

May 27, 84 A.M. - ✓

THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE

Acts 15

INTRODUCTION:

Modern science informs us that the fiercest hurricanes revolve around the perfect center of calm. That no tempest can break the peace of that center. This should be true of the church. Here in Chapter 15 we observe a wave of controversy.

#381 A.M.

Paul and Barnabas and other believers had proclaimed the truth of God and had met bitter opposition. Violent at times. Everywhere they went it seems that riots were created and heavy opposition came to the front. Paul had put his life on the line for Jesus Christ. That's what it means when it says, he hazzarded his life for the Cospel. It is putting his life on the line. The first missionary journey was a circuit that was made across Cyprus and then to Asia Minor - and up the coast. And they went up into the highlands to the city of Lystra, and Derbe. He had been stoned. And pitched outside the gate, expecting him to die.

We saw in that missionary journey that the people were ready to make him a God and worship him. And then even called him Jupiter. And then the next minute, they were prepared to put him to death. This shows us the disposition of human nature. One minute they may be praising you. The next minute, they are ready to murder you. Now in between the first missionary journey and the second, they come back and they make a report. It was a wonderful report. They tell how they risked their lives. How they had been harassed all along the way.

And Chapter 15 tells the intervening story of one of the worst betrayals in all of history. It is of the Cospel. Those who were trying to proclaim a false Cospel.

I don't think you will ever understand Christianity or the church, until you understand that there are always present in any so-called Christian gathering the manifestation and the representative of both true and false Christianity. Unfortunately, false Christianity is believed by millions. They think they understand the truth. Therefore, their minds are closed to the truth. When it comes.

Dr. Carroll said, whoever and whenever anyone makes salvation depend upon an external right, that is an enemy for the Gospel of grace.

The issue was raised, and we shall see perhaps three things that we ought to take note of in this chapter. First of all, the conflict, or the problem. Second, the conference, or the proposal that was made. Thirdly, the conclusion - the provisions they decided upon.

I. THE CONFLICT - V. 1-6

There was a very attractive heresay here in V. 1. Certain men came down from Judea, from Jerusalem - and they taught the brethren except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved. Certain Jewish brethren - they probably had joined the church. But until recently they had been devoted to sexual immoral practices in a pagan temple. And now God had saved some of these people and these Jewish brethren had come and said unless you are circumcised. That was the issue that split the church at Antioch wide open.

These Jews came and said, you are second-class Christians. Like people today propose about certain people in the church. There is no such thing as a second-class Christian. If a Christian is a Christian at all. And thus these people challenge

the Gospel of the grace of God that Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed.

This was the first really internal strife within the church. You know what it was over - race and ritual. The question - Jews vs. Gentiles.

The specific issue has long ago passed away as a concern to us, but let me point out the principle behind it is very definitely still present today. The enemy has simply changed the players and he has substituted some new issues. He uses the same old devices - platform.

The names of these breakers of the churches' peace - are not given. They are unworthy of mention. They were not people of distinction nor of authority in the church. But they were stern advocates of a right. And they held as essential to salvation.

Their religion had to do more with form than with spirit. They used two arguments to enforce the right. One, the law of Moses was the law of God and it was unchangeable. Second, the Messiah had come to develop and not to destroy Levitical law.

For many ages Gentiles had only been able to come through the Jew. And they felt that this must continue.

So the problem had arisen on the mission field. Due to the conflicting Gospel messages being preached by Paul and Barnabas, on one hand - and Judaizers from Jerusalem on the other hand. The issue hit at the heart of the Christian Gospel.

These people had come from Jerusalem up to Antioch and they thought that the Gentiles could not be saved without the coming Jews. The issue was clear.

Christian freedom was threatened, by this ceremonialism and this traditionalism.

Richard M. De Vos & his Brother Jay VanAndel org. American in Their Basement 1957 - given vacation. Bought 35' sail boat - ask fellow in sail boat to give them ride - why we never sailed - just bought boat - where planned to go? - So. America - He almost passed out on the deck! Just quick lessons - Both me & them - tiller in other - got lost immediately - got lost so badly in N.J. even coast guard not find. - missed 2 turns in night & -

In many places the issue is still the same today.

Expect some felt so lost Never Be Saved like sail boat! - got back into meshes someplace. Finally found, not Bahie Far inland - look back to ocean.

V. 2 Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension or debate with them about this question. Paul and Barnabas knew that the Gentiles were being saved without first becoming Jews.

The issue was the Greek and the Gentile believers could not be saved by beginning in the middle of the process. That it was not enough that they begin with Christ. They must also be brought to everything that prepared the way for Christ. Therefore, they must conform and go back to the law of Moses.

Circumcision in the original purpose of God was ordained for the cure of self-righteousness. It was an outward and visible sign or symbol of the fact that this people was separated unto God and that they were dependent upon God.

Circumcision was not being made the instrument of self-righteousness. Or a ritual or a ceremony in place of essential spiritual life.

We need to get this fixed. Some nominal converts to Christianity. Privately slipped off and spied upon the Antioch church. They saw Gentiles coming without being circumcised. Believing they had a lot of brass - they said, you folks can never be saved. You can never get to Heaven unless you are circumcised.

V. 5 - Today, false teachings carry on the same issues. Did you ever hear anybody

say you can't be saved unless you are baptized.) Yes, you must trust Christ, but they say some external requirement is necessary.

Here is a man dying without Christ - never been saved. Do you mean this man who had lived in sin and unbelief, rejecting Christ all of his life, can have someone come in and sprinkle a little water on his head and give him some extreme emotion - do you believe that ceremony is going to wash away his sins.

In the place of the issue they had, we still have it today. The issue of whether blacks are supposed to worship with whites. One of the largest churches in Birmingham, Alabama, has for several weeks split - because of one lone woman wanted to join the church. It stood there for 98 years.

There are many more who widely have some other principle that involves their feelings. Many Christians have added to this group or this individual in other ways.

There was one church when the Hippie movement was at it's peak - some young man working among them witnessing, won some of those young people to Christ out of that culture. Some of them began to come to church. And the church finally dismissed the young man who was witnessing. By saying he was bringing the rift-raft off the streets into the church. That is the kind of issue they had at Antioch.

I read of a preacher who said a young couple that he spoke to about going and visiting another couple of newcomers in the community and they said to him - oh no, you don't want them. They are not our kind of people.

Here is a fine family that moves into a neighborhood - a high-class neighborhood. Now the congregation says they are fine people. They are a fine family if only they were Americans. If only they were something else, but they weren't. And that was the problem here at Antioch. All the uncircumcised Gentile Christians at Antioch were thus pronounced unsaved because they had not kept the law.

And there was no small dissension or debate. Which is an expression in V. 2 - that means there was a great deal of dissension. It was a fierce argument. The controversy was heated.

But there were some men who would ^{settle} settle the whole mission plan. Circumcision and the law. There were those who would have Paul and Barnabas to cease their missionary activities. But Paul had experienced a sense of divine guidance. And he felt that the Holy Spirit was leading him.

Did you know that rituals, as well as people - often become bones of contention today. We substitute baptism for circumcision. Some people insist that unless the ritual of a haircut in a certain way - he cannot become a Christian. So we become barbers in a Christian church. There are others who would say, that no one can come in unless he has shoes on.

But you can search the Scriptures, and I don't think that these external issues are any or anything that should split the church or Christians apart.

This issue had great power over these new Christians. They had been taught that they had been saved. But these men were sincere, who came from Jerusalem. They seemed to be deeply committed.

Now another thing about these men, they seemed to have Scriptural support. They took the Bible and they proved this. They seemed deeply committed.

Ultimately Israel will rule and the Jews are chosen. So they selected these verses. And this is the thing that makes a good cultist today. It has a tremendous appeal. It is an appealing program - as Rev. Moon and some of these other cults get moving. But we fail to allow God to reveal new truth.

And they expressed their views that Jesus obeyed this law. And they used this as an argument. And it caused no small debate.

Now Paul records this in Galatians. About this situation.

And of course, you remember Peter went down and he even had a meal with the Gentiles. This was the first time that Peter had ever tasted of a ham sandwich. And probably he had bacon and eggs every morning. He was rejoicing in his new freedom - in grace. And think about that, Peter, the Apostle - was carried away. He went over to the table for breakfast and no longer ate with the Gentiles. Think of all of this. And Paul straightened him out about this and rebuked Peter. Luke tells us.

Now freedom is a risky business - can I be trusted with it. And dare I trust other people with it. I think Paul was upset about these people that were trying to impose a legalistic code. You are saved by faith in Jesus Christ - and they are saying you must be saved by becoming a Jew only. And they were attempting to force others to certain required standards or acceptable behavior. And these things have gone on forever - even Christians today resist the Spirit, I believe, and Paul wrote that the Gospel was not a Gospel of works.

There are Christians who find that practicing some of these things enrich their lives. And cause them to be more devoted to God. We have respect for them and more power to them. But when we begin to practice something that is not clearly

taught in the Scriptures, we do wrong. Christians have been given a new nature. They have the mind of Christ. They have been crucified to the flesh. They have received the Spirit.

So freedom is always risky business. Obviously some people can't be trusted with it. And these people really shouldn't grasp the total freedom which they had in Jesus Christ.

What can wash away my sins - nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again - nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow - that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know - nothing but the blood of Jesus.

II. THE CONFERENCE -

We begin about v. 6 - the Apostles and the elders are gathered together, to consider this matter. They welcomed the brethren to Jerusalem. The entire church was assembled to hear the matter. But he felt the best way to silence them was to have a council, or to have a conference. What seems to appear here, perhaps some of the leaders of the church got together first and had a little private meeting with the group as is expressed in Gal. 2. And then finally they took up the general meeting with all of the leaders and the members present. And the issue must be thoroughly aired. And there were some speakers who were noted. Course, evidently many people took part in the discussion. I think the Antioch church was an independent church and tried to settle the question itself. But the issue was similar to the other churches. And they wanted to share it with the Jerusalem church.

And I think one of the first questions asked - did you give these men any such permission to come to us. Are they representatives of you. Or are they representing their own ideas. We need to do that now in our own churches. If a man or a group of men, or a group of people get upset and go from one church to another church and stir things up about some question or other. Then there needs to be a conference to settle that thing. Did the church body really send them or did they go on their own. So here is the issue of the conference coming to a head. Now the church at Antioch had elected some messengers and sent them down. To take this matter up. And the church had decided on this thing - not those that went. And so they had the church backing. And they were on their way by the church - V. 3. In other words, these messengers did not slip off. They were going on a very important mission. A mission of this church, represented by this church. And I would suppose that the church paid their expenses. And I think the churches today ought to pay the expenses of their messengers and those who are sent to conferences, conventions, and associations.

V. 6 - We discover that there were men right in Jerusalem believing precisely what those fellows had slipped up to Antioch and said. And so they gathered all together to consider the matter. And these preachers held a meeting. And the record says they called the church to participate in the decision.

They say there are two kinds of speakers - those who have something to say, and those who have to say something. And so it went on and on.

V. 7 - Finally Peter stood up. It is important to note that Peter did not convene this council. As our Catholic friends would tell us that he was the first Pope. That he would have had the responsibility - but it does not say so. James was the president of this council. Peter was merely a spokesman. If anything was to be settled - it was to be settled by a majority vote. Peter shows that it was unnecessary. He quotes his own experience. The conversion of Cornelius.

As minister to the Gentiles was first. By divine appointment. The Holy Spirit directed. The results were spiritual. Now he said, we should not tempt God. This sin is refusing to follow his guidance. Do not be afraid to follow God even though he seems to cross barriers. Actually I am surprised, as others, that Peter kept silent so long. Because he was always opening his mouth. But while Peter was speaking - there was a sense of unity, of being recognized.

V. 8 - He unfolds his experience. That God knows the heart. And he giveth them the Holy Spirit also.

V. 10 - Now therefore, why make ye trial of God - he says. Why should we put forth an effort to obey the law and keep trying the hardest is nothing but a burdensome yoke about their necks. Throughout all the Jewish history. No body ever came to God by trying to be good. Or by religious ritual. No Jew, no Gentile. These were intolerable weights he says.

V. 11 - Now Peter put the real block-buster out. He says to these Jews, look - I believe that we Jews will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Just as those Gentiles will.

I want you to notice here that Peter does not say - they will be saved. But he says the norm for God's operation is saving men. In saving men, it is more visible. When he saves a Gentile, than when he saves a Jew. He says a Jew often confuses the issue with the efforts of self-righteousness. But the Gentile does not try that. What Peter is saying is, I have come to see that we Jews are on exactly the same basis as the Gentiles. When it comes to being saved. Now this was a thought provoking statement made by Peter, to this group in the conference.

V. 12 - Paul and Barnabas told how they had gone among the Gentiles and told of

many conversions during the missionary trip.

V. 13 - James, the chairman of the meeting now speaks, to the whole group and re-emphasizes what Peter and Paul had said. He said if you want to see what God's program is like, observe how it is working. Telling the lost people of Jesus and they are trusting him.

Now this is an extremely important statement here - it is made by a man who is the flesh and blood brother in the family of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had been raised up in the home in Nazareth. He had seen all of what his older brother had done in all of his life. He had not believed in him until after the resurrection. But in the resurrection, he saw the confirmation of all the witness that the spirit had bore to his heart through those years. He holds the upmost respect for all the factions and the different groups in the church.

James is called James the Just. He prayed so long - he wore holes in his robe. He is a man of tremendous integrity.

James was a man of constant prayer - and to make things easier and smoother, James suggests to summarize what he has been listening too - the mind of the spirit. He says there are four things that are extremely important. And perhaps we'd do well to follow.

V. 14 - He begins to unfold. First, he comes squarely to the terms with the activities of God. This is one stubborn fact that James brings out. Gentiles were already saved without asking anybody's permission. Without doing any kind of ritual. Without referring to any kind of law given by Moses. And he forced them to think of the direction of God's activities.

Second, V. 15. He says the activity of God is valid. And it corresponds to the written word of God.

Now if we could get this across to our people today. There is so much activity that is going on in the world today in the name of religion, and it is called the work of the Spirit of God. But, which is not in line with what the word of God says.

Now that may amaze you a little bit that I said that. I think many people today - through ignorance, through lack of insight, because something seems to be supernatural in activity - they say it is all right.

It is alright to know what God has done. But we must be sure that it is God who is doing it. Now whatever does not correspond with the word of God - I say very plainly, is not the activity of God. But it maybe impressive spiritually.

There is so much that is occurring today, there are so many different varieties of meetings. Some break out into some kind of tongues. And people will say, oh, look at the restoration of the gift of tongues. God is at work. The Spirit is at work.

But the question is, is it the Biblical gift of tongues. When you compare it with what the Bible says about the gift of tongues - there is scarcely any resemblance at all. So I must say, that is not God at work.

Another example today is some of the healings. I certainly believe that God can heal. I know he can. I am not denying that. But each healing must be questioned in order to discern where it comes from.

James accepts this activity among the Gentiles as from God. Because he saw it correspond to the word of God.

V. 16 - He quotes one of the prophets, Amos. Who had predicted that there would come a time when the Gentiles would be reached.

Now there are some scholars today who attempt to take this - what James said - and figure out some outline of future events. This, they say - the second coming. Jesus will return and restore Israel, and rebuild the dwelling of David. Etc. But I honestly do not think this is what James is talking about. He is predicting and referring to the first coming of Jesus. I do not question that there is a great fulfillment awaiting in the second coming. But he is talking about the son of David who will gather up all the crushed and broken hopes of David's line.

Thirdly, V. 19 - James makes some suggestions. For a letter to be sent to the Gentile believers. He said we should write them and all the churches - three or four things to do. And it concerned idolatry. It concerns sexual immorality. And these two things would do well for people to receive a letter from today. He said they need to abstain from fornication. From eating that which is strangled. From eating blood.

There are a couple things here in the moral realm. (Idolatry and sexual immorality) And these two things are in the realm of Christian love and sensitivity.

Now this is working out according to God's calendar. He quoted the great words from the prophet, Amos - in which he predicted that through the triumphant and restoration of Israel the Gentiles shall receive a blessing. He is a practical man. And of course, he concludes that no ceremony was necessary to make men Christian. But he was certain that certain prohibitions were necessary.

Woman: I Thank God Never Had Appendicitis! -14-
3rd- " " " " " An Operation
4th- " " " " " A Drunken Husband
" " " " " I Never Had a husband of Any Sort!

III. CONCLUSIONS - V. 19 ff

Now as we move into the conclusions of this conference, we say a further word about V. 20. In which he spoke about abstaining from eating fleshly food, that had been offered to idols. This meant souls. That would cause some to stumble.

Second, he talked about this because it is either God or a demon. A man must make a decision that he is going to worship one God or no God at all.

Fornication is mentioned here in connection with idolatry. Horrible worship was mingled with immorality and prostitution. Therefore, sexual immorality is something in which you destroy yourself. Interestingly enough, the Scripture everywhere warns against this. Peter says flee from youthful passions with war against the soul. This is one of the most devastating things you can do to yourself psychologically. This destroys a person's emotional life.

It breaks up the integrity of your humanity. That is why the Bible says that nations that give themselves to wide spread immorality are bringing upon themselves sure destruction. Because they are undermining the whole structure of society. And the cause of this evil is a practice against the body. It is very evident, John says.

In the matter of restraining from strangle - this was practiced by the heathens. And from eating blood. Heathens ate blood pudding. You remember, the murderer in the Scripture does not have life. It says to take the life of another in anger, you cannot claim that you belong to Jesus Christ. John says, you know that no murderer had eternal life abiding in him.

Could you do any one of those things without committing wrong. In other words,

would it be wrong for you to eat an animal. That had been killed by being choked to death. Or eating blood pudding.

Now the most of these things are part of the covenant of Noah. That he is talking about, which were before there were any Jews. In fact, this is the covenant that touched the whole human race. That we find these imposed, no more than God imposed for Noah's covenant to the whole race. Eating things strangled, taking away life - because life is in the blood. It is alright to eat beef but not to eat the blood.

Now none of us are justified to take a life in order to live.

But this is the thing animals do - a tiger or a lion will catch a deer by the throat. A mink will come in and get into a chickenhouse - he would kill a dozen chickens just to drink the blood. Sometimes wild dogs or a wolf will get into the sheep. They do not bother about the meat - they just drink the blood. Now that is the beastly thing to do. And that is why James gives these practical things as conclusions for them to follow.

V. 28-29 - The summary of these points that they were to sustain from, the blood referred to the murder. Thou shalt not murder. Fornication referred to thou shalt not commit adultery. Ex. 20:13-14. So it is very obvious that these laws are moral laws. So it had to do with the pagan attitudes toward sex. And anyone familiar with the Greek or Roman customs at that time was certainly to know what James was talking about. The Christians were to be left to the freedom of God's grace. However, their devotion to Christ, must lead them away from sinful practices. And indulgences, that the heathens practiced. They must be willing to suffer for Jesus Christ.

V. 30-35 - The conference was dismissed. And they sent the letter along with some

representatives, to confirm the meeting. And return to Antioch with the agreement.

Now this is the way that problems that come up today, the spirit-led church will handle. But the essential problems remained. Are we going to have two doors into the Kingdom. One for us and another door for them. Are we going to have two different kinds of people in the kingdom. Those that are merely saved, and those that are especially anointed. And there are a few others, that are saved by the addition of this or something else.

They went back agreed. That the Jews and the Gentiles were to be saved by grace. Apart from any works or ritual.

Second, they went back to encourage all Christian people to abstain from certain practices. That they might demonstrate their new freedom and refrain from pagan practices. Just as eating blood of strangled animals. These prohibitions, outdated Moses. They went back to Noah. Gen. 9:4. The sum total was that by grace, through faith.

Also, that God did not have one plan of salvation for the Jew, and another for the Gentile.

Now some people may wonder why we go back and dwell on such an historical account as this. It is because the problem involved is still with us.

As you study at the Jerusalem conference, they did not settle all of this matter. They continued to preach faith, plus works. And they continued to declare salvation by grace - through faith. Gal. 1:6-8, I marvel that you are so soon

removed from him - to call you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel. Which is not another. But there be some that trouble you and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we are an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, then that which we have preached unto you - let him be a curse.

In the light of this, you will discover the various methods of salvation that are being proclaimed today. In the vast segment of Christianity is by faith in Christ plus your own works. Or plus baptism. Or plus various ordinances. Or plus sacraments of the church. Still others will ask, self-righteousness. To each of these Paul says, Eph. 2:8-10, for by grace are ye saved. That is you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves.

This is the New Testament plan of salvation.

Handwritten notes:
I did some complete job - thorough job - don't mess - Police helped such - go
won to hotel - this offer now it'll be here - came back - He's 3H - pay for your unit -
total - one thing say you people very thorough.

What is it. First Paul says your salvation depends not upon what you do. But upon what Christ has done for you. Indeed, the words are ye saved are in the passion voice. Indicating that salvation is achieved for you by another. The words not of yourself is a gift of God and not of works - lest any man should boast. That is we ought to drive home the words, not of yourself. It is a gift of God. For we are his workmanship - not yours. Created in Christ Jesus.

Now the word create - always used in the Bible is for a work of God. It is never the work of man. But we are created and wrought in Jesus Christ. Through his death, his resurrection.

Now to abstain from certain things is an evidence of salvation. Paul says, is our Christian walk. The evidence of salvation comes from abstaining from certain things and walking as Paul says, in good works. This is the fruit and not the root of your salvation. Dr. Geo. W. Truett said, I would not trust my hope of

Heaven on the second best that I ever lived. Some one asked the great English preacher when he was dying, what is your hope now. To which he replied, I will steady the ship of good works. And float to glory on the plank of free grace.

Therefore it is not something that you appropriate. But something that has been appropriated by Jesus Christ. Whosoever believeth - John 3:16 says, not whosoever believeth and worketh. Hence, faith must be active. Not to sit and wait for God but to come boldly to the throne of grace. It must be a personal faith. Heb. 4:16.

And this is a permanent salvation - for by grace are ye saved. Have you been saved? It renders that the action which happened in the past is still going on. And will continue to go on. It is a finished work. So through faith in Jesus, you may be saved, you are saved, and you will continue to be saved eternally. Now when we see this, we see that we cannot lose this wonderful grace of God. Gal. 5:4. Heb. 12:15. In both cases, the sense is if you follow a works way of salvation, you fall away. It has nothing to do with falling out of grace. Once you are in grace - it does not depend upon what you do - but upon what Christ has done for you. It is permanent. What you do from day to day is what you do and believe and rest upon Jesus Christ.

Now the word grace means a gift. To forgive a debt. To forgive a wrong. And finally to forgive a sin. Forgive - makes a gift. So the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Rom. 6:23. If I make you a gift that is grace. If I forgive you a debt - that is grace. If I forgive you a wrong, that is grace. If I forgive your sins - that is grace. If you appear before the judgement seat of Christ bearing a baptismal certificate, or a record of your righteous deeds or a package of cancelled checks that you have given to the Red Cross or some other organization, or if you appear and say I have undergone

the right of circumcision, Christ will say - I never knew you. Depart from me ye
that work iniquity. Matt. 7:23.

Therefore, while you still have life and there is still hope - turn from your own efforts of salvation and express faith in Jesus Christ and what he has already done for you.

Satan reported to have a Dream -

Devil came & said -

"Look at these sins, They are all yours,
All these sins are yours, With all these sins,
There is no hope of you going to heaven" -

Read the long list - - -

Reply to Satan ;

"One thing you have overlooked,
The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth
from all sin."

God's offer of mercy is not Partial or
limited to a few!