

Faith Alone OR Faith Plus?

(The Council of Jerusalem)



⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. ¹⁰ So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? ¹¹ We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.” Acts 15:9-11 NLT

- How are we saved - is it faith alone in Christ OR faith plus living a good life or serving God or some other activity?

The Gospel is too important to be confusing. It determines the eternal destiny and personal relationship that people have with God.

In the infancy stages of the new church in Jerusalem there was confusion. They struggled with the question - **is salvation by faith alone in Jesus OR faith in Jesus PLUS other requirements?** There is often confusion today.

Acts 15 is a pivotal point in the story of the early church. This chapter is one of the most important chapters in Acts for a number of reasons:

- **Clarity** - of the gospel for the present and future generations.
- **Freedom** - from demands that the Old Testament saints could not bear. The law was never given to save, but to show our need of a Savior. The law was to drive people to Christ.

¹⁰ So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? ¹¹ We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.” Acts 15:10-11 NLTtry

- **Council** - it established in the early days of the NT Church's development a means of discussing and deciding problem issues. There were other councils over time.

The Central Lesson

Jesus paid the full price of salvation - we have nothing to add.

1. The **CONTROVERSY** (15:1-3).

¹ While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: “Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.”

Paul and Barnabas are accused by legalistic Jewish converts (Pharisees) for failure to preach Faith PLUS Judaism to **be saved!** This controversy threatened to divide the Church! A major issue in the controversy was - is the death of Jesus on the cross sufficient for salvation? Did the sacrifice of Christ need something to supplement it? Is salvation by faith in Christ ALONE or faith in Christ PLUS something else?

Today, world religions, cults, and liberal mainline churches teach that salvation is by good works or faith plus some added requirements.

2. The **COUNCIL** (15:4-18).

⁴ When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. ⁵ But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, “The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.” ⁶ So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. ⁷ At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. ⁸ God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith.”

The Council at Jerusalem show us today how to resolve controversy in the church or in a denomination. The early Christians met together to talk through their issues. The Pharisees had their opportunity to speak (15:5). Unnamed Christians had their say (15:7). The Apostle Peter also had his opportunity to speak (15:7-11). Barnabas and Paul had their comments (15:12). Last, James had an opinion about the controversy (15:13-21). After the discussion, it appears they had some form of a vote to settle the issue (15:22-29).

This is the first council of Christianity. Most denominations today have councils to deal with business and controversial issues. The Southern Baptist have the Southern Baptist Convention and Baptist State Convention every year to provide a Council opportunity.

3. The **CONCLUSION** (15:19-35).

¹⁹ And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. ²¹ For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations. ²² Then the apostles and elders together with the whole church in Jerusalem chose delegates, and they sent them to Antioch of Syria with Paul and Barnabas to report on this decision.”

In short, the conclusion of the Council was - **faith is in Jesus alone plus nothing, but live in a way that you do not hinder your testimony and witness to the world.**

MacArthur study Bible, “15:20 James and the other leaders did not want the Gentiles to revel in their freedom in Christ, which would cause the Jewish believers to follow that same liberty and violate their consciences. So James proposed that the Gentiles abstain from four pagan, idolatrous practices that were violations of the law of Moses so as not to offend the Jews.” In short, they were to avoid four areas that would hinder their ability to evangelize the Jews—“eating food offered to idols, ...sexual immorality, ...eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood.” (v.20).

CONCLUSION

Jesus paid the full price of salvation - we have nothing to add.

- ▶ Receive Christ as your Savior. ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ▶ Attend a small group. ▶ Read the Bible this week. ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.