

- **Good morning everyone! We are in week 3 of 4 in ACTS 15- the incredibly important...**
 - † **The turning point of the Jerusalem Council**
 - **If missed last two messages, go back! They are the essential backstory of where we've arrived now.**
 - **TITLE: REV..COUNTER-REV.. RESOLUTION. Today we are pushing into the RESOLUTION- the result of this event, and why it matters so much today.**
 - **Quick recap: Gentile church is outgrowing the original Jerusalem/Jewish church- both in size and the influence of its teaching.**
 - **This teaching was REVOLUTION of NEW COVENANT. Brand new way of entering into, & daily living in, freedom and Grace of Jesus Christ and a fully restored relationship with God, made possible by FAITH in resurrection, and lordship of Jesus Christ.**
 - **IN RESPONSE TO THIS, faction of Jerusalem/Judean church- known as the Judaizers- pushed back hard, claiming that all believers- but most specifically the gentiles - must be circumcised and submit to the traditions and law of the Mosaic Covenant (OC!).**
 - **For Judaizers, question wasn't so much "on what basis does God accept us, but on what basis will we accept THEM, the gentiles- the outsiders."**
 - **This set up a 'summit' between the leaders of Gentile & Jewish church, to consider this essential question:**
- The Question:** On what basis does a person receive the Grace of God? Is it through *faith* in Christ, or faith in Christ *plus* Law?
- **FAITH in Christ, or CHRIST PLUS any other performance based requirement – litmus test- be it moral, ethical, religious, ritual, or tradition.**
- The Answer:** PETER- "No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we (Jewish believers) are saved, just as they (Gentile Believers) are." Acts 15:11
- **GRACE ALONE! So Peter has made his point. This is actually last time we see Peter in book of Acts.**
 - **Next P&B tell gathering all God had done in Gentile church, followed by JAMES. James has become leader of Jerusalem church, and he emphasizes...**
- † **What God had made clear Acts 15:12-14** *The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.*
- **Luke is intentional in how he's telling this story- he wants everyone to clearly understand all of this is according to God's plan and purpose.**
 - **EXHIBIT A: Gentiles believers received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jewish believers did.**
 - **EXHIBIT B: God authenticated gospel among gentiles through thru signs and wonders- just as with Jews**
 - **And then James DRIVES IT HOME- listen to the language he uses... GOD INTERVENED to CHOOSE A PEOPLE for HIS NAME.**

- **QUESTION- UP until this point, who were the chosen people who were bearers of God's name? ISRAEL.**
- **BUT NOW, without setting aside or changing unique place Israel has in God's plan, James proclaims...**
- **"God's Chosen People are those who come to Him thru Faith in Christ. THEY are bearers of His name."**
- **THINK OF THIS! James has just taken all the tradition, pride, and religious entitlement of the Judaizers, and rendered it obsolete.**
- **James continues, saying "and in case this upsets you, this was God's plan all along!"**

‡ **It was God's plan all along**

Acts 15:15-18 *The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ¹⁶ "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,"¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things'—¹⁸things known from long ago.*

- **James here quotes from Amos and Isaiah, essential point is that restoration of King David's line/dynasty was fulfilled in Jesus Christ- messiah-**
- **PURPOSE of this restoration is that through Jesus Christ gentiles may come to God- on complete equal footing with the Jews. It was God's plan all along.**
- **HAVING MADE HIS CASE, James now reaches his conclusion. Statement –if we hear it- should bring much of the modern church and Christian culture to its knees in repentance. (verses we emphasize...)**

Acts 15:19 *"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.*

‡ **Don't make things difficult!**

- **Don't miss this! To the established church, the inheritors of the covenants, the law, and untold generations of religious and moral tradition--- to the church whom God had entrusted the glorious riches of the mystery of God's Grace... James says...**
- **It has always been GOD'S PLAN FOR ALL mankind TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO seek the Lord- so STOP MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE TO RESPOND AND TURN TO GOD!**
- **THEN, great barrier James references is circumcision and imposition of mosaic law. BARRIER!!**
- **HOW does this speak to us today? How do we (churches and church culture we represent) make it difficult for people who come to our churches to hear and receive the Grace of God, and become part of a church family where they can learn and grow? What are barriers we erect blocking the mission we claim!**
- **HEAR- I'm about to say things you may question, gut may push against- YEAH BUT- I recognize these are issues bigger, more complicated than what I can do just to in short time today. That said, I ask you to listen, think about these in light of this scripture...**
- **Perhaps biggest barrier, over past few years- Blending of gospel with partisan politics. Belief that we fully possess political and moral high ground, and we assume that people who come to church will, or at least should, agree with us.**

- **NOTHING WRONG** with strong political views! I DO AND, a Biblical world view- when we really consider it- will influence your politics!
- But when we blend or equate being a disciple of Jesus with a political party or positions- and we loudly let this be known in context of the church and our faith, this is a powerful barrier to Gospel.
- RATHER than our message to culture being “You are a valued creation of God for whom Christ died- to bring you love, freedom, restoration, and new life....
- THE MESSAGE CULTURE hears is “if you don’t agree with us, you are the problem, the enemy”
- Likewise- if I think people who don’t share my social and political views can’t love and follow Jesus just as sincerely as I do- not only is this wrong, it is damaging to the witness of the gospel.
- BARRIER! Idea that some ‘sins’ are acceptable, where others are not. All Christians agree there is no sin too great to be forgiven, and no person too sinful to receive mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God.
- HOWEVER, when it comes to welcoming and patiently loving people in our churches where they can be supported, learn, and grow, it becomes evident there is sin we tolerate and sin we don’t.
- Sexual sin. Patient with this, as long as it is hidden. But if you get exposed, if comes out, you may have to leave. And church/culture has hidden sexual sin!
- CONSIDER- A man may be convinced homosexuality is sinful and unacceptable, but have no conviction of his use of power to control and manipulate his wife- emotionally, sexually, or otherwise.
- If person’s behavior is known to a church, may make them uncomfortable- may even seek to biblically confront him, but rarely would they ask him to leave the church. YET, if a homosexual couple entered that same church, would they be welcomed, loved, and patiently encouraged to listen, learn, respond to Gods work in their lives? Would there be a time limit for them different from another person with a moral issue in their lives, if it was even known?
- If a man confided to group of brothers about porn addiction- how long would they patiently walk...
- What is more devastating... private porn, public h..
- WHO ARE PEOPLE, if they started attending our churches, would we be profoundly uncomfortable around and perhaps encourage to not come back?
- With these people in mind, we must honestly consider God’s message God has given to His church through this story...
- GOD DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE between us and them, and there is NO HEART God cannot purify through that persons FAITH.
- Make no mistake- scripture speaks to great damage done by immorality, pride, and hypocrisy WITHIN the church- 1 Corinthians 5 is example. But too often, our response is to be patient with those within church whose sin is ‘tolerable, understandable, and a journey’, While excluding those whose sin, identity, appearance, or behavior is deemed unacceptable.
- BARRIER. ELEVATE non-essential doctrines above our essential calling. WHAT is essential calling?

- *Matthew 28- great commission- GO and make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and I am with you...*
- *SO, what has Jesus commanded us? Clearest statement is Matthew 22- great commandment-*
- *Jesus replied: “‘Love Lord your God with all your heart, soul ,mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. Second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*
- *In book of MICAH- God says through prophet...*

Micah 6:8 *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

- *THIS is calling that reflects authenticity, power and goodness of God to world! Yet if you track doctrinal battles of our churches, most important things seem:*
 - *Legalistic rules. Alcohol. Dance. Cards.*
 - *View of women in ministry- divorce- comm/bapt*
 - *Correct understanding of the end times,*
 - *Plain old church drama - Pick your issue!*
- *Likewise, at times the church can become obsessed with specific social and moral issues. Issues that are very real, very important, need to be engaged from a Biblical worldview- but are NOT our most important calling and message. The GOSPEL is our greatest message, and humbly living out the goodness and character of God- relationship- is our great calling.*
- *YET when our words/actions communicate to world these secondary matters are most important – or a requirement- to being Christian- barrier to gospel!*
- *SO MUCH MORE- but have to move on*
- *Having made CLEAR that faith and life in Christ is a matter of God’s GRACE ALONE, James says something that initially is very confusing.*

Acts 15:20-21 *Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”*

† **Wait, I’m confused! Is this ‘a little law will do ya’, or is there something else going on here?**

These restrictions are for the purpose of church UNITY. They are not requirements of LAW, they are expressions of LOVE.

- *Think about it. Church has become multicultural- this is source of issue. James proclaims- instead of trying to impose our different traditions on each other, we need to UNDERSTAND AND RESPECT each other, and adjust-moderate our behavior in certain areas because of our love for each other.*
- *SO, speaking primarily to gentile leaders, James reminds them how important law of Moses is to these Jewish disciples of Jesus. “They have grown up with it, there are things very sensitive or offensive to them, that you should respect.” Why? Love!*
- **LOOK AT THESE... PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY**

† **Because we love God and love each other...**

“Abstain from food offered to Idols”

We will remain faithful to God in all things

- *Idolatry was rampant in ancient world, and the law and prophets of the OC warned the Hebrews against the great danger of idolatry. 1st commandment!*
- *In this time, for you to eat food that had been offered to idols, you would have in some way have association with the practice of idol worship.*
- *As Paul would later say “Be careful of what you approve” Let your greatest desire be faithfulness to God. This will impact our choices, our behavior.*

“Abstain from sexual immorality”

- *Reinforced through NC. But context here is important. Very likely James/church leaders are specifically referring to the sexual immorality present in cultic and pagan worship of Mediterranean world.*
- *So this isn't just about sexual immorality- it is about anything in our life that would cause our worship of God to be disingenuous. Anger- unforgiveness- Bitterness. Dishonesty. Using our power and sense of need to control or be in unhealthy relationship others- that is at heart of sexual immorality.*

In our worship, *(really, all of life)* we will honor God and value each other.

“Abstain from the meat of strangled animals and blood”

We will care about the needs and convictions of others

- *I'll spare the details, but for the Hebrews, the method by which an animal killed and prepared was of utmost importance. The essential principle for the church was ‘there may be things that are fine, you are free to do, but consider how your actions impact others! Don't let your freedom be a barrier to the gospel! Paul resoundingly taught this in Romans...*

Romans 14:13-15 *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.*

- *Powerful principle! We tend to think of in our personal relationships.*
- *BUT this ALSO applies to how we as church represent ourselves- and the Gospel of Jesus Christ- to the world around us.*
- *By our behavior- by what we hold up as most important- may we not make it difficult for people who would turn to God.*
- *Bring it down to this. In Christ, we haven't just been set free from the burden of the law. WE HAVE BEEN BROUGHT INTO, CALLED INTO, A BETTER HOPE.*

✠ **The better hope** **Hebrews 7:18-19** *The former regulation is*

set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

- *BETTER HOPE is New Cov! NEW LIFE in Christ, His Life as our life, which we live by daily faith in Jesus.*
- *CHURCH- as we draw near to God- daily love and seek him first- our lives will increasingly be transformed into His image- into his goodness....*

- *We will desire for OTHERS to know this same HOPE... and we will recognize and deconstruct the barriers that make it hard for people to turn to God.*