

**Text:** Acts 15:6-11

**Title:** Reaction to the Doctrinal Storm's Arrival

**Truth:** Church leaders and the church as a whole must work together to restate and defend the truth of God's word.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday 6/26/2013 and 7/10/2024 at FBC

## Introduction

Remember the issue causing the church-wide conflict is whether the Pharisee sect is right that Gentile believers must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. What they are saying in effect is that the missionary endeavor of Acts 13-14 was incomplete because it did not give a proper message to the Gentiles. Furthermore, they are saying that faith alone in Christ alone is not enough because it is additionally necessary to keep the Law of Moses. In other words, not only do new believers need to be told to keep the Law for sanctification, the idea is that if they do *not* keep the law, they cannot be saved at all, much less sanctified.

From our perspective today, this is obviously a false teaching. However, as there was a transition going on between the era of Law and the era of grace, the matter required a careful examination, which the church went about to accomplish.

## I. Leadership gathered with the church

- A. The picture I have is that there may have been a leadership-only meeting, but much of the matter was handled publicly in front of the church members. Verse 6 may indicate the private leadership meeting where the issue was discussed with the messengers from Antioch, and the general approach to solve the issue was decided upon.
- B. Note v. 12 "the multitude" and verse 22 "with the whole church" which indicate that the later meeting (after v. 7) included the entire church.
- C. It is clear that the sect of the Pharisees was also involved in the discussion because v. 7 mentions the dispute, and v. 10 indicates that Peter directly addresses the false teachers with a question.

## II. Peter's Response to the Conflict

- A. Peter reviews the history of his going to preach to the Gentiles "a good while ago." He is referring to Acts 10 which records his visit to Cornelius. The timeline is not absolutely clear, but the events of Acts 12-14 cover at least a couple of years time. The Jerusalem Council itself was around 49 AD. Paul's conversion in chapter 9 was about AD 34. The timeline

between Acts 10 and 15 then could be as much as 10 to 15 years which would correspond well with the words “some time ago.”

- B. Whatever the details of the timeline, Peter tells the assembled church that God chose that Peter should preach to the Gentiles. The point is that this was *God’s* initiative, not Peter’s plan. God chose it, not Peter.

Notice that the main idea “God chose” applies not only the “hearing” but also to the “believing.” God chose the whole situation to occur. And so, the Gentiles believed when they heard the word of the gospel.

- C. God knows the hearts of all people, and when they genuinely believe, He gives an acknowledgment of their salvation by granting them the Holy Spirit just like the other (Jewish) believers had experienced in Acts 2.
- D. There was no distinction between the two groups Jew and Gentile. Both heard the gospel. Both believed. Both had their hearts purified by faith. Both received the Holy Spirit.

Same is true for you if you have done likewise. God chose that by someone’s mouth you heard the gospel and believed, and received the Spirit, and were cleansed from sin.

- E. Peter confronts the false teachers and the issue head-on by asking a question: Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? This yoke, I might add, God did not put on them in order to be saved.
1. Yoke - the Law. Not just circumcision, but the entire law-keeping enterprise they were promoting. A literal yoke is a wooden or metal frame that connects animals to a harness so they can pull together. It is not a “freedom” kind of word. It is a “work” kind of word and a “bondage” kind of word, not a grace kind of word or a faith kind of word. This is true *legalism*.
  2. Test. Testing God is not good. Note Luke 4:2, 11:16 for the other two uses of the idea by Luke (author of Acts as well) that show “testing” God is a bad idea. In this case, it is not a solicitation to do evil (though it is the same word). Rather, it is to put God under the microscope to discover if He will hold to His revealed will in the matter of salvation, or whether he will relent and go to some other way of salvation. The test is probing God to see if he will really continue in that method of salvation. There is doubting here; there is denial of the reality of Gentile salvation, and ultimately there is negativity about God’s work toward the Gentile people. It is an act of presumption, trying to do something that God Himself did not do in Acts 10.

3. Unable to bear. Since the yoke is the Law of Moses, it makes sense that no one was able to “bear” it in the sense of live under it successfully. The Law pointed out sin, and for a totally depraved sinner, that was the unavoidable outcome of the Law's work.

F. Peter affirms the positive teaching that salvation comes to both Jews and Gentiles this way: through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, appropriated by faith. The key words are “in the same manner.” There are not two ways of salvation, one supposedly for Jews and one for Gentiles. Not even the Jews had to be circumcised or keep the Law of Moses to be saved. There is only one way!

I took special note this time through reading the text of Peter's confession of faith: “We believe...” this doctrine: that Jews and Gentiles are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. We believe in Him to be saved; and we believe that is the right way of salvation for everyone else too.

G. Peter turned the tables around and said that the Gentiles were saved by faith through the grace of Christ, and that the Jews would be saved the same way as the Gentiles. In other words, the gospel that was preached to the Gentiles was the correct gospel, and the Jewish twist on it was incorrect!

H. Christian salvation is not a yoke, not a burden, not a weight. If someone comes to you bringing any kind of heavy salvation, by which I mean any kind of work, labor, wages, earning, etc. you can ignore it. The salvation of Christ is light because it acquits from sin and washes from guilt and is free to receive to any who simply trust in Him. Of course you are going to turn away from all other “heavy” things you have been trusting and repent of your sin, because those are loads you do not want to carry. Christianity makes you free indeed. Not free to do whatever you want—for that is not freedom, nor is it freeing.

## **Conclusion**

Recounting the truth and God's work, and then asking the audience to compare the false teaching to God's actual work was a good technique to bring everyone along the right doctrinal path.

## **Current Events as of 6/26/2013**

A review our beliefs regarding today's Supreme Court decisions and the Texas legislature's failure to pass restrictions on abortion:

We believe that the only legitimate marriage is a sacred and permanent covenant relationship between one man and one woman.

We believe that children are a heritage from the Lord, that human life begins at conception, and that the unborn child is a living human.

Abortion constitutes the unjustified, sinful taking of unborn human life.

We believe that the sins of abortion and homosexual marriage will only be fixed in the life of an individual if he turns to Christ.

We may be tempted to respond to the abortion and gay marriage issues that came out today with frustration, anger, depression, or even apathy. But we know better: we must respond by loving God, loving our neighbors, and carrying out the Great Commission.

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