

Living out our faith Pt 18

Acts 15:1-41

V1-11

- This chapter is of utmost importance when it comes to knowing what it takes to be saved. Paul and Barnabas were going through Gentile territory preaching the gospel. No Jews were saved which should have brought joy all around; but there were Jews who believed that Christianity was just a sect of Judaism and people, specifically the Gentiles, should still follow the ceremonies and rituals of the law. These Jews wanted to keep the dietary laws, get circumcised and follow Jewish customs, before they could fully claim salvation for their souls.
- In verse 1 these men are not identified; as their names are not important what is important is that they were teaching legalism. Legalism is nothing more than man made rules and rituals placed upon a person under the appearance that it is necessary in order to please God. These men carried weight because they were from Jerusalem, the headquarters of where Christianity started. Although they were associated with the Jerusalem congregation, we'll see the congregation didn't authorize them. We'll also see how people love to drop names to justify who they are.
- Verse 2 – when Paul and Barnabas heard what was happening they immediately confronted them. We learn that some things you leave alone and let it die out, but some things you quickly address and stomp out – this was one of those times. If Paul and Barnabas left this alone, many would begin to think that the Cross of Christ was not enough for salvation. They would believe you must follow the law to have salvation. But, if you must follow the law then it is no longer God's grace. We are taught it is works by which a person is saved. Finally the brethren decide to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss this further. And it is in **Galatians 2:2** – that we learn it was the Spirit of God that told Paul to go and speak to the brethren.
- Verse 3 – notice the contrast, when the legalizers came into town there was heaviness but when Paul and Barnabas are present there is great joy. Legalism brings burden, grace gives freedom that produces joy. Verses 4 -5 – we shouldn't be surprised that some Pharisees accepted Christianity. They

believed in miracles, the resurrection, so when Jesus was raised from the dead many of them rejoiced and believed. The problem, as with any move of the Spirit, the Pharisees wanted to control it, so they suggest Christianity be a denomination within Judaism.

- Verse 7 – There is much discussion and debate until Peter the unspoken leader stands up; and it is appropriate because it was Peter and not Paul who God first used to speak the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter tells them that there's no difference between Jew and Gentile as God gave both the same Spirit. As it is written in **Ephesians 4:4-5** there is one body, one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, and one Lord. Verse 9 – and Peter also says their hearts were purified by their faith and not by obedience to the law. Verse 10 – he asks why put a yoke on them that neither our ancestors nor we could follow? And explains in verse 11 that just as we are saved by grace through Jesus so are they. Peter simplifies the dispute and says a person's heart must be cleansed and that will never happen by following rituals and rules. A person must follow Jesus, and be sanctified through Him.

V12-21

- After Peter spoke of the past, Paul and Barnabas reported on the present. Declaring how God empowered them to work miracles in the lives of the Gentiles. Again a Spirit filled believer shouldn't be following miracles, but miracles should follow Spirit filled believers. Verse 13 – The half brother of Jesus, James who didn't believe in Jesus until after the resurrection, begins to speak.
- James' opinion carries a lot of weight, and as Paul and Barnabas spoke of the present he now speaks of the future, quoting **Amos 9**. And he reminds everyone that God has known everything from beginning to end, and since salvation is of the Lord. Let us not trouble people, who are turning to God, with our flaws. Verses 19 - 20 – behaviors new believers should avoid:
 1. Idolatry
 2. Sexual immorality
 3. Eating animals who died from strangulation
 4. Eating blood

- One and two are easily understood, stay away from idolatry and immorality, but the next two need additional explanation. These have to do with sensitivity – this was cultural. Jews were told never to eat blood, and if an animal was strangled there's a good chance blood would still be present and there is the risk of ruining someone's conscience (**Romans 14:14-17**).

V22-34

- One of the men the council sent is Barsabbas whose name means son of the Sabbath. They sent, Son of the Sabbath, to tell the gentiles they were free to rest from the law. Verse 23 – when God is moving you can believe the Church will be united, if you are wrestling with a decision or doctrine, learn what was taught or followed throughout the church history. Beware of those who say you don't need the church (**Proverbs 22:28**) because it is through the wisdom of the church presently and historically that God navigates us through the landmines of life.
- Verse 23 – 29 is a letter drafted and brought back to the church informing them of their stance. Silas and Judas stay to exhort- to comfort, confirm and re-establish. I love it! You guys have been through a lot let us stay and comfort you not to worry about all that circumcision business, and remind you that you are still free. Silas and Judas staying was a blessing. And such a blessing was the church for Silas that he decided to remain and disciple to the church.

V35-41

- This started back in Act 13:13, when on their first missionary trip John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and went back home. It had been about six years since that happened, and Paul still didn't think Mark was ready for a second trip. But Barnabas disagreed and thought he was. Who was right? Personally I think it's clear that Barnabas should have listened to Paul, and here's why. At this point God had chosen to place Paul as the leader of these missionary trips, so Barnabas is Paul's helper; second, Barnabas was Mark's cousin so he was a little biased concerning him. He was allowing family ties to cloud his judgment to whether Mark was ready or not; and third Barnabas was an encourager, that was his gift, he believed he could encourage anyone to

propel them to do ministry. With all gifts we must be careful not to be blind, but be aware when a person is ready for what they are to do. Notice Barnabas was determined to take Mark, he wasn't flexible, and his determination caused him to dispute Paul. It was Barnabas pride that wouldn't allow him to leave Mark behind (**Proverbs 13:10**)

- This is the last time we hear of Barnabas in Acts, later on we do see Paul use Mark for the work of the ministry. Verse 40 – Paul and Silas get the right hand of fellowship but there's no mention of Barnabas and Mark being commended. Never let your mind or stubbornness about something or someone get in the way of the big picture of souls being saved, this could lead you to separate from God's work before His time of using you.