

- **Ok, we're going to jump right in! Last week we rejoined our journey through Acts- Acts 15- incredibly important historic event called the Jerusalem Council.**
- **This is where the revolution of the NEW COVENANT- the Fullness of the freedom of God's Grace and New Life in Christ- where this met with the counter revolution of the keepers of the OLD COVENANT.**
- **IF YOU MISSED last week... We set the stage with the covenantal back story of how the Mosaic Covenant (law), became the OLD Covenant... setting up the debate centered on THIS QUESTION.**

† Question! On what basis does a person receive the Grace of God? Is it through **faith** in Christ, or faith in Christ **plus** Law?

Acts 15:5-6 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

- **Lets push a bit deeper into what is going on here, because this wasn't just a theological debate. These people I'm calling "the keepers of the OC, who Luke describes as believers "belonging to the party of the pharisees" have also come to be known as the JUDAIZERS.**
- **The Judaizers were a faction of Jewish Christians- centered in the Jerusalem church- who asserted that the Levitical laws- the mosaic law- was still binding on all Christians.**
- **But here's the thing. For the Jewish believers, the Jerusalem church as a whole, this was no big deal. This had already been their custom for their entire lives. You see, for these Jewish believers in Jesus, they didn't see themselves as moving to an entirely new faith system. Yes, they were now disciples of Jesus, but they were STILL Jewish.**
- **But for the Gentile believers, this was a HUGE DEAL. Now, they understood Jesus' Jewish roots, and they had heard Paul teach about how Jesus fulfilled the Hebrew messianic prophecies. But when they placed their faith in Jesus, they did NOT see themselves as becoming Jewish. They were followers of CHRIST, not converts to Judiasm.**
- **For the Judaizers, THIS WAS AN ISSUE. For them, the question here was not abstracted to how ANY person became a believer, and part of the church- it was specifically how the GENTILES would become part of the church....**
- **Really, for these people, the question wasn't just "on what basis does God accept us?".... it was "On what basis will WE accept THEM... these gentiles"**
- **We see evidence of this in how Peter answered this question about the gentiles**

† The question of the gentiles

Acts 15:7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

- **Peter is referring to his encounter with Cornelius, all the way back in Acts 10- where we saw God formally- and broadly- open the door of the Gospel to the gentiles. Everybody at the JC knew this story, and Peter emphasizes this was a choice GOD MADE.**
- **IS SIGNIFICANT that Peter is the first one to speak here- NOT just because God first revealed to Peter that there was NO LONGER such a thing as UNCLEAN PEOPLE- that the Gospel was for EVERYONE....**

- **ALSO significant because it turns out Peter himself had succumbed to the religious peer pressure of the Judaizers. We see THIS in GALATIANS 2- where Paul discusses a tense encounter he had with Peter over this very same issue...**

Galatians 2:11-16 *When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.*

¹² *For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.*

¹⁴ *When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”*

¹⁵ *“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.*

- **In vs 15, you can almost hear some sarcasm in Paul’s words when he says “We who are Jews by birth (think ‘pure’), and not “gentile sinners”...**
- **This is key, because Paul is revealing here how these Jewish believers viewed the gentiles... as “sinners” and pagans by nature.**
- **You see, there is some racial and cultural bigotry going on here. How did these people view the gentiles?**
 - **As people who were DIFFERENT**
 - **As people who were UNCLEAN- sinners**
 - **People we are uncomfortable being around- yes, we know God wants them to know Jesus, but we would just as soon them not be around US.**
- **And so the response became “If you want to be WITH US, you must first become LIKE US”. You have to take on our traditions and embrace the way WE think.**
- **DO we do this in the church today? Do we raise or create unbiblical barriers and expectations before people will be accepted in our churches? You bet we do- we’ll talk about that more next week.**
- **In any case, the strong sense is that Peter repented of his hypocrisy, because he goes on to essentially say “Listen! You are discriminating based on your desire to protect your traditions and sense of religious and moral superiority. BUT GOD IS AFTER OUR HEARTS, and HE DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE.**

✠ God is after the heart

Acts 15:8-9 *God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.*

- **Peter again refers to what happened at Cornelius’ home, where the gathering of gentiles all believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized.**
- **Peter said “God purified their hearts- he forgave them fully, declared them righteous- fully right with God- and placed his own spirit within them... NEW LIFE in Christ- in response to their FAITH. Not their moral deservedness.... But because of FAITH.**
- **And then Peter makes an admission that is actually quite astonishing. “WE ALL HAVE SEEN how God CHOSE to set the gentiles free from sin, to give them NEW LIFE.... And**

now you are wanting to put them back under a burden they can never bear. IN FACT, it's a burden WE have never been able to bear!

✠ **The unbearable burden**

Acts 15:10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?

- **Peter says “you’re testing God (pushing against God’s plan) by putting this YOKE- great burden around the necks of the gentiles... BE HONEST! We have never been able to live under this system ourself! The law hasn’t worked for US as a means of living in obedience to God, why would you think it would work for them.**

– **NEED TO CLARIFY HERE**

Note: By ‘The Law’, we don’t just mean the specific ‘rules’ and requirements of the Mosaic Law, but the system under which our rightness with God –our righteousness- is based on our ability to fully and consistently live out those rules and requirements.

- **Peters point is that this system of moral self-effort and trying to achieve our rightness with God- it is doomed to futility- it always has been, and it is a crushing burden.**
- **Nowhere is the futility of this burden described more clearly than Paul’s lament in Romans 7...**

Romans 7:15-19,24 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

- **Hear! This is the burden common to all humanity- we KNOW what is right, deep in our hearts we AGREE with what is right, we even want to do what is right, but WE CAN’T. Even if we sincerely try, we still continue to fail... this is because what is RIGHT, what is GOOD, is of God- and we are born into this world broken, spiritually dead and separated from God, who is our only possible source of goodness and righteousness. THIS IS THE HUMAN CONDITION. We have the knowledge and desire to do what is good, but we can’t.**

– **THIS LEADS US TO CRUCIAL POINT...**

Reality! It was never God’s intention for humanity to RECIEVE a restored relationship with God, nor to EXPERIENCE that restored relationship with God, *through the law*.

- **Remember what Paul proclaimed to the people in Psidian Antioch on 1st missionary journey...**

Acts 13:39 “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

- **The law NEVER was able to set people free from sin, just as religious legalism today has NO power to change people’s hearts. BEGS THE QUESTION...**

† So... why the law?

- *If the moral law of God had no power to lead people to obedience, to trust, to rightness with God, then WHY DID GOD MAKE THE MOSAIC COVENANT IN THE FIRST PLACE? Why, in His Sovereignty, did He give us the Law, His moral expectations?*
- *LOTS to talk about there, but it boils down to one simple thought. God gave us moral expectations we could never keep on our own so we would be dependent upon HIM- so we would look to HIM as our source of rightness and goodness. NOT through the demands of rules, but through the transforming power of a relational presence.*
- *YOU SEE... here's what the law does.*

Through the law we become aware of our SIN.

Romans 3:19-20 *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

- *But this isn't about shame and guilt. Quite the opposite. Rather, when we come to terms with our own brokenness, this leads us to recognize our absolute need...*

Through the law we recognize our absolute need for God's GRACE.

Galatians 2:19-21 PAUL- *"For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.*

- *The law- God's moral expectations- both from scripture and the common moral understanding shared by all people- that we have no power to consistently keep.... this shows us the absolute need for a NEW WAY.*
- *And so Paul says... through the law I have realized my own weakness and inability to be wise and good- so I DIED TO THE LAW- I gave up on that old system- SO THAT I MAY RECEIVE LIFE AND RIGHTNESS FROM GOD, through faith.*
- *Paul continues with the clearest statement of this miracle in the entire NT....*

²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God (**I never, day to day, set aside**), for if righteousness could be gained through the law (**through the OLD WAY**), Christ died for nothing!"*

- *We owe a great debt to these leaders at the Jerusalem Council, because it was here the church emphatically agreed that we are SAVED- and we daily live in the GOOD of our salvation, by the Grace of Jesus Christ ALONE.*

† Grace alone... **PETER PROCLAIMS**

Acts 15:11 *No! (We will NOT place the gentiles-or ourselves- back under the law) We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."*

- *Church- hear this...*

Through Christ, we RECIEVE salvation by God's Grace alone

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

- **By our faith in Christ- this itself given by God- we are made RIGHT WITH GOD- fully and completely righteous. THIS IS GOD’S GRACE.**
- **Most Christians here would say AMEN. But that’s not all. We are SAVED, we are MADE RIGHTEOUS by faith in God’s grace... AND NOW, as those who are IN CHRIST...**

In Christ, we **DAILY WALK** in our relationship with God through His Grace alone.

- **This is where we will go next week... but in Christian culture there is always a temptation toward a false duality... the idea that we are SAVED BY GRACE... but now that we are Christians... disciples... we try to live out our faith by putting all the emphasis on moral and religious rules. The law.**
- **We are saved by faith, but we try to live- and we are tempted to evaluate and judge others- based upon our own moral WORKS- placing us back in bondage to the futility of our own weakness.**
- **THE NC WILL HAVE NONE OF THIS.**

Colossians 2:6-7 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, **(BY GRACE ALONE)** continue to live your lives in him **(BY HIS GRACE ALONE)**, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

- **Rather than a life of guilt, shame, and ‘sin awareness’, we are invited to live in the miracle of what is TRUE OF US IN CHRIST- with the daily mindset of CHRIST AWARENESS.**
- **NOW- what this LOOKS LIKE is the great theme of all our teaching here at Trinity- and we will push into the implications of this over the next two weeks.**
- **BUT I’ll end with this. Romans 7:6- In Christ we have been set free from what binds us, so that we (EVERYONE AND ANYONE WHOSE FAITH IS IN CHRIST- that’s the only criteria) serve- live- our lives are transformed- in the NEW WAY of the SPIRIT, and not in the OLD WAY of the written code.**
- **LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION!**