

(Acts 15:1) And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "**Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.**"

This is the deadly mistake of all who put their trust in Jesus +. Deadly because it kills the abundant, fruitful, precious gift of eternal life WITH Jesus; it deadens the relationship with which we have been graced; it says to Him who saves "You are not good enough!"

(Acts 15:2) Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

The dispute, I suppose, was inevitable; Man cannot keep his fingers out of the perfect recipe – he is driven to make it "better", driven by pride that says "this is really good...I can make it perfect, I can make it more satisfying, more right!".

But think about the situation: here you have a Rabbi named Paul, the Pharisee of Pharisees, claiming that centuries of conversion rituals and requirements are not necessary for salvation! You don't need to be a Jew to be saved! I mean, didn't all the Scriptures talk of Messiah coming to His people? Were not the prophecies in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 given to the House of Israel;

It was difficult because Jews were, from the beginning, told to separate themselves from those who lived around them. To be holy as God is Holy. This included restrictions for food, clothing, marriage and even their appearance, in essence, stay away from that which is unclean – and gentiles, who didn't have any laws, status or ordinances about cleanness, were defiling. To be with a gentile was like touching a dead body!

But, there were other scriptures that they conveniently forgot :

Genesis 22:18 In your **seed all the nations** of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Isaiah 42:1 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; **He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.**

Isaiah 42:6 "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, **As a light to the Gentiles,**

The problem was, when a gentile came to Christ, he/she was still considered a gentile! Therefore, they are not pure or clean; They failed to recognize that the LORD was doing a new thing: creating a new person, **IN HIM!!** The walls of separation had to be removed so that these new creations in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, could be united into the one Body of Christ.

This doesn't mean that a Jewish person must give up his cultural distinctiveness if he/she so desired; If that meant that he kept kosher, or worshipped on the Sabbath as given by God, that was ok. As long as it wasn't considered something that would define their salvation or their favor with God...OR as long as they didn't refuse to fellowship with other believers.

(Acts 15:3) So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.

The dispute did NOT curtail their mission – reaching the known world for Christ. And many of the believers, both Jew and Gentile had much joy because sinners were coming to the Messiah.

(Acts 15:4) And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

The sense and usage of the Greek work for “**receive**” includes gladness and full acceptance even in hospitality.

“**reported**” is the same word elsewhere translated “declared”.

(Acts 15:5) But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, **and to command them to keep the law of Moses.**"

Well, there you have it; “You’re saved but not completely saved”. You must have a sign of the covenant. And although it was given to Abraham for the unconditional land covenant, somehow it became a sign of being born under the Law; And, being under the Law, they must keep it!

But what of these Scriptures given by the Holy Spirit of God?

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench *it*, Because of the evil of your doings."

The LAW has always been about the heart, the root of which is loving God and loving others. But because of the weakness of the flesh, because of sin, it became something very different...the Rabbi’s heaped on top of the Law traditions meant to control every facet of their lives, ignoring the relationship that God desired to have with them!!

(Acts 15:6) Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. (7) And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by **my mouth** the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. (8) So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, (9) and made no distinction between us and them, **purifying their hearts by faith.**

Peter’s argument is simple and forceful: it was God Himself who told Peter to go to the Gentiles; Perhaps, they were misunderstanding the Commission of Jesus and only wanted to go to the Jews who were dispersed throughout the gentile nations. Peter recognized that they had no business judging

non-Jews because God doesn't look on the outside but rather the **heart**; He declared them clean! And, low and behold, they responded to the gospel for salvation and received the Gift of the Holy Spirit!

And, unlike the pharisaical Jews, whose cleanness was all external, God Himself purified their hearts BY FAITH!

Luke 11:39-41 Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. (40) Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? (41) But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.

GOD was doing a new work, under a new covenant, with a new creation IN HIM!!!

(Acts 15:10) Now therefore, why do you **test** God by putting a **yoke** on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Test: the word in the Greek is "tempt"; which is a great choice of words considering the admonition

Deuteronomy 6:16 "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted *Him* in Massah.

Which is essentially what Jesus told Satan while in the wilderness.

The Law, as interpreted by the letter, was just too much to bear – a heavy yoke and even more so since the Rabbi's heaped their man-made traditions on top of it; This yoke was immeasurably different than the one offered by Jesus. AND Peter, was there and had heard what Jesus had said:

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take **My** yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For **My** yoke *is* easy and **My** burden is light."

Through the Holy Spirit, Peter carefully chose his words to compel them to think carefully about what they were doing.

(Acts 15:11) But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Salvation is from God and the sacrifice of the perfect Man, Jesus! And as Paul pointed out to the Galatians several years hence, we can neither work for salvation nor keep working to preserve it! We are in the capable hands of our Potter being molded and prepared for the good works He had prepared!

(Acts 15:12) Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring **how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.**

With what Peter has said, silence fell upon them as they considered his words; and, possibly it was a sign that they were **now willing** to listen to others who were to speak...

One must think that the miracles and wonders worked thru Paul and Barnabas included the actual saving of the Gentiles. Jews take seriously “miracles and wonders” as proof of God’s involvement in the circumstances;

(Acts 15:13) And after they had become silent, **James** answered, saying, "Men *and* brethren, listen to me: (14) Simon has declared how God at the first visited the **Gentiles** to take out of them a **people** for His name.

This James is the half-brother of Jesus, the brother of Jude and was the James that wrote the book called by his name.

There are 2 words for “people” used in this verse:

Ethne = a nation especially foreign and often used to refer to heathens

Laos = people of your own “kind”;

Jews always thought of themselves as the chosen “people of God”... Certainly not the unclean gentiles; but Peter says that from these Gentiles (*ethne*), God received to Himself a “people” FOR HIS NAME!

(Acts 15:15) And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

(Acts 15:16) ‘AFTER THIS I WILL RETURN AND WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID, WHICH HAS FALLEN DOWN; I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL SET IT UP;

(Acts 15:17) SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, EVEN ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE **CALLED BY MY NAME**, SAYS THE LORD WHO DOES ALL THESE THINGS.’

Amos 9:11-12 “On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will 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 Gentiles who are called by My name,**” Says the LORD **who does this thing.**

The Rabbi’s and the sages understood this to be a reference to the Messiah, “the tabernacle of David”.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Hebrews 8:1-2 Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, (2) a

Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

And even of Messiah's raising from the dead (rebuilding the ruins and setting it up)!

AND one last comment: "Called by my NAME": God often spoke of the people of Israel, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple as "called by My Name" → declaring that there was an unshakable bond between Him and His called out ones – And NOW this included the Gentiles as well!!!

(Acts 15:18) "Known to God from eternity are all His works.

Knowing the end from the beginning!

(Acts 15:19) **Therefore** I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,

Trouble = harass more or annoy;

Turning = elsewhere translated "converting". Again, a great choice of words because if they are being converted by God, there's no reason that they would have to be converted by man-made rituals and requirements!

(Acts 15:20) but that we **write to them** to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.

This is an example of the art of compromise WHILE at the same time declaring that he believed Peter, Barnabas and Paul to be correct.

The compromise came not from the Law of Moses but the Law of Christ. For love's-sake, the Jews would not lay any heavy burdens on the Gentiles, particularly as related to salvation; and the Gentiles would change some of their ways so as not to offend their Jewish brothers and sisters in the LORD and not to offend any non-believing Jews who lived in the same region which, in effect, might kill their witness of the Messiah!

They were to abstain from:

1. Things polluted by idols (that is, things sacrificed to idols)
2. Things strangled (forbidden under Jewish law because the blood needed to be immediately and completely drained so that none of it remained in the body)
3. Blood – no eating nor drinking blood of any kind: which like the preceding one is written in the Law:
 - a. **Leviticus 17:11** For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.'
 - b. **Leviticus 17:13-14** "Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; (14) for *it is* the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. ...
4. Sexual immorality – Pastor Guzik believes this doesn't mean sex between unmarried men and women (or an unmarried person with a married person) but rather those actions which were written in

Leviticus 18 where God proclaimed the prohibitions regarding sexual conduct between members of the same family or people of the same gender. These things, evidently were not considered “sin” in the Gentile culture.

(Acts 15:21) For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

The letter wasn't written to the Jewish believers since they knew the Law and its prohibitions; The gentiles were encouraged to follow these simple commands so that their Jewish brethren would not be offended;

(Acts 15:22) Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

(Acts 15:23) They wrote this *letter* by them: **The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.**

(Acts 15:24) **Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" — to whom we gave no such commandment—**

Which would be a stinging rebuke of those Judaizers who claimed to come from Jerusalem under the authority of the Jewish leadership.

The KJV uses a stronger word for “troubled” – subverted which means “the undermining of the power and authority of an established system or institution” and therefore more accurately describes the situation;

(Acts 15:25) **it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,**

Paul, the persecutor has become the beloved!

Note well that they didn't just send the letter out by just any disciple...no it was sent out by Paul and others who were under the authority of God.

(Acts 15:26) **men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Acts 15:27) **We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth.**

Man, if they only had a copy machine...poor Judas and Silas wouldn't have to rely on their memory...

(Acts 15:28) **For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:**

(Acts 15:29) **that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from**

sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

(Acts 15:30) So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. (Acts 15:31) When they had read it, **they rejoiced over its encouragement.** (Acts 15:32) Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. (Acts 15:33) And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. (Acts 15:34) However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. (Acts 15:35) Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Some have argued that what the leadership decided was putting the gentiles under Law since that's the source of these commands.

But even a skimming reading of the New Testament shows that Paul often admonished his readers to "behave" – and much of that behavior was codified in the Law of Moses.

However, there's a huge difference between obeying the Law motivated by the consequences of our failure to perform it and our motivation from the internal guidance and exhortation of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. **(2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**

Today we see what happens when we don't keep the pure gospel of Jesus close to our hearts and guarded like a shepherd protects His sheep. Bob Deffinbaugh wrote on Bible.org:

The gospel requires nothing more than a personal faith in the substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, in the sinner's place, resulting in the forgiveness of sins, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and the certainty of eternal life.

There will always be wolves and other carnivores who want to devour our faith and send us running out of the pasture and straight into the jaws of death. They bring tribulations which cause us to doubt the simplicity of the Gospel – there's got to be more than "faith", right? We need to do more than just believe, right? Not for salvation! It's Jesus and Jesus Only! It's all of Him and none of us!

So, are you sure there aren't any other requirements for salvation **other than faith**? NO, THERE ARE NOT! BUT SOME HAVE TRIED TO IMPOSE THEM ON THOSE COMING TO JESUS. Jewish believer and scholar, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, teaches that "Faith" in the NT is described by three different words used in five different ways:

1. Conviction that something is true;
2. Trust
3. Persuaded
4. Belief based on the facts of knowledge
5. Faith always has an object: The God-head

What are false additions to salvation?

1. **Repentance when it is misused:** When a person just feels sorry for his/her sins, that is NOT repentance; True repentance is “changing one’s mind” and is often linked closely with faith; Feeling “sorry” is a “work” and we can’t earn salvation by how we feel; emotions are too fickle; Yes, your conversion experience can be emotional, but that is a result of changing your mind about Jesus and believing Him alone!
2. **Public Confession of the Messiah:** the two passages for this are [Matthew 10:32-33](#) "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. (33) But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." AND [Romans 10:9-10](#) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (10) For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
 - a. But the context for both is that these are acts of faith and not requirements to “complete your salvation”.
 - b. Dr. Fruchtenbaum notes that in the Romans 10 verses, the Apostle Paul uses a Hebraic poetic form called “inversion” that shows that 2 different concepts are the same: confession and belief;
 - c. Again, confession, if a requirement of salvation, becomes a “work”.
3. **Confession of sins:** This false requirement is taken from 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. “. The biggest problem with this is that John was writing to believers! Can you imagine a sinner coming to Christ being asked to confess all their sins? You can’t therefore you can’t be saved!
4. **Begging God for Salvation:** Often quoted in Isaiah 55:6 “Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.” With the interpretation of “imploring God to save”. The issue here is that Paul taught that there are none who seek God on their own! And remember the two men praying in Luke 18? Some interpret this as the “humble” man seeking God for salvation...but the passage is about prayer-life and our humility in it!
5. **Surrendering to the Lordship of Christ:** Romans 12:1 talks about presenting your body and a “living sacrifice” and therefore some use this verse to convince a person that they must surrender to the LORD when they come to salvation. But again, the context is for those who already believe!
6. **Baptism:**
 - a. [Mark 16:15-16](#) And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. (16) He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned". The passage doesn't say that if you are not baptized you won't be saved. It just says “he who believes” is saved and traditionally, after salvation comes the immersion that is a symbolic act of identifying with Jesus.
 - b. [Acts 2:38](#) Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Greek wording here means “because you are saved, therefore you should be baptized”.
 - c. [Act 22:16](#) And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' Again, in the Greek, this should be translated, “Calling upon the Name of the LORD, one is saved; having been saved, one should arise and be baptized”.

I have heard some of these teachings and personally experienced the “you must make a public confession” because otherwise your salvation will be denied. I have heard it taught that “the first act of obedience is your

baptism” with the thought that if you don’t immediately get baptized, you are being disobedient and therefore are in jeopardy losing what you just received (or you’re not quite saved until this takes place).

NO! If Jesus is the perfect lamb of God, the complete and utter sacrifice for our sin, the only door through which we walk into eternity with God, then NOTHING can be added! He drank the full cup of God’s wrath so that we could drink from the fountain of living waters!

Where did we go wrong? Our pride is the source of this and other hindrances to our coming to HIM!

Oh GOD forgive us! We have taken the most unbelievable thing, the salvation of the rebellious sinner, and tried to make it believable! We have taken the most precious gift we will ever receive and repurposed it to our liking. Oh GOD forgive us! Not only are You and You alone the only One who can satisfy our deepest longings, but You didn’t just save and leave us to our own devices. You invited us to join with You in a relationship that can only be sustained by You and by our abiding in You. Oh God forgive us when we ignore, we take for granted, we keep you at arm’s length by neglecting our life-line of worship. Oh God forgive us! Grant us repentance to turn towards You and stand Face to Face with the Lover of our Souls!

