

## ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

### XXXVI. Settling The Question On The Gospel Of Salvation

(Acts 15:1-21)

#### I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 15:1-21 records how the Early Church apostles answered the question of whether one was saved by faith alone or if he had to believe in Christ plus perform good works, which at that time were the deeds of the Mosaic Law. This landmark event has immense application for us today, so we view it for our edification:

#### II. Settling The Question On The Gospel Of Salvation, Acts 15:1-21.

- A. A big debate arose in the Church on whether salvation was by faith alone or by faith plus works, Acts 15:1-5:
  - 1. After Paul and Barnabas had returned from their first missionary journey to the Church at Antioch of Syria, some men came to Antioch from Judaea teaching that unless Gentile believers were circumcised, they could not be saved, Acts 15:1. This was a different Gospel than what Paul and Barnabas had given on their first missionary journey, for they had taught justification by simple faith in Christ, cf. Acts 13:46-48.
  - 2. Accordingly, Paul and Barnabas then had a great dissension and debate with these men from Judaea, so the leaders of the church at Antioch determined that Paul and Barnabas with others of their number should go to Jerusalem and check their Gospel with the apostles and elders there at the founding Church, Acts 15:2.
  - 3. As this delegation traveled to Jerusalem, they reported along the way how the Gentiles had received the Gospel, causing great joy among the believers, and when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, they were received of the Church, the apostles, and the elders, and told what God had done with them, Acts 15:3-4. However, some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed objected to the words of Paul and Barnabas, saying that it was necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law, Acts 15:5.
- B. When the Church convened in a large council with the apostles and elders present, there was initially a great amount of discussion over the issue, Acts 15:6-7a.
- C. Peter wisely waited for this discussion to occur before testifying "lest the impression be given that the results were a foregone conclusion" and the meeting thus lose credibility before all, Acts 15:7b; *Ibid.*, p. 393.
- D. When Peter spoke, he testified how back in Acts 10:44-48, the Holy Spirit had been given to uncircumcised Gentiles when he had preached the Gospel, Acts 15:7c-8. Peter explained that God had made no distinction between Jewish believers and these Gentile believers, purifying their hearts by faith, Acts 15:9. Thus, Peter asked why some wanted to put God to the test by putting the yoke of the works of the Mosaic Law on the neck of Gentiles when they as Jews and their Jewish forefathers could not even keep it (Acts 15:10). Peter summed that the Church should believe that both Jews and Gentiles were saved by the grace of God, Acts 15:11.
- E. The entire multitude then fell silent and listened to Paul and Barnabas declare the attesting miracles God had performed among the Gentiles by them as they taught the Gospel of justification by faith alone, Acts 15:12.
- F. When they had finished speaking, typical of how a Jewish Sanhedrin meeting was run, James, the half-brother of Jesus who was considered the leader of the group, spoke up in support of Peter's testimony, Acts 15:14. This was a wise move by James, for he did not rely on the disputed parties of Paul and Barnabas, but on the precedent of Peter, one of Jesus' first disciples, who told of God's justification of Gentiles without the Law!
- G. James added that the Old Testament supported Peter's testimony, citing Amos 9:11-12: that passage revealed that in the Messianic Kingdom to come, uncircumcised Gentiles would be called by the name of the Lord, so it was unnecessary to require believing Gentiles to be circumcised in the current Church era! (Acts 15:15-18)
- H. However, James knew of the vast practical differences between Jews and Gentiles, so he added that though the council not require Gentiles to be circumcised, that they urge Gentiles to avoid idolatry, immorality, eating meat that was strangled and ingesting blood, acts that were especially offensive to Jews, Acts 15:19-20. James felt this was a reasonable request as Gentiles all over the Roman Empire knew of such stipulations, so Gentile believers knew these practices were offensive to Jews and were thus to avoid them for Jewish believers, v. 21.

***Lesson:*** *Christ's apostles in the Early Church unitedly agreed that all men are saved by grace through faith apart from works as a critically important precedent for the rest of Church History that justification is by faith alone!*

***Application:*** *If all of the apostles unitedly agreed that salvation is by faith alone in Christ, we should do the same!*