS CHAPTER deals with the question of ritual, salvation and faith – and asks which (if any) is applicable. It asks the question and answers it for us.

This is an interesting section of history from our Christian past. This question surfaced during the first months of Jesus' Reign. It seems there was an error in the thinking among the brethren.

The background was this: Paul and Barnabas had recently returned to Antioch from Asia Minor. The ecclesia came together to hear their report of the trip and Paul was relating how God had opened the door of faith to their brethren in Asia Minor. However, certain men had come down from Judea and were raising an objection. They claimed that the brethren Paul and Barnabas had met in the nations could not be saved by just hearing and having faith in Christ. They insisted that circumcision and observance of certain rituals were necessary.

The disciples at Antioch discussed the matter and decided to take it up with the elders in Jerusalem. Taking a few men from Antioch, they went to Jerusalem to try to resolve the issue. The resulting discussion was interesting.

After considerable deliberation, they admitted that God was granting repentance to men in the nations and pouring his holy spirit upon them. And this all happened by the hearing of the word and faith ... with neither ritual nor performance.

Now please don't make the common mistake of assuming that this questions the validity of the law. It doesn't. Law was never the question. The question was: "Can Christ save a man who is not circumcised and has not kept the old rituals?"

The question today might be asked this way: "Are there rituals of any kind – circumcision, baptism, etc. – that are mandatory before Jesus can save us?"

Today, as then, this question brings us to a fine point in theology. Does Jesus save sinners ... or only those who are righteous? Are works and performance required?

Look at this example. Taking the good news to the nations was reaching out to the lost by giving them faith in Christ. Sure, they were sinners. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rm. 3:23). They had much to learn, but it would come later. They had been reached by Christ and faith was implanted. Now they needed nurturing, and time to grow. This was the answer hammered out by the disciples and apostles during the meeting in Jerusalem.

God's law was not in question. But God's law cannot be appreciated or kept by lost men who have no faith. Therefore it is illogical to assume that law-keeping was a prerequisite to being saved. Law-keeping comes after salvation. It is made possible by salvation. It's an outgrowth, a blessing, a fruit born of salvation. After we are saved, then comes the education and wisdom of the law.

ACTS 15:1-6 “THEY OF THE CIRCUMCISION”

And some men, having come down from Judea, were teaching the brethren, saying: If you are not circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

But when there had occurred no small dissension and disputing by Paul and Barnabas with them, they arranged for Paul and Barnabas, and some others of them, to go up to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem

concerning this question.

Therefore, having been sent by the ecclesia, these were going through Phoenicia and Samaria telling as they went of the conversion of the nations: and they caused great joy to all the brethren.

When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the ecclesia, and by the apostles and elders, and they recounted all things that God

had done with them.

But some from the sect of the Pharisees, having believed, stood up and said that it was necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

And the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter.

VERSE one speaks of certain men from Judea who were teaching that un-circumcised men were unsuitable for salvation. This mind set can be confusing to modern Bible students trying to understand what was happening at that time. These men from Judea were clearly tainted with Jewish theology.

First, remember that Judaism was the religion that was exported out of Persia (Babylon). It was NOT the religion of Moses and old Israel. Judaism, however, was an eclectic religion incorporating certain elements of Israel's Old Covenant rituals along with Babylonian theology (the Tradition of The Elders). The Persian (Babylonian) religion was Zoroastrianism, and its devotees were called "Pareses" (the term evolved into "Pharisee" in Jerusalem). In other words, what the Bible calls "the tradition of the elders," or Pharisaism – and what today is called "Judaism," was merely a form of Zoroastrianism (Babylonianism) ... and one of the doctrines it incorporated was circumcision.

Verse 5 and 24 of the same chapter tell us who these certain men were:

5. But some from the sect of the Pharisees, having believed, stood up and said that it was necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Acts 15:5

24. Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain ones from among us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls: to whom we gave no such commandment:

Acts 15:24

There is also another confusion associated with this passage. That which the Pharisees called "the law of Moses" was not actually Moses' law. It was the hybrid

theology of Zoroastrianism with a few elements of the Old Covenant added in. Therefore, the apostles' argument was not against God's law or Moses' law, but against Babylonian tradition and ritual.

Notice that these confused Judaizers were from the area of Jerusalem, and had emerged out of the brethren – out of the ecclesia. Interesting! They came out from among the disciples. They believed in Christ, but still carried some of their old theological baggage from Jerusalem ... clinging to old error (i.e., the traditions of the elders).

This scenario could be likened to some brethren today who have, with the help of good teachers, escaped from the established churches but still carry some of their old church theological baggage. Luke called them "*Pharisees who believed.*" Today, that would be like saying "*Churchgoers who believe.*"

These confused brethren apparently realized that Jesus had risen and was offering new life in Israel. But they wouldn't let go of certain learned rituals from the Persian theology of Jerusalem. They were still partly Pharisaic in their thinking. It just so happened that in this case the issue was circumcision. The Jewish Pharisees of today still cling to this ritual as a mark of the elite.

So, we find this sect of believers from Jerusalem were "of the circumcision." They wanted to corrupt the true faith by establishing a church so they could force converts to be circumcised like them. This was typical churchism.

So, what did Paul and Barnabas do? Did they politicize the issue to preserve unity among all the preachers? NO!

Verse 2 says they had "*no small dissension and disputation with them*" "No small" means "BIG." They raised the roof! They smelled a rat, and would have nothing to do with Pharisaic corruption.

Were Paul and Barnabas being divisive and causing

trouble? To modern churchgoers it may seem that way. But Paul and Barnabas were godly men who should be emulated ... not criticized. Christ was doing a work in Asia Minor and Paul and Barnabas were not about to let that be sullied by the confused teachings of half-baked Judeans.

After discussion, the brethren in Antioch decided to take this up with the elders of the ecclesia in Jerusalem – namely, Peter, James, and the other elder statesmen of Christ’s Reign. These were apostles who were still in Jerusalem when the majority of Christ’s followers were forced to relocate elsewhere. These

few who remained probably had to remain underground because of the tremendous persecution from the Babylonian Jews who had pretty much taken over Jerusalem.

As the brethren from Antioch headed south toward Jerusalem, going through the communities in Phoenicia and Samaria, they shared the good news that great things had happened in Asia Minor. This was blessed news to the locals.

QUESTION: How can you say that Paul was a Godly man when in Acts 15:5 & 24 he taught that Christians don’t need the law?

QUESTION: When you use the term “saved,” what do you mean? Do you mean someone earning a position in Heaven, thus escaping Hell? Or do you mean someone securing a position of rulership in the future Kingdom of God?

ACTS 15:7-12 BEWARE THE YOKE OF RITUAL

And after much inquiry had occurred, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brethren, you know well that from the first days God made the choice among you, and that through my mouth the nations should hear the word of the good news, and believe.

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them giving them the holy spirit according also as He did us.

And making no distinction between us and them to the faith, purifying their hearts.

Now therefore why are you tempting God by imposing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have strength to bear?

But we trust to be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same manner as they.

Then all the multitude became silent, and were listening to Barnabas and Paul relating the many signs and wonders God had done in the nations through them.

PAUL is often thought to have been the one apostle singled out by God to take the gospel to the nations. However, verse seven says clearly that Peter also was chosen for this task. Obviously, Peter was not the exclusive apostle to the nations, but then neither was Paul.

In his statement, Peter was referring back to Acts chapter two where he had discerned the reason for the gift of tongues at that time. God had manifested “tongues” to the apostles in Jerusalem in order for them to communicate with foreign-speaking visitors who had traveled there for the festival. Each foreign visitor heard the apostles’ words in his own dialect. This showed God’s intention to have his gospel taken beyond Judea. The gift of tongues facilitated communication ... not mysterious babel and gibberish as some churches teach.

Peter was also referring to his vision in Acts chapter ten when he had seen a sheet descending from the sky. On the sheet were all manner of animals. The message of that vision was that Peter was to share the message of the gospel with brethren who lived in other lands ... considered improper by the Judeans. Jesus told Peter that He (Jesus) had cleansed the hearts of the brethren in foreign lands too, and they were not to be considered unclean or common.

Thus, Peter reminds them that God had commissioned him to take the message to the nations. So, it should not be a surprise now that Paul was witnessing that this very things was actually happening.

Later on in Antioch, as recorded in Galatians 2:11-14, Peter will falter under pressure of local ritual, and Paul will remind him of his own words spoken here in Acts 15. God had shown them that brethren in the

nations were being granted repentance and were receiving holy spirit the same as was happening in Jerusalem. But some of the Judaized brethren thought that everyone had to become Judaists first before they could be “saved.”

There was much to be learned of Christ’s Reign and its affect upon Israelites both in Jerusalem and those scattered throughout the nations.

Verse 9 speaks of “purifying their hearts,” which is the implantation of eonian life into the hearts and minds of men. This purifying process was a miraculous giving of life to Israelites throughout the nations. The new life endowed them with eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts that sought to obey the law. They received motivation to seek God, whereas before they were at enmity with Him.

The message of verse ten has been generally misunderstood! Churchgoers typically read it and say, “See! Peter told them to stop trying to obey the law of God because it was only a yoke on our necks, and it has been done away in Christ. So, don’t push the law upon Christians!”

Of course, that was not what Peter was saying. The word “yoke” does not refer to God’s Law! “Yoke upon the neck” is an idiom symbolic of slavery. God is not a slavemaster, and his law was never slavery. The kind of slavery Peter is referring to was the false ritualistic religion of Babylon (Persia) that had been imported into Jerusalem. The yoke (or the slavery) was in being tied to Zoroastrian tradition and ritual, and had nothing to do with God’s law.

Peter was warning against idolatry, not against Law.

Tradition and ritual is not bad in itself ... accept when it derives from false religions. God had divorced himself from Jerusalem centuries earlier. Since that time the city had been taken over by the Persian religion of Babylon. Zoroastrianism had mixed with some of the tenets of the Old Testament and created “Judaism” – a bastardized religion that passed itself off as “the law of Moses.” Churches, to this day, continue to be confused about this transition ... erroneously assuming that the religion of Jerusalem of the first century (as well as the religion of the Jews of today) was the religion of old Israel. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When Jesus condemned “the tradition of the elders” and the Sanhedrin, He was condemning Babylonian law that dominated Jerusalem of that day.

Galatians, chapter 5, admonishes us that once we’re free of an error, we should stand fast in that freedom and not return to the slavery. One of the rituals incorporated by the Zoroastrian Pharisees was circumcision:

1. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

2. *Behold, I Paul say to you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.*

3. *For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*

Gal. 5:1-3

Was Paul saying that circumcision in itself is bad? No. He was saying that the Babylonian twist on law declared circumcision a prerequisite to receiving God’s favor. Therefore, if the prerequisite for salvation was to obey law, then to be consistent one must obey ALL of the laws – not just circumcision. He was stating a logical conclusion based upon principle.

4. *Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace.*

5. *For we through the spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.*

6. *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love.*

Gal. 5:4-6

Law obedience was NEVER a prerequisite to receiving God’s mercy and salvation. God saved Israel, and many individuals, from desperate situations that had resulted from not following God. The need for salvation, itself, reveals an alienation from God in the first place. Anyone who claims justification by the law is, in effect, denying that he was lost and in need of being saved.

Faith is what bridged the gap between them and Christ. Faith in Jesus is essential to salvation. This in no way disparages God’s Law. It only disparages Babylonian (Jewish) obsession with ritual.

Peter continued to tell these people that the salvation of Christ and the supernatural preparation of men’s hearts preceded the apostles into the nations. When the apostles arrived in the nations, the hearts of those to whom the call was being issued were already prepared to accept the good news of Christ’s Reign. Hearts must be prepared BEFORE the Gospel can be heard. Christ’s salvation had been working in them before the apostles went to them.

This shows that the converts in the nations were the same people who were promised the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 – namely, Israelites who had the law in their hearts.

QUESTION: During Moses’ time people didn’t have the advantage of antibiotics, soap and advanced medical knowledge we have today, so they had to practice circumcision. But hasn’t this item of Moses’ law been proven to be outdated because of our current medical knowledge? And, if so, then isn’t this outmoded behavior, in itself, a condemnation of Moses’ law?

ACTS 15:13-16 DAVID'S TABERNACLE HAD FALLEN

And after they became silent James answered, saying: Men, brethren, hear me:

Simeon (Peter) has explained how God first began to visit the nations, to take out of them a people in his name.

And to this the words of the prophets agree; as it has been written,

After these things I will turn, and I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; and I will build again the ruins of it, and erect it again:

JAMES, was the elder patriarch in the Jerusalem ecclesia. He stood up and declared that Peter's testimony made sense, and that it agreed with a prophecy in Amos chapter nine.

11. In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old:

Amos 9:11

The word "tabernacle" was another way of saying "house." And "house" was just another time-honored way of saying "kingdom" or "king-ship." Those who have studied English history are familiar with this term. A kingdom was called a "house" ("House of Windsor; House of Stuart"; "House of York"; etc.). Furthermore, "tabernacle" (kingdom) also signified "throne."

Now, we can't pass over that without noticing this clear statement: **the tabernacle (throne) of David had fallen.** The reason this is worth noticing is that there is still an ongoing argument among certain people as to whether or not David's throne ever fell. The point is, there is a doctrine of "British-Israelism" that claims David's throne never fell; that God never put away Judah (and Jerusalem) as He did the House of Israel; and that the throne of David was preserved in the Crown of England. The theory continues that English kings and queens have been sitting on the physical throne of Christ ... preserving it so that Jesus could one day return to Earth and take it again. Thus, they claim the Throne of England is actually the Throne of God. Pretty strange!

They cite prophecies in the Old Testament which, if interpreted in just a certain way, seem to indicate that David's throne (which they equate with the House of Judah) would never fall or cease to exist.

Well in fact David's tabernacle DID fall. It fell – ceased – stopped! Amos 9:11 confirms it. Acts 2:29-36 verifies it! Jesus "rebuilt" (actually, replaced) the fallen "house," by ascending to his throne as King of kings after Yahweh raised Him from the grave. No one occupies Christ's throne in his place.

QUESTION: On the one hand you talk about the CLEAR statements of Acts 15:16 and Amos 9:11 which say David's throne would fall. But what about the other CLEAR statements of 2 Sam. 7:15-16 and Jer. 33:17 which say it would last forever?

15. But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you.

16. And your (David's) house and your (David's) kingdom shall be established FOR EVER before you: your throne shall be established for ever.

2 Sam 7:15-16

17. For thus says the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel;

Jer. 33:17

ACTS 15:17-21 THE REMNANT

So that the remnant of the men might seek after the Lord, and all the nations that call upon my name, says the Lord who is doing these things that are

known from the age.

Thus my judgment is that we not trouble them of the nations turning to God:

But to write them to abstain from pollution of idols, and of immorality, and of things

strangled and of the blood.

For Moses, from ancient time, has in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.

“ *THE remnant*” is an interesting label for people like us. “Remnant” is translated from a Greek word which means “the remains” or “the rest.”

“The remnant” is apropos. In this particular instance James was referring to the few Israelite brethren outside Judea who still sought after the God of Israel.

The KJV translators added several words to verse 18. The Greek text does not include: “... *known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*” Verse 18 is a continuation of the sentence started in verse 17, so there shouldn’t be a period at the end of verse 17 as in the KJV. The sentence should continue to read “... *says the Lord who is doing these things that are known from the age.*”

In other words, those who were being called would understand that the age was being defined by the works of Jesus. But there were a great many people existing who didn’t know what the Lord was doing. They didn’t understand that He was calling this remnant of men. They didn’t understand what was happening in the nations. But those who discerned the age knew it.

In verse 19, James renders his “judgment,” which reflected his position in the ecclesia. He was the patriarch giving his considered and respected assessment of the problem. A patriarch did not make law, nor did he rule. But his judgment carried weight and was highly honored. James’ judgment was that the Jerusalem ecclesia should cease troubling “*them of the nations turning to God.*” James, in essence, confessed that certain traditions of Jerusalem (such as circumcision) were shown to be not of God, but of men ... and that certain men from them had erred in attempting to foist these rituals onto new converts.

The King James translation renders the Greek “porneia” in verse 20 as “fornication.” That is not the correct translation of the Greek word. “Immorality” is the correct translation. “Porneia” is immorality in a broad sense – not just the narrow sense of illicit sex as is the implication of the KJV’s word: “fornication.”

James recommended writing to the new brethren in other lands. The letter was to have no other instruction than to abstain from pollutions of idols, and from immorality, and from things strangled and the blood (i.e., pagan customs having to do with ritual killing and blood).

Now, please notice: through all of this, when these men of God were describing what they thought was best for the

nations, they made no declaration of what was required “to be saved.” You see, the apostles knew that Jesus’ grace was unearned. Jesus saved men who could not save themselves. Jesus saved lost men. He didn’t ask them to earn their salvation. Israel was saved by an act of power far above their own abilities. Performance and ritual had nothing to do with it. Nothing they did, or could do, would have been powerful enough to raise Israel from the state of death into which she had fallen. Therefore, the apostles were careful to give credit where it was due. And all credit belonged to Jesus. None belonged to man, or man’s performance.

The Israelites in the other lands were aware of the law of Moses. They heard it, or at least parts of it, regularly. So, what’s the point of this? Just this. They didn’t need to hear more about the law of Moses. If knowledge of the law of Moses was able to make them deserving of salvation then they didn’t need Jesus to rescue them.

The power of law (even God’s law) is limited. It only does one thing: it defines sin. But Jewish law couldn’t even do that ... because it was perverted. Under the guise of “law” they amassed a collection of Babylonian rituals. They called it “Moses’ law,” but it was Babylonian ritual. And it never worked. Even if it had been Moses’ law, it still would have been limited to defining sin.

Knowing right from wrong (i.e., law) is not enough. The ability and will for a man to choose what is right, and to do it – that is the answer. This is the work of holy spirit. Man cannot survive on law alone ...nor on ritual. Law is essential, but it is not complete without spirit. The will to do right is produced and empowered by spirit. Holy spirit in man compels his faith in God and his law.

The emphasis is on faith; in what men believed. Faith was being restored to a lost and dying people. That faith blossomed into eonian life. Law and ritual could not produce life. The apostles saw this.

The life and faith in Christ was the working of God’s spirit in Israel ... placing his law in their hearts. It came by grace – not by works. It changed their lives. It changed their perception of reality.

To sum it up, the law defines right and wrong – but it cannot raise the dead. The issue of the day that was emphasized was faith in the new King; power and salvation that turned men’s hearts around. If you can grasp this, then you too are of “the remnant of this age.”

QUESTION: Isn’t there a parallel here with the so-called “Patriots” who study every facet of man’s law, memorizing all the details to the letter as if they were religious rituals, and using them to appeal to the courts that belong to their enemies?

QUESTION: What about the ritualistic feast days as outlined in the Old Testament? Are those who religiously keep these feast days, obeying God’s Law better than those who don’t? Or is the keeping of the feast days also a kind of yoke of ritual like circumcision was to these people back at the time of Acts 15?

ACTS 15:22-29 CONFIRMING THE FAITH

Then the apostles and elders, with the whole ecclesia, selected men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas who was called Barsabbas, and Silas: leading men among the brethren.

And by their hand they wrote: The apostles and elders, brothers, to the brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia who are from the nations. Rejoice!

Forasmuch as we have heard that certain ones from among us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls: to whom we gave no such instructions,

It seemed good to us, being in accord, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Men that have risked their souls for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, that they also may report the same by word.

For it seemed good to the holy spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

To abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and blood, and things strangled, and immoralities: from which if you keep yourselves, you shall do well. Be you in good health.

THAT was the letter they sent with the delegation composed of Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas. The letter, and delegation, went out of Jerusalem to the cities Paul had visited earlier. This was to be Paul's second mission to Asia Minor.

In verse 29, "*things offered to idols*" could refer to anything – not just food. Food was not the only thing offered to idols. It could even refer to temple rituals ... which were often of a sexual nature.

The ending phrase, poorly rendered "*Fare you well*" in the KJV, actually says "*Be in good health.*" Abstaining from things strangled, and blood, would obviously help them to be in good health.

The letter stated, in essence, "Do not worry yourselves with teachings from men who are confused. But avoid idolatry."

The bottom line? There were only three things the apostles of Christ wished to warn the new believers about. These three things were not ritualistic in nature. They dealt with health, cleanliness, and morality ... no ritual works to earn salvation.

Their enlightened instructions are, no doubt, too simple and down to earth for most churchgoers today. But, one can conclude after reading this chapter that salvation is by Jesus ...not by man's works!

QUESTION: Is it OK to associate with other Christians who keep the rituals of Moses' law – such as the feast days – as if their salvation depends upon it?

ACTS 15:30-41 BARNABAS AND PAUL GO SEPARATE WAYS

Therefore, having been dismissed, they went down to Antioch: and having gathered the multitude together, they handed them the letter:

And having read it, they rejoiced for the encouragement.

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also, confirmed and encouraged the brethren through many words.

And having spent some time, they were peacefully released by the brethren in accord with those (in Jerusalem) who had sent them.

But Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch with many others, teaching and declaring the good news of the word of the Lord.

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas: Let us return and visit our brethren in every city

where we have announced the word of the Lord, and see how they fare.

And Barnabas determined to take with them John, who was called Mark.

But Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who abandoned them in Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

And a contention occurred between them which separated them one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed to Cyprus;

And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being commended to the grace of the Lord by the brethren.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the ecclesias.

THE delegation brought the message from Jerusalem back to Antioch where they received it gladly. Remember, Antioch was the hub from which the gospel went westward to Asia Minor and beyond.

Verse 36 is the start of what can be called Paul's second missionary journey. He returned to Asia Minor, and this time a little farther. He and Barnabas intended to return to the cities Paul had visited earlier and encourage the new believers.

In verses 37 and 38 we see Barnabas and Paul parting company over a disagreement concerning John (also known as Mark). Barnabas wanted to take Mark along on the trip, but Paul was against the idea. Mark had been with them before, and had suddenly turned back, as we saw in Acts 13:13.

Even though it wasn't obvious at the time, Mark's action of turning back upset Paul. When Barnabas suggested including Mark again on this second journey we see how

adamant Paul was against it.

Apparently, Paul had wanted John to continue, but he went back to Jerusalem. Barnabas didn't see it this way, and thus, the contention over this subject caused a split, sending the two apostles separate ways.

CONCLUSION

In the next chapter we'll read about Paul's second mission into Asia Minor and beyond. This time Paul takes the message of Christ's Kingship as far as parts of Europe. He will revisit some of folks he met on his first missionary journey. Paul was building a relationship with these new ecclesias and confirming the faith and the salvation they shared. He will update them about what was happening in Antioch and Jerusalem, and strengthen them in the good news of the reign of Christ.

END OF LESSON THIRTEEN

For Answers And Notes, See Enclosed "ANSWER SECTION."

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PO BOX 740,
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POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. For someone with a background in the church world it can be easy to misunderstand chapter 15. Churches perceive it to be a debate between faith and law. But it ISN'T! Christ condemned neither faith nor law, but rather idolatry and misuse of law. To say that man needs more than law to save him is not a criticism of law. There are natural limits to what law can do. In order to work properly law requires faith as a partner. And in terms of priority, faith precedes law.

2. Paul and Barnabas did not know for sure what to expect when they went to the nations. But as they delivered the good news, and the hand of God began to be revealed, they witnessed His salvation at work. They saw repentance, holy spirit, and faith in the nations. These things constituted undeniable evidence of Christ's salvation working in the hearts of men.

3. Some confused brethren from Jerusalem, who still carried old baggage from their former ways, tried to define salvation in such a way as to give credit to themselves. They wanted to claim part credit for their salvation. They described their part as "*being circumcised and keeping the law of Moses.*" And they wanted new comers to follow their example – that is, they believed people had to come to Jesus through law and ritual. But the fact was that they didn't "come to Jesus." Jesus came to them! Thus, their salvation was the work of Jesus, not of them. They had deluded themselves by their erroneous grasp of law and ritual from Babylon.

4. Nearly every churchgoer, if totally candid, will admit that he thinks there must be something we must do to be able to receive salvation. On the other hand he will also admit that scripture plainly states that salvation is by grace and not by works of man. That leaves most Christians with the problem of being double-minded – as the Pharisaic brethren in Acts 15.

5. Christ expects works from Christians AFTER they are saved ... but not in order to be saved. Salvation is a free gift – not a payment earned by those who do the right rituals.

6. Christians are expected to learn and keep God's law. They are expected to learn a great many things about right and wrong, and the operations of the Kingship of God on Earth. They must learn to distinguish between correct ritual and incorrect ritual; true law and false law; good traditions and bad traditions. They are expected to do good works. All this is required after they are saved by grace – NOT before.

7. The undeserved grace of God that rescues lost people must never be confused with the need for obedience in a saved people. It is two different things; two different applications.

8. "Holy spirit" is the force – the motivation – that moves people to separate themselves; to love, believe, understand, and fulfill the laws of God. Obedience to God's laws is therefore, of necessity, post salvation; never a prerequisite or test to see who deserves salvation. No one deserves salvation. It is by grace.

9. The Throne of David had fallen, and Jesus came to raise it anew. Yahweh raised David's throne from the level of mortal man, to the level of the raised, glorified, immortal Jesus. The throne would never again be misused by fallible man. This occurred over 1900 years ago, and is described in Acts 2:29-36.

10. Judeans had given the label of "Moses' law" to their "traditions of the elders" and the perverted laws brought with them from Babylon and Assyria. Their so-called "laws" (including Babylonian feast days, purifications, circumcision, and calendar), were imported from Babylon. They twisted the original laws of God ... not unlike the churches have twisted Bible truth. Jerusalem law had become

counterfeit – otherwise they would not have hated Jesus and murdered Him, and they would not have persecuted and driven out the disciples.

11. The procedure outlined in this chapter is a good example of how disputes and disagreements can be handled in an ecclesia – without resorting to government courts, and without enforcement. Knowledge of God's ways, and faith in them, is all that's required.

ANSWERS:

pg.3

a) Paul **never ever** taught that Christians don't need law. Paul taught the principles of law better than any other apostle. He defined the difference between law, ritual, faith, and grace. He showed the need for, and the place for, each. He also pointed out several misuses of each. Paul was never against law – especially God's law. He was only against people's misuse of it.

b) Neither of the options listed in the question are adequate.

"Going to Heaven" is a church myth, as is a "burning Hell." Scripture teaches no such things.

By the same token, earning a position of rulership in a future Kingdom is another church myth. Different churches have different versions of this myth.

These myths are hold-overs from Zoroastrianism and Babylonian Judaism.

The salvation of Christ means to be rescued by a higher power that reaches down and lifts you up when you can't stand on your own. It means being returned to a meaningful relationship with Yahweh through Jesus. Jesus finished this work approximately 2000 years ago. That work is still affecting the hearts of men today.

pg. 4

I find no evidence that circumcision was ever anything other than a token of a covenant (Gen. 17:11). It has no intrinsic health ramifications.

Therefore, its application is not dependant upon medical technology.

The ritual of circumcision was the sign of a covenant promise wherein God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham's offspring (Gen. 17:8). That covenant ended centuries later when Israel was disinherited and lost possession of the land of Canaan (2Kings 17:5-6) (2Kings 24:8-16).

Some get confused because the KJV Bible uses the word "everlasting" to describe this covenant of the land. "If the covenant is everlasting," they reason, "how could it have an end?"

The correct translation of this Hebrew word [OLAM] is not "everlasting," (sometimes rendered "forever" in the KJV). The correct translation is "time beyond sight" (i.e., a period of time of which the end is not yet determined). It meant that the end of that covenant was beyond sight. That certainly did NOT mean "endless" ... in fact, the term actually implies an end – one that is distant, but nonetheless there.

This covenant of circumcision and inheritance of the land applied to not only Isaac & Israel, but to Ishmael, and ALL the purchased slaves owned by Abraham (Gen.17:12-13, 27).

pg. 5

The prophecies in 2 Samuel 7, and Jeremiah 33, which speak about the durability of David's Throne, refer not to the physical throne where King David sat, but rather to the upgraded Kingship presently held by Jesus. These scriptures, along with Amos 9:11, Acts 2:29-36, and Acts 15:16 all work together to describe a kingship upon the Earth. In shadow form, it was seen in the way Yahweh dealt with David's kingship. But in true substance it is now seen in the way Yahweh deals with His Son Jesus. David's Throne (Kingship) was a

shadow of the Throne of Christ. Christ's throne is the one with lasting durability.

The word "forever," in 2 Samuel 7:16, is the same word as above: OLAM – it does not mean "forever."

pg. 6

a) Yes. The parallel is that they both create and/or recognize false gods, and then embrace the myriads of laws and rituals which give credence to their false gods.

b) Again, the parallel is there. The kind of yoke the apostles spoke of regarding circumcision is similar to the kind of yoke promoted by those who still try to keep the Old Covenant feasts. Those who do this fail to understand that Yahweh's Old Covenant marriage with Israel stopped when God put her away (Jer. 3:8).

Modern-day feast keepers may have good intentions ... but they lack an understanding of covenant law. Further, the feasts (festivals) recorded in Jerusalem in the first century were "feasts of the Jews" (Jn. 5:1; 6:4) not feasts of Israel. The customs and feasts of Jerusalem at that time were imported from Babylon. They were not the true laws and customs of Moses. Thus they were of non-effect ... like the Pharisees' ritual of circumcision in Acts 15.

pg. 7

It depends upon what is meant by "association."

Paul and Barnabas, and even Jesus, made contact with the lost and the confused. This was necessary to bring the good news to the ones who needed it. That form of "association" is obviously acceptable.

It has been said that the only man who makes no mistakes is one who does nothing. By the same token, the only way to insure that you don't associate with someone who

disagrees with you is to not associate with anyone.

In reality, no other person on Earth is in full agreement with you. Therefore, in order to have fellowship there must be room for some disagreement between brethren.

Paul and Barnabas did not disfellowship the Pharisaic-leaning brethren from Jerusalem. They did try to correct them.

We do not have to be clones to be associates. However, if by "association" you mean to be assimilated into their churches and their culture, then the answer is decidedly no!