

What is the most important part of the Gospel?

Acts 14:1-28 September 27, 2020

Acts Series: Taking the Message of Jesus' Kingdom Everywhere

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question.⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me.¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ " *'After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.*

*Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,*

¹⁷ *that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things' —*

¹⁸ *things known from long ago.*

¹⁹ "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."¹

¹ The New International Version. (2011): Zondervan.

1. Dispute

Acts 15:1-5

"Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." Verse 1

A. Unauthorized Teaching

Acts 15:1

How is a person saved?

Why is a person not saved?

B. Unresolved Debate

Acts 15:2

A big question that needs wide agreement

C. Unexpected Reports

Acts 15:3-5

To churches on the way – Glad at the news of conversions

To the church in Jerusalem – Reported what God had done

By the Pharisee Group – Circumcision and Moses

2. Deliberations

Acts 15:6-12

No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." Verse 11

A. Peter's Points

Acts 15:6-11

God given Mission	Verse 7
God given Spirit	Verse 8
God given Purification by Faith	Verse 9
By His Grace we are saved	Verse 11

B. Barnabas' and Paul's Testimony

Acts 15:12

Likely the mission of Acts 13 & 14

3. Decision

Acts 15:13-21

that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Verse 19

A. James consults the Word

Acts 15:13-18

Peter acted in line with what he believed. Verse 14

Paul and Barnabas not quoted (but vindicated)

A summary from Amos 9:11, 12 and Isaiah 45:21

B. James Suggests some Wording

Acts 15:19-21

Don't make it difficult. There is some logic in that.

Every choice, decision or judgement draws a line

Abstain from these

Verse 20

Some suggest this is to bridge fellowship not salvation
Recommendations or Requirements?

3. Delegation

Acts 15:22-32

*Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets,
said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.* Verse 32

A. How did they finally decide?

We have no clear idea how they came to agreement but they did

B. What did they actually do?

Acts 15:22-29

Apparently agreed with Paul's position

Commissioned delegates to travel with Paul (endorsement)

Adopted most of James' wording

They listened to the Holy Spirit

C. What was the response?

Acts 15:30-35

Encouraging and strengthening

Returned a blessing

More people learned and heard

What is the most important part of the Gospel?

Faith and Grace, Jesus brings us to God

How can we be an encouragement or a blessing?

Study Questions

For your personal study or with family, a friend, mentor or Life Group

Beginning:

1. What insight, idea, question or principle from Sunday's message did you find most helpful, eye opening or troubling?
2. What are some of the burdens people seem to add to the mix for following Christ? What rules have you seen added to following Jesus?

Exploring

3. Why do you suppose the early church had so many different kinds of debates and controversies?
4. If Paul and Barnabas were bringing a question to be debated why do you suppose the Pharisees started first in verse 5 and then Peter comes in second in verse 6?
5. Who is the subject of Peter's speech in verses 6-11? What is his conclusion?
6. In Verse 12 what is the greatest wonder Paul reported? Look back at verse 3 for a clue.

Applying:

7. How do you tend to handle debate or disagreement? Do you enjoy it, try to start it, avoid it or other?
8. Scripture is not written to us but certainly for us. How does the content of Acts 15:6-12 benefit us?
9. What is the single most important part of the Gospel in today's passage?
10. Look at verses 32 and 33. How can we improve the ways in which we encourage, strengthen and bless others?

Praying:

11. Pray for someone you care about that they would come nearer to knowing the grace of God in Jesus (Verse 11)
12. Pray about how you might be a blessing of peace in a time when our world seems so on edge, angry and polarized.

Mentoring and personal reflection: Reflect on you own experience in being a follower of Jesus and having extra rules added on? Why do we seem to have so much trouble with the idea of Grace? Sometimes in receiving it and other times in extending it.