

Calvary Chapel on the Horizon

November 21, 2021

Acts 15 "Grace vs. Law"

I. Introduction

Read: Eph 2:11-18

† We will talk about Law and grace today – where does it fall in our lives and what should we believe doctrinally...

† Paul and Barnabas have finished their first missionary journey and are in Antioch...

II. Law or Grace?

A. Necessity of the Law?

Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

† **This is the principle issue of the discussion!**

† They are saying you must "DO" to be saved...that some form of "work" must be performed.

† **This is legalism that requires you to earn your salvation!**

Act 15:2-4 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

† **They couldn't resolve the argument – truly a doctrinal issue that affects all of us...so they headed to Jerusalem to speak with the Apostles who have been with Jesus and with James, who was the leader (pastor) of the church in Jerusalem and was the ½ brother of Jesus.**

† **Pro 11:14** Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

† **Pro 12:15** The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

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† **Pro 15:22** Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

Act 15:5-6 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

† **The debate is between Jesus and Moses...**

† **Joh 1:17** For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

† **Today we have similar divisions:** We often see this debate about **Baptism**, **good works**, **what you can eat**, **what you can wear**, **where you can go**... or even **going to church**.

† **So, the elders and leaders came together to discuss this and decide what was true and right and what was "NOT"!**

B. Grace Alone?

1. Peter to the Gentiles

Act 15:7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

† **Peter reminded them (in vs.7) that God had called him to be an apostle to the gentiles, even as Paul was called**

† **Act 10:13-15** And there came a voice to him, **Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.** 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. 15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

† **To Cornelius, the Roman Centurion who was a gentile: Acts 10:44-48** While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

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† This passage is also great for disputing with those who say you must be baptized before you can be saved – here they were saved and baptized in the Holy Ghost and THEN they got water baptized.

2. God Knows Our Hearts

Act 15:8-9 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

† **Psa 139:1-4** O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. 2 Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

† **Psa 94:11** The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.

3. The Yoke's on You

Act 15:10-12 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. 12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

† **The "Yoke" was the Law...Jesus said, Mat 11:28-30** Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

† **Gal 3:24-26** Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. 26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

† **1Ti 1:8-9a** But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; 9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient,

C. Good to the Holy Ghost

Act 15:13-21 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me (*historians tell us that James was the Pastor of the early church in Jerusalem –*

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this was James the half-brother of Jesus; nicknamed "old camel knees" as his knees were heavily calloused from praying constantly an average of 8 hrs./day): 14 Simeon (*Simon Peter*) hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. (*James is quoting from Amos 9:11-12*) 19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

† **The restrictions placed upon the early church were given to deal with idolatry...**

- **Stay away from idols (things that have a higher priority in your life than Jesus)**
- **Stay away from fornication (sexual uncleanness – always associated in the Bible with idolatry): 1Th 4:3-4** For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: 4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;
- **Stay away from things strangled and blood: These both deal with blood...meat strangled has not been bled-out and still have the blood in the meat, which is the same as blood on its own.**
- **Lev 17:14** For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eats it shall be cut off.
- **Again...these constraints were all tied back to idolatry.**

D. Sending Word

Act 15:22-29 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: 24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: 25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have

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hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

† **They wrote a letter that said what James and the Holy Ghost had concluded...**

† **Notice, James starts out with, “...we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying...”**

† **Adding a “works” requirement to our salvation is actually “subverting the soul” – we should neither add to or take away from the Word of God!**

† **This goes for anyone...even an Angel: Gal 1:6-9** I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

E. Rejoice!

Act 15:30-33 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. 32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. 33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

† **They rejoiced because they did not have to carry the heavy yoke of legalism.**

† **They rejoiced because they were free to love Jesus without constraints – they were free to simply abide in His love and walk in His grace.**

III. Our Application

† **Legalism comes from pride → Eph 2:9 We’re not saved by works so that we can’t boast!**

† **Grace came by Jesus Christ – whether our pride is in regard to the “Law” or our own personal opinions or expectations...they all bring a heavy yoke that we can’t bear!**

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† **The heavy yoke can be placed upon others...but it can sometimes be placed on ourselves, as well.**

- **If we dwell on our sin we often become incapacitated – we think we're not worthy, not good enough and that God can never forgive us!**
- **The opposite is true, however, and if we'll simply repent and turn to Jesus – confessing our sins and asking Him to empty us of us and fill us with Him: HE WILL!**

† **One of the Main principles to keep from falling into the trap of pride and legalism is to simply follow Phil 2:3 "...take NO THOUGHT for ourselves!"**

† **Remember, God's grace is why we have Paul wrote: 1Co 10:23** All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

† **Also remember, those who are legalistic are the more immature believer...**

† **Rom 14:1-2** Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. 2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

† **Rom 14:23** And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

† **Rom 15:1-2** We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

IV. Conclusion

† **Rom 16:17-18** Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

† **Eph 2:8-9** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.