

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
1st Church Council
Acts 15:1-29

Last time...Paul and Barnabas moved on from the fruitfulness of, and hostility to, the Gospel in Iconium to preach the Gospel in Lystra
Healing a man lame from birth, they barely prevented the people from worshipping them
Then, unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra

- turned the town against them
- stoned Paul and left him for dead

But Paul, a man of God in the will of God doing the work of God, had not finished his course

Paul and Barnabas continued God's work in Derbe, then retraced their steps home to Antioch, Ch 14:22 as they went

This time...a false gospel come to Antioch from Jerusalem, causing a real uproar.

The simmering Church split brought about by the conversion of Gentiles comes to a boil

From its birth and early on, the Church was Jewish

But, God was also working among the Gentiles

Jesus said, "Salvation is of the Jews"

What does that mean?

- salvation
- of the Jews

Who and How can a person be saved?

The Gospel of Grace

or

the gospel of works

The 1st Church Council is convened to settle this MOST important issue

We are in Acts 15

v1-2 certain men...taught...Except...cannot be saved...no small dissension:

Paul and Barnabas are ministering in Antioch, awaiting further instructions from the Lord

To the Church in Antioch comes from the Church in Jerusalem some Pharisees (v5, 24)

And, while not outright denying that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, they teach the brethren that to be saved Gentile believers must also be circumcised, in keeping with the Law

i.e. the work of man must be added to the work/sacrifice of Jesus Christ

This teaching very much upset the believers in Antioch and offended Paul and Barnabas, resulting in an uproar, a heated dispute

Being taught was another Gospel, and any other gospel is a false gospel

- Jesus Plus
- Salvation by works

Why did Paul and Barnabas so intensely dispute the teaching of these “brothers” from Jerusalem?

Because they know the truth...therefore they know the lie when they hear it

Because they love the flock of God and will protect them from danger...

wolves in sheep's clothing (as foretold by Jesus in Matt 7:15)

Gal 1:1-17

- Paul is an apostle chosen by Jesus Christ and God the Father, not appointed by man (v1)
- Whosoever will believe in Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for our sins, is delivered from this present evil world (v4)
- Perverting the Gospel of Christ troubles the disciples of Jesus (v7)
- Every other gospel is accursed, as well as those who preach it (v8-9)
- he knows before Whom he stands and seeks to please (v10)
- The Gospel he preaches came directly from Jesus Christ Himself (v11-12)
- The Gospel of Christ is of grace, not works (v13-16a)
- Upon his conversion, he spent 3 years at the feet of Jesus as John 14:6 poured His heart into him as He had the other 11 apostles for 3 years (v16b-18a)

The teaching of the Pharisees from Jerusalem and the resulting uprising against it moved the Church in Antioch to send Paul, Barnabas, and some others to the Church in Jerusalem to get this MOST important issue resolved

How is a person saved?

What is God's Gospel message to the Church and the world?

This must be resolved before the Church goes any further

v3-4 declaring the conversion of the Gentiles:

No doubt all fired up and eager for “battle” in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas make the 400-mile-long journey, declaring as they went what God has done among the Gentiles (turning them from idols to serve Him).

And very properly, the believers/brethren/disciples rejoiced at what God had done

When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were warmly welcomed by the Church, apostles (Gal 2:9), and the elders of the Church

And as they had in Antioch upon their return home, and as they had done on their journey to Jerusalem, they declared to the Church in Jerusalem what God had done among the Gentiles

Timestamp: 3 ([Gal 1:18](#)) + 14 ([Gal 2:1-4](#)) = 17 years after conversion (Acts 9)

Note: one of the others to go from Antioch to Jerusalem was Titus

v5 But....sect of the Pharisees...needful to circumcise:
v4b...but

Objecting to the Gospel preached to the Gentiles by Paul and Barnabas are some Pharisees

- believers in Jesus Christ
- still lugging around their religious baggage...legalism

They argued that it was necessary for the Gentile believers to, as they,

- be circumcised
- keep the Law of Moses

Timeout!

It's been 17+ years but have they forgotten, or do they not yet understand, the harsh words of the Lord Jesus Christ spoken about and to their sect?

[Matt 23:1-4, 23-24](#)...missing the whole point of the Law (Love)

Their objection to the Gospel of Grace comes after the pastor of their Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote a letter to the entire Church (during difficult times), saying [James 2:8-10](#) and undoubtedly had preached it to them

In in the Books of Moses, what about the Father of the faith, Abraham?
Gen 15:6

The Gospel of Grace (the Gospel of Christ) is under attack in the early Church... even by believers

v6-7a consider...much disputing:

A Church Council was convened to discuss this matter, the nature of the Gospel whereby a person must be saved from condemnation and eternal death
In the Church Council was an uproar...intense discussion, questioning each other

Q: Upon what Authority would the Church Council stand to settle the debate about this eternally important matter?

v7b-9 Peter...God made choice:

After there had been much “family discussion”, Peter was given the floor

- the Church’s early spokesman
- humbled, then empowered to “strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32)
- moved by the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by what he said

Men, brethren...we are brothers in the Lord

a good while ago...this issue did not come up just today, and not yesterday,
but a while ago (and it has been simmering ever since)

God made choice among us...this was God’s Sovereign choice,
not mine and not ours

Acts 10:15

Acts 10:19-20

that the Gentiles by my mouth...God spoke to the Gentiles using me

Acts 10:34-36, 43

should hear the word of the Gospel and believe...the genuineness of their faith
being witnessed of by God Himself when He gave them the Holy Spirit,
just like He did to us (Acts 2)

Acts 11:15-18

God put no difference...no distinction, no separation, no discrimination...
between us (Jews, circumcised) and them (Gentiles, uncircumcised);

i.e. both Jew and Gentile are purified of heart by faith

Key truths:

1. God’s choice, not man’s
2. the issue (God’s mind): the heart of man, all people
 - the inward, not the outward
Deut 10:16 and Jer 4:4
1 Sam 16:7
Rom 2:23-29
 - relationship (possible by His work), not religion (man’s work)
3. Purification of heart (God’s work) comes by faith, not by works
4. God’s Plan is not “Jew vs Gentile” but “Jew and Gentile”

v10-11 why tempt ye God...But we believe:

Peter's argument is a concise testimony of what God has already done and they
have already heard it; he is bringing it into their remembrance
Therefore his conclusion (again) is irrefutable

why tempt ye God...we've been thru this before, why are we going around the
same mountain again?

Why would we test/question/scrutinize/inspect God about what we know
He has done?

Why would we burden our Gentile brethren with something us Jews have
NEVER been able to bear?

(Remember what the Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees (John 7:19a) and
what the Holy Spirit inspired James to write (James 2:10)

But we believe...we the apostles or we everybody in the Council and the Church?

thru the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...by the grace of God and not the
performance of man (in keeping with Gen 8:21)

we shall all be saved...believing Jew and believing Gentile on the same footing
before God – in Christ

The Law is not a “flotation device” tossed to drowning mankind by God,
Jesus Christ is!

v12 silence...Barnabas and Paul:

The Council had no rebuttal to Peter's testimony and conclusion
So the floor was then given to Paul and Barnabas to give testimony of what God
had done among the Gentiles by/thru them,
earthen vessels of the indwelling Spirit of Christ

The believing Pharisees should pay close attention...Paul is one of them,
a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee, more zealous than they before being
converted to serve the Living God

v13-18 James answered...Simeon...the prophets:

When Paul and Barnabas had finished their testimony, James confirmed the testimonies of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, using as his authority the Word of God

James

- pastor of the Church in Jerusalem
 - son of Joseph and Mary
 - half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - recorder of the letter inspired by the Holy Spirit
- concluded/summarized the discussions about the nature of the Gospel
- God spoke to and then thru Peter to the Gentiles
 - God saved those who believed what God had said and done
 - God spoke to and thru the prophets to us Jews about the Gentiles... as He spoke to and thru Peter to them
 - Amos 9:11-12
 - the temple = the risen Lord (John 2:19-22, John 12:32)
 - The testimonies of Peter and Paul/Barnabas are not contrary to the Word of God, they bear witness of God fulfilling His Word
 - In one accord are
 - The Word of God
 - The Spirit of God
 - these servants of God, our brothers
 - This dispute among ourselves is of us/flesh, not of God/Spirit
 - The salvation of God is
 - for Jews AND Gentiles...whosoever will believe
 - by God's grace, not by man's work (circumcision, performance in keeping the Law)
 - God
 - determined to do this before the foundation of the world; saving the Gentiles is not a Divine impulse!
 - in His foreknowledge He told us in advance what He was going to do
 - in His timing and in His way, He is doing it

v19-21 Wherefore my sentence is:

With the Word of God and the Spirit of God as his authorities, James renders his decision in the matter:

- To not trouble/burden the Gentiles that God has saved
 - need not be circumcised (1 Cor 7:18-20, Matt 22:36-40)
salvation is a matter of the heart
 - need not bear the yoke of the Law (Matt 5:17, Rom 10:4)
 - Eph 2:8-10

- Write/Guide the Gentiles believers to abstain/refrain from
 - idolatry and all things it pollutes (1 John 5:21)
 - fornication (1 Thes 4:1-5)
 - things strangled...meat not bled out
 - blood...Deut 12:23
- Learn the boundaries established by God within which we live safe and healthy lives that honor Him (1 Peter 1:16, Eph 4:11-14)

Is James deciding to set aside the Law?

No, he is reinforcing the purpose of the Law

Rom 7:12-14...the Law is a needed “mirror” and schoolmaster

Gal 3:24-26 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster, For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Rom 14:17-23...peace, edification, love of neighbor

v22-23 pleased it...to send...letters by them:

The other apostles, the elders of the Church, and the entire Church (including the believing Pharisees) agreed with James’ conclusion and decision

Qualified and credible and spiritually mature men...Judas Barsabas and Silas... were appointed to take the Church’s decision back to the Gentiles brethren...family (Matt 12:47-50)...with

- written letter
- oral report

v24-27 troubled you with words, subverting your souls:

It has been brought to our attention that men from this Church (Gal 2:4) came to you with a teaching that has upset you – you must be circumcised and you must keep the Law of Moses to be saved

We, the leaders of the Church, did not send them.

Theirs is a doctrine of demons, not the doctrine of God

They came to you not on our authority, they came of their own volition

Q: had the believing Pharisees sent them, not submitting to the leadership of James?

Therefore, to set the record straight and to comfort your souls, we, being of one accord, are sending this letter to you by chosen ambassadors, accompanying our beloved and faithful brothers Paul and Barnabas

Note: This letter were the credentials carried by Judas Barsabas and Silas in this official capacity

v28-29 it seemed good to...that ye abstain from:

This internal dispute about the Gospel of Christ is resolved by

- the Holy Spirit...John 16:13a, PTL!
- the apostles (10 in one accord with the 2), the elders of the Church, and the entire Body of the Church in Jerusalem (Spirit-filled and Spirit-led, 1 Tim 3:15b)

Our direction to you is to abstain from that which

- God has revealed to be unhealthy (spiritually, physically) for mankind
- destroy peace between Jewish and Gentile believers in the Church
- will make your witness of Jesus Christ to others confusing (unbelieving Gentiles) and offensive (unbelieving Jews)

Fare ye well: Good-bye, have health and strength
(the motive for these necessary things)

Who led the Church Council?
God the Holy Spirit

Evidence:

- oneness of heart and mind...men and God are in one accord;
“and to us” who were in tune with the still small voice of God
- harmony of the testimony of Scripture and the testimony of God’s co-laborers among the Gentiles
- peace in the Church...Jewish believers and Gentile believers
- to the glory of Jesus Christ and God the Father
- spiritual health of those who obey

So...the dispute about how a person can be saved is settled, right?

Standing on the Authority of the Word of God, guided into the truth by the Spirit of God, and being in one accord with the Holy Spirit, the 1st Church Council settled for all time the Gospel of Grace, right?

No.

The Judaizers, false brethren in the Church, wolves in sheep’s clothing, followed Paul everywhere he preached the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of Grace...
”evangelizing” believers with their gospel (v1, v5)

After the 1st Church Council, the Holy Spirit will inspire the writing of
Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, Ephesians to guide us unto all truth, the doctrine of Christ

Application/Lessons

The Gospel of Grace is still attacked, even by believers in Jesus Christ.

We are still confronted by “modern day Judaizers” attacking the Gospel of Grace

- Legalists
- RCC

The Gospels of Jesus Plus and of Salvation by works remain to this day in Christianity

In the world: confusion, corruption, darkness, deception

In this nation: confusion, corruption, darkness, deception

In Christianity: confusion, corruption, darkness, deception (Rev 2-3)

If we look to the world or this nation or Christianity (doctrines of man) for answers, we will be confused, distracted, discouraged

If we look into the Word of God and look for the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will be settled, focused, encouraged

In Christ, the believer/follower/disciple of Jesus Christ has a loving relationship with the Father in heaven (grace), NOT a legal relationship (justice)

In Christ, our fellowship with God is based on His faithfulness, performance, merit, righteousness, work...NOT ours (PTL!!!)

The Gospel of Grace is the message of the Church to a dark and dying world...today

It is the message of God whereby any person can be saved from condemnation and eternal death

How then can a person be saved?

The Gospel of Grace...of God – freedom

or

the gospel of works...of the devil – bondage

Titus 2:11-15a

Col 1:27

Rom 8:18