

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To Spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 13:4-28:31

7. Christ's Confirmation Of Paul's Gospel Of Grace By Reputable Apostles Of Christ

(Acts 15:1-19)

I. Introduction

- A. The Gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone taught by the Apostle Paul has often been countered in Church History by those who have sought to add human merit or works to faith for salvation.
- B. Acts 15:1-35 offers an event that effectively evaluated Paul's Gospel, and we do well to view it as follows:

II. Christ's Confirmation Of Paul's Gospel Of Grace By Reputable Apostles Of Christ, Acts 15:1-19.

- A. Some Jewish believers from Judaea entered the Church at Antioch of Syria and began to tell its Gentile converts that unless they were circumcised in accord with the Law, they could not be saved, Acts 15:1.
- B. This countered Paul's faith-alone gospel (Eph. 2:8-9), so he and Barnabas disputed these believers, 15:2a.
- C. The Church determined that Paul and Barnabas with accompanying witnesses go to the Jerusalem Church and have their debate settled by the original Apostles of Christ and the Church elders there, Acts 15:2b.
- D. The events that then transpired revealed the truth of the gospel Paul preached (as follows), Acts 15:3-35:
 - 1. First, while Paul and Barnabas traveled for this Council, their report to believers along the way of the conversion of Gentiles apart from circumcision caused great joy, Acts 15:3. This testified of the Holy Spirit's confirmation through these believers of the conversion of Gentiles apart from circumcision!
 - 2. Second, when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the original apostles of Christ and the elders, indicating they had no initial concerns about Paul's credibility, Acts 15:4a.
 - 3. Third, Paul and Barnabas candidly explained their ministries to this authoritative audience, Acts 15:4b. This openness showed their gospel was not a deceptive one, but it was believed by these missionaries!
 - 4. Fourth, when believers from the sect of the Pharisees objected to Paul's gospel, the Jerusalem leaders met to settle the debate, and that led to a great dispute involving Paul and Barnabas versus the Pharisee sect, revealing a deep disagreement between these parties that had to be settled by others, Acts 15:5-7a.
 - 5. Fifth, Peter testified in support of the gospel Paul preached, a landmark testimony, Acts 15:7b-12:
 - a. Peter arose to calm the debate by giving his authoritative view, an authority from Christ's own word back in Matthew 16:18-19 that Peter would be given the keys of the kingdom, Acts 15:7b.
 - b. Peter then reported how well before that time, God had shown by leading him to evangelize Gentile Cornelius and his family back in Acts 10:45 that the Holy Spirit witnessed He purified the hearts of that Gentile household by faith apart from circumcision, Acts 15:7c-9; 10:44-46; 11:17-18.
 - c. Thus, Peter urged that the Council not tempt God versus this divine precedent by putting a yoke of circumcision and of keeping the Law on Gentiles, which yoke they nor their Hebrew fathers had been able to bear, Acts 15:10. [Note how this view confirms Paul's teaching at Romans 3:20-24!]
 - d. Rather, Peter concluded that the Gentiles were justified by God's grace through faith [alone] just as the Jewish believers needed to be justified apart from circumcision and keeping the Law, 15:11.
 - e. Peter's address quieted the Pharisee sect, and gave room for Paul and Barnabas to be heard as they testified of God's miracles and wonders among the Gentile believers similar to God's work with Cornelius' household as had been testified by Peter, cf. Acts 15:12 as compared to Acts 10:44-46.
 - 6. Sixth, Jesus' half-brother, James who led the Council (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., p. 1749) affirmed that Peter's testimony aligned with the Amos 9:11-12 prediction that God would justify uncircumcised Gentiles in the Messianic Kingdom, Acts 15:13-18!
 - 7. Seventh, that citation along with Peter's testimony left the authoritative Apostle James, Jesus' half brother, concluding Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised as Paul had held, Acts 15:13-19.

Lesson: Christ used a conflict Paul had with Jewish believers to produce the authoritative confirmation by the Apostles, Peter and James, Christ's half brother, of Paul's gospel of justification by faith alone.

Application: May we APPRECIATE Christ's CONFIRMATION through Peter and James of Paul's Gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone so that we might CONFIDENTLY promote it!