



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Study 23: **MAINTAINING UNITY ON THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST'S  
REDEMPTION**  
**Acts 15:1-41**

This is one of the most crucial chapters in the Acts because it deals with the proper understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. The gospel of grace had been preached among the Gentiles, many of them had repented and believed in Christ for their salvation and eternal destiny with God. The gospel was faithfully preached, many Gentiles were saved and God confirmed the unadulterated word with miracles, signs and wonders. Local churches, congregations of transformed believers, were established in all the cities where Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel. Elders, pastors and leaders were appointed for every church in every city to continue teaching the churches and evangelizing their communities.

After the departure of Paul and Barnabas, false teachers arose and they taught the Gentile believers that they could only be saved if they were circumcised and kept the Law of Moses after believing on Christ. Their message was that faith in Christ's atonement on Calvary was not enough. They must keep the Mosaic ceremonial, civil, social and dietary law and be circumcised like the Old Testament Jews in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas vigorously opposed these false teachers from Jerusalem, the headquarters church. The leadership at the headquarters church did not send the false teachers. They said, "we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:24). The controversy was discussed and resolved on the basis of God's written word, His sovereign act of grace in saving the Gentiles without demanding their circumcision and the clear leading and enlightenment by the Holy Spirit.

### **RESOLVING THE CONTROVERSY ON SALVATION WITHOUT CIRCUMCISION**

Acts 15:1-12,23,24; Romans 4:8-12; Galatians 5:6; 2:1-5; Acts 21:19; Ephesians 2:14-22; Romans 3:24-26; Colossians 3:11; Titus 2:11-14; Galatians 6:12-16.

The early Church relied solely on the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Relying on the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit leads to false interpretation and relying on the Spirit without the Holy Scriptures leads to fanatical inclination. The Pharisees read the Scriptures without the illumination of the Spirit; they remained spiritually dead and never experienced saving faith. The Corinthians rested on the Spirit without the Scriptures and they were ignorant and immature, fleshly and faltering, carnal and confused. To resolve the ongoing controversy in the Gentile church, "Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them" were sent to Jerusalem to ascertain the saving truth. The error had to be exposed and disposed of before infiltrating and destroying the church. Satan wanted to plant the seed of dissension, division, dispute and debate to bring distrust and doctrinal disunity in the church. While controversy raged in the church, the evangelization of the world and the establishment of the church were hindered. Controversy in the church hinders and blocks the conversion of sinners in the world.

After much discussion, Apostle Peter rose to remind the leadership of the salvation of Cornelius and his household without circumcision or keeping the Mosaic Law. He appealed to God's past performance, His present programme and His prophetic planned purpose. Peter reviewed the past; Paul and Barnabas reported the present; James referred to the future - all pointing to salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The doctrinal issue was resolved.

### **REAFFIRMING THE CONVICTION ON SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST**

Acts 15:13-35; Matthew 1:21; Acts 4:12; 8:30-35; 16:30-34; 1 Timothy 1:15; Romans 5:1-11; 10:8-10; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; Amos 9:11,12; 1 Peter 1:10-13; Revelation 2:24-29.

Peter referred to the Mosaic Law as "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear". He asked the brethren, why impose an unbearable yoke which cannot save on others? He reaffirmed the truth for all races and all ages: "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we (the Jews) shall be saved, even as they (the Gentiles)". Peter emphasized that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles and it would be eternally

unpardonable to close that door through pharisaic commitment to tradition. Christ must not die in vain and the salvation of millions of Gentiles must not be lost or buried under Mount Sinai. Paul and Barnabas also related their testimony as to how the Lord had wrought miracles, signs and wonders through them while evangelizing the Gentiles. Multitudes repented of their sins, turned from idols to serve the living God, believed on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and they were changed and transformed by grace through faith without first asking them to be circumcised. James concluded by recalling the prophecy in Amos 9:11,12. "God did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." All they needed to do was to write to the Gentiles who were already saved by grace through faith in Christ to live righteously and abstain from the sinful lifestyle of other unsaved Gentiles.

## **REVISITING THE CHURCHES TO STRENGTHEN THEIR COMMITMENT**

Acts 15:36-41; Isaiah 35:3,4; Romans 1:11; Acts 14:22;15:32; Philipians 1:27; Acts 16:4,5; 1 Thessalonians 2:17; 3:10-13; Revelation 3:2.

Compelled by the Spirit and moved by the compassion of Christ, the true Shepherd, "Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do" (Acts 15:36). Our Lord, Jesus Christ had commanded that His ministers preach the gospel to every creature, plead with sinners to repent, believe and be converted. The Lord also commanded us to disciple, strengthen and mature believers. The evangelization of sinners, edification or education of converts and establishment of churches must be pursued relentlessly. We must not be negligent in seeking to convert sinners to Christ and we must not fail in the ministry of conforming those converts to Christ. "We preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28).

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