



Portion:

Title:

SCRIPTURES

- Acts 15
- Matthew 19:10-26

A SCHISM IN THE MAKING

- Salvation by the Flesh?
- The First Church Split

Try this on for size! Your whole life you've been told that in order to have any chance of eternal life, you have to obey very specific rules and regulations, and not just obey, but to do so with bulls-eye exactitude. And, doing your very best will only prove that you will never be good enough to accomplish this daunting task.

Now... introducing the Gospel of Jesus Christ! In the presentation of Y'shua to the masses, one could come to the saving grace of Yahweh by simply believing in this Rabbi, Y'shua. Believe He willingly died on a cross after being beaten, mocked, spat upon, and having a crown of thorns placed on His head. Believe that after all that, He was buried in a cave with a massive two-ton stone placed to seal the entrance. Why? There is no way for an ordinary person to pass in or out without some plan to move a huge rock, unless of course you have access to an angel whom can roll away the stone. And, to add a few additional incredible details to the

story, this dead Rabbi resurrected from the dead, walked out of the grave and mingled with His disciples and many others for forty days, and then He floated away into the clouds, while His disciples simply stared in amazement!

In Acts 15, certain men were not buying into this simplistic message of Christ crucified! They perverted the message of salvation by adding some dependency on a system of religious acts necessary to perform in conjunction with the work of Christ, in order to be born-again. It's likely they felt as if they got ripped off and had to previously work for something that now anyone could freely receive. They were not having it! And, they were making it known in no uncertain terms.

These, not so small dissensions, became a schism in the making. They marked the beginning of doctrinal differences that morphed themselves into all sorts of views throughout human history. These mutations have caused schisms, time and time again. Instead, why not just work harder at learning, believing, and trusting the simplistic message of the Gospel of Salvation, rather than, add to it or adjust it to our man-contorted ways, just because it sounds too good-to-be true?

PROPHETIC SEED:

“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “**Unless you are circumcised** according to the custom of Moses, **you cannot be saved.**”” Acts 15:1 NKJV

PROPHETIC FRUIT:

“Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had **no small dissension** and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should **go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.**” Acts 15:2 NKJV

Let's Set the Scene: Portion in a blurb

Introduction

Last week in [Christian Idolatry](#) Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem. It was prophesied that they would be in ministry together and sent out on a mission. So, they headed out west to the coast and they sailed to Cyprus to minister in Salamis on the eastern shore and then they headed over to Paphos on the western shore. In Paphos, they encountered a Jewish sorcerer who had become an advisor to the local proconsul. He did whatever he could to run interference between the missionaries and the proconsul, so he would not get converted. However, Paul spoke

judgment over the sorcerer, pronounced he would become blind. It happened just as he declared and that is all the proconsul had to see; he believed in that moment!

Paul and his group left Paphos, and sailed north to Perga in Pamphylia (the southern coast of modern-day Turkey). From Perga they moved inland, further north to Antioch in Pisidia (in Galatia, still modern-day Turkey). Paul taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath and he gave a little turbocharged history lesson starting with Israel in Egypt. He mentioned the judges, kings Saul and David, and then how John the Baptist pointed to the Christ. He spoke of how many Jews missed Him and then had him executed and how Christ raised from the grave to fulfill God's promises. You see, David died and stayed dead, but Y'shua got right up out of the grave and never rotted in the earth. He went on to teach that Y'shua came with the message of forgiveness, and not just what it means, but how it actually works. Paul warned them that they don't want to be in the group that misses Him.

The following week the whole city (Antioch in Pisidia) came out to hear him and the controversy really heated up; the Gentiles were overjoyed that they had the same path to salvation, but the jealous Jews attempted to deny, refute, and counter every word Paul spoke, to the point of blasphemy. Paul and Barnabas dropped the hammer on these obstinate Jews, but they still stirred up trouble

against those who believed. Persecution was the name of the game and they chased Paul and Barnabas from the region. Then, exactly the way Y'shua instructed His disciples to do, they shook the dust off their feet and moved on.

In the next city, Iconium, they went right back to the synagogue. The same thing happened; some believed and the ones who didn't became aggressive—this time they wanted to kill Barnabas and Paul. Once they realized their intention, they fled the city for their next stop on their mission.

Lystra was the next destination. This is where Paul encountered a crippled man from birth and healed him. The pagans witnessed the miracle and began to worship Barnabas, who they called Zeus (the supreme god), and Paul who they saw as Hermes (because in Greek mythology Hermes, the son of Zeus, was the messenger of the gods). Barnabas and Paul ran into the crowd to stop the madness: *"We are literally here to preach against this very thing. We want you to reject useless idols and accept the true and living God. He is the creator of all things and your gods are fake and can do nothing."* Nevertheless, it was impossible to control them. Pagans do what pagans do; they sacrifice to anything they think is a god!

Then Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium showed up in Lystra to stir up trouble. They finally got what they wanted as they instigated the people to stone Paul until they believed he is dead.

They dragged him outside the city and dumped him off. But Paul got up, dusted himself off and went back into the city overnight. The next day he left Lystra with Barnabas and headed to Derbe.

He preached the gospel in Derbe and made many more disciples. Then, he went back through each city in which he was recently persecuted, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. His experience allowed him to teach one of the most important lessons for every believer; *“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”* Finally, Paul set up a leadership structure in each local church and then they headed back to Antioch (in Syria) to report all that happened among the Gentiles.

This week the church faces its first internal crises. There are some Jewish believers who come from the religious class that are saying that Gentiles coming to the faith must be circumcised and, in fact, must adhere to the entirety of the law of Moses to be saved. Paul and Barnabas vehemently oppose this false doctrine. Let's be clear about what's wrong with the doctrine being espoused; there are requirements being added to what it takes to be born-again. The problem is not circumcision or the law, only that they are being required for salvation. And quite frankly, anything other than faith being required would represent the same problem. And although Paul has not yet written what Christians understand today, about what is necessary to be saved, he already knows it! *“For by grace*

you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem to address this serious matter and a council is convened, what becomes known as the Jerusalem Council. A dispute ensues and Peter is the first to speak. He reminds everyone of his testimony with the Gentiles and how they discovered that God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to salvation; everyone is saved by faith alone. And he also reminds them that none of their relatives could ever get saved by the law, so how could that be a requirement for the Gentiles coming to the faith.

Barnabas and Paul weigh in and report the testimonies from their recent mission trip and all the Gentiles who came to Y’shua by faith alone! Then James stands up to speak. He’s the leader in Jerusalem and first he affirms Peter. Then he assures that how the Gentiles coming to faith is all according to prophecy and he makes a ruling. Here are the three categories of laws Gentiles should adhere to when they come to the faith. They should abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, and unclean eating practices. Yes, they should obey God’s laws, but their ability to do so has nothing to do with salvation. Then he reminds them that, like all of us raised as Jews, we learned the Torah over our whole lifetime in the synagogues every Sabbath, and so will these new Gentile converts.

It's perfectly fine that they start with these areas of law and learn more in time.

After the ruling, Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas are sent to Antioch to deliver a letter with what was officially decided. The people are understandably encouraged. Judas and Silas also had a lot to say and prophesied over the people, which was also very encouraging.

Judas heads back to Jerusalem, but Silas, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to minister. Paul then tells Barnabas that he wants to go on a second missionary journey to retrace the steps of their recent mission trip to check on the people in each city.

Barnabas wants to bring John Mark, but Paul does not agree, likely because John Mark could not be trusted to stick with the work required, as he previously bolted on them in Pamphylia, before they went to Antioch in Pisidia. He missed all the persecution and is thus untested. Those sentiments don't sit well with Barnabas (the son of encouragement) and the disagreement gets heated. The solution is to split up: Barnabas takes John Mark to Cyprus; and Paul takes Silas through Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches.

Acts 15

Conflict Over the Requirements for Redemption

1. What is the conflict?

- (a) Men from Judea were teaching that circumcision, as per the law, was a requirement for salvation.
- (b) Paul and Barnabas were vehemently opposed and decided to go to Jerusalem to get a ruling on the subject from the leaders.
- (c) They testified about the conversions of the Gentiles all along their journey to Jerusalem.
- (d) In Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the leaders and they told stories of the Gentiles coming to the faith.
- (e) But even in the church that brand of religious elitism, which poisoned first-century Judaism, was manifesting in some Pharisees who believed in Y'shua.
- (f) They claimed... "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

The Jerusalem Council

- 2. A committee comes together to make a ruling.
 - (a) There is a major dispute over this topic and Peter gets up and gives his testimony about how God initially used him to break the barrier and bring Christ to the Gentiles.
 - (b) He reminds them how God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to salvation; everyone is saved by faith.

- (c) He goes on to ask, “Why would you test God and make requirements of the Gentiles for salvation that no one in the past amongst the Israelites could live up to?”
 - (d) “We have come to discover that we are all saved the same way by grace through faith.”
3. Then Barnabas and Paul weigh in and report the testimonies they’ve seen among the Gentiles.
 4. And after that, James (the brother of Y’shua, leader in Jerusalem, author of James) speaks.
 - (a) Simon was the first to minister to the Gentiles and proved God was also calling them by His name.
 - (b) It was all according to prophecy; even all the Gentiles will be called by His name; it was His plan from eternity past.
 5. So here is the ruling:
 6. Don’t trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God (through Christ).
 7. Here are the three categories of laws they should adhere to when they come to the faith, plus one reminder. They should abstain from:
 - (a) Idolatry
 - (b) Sexual Immorality
 - (c) Unclean eating practices.

- (d) Reminder: Like all of us raised as Jews, we learned the Torah over our whole lifetime in the synagogues every Sabbath, and so will these new Gentile converts.

The Jerusalem Decree in Writing

- 8. The leadership in Jerusalem chose a few of their own men (Judas and Silas) and sent them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, with a letter that reported this determination:
 - (a) We know that some of those in the faith have caused some confusion with their demands of the Gentiles that “They must be circumcised and keep the law as part of the requirements for redemption.”
 - (b) We have never made any such a claim.
 - (c) So, we thought it would be a good idea to send a letter to you via the hands of our beloved brothers Barnabas, Paul, Judas, and Silas so you would have the official word.
 - (d) The Holy Spirit has confirmed that there are groups of laws that you must start with in your new faith, and none of them are required for you salvation.
 - (e) Abstain from idolatry, unclean foods, and sexual immorality. Begin with these in your new faith and you will do well.

The Ruling is Delivered and the Ministry Continues in Syria

- 9. The messengers (Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas) arrive in Antioch (in Syria), call for a meeting, and deliver the letter.

- (a) The people are understandably encouraged.
- (b) Judas and Silas also had a lot to say and prophesied over the people.
- (c) Their words strengthened the people and motivated them to be active in their faith.
- (d) After a while in Antioch, they were sent back to Jerusalem to connect with and make a report to leaders.
- (e) It seems of those named, only Judas goes back to Jerusalem, as Silas, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to minister.

Paul and Barnabas Part Ways over John Mark

10. After some time in Antioch, Paul tells Barnabas that he wants to retrace the steps of their recent mission trip to check on the people in each city.

- (a) Barnabas wants to bring John Mark, but Paul does not agree, citing that John Mark could not be trusted to stick with the work.
- (b) He bolted on them in Pamphylia before they went to Antioch in Pisidia .

1) *“Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; **and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.**” Acts 13:13*

- (c) Paul remembers that John Mark skipped out on the ministry and missed all the persecution. He is untested and can't be trusted.
- (d) Those sentiments don't sit well with Barnabas (the son of encouragement) and the disagreement gets heated.
- (e) We witness how a clash in personalities can effect the work of ministry.
- (f) The solution is to split up: Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus; Paul takes Silas through Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches.

CONTROVERSY

1. Salvation by the Flesh?

A. Presenting the Problem

(1) Conflict Over the Requirements for Redemption (**Acts 15:1-5**)

(a) Adding Something to Salvation

1. "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, **"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."**

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had **no small dissension and dispute** with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them

should **go up to Jerusalem**, to the apostles and elders, **about this question**. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. **And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them**. But **some of the sect of the Pharisees** who believed rose up, saying, **“It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”**” Acts 15:1-5 NKJV

2. What is the conflict?

- a) Men from Judea were teaching that circumcision, as per the law, was a requirement for salvation.
- b) Paul and Barnabas were vehemently opposed and decided to go to Jerusalem to get a ruling on the subject from the leaders.
- c) They testified about the conversions of the Gentiles all along their journey to Jerusalem.
- d) In Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the leaders and they told stories of the Gentiles coming to the faith.

- e) But even in the church that brand of religious elitism, which poisoned first-century Judaism, was manifesting in some Pharisees who believed in Y'shua.
- f) They claimed... "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

(2) Unless circumcised, you cannot be whole?

- (a) But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "**Unless you are circumcised** according to the custom of Moses, **you cannot be saved.**"

1. In the first verse of Acts chapter 15, we find ourselves witnessing future schisms in their infancy, ones that in time continue to develop into different shapes and forms, that even today gets the best of Christendom.

- a) The word "**saved**" in the first verse can also be translated to be "**whole**"
- b) In essence, the men who came down from Judea were telling others that they were incomplete because they were not circumcised.
- c) In other words, "**get your circumcision**" and you will then become "**whole.**"

- d) We know this dogmatic view to be inaccurate because today we have the entire counsel of God in canonized form. From reading the entirety of His word we know that circumcision is not a salvation issue.
- e) At the onset of the early Church those who held to the customs in Jewish tradition were not aware of this and were very zealous about such traditions.
- f) Even though we have the totality of God's word in our hands, we still find a way to twist what God said through His Apostles and is saying to us today through His Holy Spirit. Leave it to mankind to want to reinvent the wheel, so to speak.

(3) Popular Uprising

- (a) 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.
 - 1. The aforementioned topic of circumcision brought about a heated debate.
 - a) The word **"dissension"** in the greek is the word "stasis."

- b) From the base of G2476; a standing (properly the act), that is, (by analogy) position (existence); by implication ***a popular uprising***; figuratively controversy: - ***dissension, insurrection, standing, uproar.***
- 2. It would be less than legitimate for us to downplay the harshness of emotions, actions, and speech that this issue brought into the lives of the early believers.
 - a) However confined these arguments might have been, without a shadow of doubt, those who were involved leaked this issue to others not so close to the subject matter being disputed.
- 3. This happens in our Church environment today!
 - a) If an issue of doctrinal differences arises within the leadership of a Church, it is almost guaranteed that the discussion will spill out onto the believing community.
 - b) It is also a guarantee that those who hear about it will pick their preferred side and defend that position “tooth and nail.”
 - c) These issues are mostly centered on issues of carnality. This is not always the case but is most often.

- d) What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” 1 Cor 1:12
- 1) Very easily people will gravitate toward those to whom they look up to, and very often will look up to them to a fault.
 - 2) Everyone of us needs to practice only looking up to Y’shua and His teachings.
 - 3) It is paramount that a believer practices understanding Y’shua’s teachings in the totality of Scripture and not fragmented as if to fit matters of personal interest.
 - 4) Y’shua’s counsel is fitting for all believers, of all times and all places.

B. Convene a Council (Division is a killjoy!)

(1) The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-21)

(a) They came together to consider the controversy...

1. “Now the apostles and elders **came together to consider this matter**. And when there had been **much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them:** “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that **by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe**. So God,

who knows the heart, acknowledged them by **giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.** Now therefore, **why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.** Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, **“Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things.’ “Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not**

trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”” Acts 15:6-21 NKJV

2. A committee comes together to make a ruling.
 - a) There is a major dispute over this topic and Peter gets up and gives his testimony about how God initially used him to break the barrier and bring Christ to the Gentiles.
 - b) He reminds them how God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to salvation; everyone is saved by faith.
 - c) He goes on to ask, “Why would you test God and make requirements of the Gentiles for salvation that no one in the past amongst the Israelites could live up to?”
 - d) “We have come to discover that we are all saved the same way by grace through faith.”
3. Then Barnabas and Paul weigh in and report the testimonies they’ve seen among the Gentiles.

4. And after that, James (the brother of Y'shua, leader in Jerusalem, author of James) speaks.

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(b) It was all according to prophecy; even all the Gentiles will be called by His name; it was His plan from eternity past.

5. So here is the ruling:

a) Don't trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God (through Christ).

6. Here are the three categories of laws they should adhere to when they come to the faith, plus one reminder. They should abstain from:

a) Idolatry

b) Sexual Immorality

c) Unclean eating practices.

d) Reminder: Like all of us raised as Jews, we learned the Torah over our whole lifetime in the synagogues every Sabbath, and so will these new Gentile converts.

(2) Yoke on the Neck vs. Grace of the Lord

(a) Testing God!

1. “Now therefore, **why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples** which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But **we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.**” Acts

15:10-11 NKJV

- a) The person walking in the Spirit of God and doing His work, is helping people come to the recognition of their need of Savior.
- b) The gospel of salvation, in its most simplistic form, is exactly that, it is to lead those who are walking spiritually dead to come the knowledge of eternal life.
- c) We need not add or take anything away from this recipe. However you deliver the message, make sure you are not trying to get an emotional decision from the hearer.
- d) The believers of “the party of the Pharisees” rose up as a killjoy.
 - 1) Our Bibles would read so much better if they (the Pharisees) would have been ecstatic when they heard of these gentile converts.

- (3) For those in the leadership of congregants, there is nothing more electrifying than seeing the Holy Spirit impact the lives of those to whom they minister, and their names being sealed in the Lambs Book of Life.
- (a) These Pharisees were much more electrified by seeing people stick to a “legalistic” dead end form of religion. No one has ever been saved by the Law. Anyone who has ever been saved, has only been saved by God’s grace, period!
 - (b) Peter, stands up in the meeting and says “ “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.
- 1. By most scholarly accounts, when Peter mentions “***the early days***”, they assert it had been roughly thirteen to fourteen years since Peter had his vision in Acts 10.
 - a) Immediately after He had the vision the Centurion came to believe in Y’shua receiving salvation as a gentile.
 - 2. It is important to note that Peter realized one of the most important lessons all believers should learn.

That is **“he made no distinction between us and them.”**

- a) God is no respecter of man! He does not grade or save on the curve. He does not save because of socio-economic status, race, religion, or gender. Hence the reason Peter reminds the Pharisees that God made no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles.
 - b) Paul reminds us– There is ***neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female***, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:28 ESV
 - c) Here ***there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*** Col 3:11 ESV
- (4) One is saved ONLY by God’s grace!
- (a) But ***we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.***
 - 1. Peter is remembered mostly by his bone-headed statements. However, the statement he makes during the debate taking place in the Jerusalem council will resonate into eternity.

- a) Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians drives this point further when he wrote– “For ***by grace you have been saved through faith***, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.”.
- b) It is “BY GRACE ALONE, THROUGH FAITH ALONE, IN CHRIST ALONE” that a sinner is granted salvation!
 - 1) It seems almost silly to have to repeat this so often to the ears of those who have heard it a million times. However, C.S. Lewis in his book *Screwtape Letters* writes about the believers who can’t bear the fact that salvation can be so simple. The devil (Wormwood) reminds his nephew (Screwtape) that he has to keep the Christian from believing he is saved by grace alone, faith alone and Christ alone. Instead, Wormwood exhorts Screwtape to trip up the believer by making him believe he needs to add works into his life in order to earn salvation.
 - 2) Therefore be it known to you, men, brothers, that through this One the forgiveness of sins is announced to you. And by Him all who believe

are justified from all things, from which ***you could not be justified by the Law of Moses***. Acts 13:38-39 ESV

- 3) The Law of Moses has its value insofar as it should be used by believers to recognize the error of their ways in whatever area it reveals.
- 4) It is not designed to drive fear, neither is it there to make a believer feel “less than”, or lastly, to think that by works of the law they’ll be assured of salvation.
- 5) Paul states in Romans— ***because by the works of the Law none of all flesh will be justified*** in His sight; for through the Law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20
- 6) Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith ***without the works of the Law***. Romans 3:20; 28
- 7) Why is it so hard to figure out what Paul said and what he didn’t say?
- 8) He didn’t say to throw the “baby out with the bathwater.” That is certain! His intention was never to get rid of the law but instead, his intention was to teach his fellow Jew that they

were never going to achieve salvation by the law.

(5) What did Paul mean by “works of the law”

(a) If we read Matthew 19, we can get a perspective into what Paul had realized in his own time with the Lord.

1. And behold, one came and said to Him, Good Master, ***what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*** And He said to him, Why do you call Me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. ***But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.*** He said to Him, Which? Jesus said, You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. ***The young man said to Him, I have kept all these things from my youth up; what do I lack yet?*** Jesus said to him, If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven. And come, follow Me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, Truly I say to you that a rich man will with great difficulty

enter into the kingdom of Heaven. And again I say to you, ***It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*** When His disciples heard, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, ***Who then can be saved? But Jesus looked on them and said to them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*** Matthew 19:10-26 ESV

- a) From Jesus' words we can ascertain.
 - 1) Salvation is not of men.
 - 2) Salvation is not an exchange for human performance.
 - 3) Salvation flows from God to men through a non expectant heart.
- (b) Since God's word never changes. We can surmise that salvation today is the same as it was when Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler. Jesus did not tell him to "not" keep the commandments. However, he did implicitly tell him to not rely on the commandments for salvation.
 - 1. Salvation cannot be purchased by humanistic efforts. If that were to be the case. The Bible would be the biggest blunder of all ages when in Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul wrote— ***For by grace you are saved through***

faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, ***not of works***, lest anyone should boast.

2. Why is this so hard to figure out? Is it not simple enough to understand that salvation has been freely given? That being the case, why do so many denominations preach a salvation by works message? The answer is actually a sad one. They have been duped by the enemy and are leading their disciples straight to hell!
3. Trying to bribe a judge on earth will only get you a worse sentence, of course, that is if the judge is not a crook. How much more of a punishment would we receive if we try to bribe Yahweh with our works which the bible defines as *“filthy rags”*.

C. Put it in Writing!

(1) The Jerusalem Decree in Writing (Acts 15:22-29)

(a) So there is no confusion now or in the future...

1. “Then **it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church**, to send chosen men of their own company **to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas**, namely, **Judas** who was also named Barsabas, and **Silas**, leading men among the brethren. They **wrote this letter** by them: The apostles, the elders, and the

brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. **Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law” —to whom we gave no such commandment—** it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For **it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these** necessary things: **that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.** If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” Acts 15:22-29 NKJV

2. The leadership in Jerusalem chose a few of their own men and sent them back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, with a letter that reported this determination:

- a) We know that some of those in the faith have caused some confusion with their demands of the Gentiles that “They must be circumcised and keep the law as part of the requirements for redemption.”
- b) We have never made any such a claim.
- c) So, we thought it would be a good idea to send a letter to you via the hands of our beloved brothers Barnabas, Paul, Judas, and Silas so you would have the official word.
- d) The Holy Spirit has confirmed that there are groups of laws that you must start with in your new faith, and none of them are required for you salvation.
- e) Abstain from idolatry, unclean foods, and sexual immorality. Begin with these in your new faith and you will do well.

D. Delivered

(1) The Ruling is Delivered and the Ministry Continues in Syria (**Acts 15:30-35**)

(a) This is good news...

1. “So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, **they delivered the letter.** When they had read it, **they**

rejoiced over its encouragement. Now **Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets** also, **exhorted** and **strengthened** the brethren with many words. And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, **it seemed good to Silas to remain there.** **Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch,** teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” Acts 15:30-35 NKJV

2. The messengers (Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas) arrive in Antioch (in Syria), call for a meeting, and deliver the letter.
 - a) The people are understandably encouraged.
 - b) Judas and Silas also had a lot to say and prophesied over the people.
 - c) Their words strengthened the people and motivated them to be active in their faith.
 - d) After a while in Antioch, they were sent back to Jerusalem to connect with and make a report to leaders.
 - e) It seems of those named, only Judas goes back to Jerusalem, as Silas, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to minister.

2. The First Church Split

A. Not Over Doctrine but Trust!

(1) Paul and Barnabas Part Ways over John Mark (Acts 15:36-41)

(a) Let's go back and check on the people...

1. "Then after some days **Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."** Now **Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.** But **Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia,** and had not gone with them to the work. Then **the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.** And so **Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus;** but **Paul chose Silas and departed,** being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And **he went through Syria and Cilicia,** strengthening the churches." Acts 15:36-41 NKJV
2. After some time in Antioch, Paul tells Barnabas that he wants to retrace the steps of their recent mission trip to check on the people in each city.

- a) Barnabas wants to bring John Mark, but Paul does not agree, citing that John Mark could not be trusted to stick with the work.
- b) He bolted on them in Pamphylia before they went to Antioch in Pisidia .
 - 1) *“Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; **and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.**” Acts 13:13*
- c) Paul remembers that John Mark skipped out on the ministry and missed all the persecution. He is untested and can't be trusted.
- d) Those sentiments don't sit well with Barnabas (the son of encouragement) and the disagreement gets heated.
- e) We witness how a clash in personalities can effect the work of ministry.
- f) The solution is to split up: Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus; Paul takes Silas through Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches.

(2) More Commentary

- (a) Paul did not take lightly to the fact that Mark had left him with Barnabas when they faced persecution. Paul

saw this as a weakness in Mark's character and was not about to have him traveling in his next missionary journey.

1. Barnabas did not agree with Paul's decision and decided that splitting up was best.
 - a) We can count on this type of difference to cause divisions in the Body of Christ today.
 - 1) It is not uncommon for ***believers to take sides*** and to carry disputes to a place of no imminent solution. At least for the foreseeable future.
 - 2) How should Paul have handled this differently?
 - 3) It seems rather interesting that the bible accounts for this issue and I believe it is one of the most beautiful traits of biblical historicity. ***The Bible does not shy away from retelling stories exactly as occurred*** because Yahweh knows humans ***will make the same mistakes again unless they have a reason not to.*** What better reason is there than reading it in God's book for His Children, so that they know how to resolve conflict?

- 4) What has your experience been in this area?
Have you seen your Church leadership properly resolve conflict?
- 5) Don't you find it odd using the word "conflict" in the same sentence using the word "Church"?
I do!

(3) Conclusion

- (a) In today's scripture reading we have seen a myriad of circumstances played out, not exactly the way we would hope they'd play out in a ministry setting.
 1. But where did we get the notion that ministry settings are always free of conflict, that everyone is just floating around filled with joy devoid of negative emotions? This view is caricature at best!
 2. What we should focus on as a take-away from Acts 15 "Let's learn to fight nice." Let's be the Church that handles conflict well, regardless of the issue.
 3. Let us be the Church that is so in love with God and His people, that we can discuss doctrinal differences or mishaps without hurting feelings, and if we hurt someone's feelings, that we are willing to be the mature Christians we are called to be and ask for forgiveness wherever we have acted incorrectly

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

- 1. Identity what caused the controversy in Acts 15:1-5.**
 - A. What was Paul's immediate reaction?
 - B. What did he do about it?
- 2. Once they came together in Jerusalem, who rose up to speak first in Acts 15:6-21?**
 - A. What did he say?
 - B. Who spoke next and what did he add?
 - C. Who seemed to have the final word and what was the ruling?
 - D. Why do you think he ended his ruling with what he specifically reminded them of in verse 21?
- 3. Once the ruling was made, what wise thing did they do in Acts 15:22-29?**
 - A. Who was given the responsibility to share the outcome and where did they begin?
 - B. How do we know that the ruling came from God and not man?
 - C. How was it received in Acts 15:30-35?
- 4. Why do you think Paul did not want to travel with John in Acts 15:36-41? (Hint: read Acts 13)**
 - A. How was the controversy settled?
- 5. Bonus:**

- A. Review the ruling that was made in Jerusalem and write a short essay summarizing the outcome and with this question in mind. "Were there three rules to follow or three categories of rules?"