

Salvation by Grace through Faith | Acts 15 1-11 | 3/13/16

- Introduction
 - Today we now that our salvation is only possible by the grace of God and our faith in Jesus Christ.
 - This was the purpose for Jesus going to the cross to die as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind.
 - This salvation by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ is the root of the Gospel, it is the foundation of the Scriptures.
 - It is certainly made very clear all throughout the New Testament.
 - **However, during this transition time in the first 20 or so years after the ascension of Christ we have our first church council that is meeting to discuss the greatest doctrinal question of all**
 - **“How does one receive salvation?”**
 - There was a group of believing Jews who are trying to introduce additional requirements for Salvation, to being a Christian.
 - Mainly they wanted for any Gentile convert to also have to become a Jew and to adhere to the strict laws (that Jesus had already set aside) for one to become a Christian.
 - This was contrary to the plan teaching of Jesus Christ.
 - So today we are going to take a look as these events unfolded in Antioch and Jerusalem and also take a deep look into what salvation by grace through faith looks like.
- Opposing views of the requirements for salvation. | Acts 15:1-5
 - **Read Acts 15:1-5**
 - At the church in Antioch Paul and Barnabas had been obeying their Godly calling to preach and teach the Gospel.
 - Most of the problems they ran into usually ended up being people who were opposed to the Gospel, those who refused to believe.
 - However, we know see the entrance of some believing Christians from Jerusalem who came down to Antioch and have made a very disturbing proclamation.
 - In verse 1 we see that that the Christians from Judea were proclaiming that one must be circumcised in order to become a Christian.
 - The problem here was not that circumcision was wrong, because obviously it isn't, but that it was a requirement for one to receive salvation.
 - This was in direct contradiction to teachings of Jesus Christ which was evident to both Paul and Barnabas.
 - They knew that this was not only wrong to say this but it was very dangerous.
 - One does not “add to” the God's requirements for salvation.
 - The debate of a serious matter – Verse 2
 - We can see that Paul and other Christians had gotten into a very serious argument and debate over this.
 - NKJV and ESV use “dissension” which definition means disagreement or quarreling.
 - On one had we think oh this is a bad example for Christians because we have arguing among brothers.
 - Is not the church supposed to show love unto one another?
 - Isn't showing brotherly love the mark of a true Christian?
 - **However, there are times where serious argument and debate is divinely appointed by God even within the church and this was one of them.**

- To argue over the color of the carpet is not pleasing to the Lord, but when critical issues of doctrine especially the doctrine of salvation we are not to take that lightly.
 - We must not and cannot sit down when foundational issues of the Bible are being twisted.
- **What are a few examples where a “debate of a serious matter” within the church is justified?**
- The concerns by the church and Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas was so great that they felt it necessary to go to Jerusalem to the “mother church” to meet with the other church leaders to discuss this.
 - If these men that came down were twisting and adding to the teachings of Jesus, then there could be the same concern with others in Jerusalem.
 - So Paul and Barnabas set of to addresses the matter.
- The Jerusalem Council
 - When we talk about a church council it is simply a meeting of church leaders.
 - Historically this consisted of the gathering of bishops (preachers) from various churches.
 - In the first few centuries there were many important councils that were spirit-led that have set some very foundational beliefs on the meaning of Scripture and also the Scripture itself.
 - The Council of Nicaea – 323 A.D.
 - The emperor Constantine called a meeting of the bishops of all the various surrounding churches to come together to discuss church doctrine.
 - Constantine was receiving requests to be people banished from the church because of their doctrine.
 - This was troubling because Constantine desired a unified Christianity.
 - **The item of discussion for this council was to discuss the relationship between, Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit what we know as the trinity.**
 - There was a man by the name of Arius who introduced heretical teachings (know as Arianism) that taught that Jesus was a creation and a lesser being than God.
 - The Holy Spirit prevailed however and the council renounced the teachings of Arius and full accepted the concept of the Trinity.
 - “True God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.”.
 - Other councils –
 - Constantinople – 381 – Full humanity of Jesus
 - Ephesus – 431 – Union of divine and human natures
 - Chalcedon – 451 – Distinctiveness and coexistence of the divine and human natures.
 - The council of Jerusalem discussed the most critical of all the doctrinal issues.
 - While what was discussed at those later councils was important, they are shadowed by the one in Jerusalem because it addressed the foundational question of
 - **What are the requirements for one to receive salvation?**
 - **How do we interpret the teachings of Jesus Christ?**
 - The Christian Pharisees desired to introduce legalism into Christianity.
 - There were Pharisees who were Christians as was the case with Paul.
 - But these Pharisees were trying to force their legalistic views upon the requirement for Salvation.
 - They said that it was NECESSARY for one to not only be circumcised but to also keep the law of Moses to become a Christian.

- Now again these were Pharisees who were converted so they were still stuck on their rituals, but their statements showed that they did still not fully understand the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- **They were trying to make Christianity a salvation that was obtained by works and not by faith.**
- They did not understand that the promised inheritance spoken to Moses was righteousness that came by faith and not the law.
 - Romans 4:13
 - “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”
- They did not understand the separating of the veil
 - As Jesus gave up His spirit upon the cross the veil in the temple was torn.
 - Luke 23:45b
 - “...The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle.”
 - This removed the separation that had existed between God and the rest of mankind and with it the law that was a temporary guide.
 - Ephesians 2:14-16
 - “For He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In His flesh, He made of no affect the law consisting of command and expressed in regulations, so that He might create in Himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. He did this so that He might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross and put the hostility to death by it.”
 - Galatians 3:23-26
 - “Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. **The law, then, was our guardian until Christ**, so that we could **be justified by faith**. But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for **you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus**.”
 - The Gospel of Luke, and Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and the Galatians and already been written.
 - Galatians A.D. 53-54
 - Ephesians A.D. 62-63
 - Luke A.D. 59-61
 - Acts A.D. 63-64
- Separation of the Jewish practices for Christianity
 - By A.D. 64 a hard line was made between Judaism and Christianity.
 - The Christians had fully separated themselves from the dietary law restrictions and were living a non-Jewish cultural life.
 - This also included switching to observing the Sabbath on Sunday (the day of the resurrection) instead of Saturday.
 - In fact, the Jews of that time had added an item to their prayer which said
 - “oh how we are glad that we are not like these Nazarenes!”
 - **Are their people or church’s today that impose additional “requirements” to becoming a Christian? What are some examples?**
- Paul’s defense for salvation by God’s grace through faith. | Acts 15:6-11

- Paul after having listened to them for some time debating and arguing he stand up and gives one of the greatest defenses in all of Scripture that salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Read Acts 15:6-11**
- Key points of salvation by grace through faith.
 - One of the simplest and clearest passages of Scriptures for this was in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.
 - Ephesians 2:8
 - “For you are saved by grace through faith and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift.”
 - This short verse sums up the key points to salvation.
 - God’s grace
 - What does it mean?
 - There is nothing WE can do on OUR OWN to be saved.
 - Your good works cannot save you.
 - You cannot be saved by simply being a “good person”
 - Only by the grace of God is Salvation even possible.
 - Sin brought us death, but grace gave us everlasting life.
 - Romans 5:21
 - “so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life.”
 - Salvation is a gift from God.
 - The main issues introduced by the Pharisee’s was that works were required for salvation.
 - Paul addresses this quite clearly in Romans.
 - Romans 4:1-4
 - “What then can we say that Abraham, our physical ancestor, has found? If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to brag about—but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. Now to the one who works, pay is not considered as a gift, but as something owed. But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who declares the ungodly to be righteous, his faith is credited for righteousness.”
 - God’s grace poured upon us.
 - There is perhaps no greater passage of Scripture to show us the pouring out of Gods’ grace than John 3:16
 - John 3:16 (NKJV)
 - “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
 - His grace was shown in His sacrifice for us.
 - Romans 5:6-8
 - “For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone

might even dare to die. But God proves His own love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!"

- Through Faith (Belief)
 - **So why is it faith and not works for salvation?**
 - If it is by faith, then it can only be according to grace of God that we can all be saved.
 - **Romans 4:16**
 - “This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants— not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of Abraham’s faith...”
 - The requirement of faith/belief points towards God’s grace.
 - **Why is Romans 4:16 so hard for people to comprehend? That “works” are not required?**
 - **Paul speaks of hearing and believing in Acts 15:7, but what does it mean?**
 - When we speak of faith and belief in the view of salvation we are looking at the same meaning.
 - If examine the Greek word for “believe” from John 3:16 we find the true meaning.
 - Greek word for believe = pisteuo (pist-ev-o) < -Lemma (dictionary word)
 - Full Greek definition:
 - Believe, trust, put faith in (confidence)
 - Believe to the extent of complete trust.
 - What true faith or belief is not
 - It is not intellectual knowledge alone. One cannot just intellectually be aware of Jesus to have saving faith.
 - As the demons even have this:
 - James 2:19
 - It is not just an emotional experience
 - While emotions can certainly be involved we need to be sure that we are not seeking solely an “emotional experience” as assurance of our salvation.”
 - Faith for salvation requires belief
 - This is also intellectual knowledge of Jesus Christ which is important but by itself will not save you.
 - We intellectually believe it to be true that Jesus is the Son of God, He died as a sacrifice for our sins, was buried and resurrected.
 - How do we gain this knowledge?
 - Romans 10:17
 - “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.”
 - **Relate with Acts 15:7**
 - This message cultivates true saving faith in the believer.
 - This belief MUST come from the heart.
 - Paul said in verse 8 that “God who knows the heart testified to them by giving the Holy Spirit”.
 - God sees into our hearts and knows if we truly believe.
 - Romans 10:9

- “If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and **believe in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”
 - Our heart is where we will find God.
 - Jeremiah 29:13
 - “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”
 - **This is why intellectual knowledge alone is not enough.**
- Faith for salvation requires us to put our trust in Jesus Christ and what the Scriptures testify about Him.
 - This is what the demons cannot do. They do not trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
 - If we have faith in Jesus Christ it means that we put our full trust in Him that what He tells us in Scripture is true.
 - We trust Him with our souls and our lives that He is able to do what he says.
 - David put His trust in God.
 - Psalms 62:5-8
- Faith for salvation is confidence that what God has promised He is able to fulfill.
 - When we have faith for salvation we are confident that Jesus did die on the cross and that He has forgiven our sins.
 - Confidence is the feeling of being certain that something will happen regardless of worldly circumstances.
 - One of the greatest examples from Scripture to show us what this confidence in God looks like is Abraham.
 - Romans 4:16-22