

Is The Church A Gospel Church

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Date: 09 January 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] This morning we're continuing our series in the book of Acts, and we are at chapter 15.
- Last time we were in Acts was before Christmas, so... Acts chapter 15.
- There's a name used sometimes in the book of Acts for the church, and we came across it in chapter 9 before, and we'll come across it again a few more times later in the book.
- And in chapter 9, it talks about when Paul was looking for those belonging to the way. I've said it before, and I'll always remember the wee church that I used to walk past that had Jesus' own words and big letters on the wall.
- Jesus said, I am the way. John 14, 6. It took me a while to understand what that meant.
- [1 : 0 4] It took a miracle to understand what that meant. But I've come to know that Jesus is the way to the Father. Jesus is the way to eternal life.
- He is the way to resurrection. And he is the way to the kingdom of God. And so his apostles, his chosen witnesses, chosen to show the world that he is the way.
- It's not strange that these group of disciples then became known as the way. Here's this group of people that are called the way.
- Because they talk about the one who is the way. So I just wanted to highlight that little phrase, because at this moment in history, Acts chapter 15, it's a real event in history.
- It's a pivotal point in whether a church will continue to be the way or not. You see, Luke makes it clear in Acts, the whole book of Acts, that the gospel is unstoppable.
- [2 : 0 7] The gospel is unchanged, unchained, unhindered. And regardless of circumstance, it's unstoppable. The question is whether or not the church will continue to be a gospel church.
- Now, it wouldn't stop Jesus accomplishing his mission of the gospel going to the ends of the earth. But it's also true that a church can stop itself from being part of that.
- The church has been entrusted with the gospel and should guard the gospel as it proclaims the gospel. And we must keep the good news of Jesus from being tampered with or compromised or watered down or changed.
- Otherwise, no one will know the way. That's what happens when the gospel is tampered with. That's what happens when a church stops being a gospel church, is that people don't know the way.
- And people need to know the way. So Acts chapter 15, I'm going to read the first 35 verses. Let me read.
- [3 : 2 0] But some men came down from Judea. That has come down to Antioch. The Bible often talks in topographical terms, not geographical terms.
- We talk about south as going down, but that's talking about elevation. Some men came down from Judea, and we're teaching the brothers that as in Antioch. Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, it is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.

[4 : 43] The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Now therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through grace, the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

And all the assembly fell silent. And they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

And after they finished speaking, James replied, Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name.

[6 : 08] And with this, the words of the prophets agree just as it is written. After this, I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord.

And all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old. Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from what has been strangled and from blood.

For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him. For he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues. Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They sent Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter. The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.

Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have rest their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 53] We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements, that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood, from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality.

If you keep yourself from these, you will do well. Farewell. So they were sent off. They went down to Antioch and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.

I don't know if you noticed, there's a footnote, verse 34 is missing, but it says, but it seemed good to Silas to remain there. This is evident because later on, Silas is still there.

But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also. Amen.

[9 : 12] We pray that God would bless his word. Well, in order to try and understand and remember the importance of this, I've tried to break this passage down into four parts each part having a question building on the last.

So, does the gospel save? Who does the gospel save? How does the gospel save? And how do the saved reflect the gospel?

So, so, verses one to five, does the gospel save? This is a big question. This is an important question that we must get right.

Seems like such a basic question, but there are many religions in the world that differ on their answers to this question. the context here is that Paul and Barnabas have went out, they've been sent out by the church and by the Holy Spirit, set apart for this great missionary journey where they went through Cyprus and then went to mainland and went all around.

Many, many people responded to the gospel, and Paul and Barnabas faced many trials on that journey.

[10 : 43] This was a great missionary journey. In fact, it was the first major missionary journey of the Christian church. When they went to Antioch, that was the scatters who were, the believers who were scattered from Jerusalem started the church in Antioch.

But this church in Antioch, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sent out these Barnabas and Paul to do this missionary journey. This was a great missionary journey, and we explored it in chapter 14.

And they've come back. If you've spent enough time in a church, you've been around to hear a missionary give a report on a missionary journey, haven't you? Where they come up and tell you how things went.

Well, Paul and Barnabas, just at the end of chapter 14, they came back. They came back to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had now fulfilled.

When they arrived and gathered the church, they declared all that God had done and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. It was a great time. This was the height of the church in Antioch.

[11 : 51] What a great time. You know, they've sent these two people out in this missionary journey, and here they come back, hanging by a thread, Paul with scars all over his body from being stoned and all sorts.

They come back and they say, God has moved greatly among the Gentiles. These people have responded to the gospel. This is the context.

They're elated, they're rejoicing at the fruitful mission despite the scars, and we're introduced in chapter 15 with the word, but. I don't know as well if you've spent enough time in churches when things are going well, there's often a but.

But some men, not even from that church, some men from Jerusalem came into the church and started teaching them that unless, unless you're circumcised, according to the custom of Moses, you can't be saved.

That little line, do you know what implications that has for everything that has just gone on before? You know, Paul and Barnabas risking their lives.

[13 : 02] That's what it said in the letter, these men who risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus. They risked their lives for what? For nothing. So that these people could get half a gospel.

All these Gentiles that they'd reported responded to the gospel. These men came from Jerusalem and said, nah, they're not saved. Now, none of those people that you preached to, none of those churches you started, none of those people that responded to the gospel, they're not saved.

Because unless they're circumcised, they're not saved. You can't be saved. What discouragement that would have been. What confusion that would have been to the disciples in Antioch.

Really? And what anger that would have caused Barnabas and Paul. Cannot be saved. cannot be saved.

Really? No wonder Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them. You see, although it didn't cause the likes of Paul or Barnabas any crisis of doctrine, this teaching had very likely rattled a number of believers.

[14 : 12] And if you want to see the kind of effect that this simple but devastating teaching can have, if you want to see the effect of it, read Paul's letter to Galatians because that's what it does.

In fact, Paul's letter to Galatians is what this done. Speaking to the same situation, the same people doing the same things. it was likely that Paul wrote Galatians just before the council of Jerusalem because this has already happened in one of these churches.

It's already happened, these people going out and spreading this false teaching. It's the same issue but it's not quite at its zenith until Acts chapter 15.

We know that as well because if Paul had wrote Galatians after this, he definitely would have referenced the apostles' letters to close the issue.

So we go from these celebrations in Antioch over the success of the first mission to now questioning the legitimacy of the whole thing and casting doubts over the status of all Gentile believers, every Gentile believer, now is in doubt as to whether they're saved or not.

[15 : 31] From a high point in Antioch descending very quickly into a major downer and despite Paul and Barnabas, two major characters, despite them being recognized leaders and teachers in the church in Antioch, verse 2, the issue is not resolved and it has to be taken to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

Verse 3 and 4 being sent on their way, they visit churches along the way and update them on the conversion of the Gentiles. This is great. Despite this false teaching, they're going around on the way to Jerusalem, on the way to the meeting to settle this matter.

They're going telling the churches, the Gentiles have been converted. They have. And there's a lot of rejoicing and this tells us that it was a minority view, this issue about circumcision.

And I wonder if the people who had this false idea, I wonder if they were traveling with them, the two sides of the argument were traveling to Jerusalem together because that would have been really awkward, especially when you begin to visit the churches on the way saying, hey, listen to what happened to all the Gentiles.

Pretty awkward. we don't know if that was the case, but what we do know is that given all the churches responses, it's clear the issue is held by a minority.

[16 : 55] Again, in verse 5, the issue arises again. I mean, all these churches accept them, welcome them, rejoice. Jerusalem welcomes them, the apostles welcome them, the elders welcome them, and then we see that word again, but, verse 5, some believers who belong to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, it is, yeah, yeah, we agree, it is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.

This is the real disappointment. It was believers who were pushing the issue. These Pharisees were nonetheless believers, and they were pushing this issue.

It was the very people who had received the grace of Jesus. who were insisting that the law was required for salvation. That's the disappointing thing.

Is their claim legitimate? Does the gospel save, or do we need the law as well? Why is it circumcision?

Why is circumcision the issue? It's not like they were saying at first, you need to keep all the commandments. if you're perfect in all the commandments, you'll be saved. Why circumcision?

[18 : 16] Well, if you don't know the answer already, perhaps the Old Testament will give you a bit of a hint. In Genesis 17, you can read these words in Genesis 17, when God was telling Abraham that he must keep God's covenant, that every male must be circumcised, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.

This is the words of Genesis 17. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, anyone who's not done that, shall be cut off from his people.

He has broken my covenant. Sounds scary, doesn't it? The Jews who were steeped in this obviously rightly feared breaking this covenant.

Who would want to be cut off from the people? I mean, that was the idea of the covenant, of cutting, cutting off a covenant, was to show that if you didn't keep this, you would be cut off.

An everlasting covenant, and if you don't do it, you shall be cut off. So these people are thinking, well, I think circumcision is needed here for salvation. I mean, it's convincing.

[19 : 44] Is it serious? Absolutely, it's serious. When you think about the implications of that, how do you answer the question? Does the gospel save, or do we need to be circumcised as well?

When you think about the implications and the Jewish background in the covenant, what do you say to that? Well, let me ask you a simple question. What do you think is more effective?

Cutting off a bit of flesh, or the death of Jesus, God's own Son? When these confused and overzealous false teachers roll into Antioch, saying, unless you do this, you cannot be saved, they were effectively saying, because they were believers, they were effectively saying, even with the death of Jesus, even with the blood of Christ, it cannot save you unless you do this.

Talk about completely misunderstanding the grace of God. Doesn't that sound unbelievable? What does that say about the death of Jesus?

Can we really not have confidence in the blood of Jesus shed on the cross to save us? is there really any more value to be added to the blood of God?

[21 : 07] Although it takes us in all sorts of directions, let me show you Paul's own argument, because Paul has a very easy answer to this, and it's not some, he argues it from the Old Testament.

Romans 4, 9 to 12, Paul says this, is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness could be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Paul is basically saying this, and it's easy, this is an easy way to think about it. Abraham's faith that was credited to him as righteousness was in chapter 15 of Genesis.

[22 : 34] The sign of the covenant, chapter 17. You see the order there? He was, it was counted to him as righteousness before he was circumcised. His faith was the thing not circumcision.

That was a sign of something that had already happened by faith. So perhaps someone would say, well, well you're talking about the circumcision of Abraham, but they are talking about the circumcision according to the custom of Moses.

You see, they're talking about Moses and the law. Again, Paul argues this from the Old Testament in Galatians chapter 3. Paul says, the law, by the way, not Genesis 17, but the law came 430 years after.

And it does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God so as to make the promise void. See, the covenant was ratified by God. The promise can't be made void by something that is coming out 430 years later.

No. Again, the order is there. So the question, does the gospel save? Absolutely. Yes. A million times yes.

[23 : 47] The gospel saves. The gospel is the only thing that can save us because it is the only thing that can show us Jesus who is the way.

Paul said this in Romans 1, didn't he? The gospel, the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. So the second question, who does the gospel save?

We look at verses 6 to 10 when Paul said that all have sinned and fall short. Paul says this in Romans 3, doesn't he?

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and all are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received.

By faith. When Paul says all have sinned and fall short, he first said there is no distinction. No distinction.

[24 : 53] Paul is showing the obvious evidence that when it comes to sin there's no distinction. There's no distinction when it comes to sin because all have sinned. It doesn't matter if you're a Jew, a Gentile, it doesn't matter who you are, a male or a female, a slave or a free, whatever, everyone has sinned.

There is no distinction when it comes to who's guilty for sin. He then shows that the salvation that God gives, God offers without distinction to all people.

But don't just take Paul's word for it. Certainly this issue was so vital to the gospel that we couldn't just take Paul's word, but it would have to have the consensus of the apostles.

At this moment in history, it needs to have the stamp of approval from the apostles, the one chosen by Jesus to spread the word to the ends of the earth. The church, the entire church has to be together on this.

It really does. This was the big issue, wasn't it, in the Reformation. The church has to be together on this answer. So when the apostles and elders had already given consideration and much debate, Peter stood up and said the same thing as Paul.

[26 : 14] Verse 9, Peter says, God made no distinction between us and them. See, Peter's basis, Peter bases his argument on the undeniable first-hand experience of seeing God do this with Cornelius.

How was anyone going to deny what God had already done through Peter with Cornelius? It already happened, it was evident. Upon hearing the gospel and believing, God gave Cornelius the Holy Spirit, Peter says, just as he did to us.

Cornelius, this Gentile, received the Holy Spirit just like we received the Holy Spirit, in the same way. He didn't need to be circumcised for that. What was I going to do? God had already given him the Holy Spirit.

Who can be saved? Well, anyone who believes. Anyone who hears the gospel and believes can be saved. It doesn't matter if you're a Jew, Gentile, male, female, child, parent, whoever you are, whatever you've done, whatever your background, anyone can be saved.

Anyone. Every person on this planet is offered salvation on the same basis without distinction. By faith. Everyone has an ability to believe.

[27 : 34] This is not something that only some can do. God offers it to all without distinction. So Peter then says two more comments. One is asking a question to challenge his fellow Jews, and the other is a clear statement about what they believe.

Verse 10, Peter says, Now therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

You're wanting them to do something that we can't even do? Asking the Gentiles to do this just because it has been your burden would be hypocritical because you have never been able to do it and bear it anyway.

That's what Peter's saying. I mean, this happens though, even now. It doesn't need to be circumcision or the law of Moses. people tend to require other people to do things that they themselves don't do.

Peter says, Enough of that. Enough. Verse 11, which answers our third question, and this will effectively be Peter's final words in the book of Acts.

[28 : 49] Verse 11, Peter's final words in the book of Acts answers the question of how does the gospel save? And Peter's final contribution to the book of Acts is this, but we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

I mean, what amazing final words from Peter. We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. He's not only saying that the Gentiles don't need to do this, that faith is enough for them, he's saying faith is all we have.

He's saying that to his fellow Jews. Listen, we need to, this is the only way we can be saved, never mind the Gentiles. The only way anyone can be saved is through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Not through the merit of anything we can do, but through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Jesus. The gospel saves. How does the gospel save? The gospel saves through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone.

That was the great mantra of the Reformation, wasn't it? And rightly so, because this is a serious issue of not only life or death, but eternal life for everyone.

[30 : 15] They need to know the way, and the way is grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. You see that?

We will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will, just as anyone will. We will only be saved by grace, not by works. Grace means we do not contribute. That's what grace means.

Circumcision, law, good works, all that stuff does nothing to earn salvation. You see, the price of salvation is just too high. It's too high.

None of those things could pay the price of salvation. We could never, none of us could ever pay for salvation by our own efforts. No amount of skin or body parts cut off could do it.

No amount of good works could earn God's favor. The price is way too high, but thank God that it's been paid by the precious blood of Jesus. You see, only he could pay for it.

[31 : 16] He couldn't pay for it if he was merely a man. The blood of man cannot pay a ransom for another man. This is what it says in the Psalms.

And in the same Psalm it says, but God will ransom me. Well, this is how he does it, through Jesus Christ, his son. You see, the blood of a man, merely a man, cannot do it.

But Paul says in Acts 20, later on, he calls it the blood of God, because Jesus is God. He bled on the cross. The son of God and his life is of infinite value and we are only saved by grace and his grace is sufficient.

Paul says in Ephesians, for by grace you have been saved through faith and this not of your own doing is the gift of God. He's agreeing with what Peter said in this crucial counsel.

When Peter said this, the place fell silent. Who could argue? If you know Jesus, if you've received his grace, then surely you realize this.

[32 : 26] Such was the force of Peter's argument and the reality of it, that it had already happened to Cornelius and Peter was a mouthpiece and witness. How was anyone going to argue with that?

So there was silence and then there was a time given for Paul and Barnabas to relate all that God had done through them to the Gentiles. And then next came James.

Not an apostle, not the apostle James, not the brother of John, but the young brother, the young half-brother of Jesus Christ. Not only had he become an important leader in the Jerusalem church, but he became a much respected one at that because he represented the model Jew.

James was a righteous man. James the just, he was called, had knees like camels because of how often he prayed. If anyone was going to sympathize with the side of the Jews and with the law of Moses, it would be him because he was a Jew's Jew.

If anyone was going to see the importance of a Jewish custom, surely it was James. Yeah, but James agrees with Peter and with Paul and Barnabas. In case the apostle Peter didn't convince you, and in case his example of Cornelius didn't convince you, James turns to something that really should convince them.

[33 : 52] The very scriptures and prophets that they held so dear. James says, yeah, you know the prophets are in agreement with this. You see, what Peter said and what Peter experienced, the prophets foretold that.

Hey, you're going to argue with the prophets? You're going to argue with your Old Testament? The Jews were not going to do that. So, to disagree with Paul and Barnabas and Peter is to disagree with the sacred scriptures.

Certainly, Paul and Barnabas are getting the stamp of approval by Peter, the foremost apostle, and by James, the foremost elder. And James reinforces what Peter said when he said, therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble the Gentiles.

Don't trouble the Gentiles who turn to God. It's a non-issue. How does the gospel save? Through grace alone, by faith alone, and Christ alone.

We shouldn't add any requirements to anyone as though they need to be like us to be saved. You see, you don't need to be a Baptist to be saved. You don't need to subscribe to our denomination.

[34 : 59] You don't need to be a member of a church to be saved. You don't need that. You don't even need to be baptized. I know there's a debate about that. You don't need any of that. You don't need to be over 70% attendance in a church.

You don't need to do this good thing or that good thing or be given. There is one basis for salvation, and that is faith in Christ. It's the only basis. It's the only thing that can save us.

The gospel. You don't need all these add-ons, and we should never, ever, ever make the door narrower than Jesus himself makes it. there is one basis for salvation.

That's faith in Christ, and there is one way of salvation, and that is the grace of Christ. We need to present the gospel without our add-ons. Otherwise, it won't truly be good news.

We take away from the goodness of the good news and the effectiveness and the truth of it if we add anything on. It's like my boys when they're playing on the phone, a wee game.

[36 : 07] Every app that you get has got a wee note under it, in-app purchases. You don't get all that there is with this when you download it. No, you need to get more and you need to pay for it.

It is not so with the gospel, and it's not so with Jesus. Faith in Christ, and you get everything. Paul says that in Ephesians. we have every spiritual blessing in heavenly realms through Christ.

We need to present the gospel without our add-ons. And if we do, we need to let the good news be good and watch the power of God work through it in people's lives.

You see, some things, some fights are worth fighting for. And this, the matter of the gospel, is worth fighting for. The gospel will continue, but if a church compromises on this, the church won't continue.

Is the church a gospel church? Is the church a church of the way? The great thing is that the gospel is the power of God.

[37 : 14] We don't need to add anything on. We might feel inclined to at times, but we don't need to. The great thing is, and the great thing about this, and about the reason why they fought so hard for this, is because the gospel does save.

And we need to have confidence in this gospel. Yeah, it seems foolishness to the Gentiles, to the Greeks. Yeah, it's sometimes a stumbling block to the Jews, but it's the power of salvation to all who believe, both Jews and Greeks.

This is a fight worth fighting. So finally, how do the saved reflect the gospel? Verses 20 to 35, it's a big section, but we're going to not spend too much time on it.

I think one of the issues with the people, these people who did this in the first place, the people who went to Antioch saying, if you're not circumcised, you cannot be saved, and then the Pharisees in Jerusalem who were believers.

They were believers, but when they said it's necessary to do this, do you know, I think the problem was that they didn't really grasp the grace of Jesus in the first place.

[38 : 25] They don't realize the grace that has saved them. If you don't truly grasp the grace of Jesus that saves you, then you don't truly live out the grace of the gospel in your life.

That's the outcome. These people weren't living the grace of the gospel, because they didn't really understand the grace of the gospel. If they understood what Jesus did and his grace, they never would have thought that in a million years.

These men who went to Antioch teaching that without circumcision of Moses you can't be saved, they must have misunderstood their own salvation. They must have.

You remember the parable that Jesus told about the man who owed more than a million lifetimes could pay for, and he went begging to the king, and the king let him off, and then he went out to someone who owed him a month's wages and said, you need to give me it or you're going to jail.

He completely misunderstood the grace that God gave him. That's exactly what's happening with these people. Did they really think that what, did they really think that their circumcision was the thing that was saving them?

[39 : 43] I mean, talk about missing the significance of Jesus. Did they really think that their circumcision or law-keeping did anything to contribute to their salvation? Paul says, you know, in Galatians, if that was the case, then Jesus died for nothing.

He would never have needed to die if that was the case. But it was not the case. The law can never save. That's why he had to die. The only reason that he died was because it couldn't happen any other way.

Man, did they really think that their circumcision did anything or that that was the thing that saved them? I mean, if so, you've got to conclude that they didn't really grasp the grace and sacrifice of Jesus.

I think that's the case. Even now, it might not be the circumcision issue. It might not be legalism in the Old Testament law. But very often, people just underestimate or misunderstand the grace of Jesus.

It's something that we can never get to the depths of, but something we should always meditate on, something we should always think on. You know, like Mary ponders things in her heart. This is our treasure.

[41 : 01] This is the thing that saves us. And it's the thing that should affect the way that we live. So James gives some practical instructions to the Gentiles.

He says, you don't need to become a Jew to be saved. You really don't. You don't need to do that. But, you shouldn't become a stumbling block to the Jews. Don't do that.

And I don't think this is just a message to Gentiles saying, listen, you've got to follow these rules. It's not just for them to accommodate their Jewish neighbors. I think the whole issue has been a message to the Jews and the Gentiles.

James isn't just giving commands to Gentiles. He's saying to the Jews, you need to stop this. He's saying to the Jews, stop the circumcision debates at once because it does nothing to your salvation.

Stop this circumcision thing because you Jews are being a stumbling block to the Gentiles. Stop it. This is getting in the way of the gospel. It's getting in the way of what Jesus came to do.

[42 : 05] And so his message to the Gentiles is that while the Jews should not trouble them, neither should the Gentiles trouble the Jews. And he does this by giving them four things to abstain from.

Things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, things from what has been strangled and from blood. It seems like a bit of a random list of things.

But then he says this, for from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues. Now much ink has been spilled on this.

And actually Scotland, if you've ever listened to a sermon on this, Scotland has been referenced in debates about this list of four things. Sermons and debates and articles.

Scotland's been referenced on this. Do you know why? Have a guess. Black pudding. Black pudding. Next time you're ordering a big breakfast, what do you do with the black pudding thing?

[43 : 10] You're going to think of Acts 15 and go, oh, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. I don't want to spend too much time in this because I don't think it's an issue. I don't think it's an issue and I don't think it is the issue.

And I don't want to detract from what the whole thing is about. But what he said after the list about Moses being proclaimed in every city, that's a helpful line for understanding why he tells the Gentiles to abstain from these particular things.

You see, I heard recently an argument about this line, you know, for Moses is proclaimed in every city. Someone was arguing the case that these four things were just starters.

These were just to get you going and your law keeping. Not to overburden you, we'll just give you four, but because Moses is proclaimed in every city, you'll learn the rest.

And I was really disappointed when I heard that. I thought, what a terrible argument. You just missed the whole point of the passage. And it's a terrible argument because much more obvious the meaning of the statement is this.

[44 : 21] When James says to abstain from these things because, that word for, because Moses has had in every city from ancient generations those who proclaim him.

James is basically saying, wherever you go, you're going to encounter Jews. Wherever you go, you're going to encounter Jews in every city who proclaim Moses.

You're going to find Jews all over the place who are champions of Moses. they care about these issues. And you're going to encounter them in every city because from ancient generations there's been synagogues all over the world.

So that's the argument. That's the reason for it. It's not because these four are just to get you going. It's because you're going to find Jews who proclaim Moses.

See, you're going to go out proclaiming Jesus and you're going to find Jews who proclaim Moses. And you need to be sensitive to what they think from Moses. Because if you want them to hear the gospel and not close their ears, then you need to be careful.

[45 : 31] Paul does this, you know, you see it in Romans, you see it in Corinthians, you see it elsewhere. Paul says, don't use your liberty, don't use your freedom as a stumbling block to someone else.

He says you can use your liberty to limit yourself for the sake of the gospel. to the Jews I became a Jew, to the Gentiles I became a Gentile. I became all things to all people so that he might win some.

That's what he's talking about. I don't think these four things are moral laws simply. Righteousness is well taught in the church. I think these four things are ceremonial things that are associated with worship.

You see, things which would not merely offend the Jew, but things that would prevent table fellowship with a Jew. How do the saved reflect the gospel?

By showing the grace to one another that they have received from Christ. These things would prevent even table fellowship with a Jew. These things would hinder a Jew from even listening to you if you were to give them the gospel.

[46 : 39] people. I mean, there's reasons that these things were in the law. It says in Genesis when Noah came off the ark, God said you shouldn't take the blood from an animal because the life is in the blood.

You need to value life. Now what does that mean when we come to our big breakfast and what items we have on it? There were practices in ancient times in pagan worship where they would take blood as part of a worship ceremony and stuff like that, you know.

And certainly if you're around a Jew, maybe leave the black pudding out. But it's a non-issue. These things are meant to help us. And this is the whole thing that's going on. You Jews play nice with the Gentiles.

And you Gentiles play nice with the Jews. And I know what that's like because I'm saying that to Levi and Ezra. Play nice with you, brother. We need to be sensitive to these things because in every city you're going to find Jews who proclaim Moses.

It might not be apparent here now, but you might in Scotland. There are pockets of synagogues in Scotland and you might have to face this. It's a non-issue, but it's about not becoming a stumbling block for the gospel.

[48 : 03] Showing the grace to one another that you have received from Christ. Accommodating one another and being considerate of the other person. Paul talks about this in Romans. Don't use your freedom for selfishness.

You are free to limit your liberty for the sake of others. You're free to limit your liberty not to flaunt it. You should never flaunt your freedom. You should use your freedom in a way that helps the gospel, not hinders it.

So how does that look for us? I am sure that there are a thousand ways that we could exhibit the grace of the gospel in our lives. I'm sure that the more that we see the grace of Christ, the more we understand the grace of Christ towards us, the more grace we will exhibit towards others.

And I think that's evident when you meet Christians who have been trod in the path for a long time. You find more graciousness, growing in the grace.

The more we see the accommodation of Christ towards us, the more we will accommodate others. And by accommodate, I don't mean compromise on the gospel, but rather compromise on anything that may help the gospel where a lack of compromise may hinder it.

[49 : 27] If there's anything that we can compromise on that will help the gospel, we'll do that. You know, if that means not eating meat because a weaker brother's a vegetarian, so be it.

Paul says that, doesn't he, in Romans? If that means doing some things differently because you're around Jews or around anyone, born, an example is, I don't know if you know this, but if you ever come across Mormons, they will only accept the King James Bible.

I don't know why, well, I do know why, because Joseph Smith plagiarized it. Anyway, if you want to get leeway with these people, you need to accommodate them, but you never compromise on the gospel.

How do the saved reflect the gospel? By living in such a way that makes the gospel increase and multiply, not by living in a way that stifles the gospel. See, these people were stifling the gospel.

Whereas James and Peter and Paul and Barnabas are saying, listen, you need to live in a way that's going to increase and multiply the gospel, not stifle it. And as a result of that, it's seen in the rest of our passage.

[50 : 40] The troubled believers in Antioch get a letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, reassuring them of Paul and Barnabas, their teachers, who risked their lives for the name of Jesus.

The letter reassures them that the people who came and caused the trouble in the first place were not representing anyone in Jerusalem. No, they were rogue. The letter reassures them that the confirmation of Judas and Silas from Jerusalem confirmed it by word of mouth also.

And more importantly, the letter and conclusion to the matter reassures them of their confidence in the gospel to save. And as a Gentile, that's a wonderful thing to hear.

You can rely on the gospel. You don't need to do any of this X, Y, and Z. You don't need to rely on your status as a member. You don't need to rely on how often you come to church.

You don't need to rely on how well you're doing as a Christian. You don't need to rely on how many laws you're keeping. You don't need to rely on how well you perform. You don't.

[51 : 46] The gospel's enough. Your faith in Christ is enough. You need to know that we can have confidence in the gospel, both for your own salvation and so that you're convicted when you tell other people about how to get saved.

You need to have confidence in the gospel for yourself and for others. And this is seen. They don't need to be circumcised for if they believe then they are already saved.

What good news when they're all wondering, well, are we saved? Are we even saved? All these Gentiles who Paul and Barnabas are preaching to, did Paul and Barnabas miss a vital thing out?

Are we even saved? The letter comes and says, yes, you are saved. And unsurprisingly, they rejoice because of its encouragement. They're all at peace and they return to the business of teaching the word of the Lord.

You see that? Not just Paul and Barnabas, but many others with them teach the word of the Lord. You can be confident that the gospel saves.

[52 : 52] You can be confident that the gospel saves anyone who receives it. You can be confident that the gospel saves through grace alone, by faith alone and Christ alone.

And you can be confident that the saved will reflect the gospel when they truly grasp the grace of Jesus toward them. This moment in history solidified the apostles and elders.

It solidified Jerusalem and Antioch as true gospel churches. And so long as we keep these things right, we will grow as a gospel church too.

Let me pray. God, our heavenly Father, we thank you for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. A gospel that you have ensured has come down through thousands of years to us.

A gospel that you have ensured has not been tampered with. A gospel that's been entrusted to faithful men and women throughout the ages.

[54 : 04] Entrusted and passed along and guarded. God, we thank you that your gospel has been guarded. We thank you that you have entrusted this to us. We pray that you would help us to guard this gospel.

We pray that you would help us to have the confidence that we have in this gospel for this gospel that came to us is the same gospel that came to these people in the Bible.

The gospel that came to us is the same gospel that saved even the apostles. The gospel that came to us is the gospel that not only does save everyone, but it's the only gospel that can save anyone.

We thank you for this gospel that has saved us. God, help us to have confidence in it so that we will truly rejoice at our own salvation, looking at the grace of Christ alone, and also so that we will proclaim that to everyone else so that they might know the way as well.

God, we give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Now let us now sing appropriately nothing but the blood.