

What is the Gospel?

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Acts 15

About Acts 15, the commentator F.F. Bruce writes, “The Council of Jerusalem is an event to which Luke attaches the highest importance; it is as epoch-making, in his eyes, as the conversion of Paul or the preaching of the gospel to Cornelius and his household. As he (Luke) reports it, the Council was a meeting of the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church convened to consider, primarily, the terms on which Gentile believers might be admitted to church membership...”¹

Three Aspects of the Law of Moses in the Old Testament

1. **Ceremonial** – offerings, washings, the festivals
2. **Civil** – laws that governed the Theocracy of Israel.
3. **Moral** – Laws governing individual behavior, including the ten commandments.

Circumcision was seen as representative of a commitment to keep the law. (Paul addresses circumcision throughout his writings). It was from this conference that Paul’s theology grew out of to all the world.

- Romans 2:25-29, Paul emphasizes the inward circumcision of the heart. (**Romans 2:29**, “...*His praise is not from man but from God.*”)
- Romans 4:9-16, esp. vss. 9-11
- Galatians 2:3-5; 5:2-12; 6:12-15
 - **Galatians 2:5**, *To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*
 - **Galatians 5:2**, *Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.*
 - **Galatians 6:15**. *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*

Romans 11:6, *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

Deuteronomy 9:4-5, “*Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. 5 Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*”

I. The Disruption (Acts 15:1-5)

A. The State of the Gospel.

1. The Gospel becomes adulterated with any addition/subtraction. In the name of peace, that is what is happening in Jerusalem in Acts 15 and what happens to day. However, the gospel causes division in the world according to Scripture. (**Mathew 10:34-39**)
2. Why is there false teaching
 - a) Impacted by religious tradition (**Mark 7:1-13**).
 - b) Impacted by a focus on appearances rather than the heart.
 - c) Satisfaction with a superficial testimony of addition, these Pharisees, and not transformation.
3. The more significant issue (**Galatians 5:3**, *I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.*)

¹ Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.

C. **The State of the Church**

1. Unbelievers & false teachers are a part of every church (**Acts 15:1**)
2. Unmature believers are a part of every church (**Acts 15:5**) (**Colossians 2:16-17**; **Hebrews 8:13**)
3. Jesus predicted this in His parable of wheat and weeds (tares) **Matthew 13:24-30, 37-42**
4. The enemy is always on the prowl to:
 - a) Disrupt any unity (**Acts 15:2**)
 - (1) Dissension - Intense and emotional difference, a heated debate and quarrel.
 - (2) Debate – opposite opinions and statements.
 - (a) **Acts 15:24**, *Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,*
 - (b) **Galatians 2:4**, *Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—*
 - b) Prohibit salvation
 - c) Thwart spiritual growth

II. **The Defense (Acts 15:6-18)**

- A. Previous Revelation Proves Salvation is by Grace (**Acts 15:7**)
 1. Peter references the miracles surrounding the conversion of Cornelius (**Acts 10:44-48**)
- B. God gave the Gentile His Holy Spirit (**Acts 15:8-9a**)
 1. The miracle of giving the Holy Spirit was confirmed by phonetic languages (**Acts 10:44-48**)
- C. The Cleansing of their Hearts by Faith (**Acts 15:9b**) (**Eph 2:8-9**)
 1. **Acts 10:43**, *To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*
 2. **Ephesians 2:8–9**, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
- D. The Inability of the Law to Save (**Acts 15:10-11**)
 1. **Galatians 5:3**, *I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.*
- E. The Miracles prove that Salvation is by Grace (**Acts 15:12**)
- F. The Prophetic Promises prove salvation by Grace (**Acts 15:13-18**)
 1. **Amos 9:11–12**, *“In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, **12** that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the LORD who does this.*

III. **The Decision (Acts 15:19-29)**

- A. The doctrinal issue resolved (**Acts 15:19**) – The Jews were not to trouble the Gentiles.
- B. The practical issue addressed (**Acts 15:20-21**) – The Gentiles were not to trouble the Jews.
 1. Things offered to idols
 2. Sexual immorality
 3. Things strangled and from blood

IV. **The Delight (Act 15:30-31)**

- A. Believers must resist the temptation of independent thinking (**Genesis 3:6**)
- B. Believers must remain humble in prayer (**Matthew 7:1-12, esp. 7-11**)
- C. Believers must consistently look in the mirror of God’s word and adjust their thinking and behavior to its teaching. (**James 1:23-25**)