# Salvation by Grace not Law

### Acts 15:1-35

### Time: ~ 70 minutes

**Intended Audience:**  
 This study of Acts 15:1-35 is going to be tailored specifically towards college age adults and older. The lessons learned here are for Christians who have some aspect of understanding of the meaning of God’s grace and salvation as well as a maturer Christian faith.

**Objective:**  
 This study will demonstrate how Christians approach the subject of false teaching/doctrine and will demonstrate the need for Christians to consistently use discernment and scripture to preach the Gospel to others accurately and when speaking with each other on issues that arise and how to do it with love and humility.

**Hook:(5 min)**  
 Have you ever had an argument with another Christian brother/sister? Do you find that at times these “arguments” can become heated and it seems there are no resolutions? The passage we are about to study Acts 15:1-35 will help all of us learn from the original Christians on how we can resolve and talk out the disagreements we all may encounter as well as teaching us to be strong in the face of false teachers. While going through this study I would like for all of you to think about this question: must Gentiles be held to the same Laws of Moses that the Jewish community were held to in the Old Testament?

**Book:(35 min)**  
 Before we dive into Acts 15 let me set the scene for you starting with a summary of Acts chapter 10. In this chapter we read about the Roman centurion Cornelius and one night he is shown a vision from God telling him to reach out to the Apostle Peter. Meanwhile Peter also has a vision shown to him from God. In this vision God declares to Peter that no longer will there be a separation between Jew and Gentile. This means there will no longer be food considered unclean and the Gospel is to be preached to everyone not just Israel.   
 Chapter 15 starts out in a town named Antioch. Here the Gentiles were being told by prior Pharisees that came from Judea preaching a false doctrine. They were instructing all the Gentiles that if they wanted to truly become Christians and receive salvation they would have to conform to the Laws of Moses including circumcision first. When Paul and Barnabas were told about this they confronted the Pharisees. This is where we see the first thing that points to the proper way to handle disagreements between Christians. Instead of confronting the Pharisee’s there on the spot Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to speak with the other Apostles about what these Pharisee’s were preaching to the Gentiles.

Once in Jerusalem Peter in verse 10 poses a pretty strong argument against the teachings of these Pharisees. He states, “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles the yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?” In posing this question Peter is trying to demonstrate that if the Jewish community isn’t even able to uphold all the Laws of Moses why then would we force new Christians into having to bear that same burden as well.  
 Peter also stated in the prior verses 8 and 9, “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.” This is a direct recall to the events that we read about in chapter 10. Peter is really driving home the point to the Jerusalem Council that because God no longer distinguishes between Jew and Gentile no longer shall we. Even James spoke up to the council quoting a passage from Amos 9:11-12, “In that day, I will restore David’s fallen shelter– I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins–and will rebuild it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, declares the Lord who will do these things.” (“Bible Gateway Passage: Amos 9:11-12 - New American Standard Bible 1995” 2019)  
 The strong arguments from Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James caused the council to sit and peacefully debate and come up with solutions to this issue caused from the false teaching of the Pharisee’s in Antioch. This council while I am sure there were some people who didn’t fully agree with them (Like we find occurs even today when a group of people meet to discuss issues.) all decided that it was true holding Gentiles to the full Law of Moses was not only in direct conflict of what Jesus preached, but would unfairly burden them as well. In the end the council decided to draft a letter to the Gentiles in Antioch with intentions of it spreading to other areas as well. The letter explained that the Gentiles would in fact not be held to the full extent of the Laws of Moses most specifically circumcision, but it did instruct the Gentiles to refrain from eating food that was sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, eating the meat of an animal that was strangled, and from eating anything with the blood still in it.

**Look:(20 min)**  
 Discussion Questions:  
 \* After going over this passage how do you now feel about the question I posed in the beginning?

\* Give examples of things churches have added non-scriptural requirements to salvation.

Activity:

\*\* Have the students get into groups and discuss whether the list below are things that **are required** or are **not required** to be able to lead a Christian life. Have them give the reasons based on scripture for their answers.

\* Removal of Tattoos

\* Removing all sin from life

\* Addictions

\* Smoking

\* Drinking

\* Listening to secular music

\* Baptism

\* Confession

\* Prayer

\* Keeping of the Sabbath

**Took:(5 min)**  
 As we close this study out I would like to have you think about two additional questions that we learned from this passage.  
 \* What does this passage teach us about the Gospel?  
 \* How should Christians handle disagreements over doctrine today?

I would also ask that during this week you all pray each night for humility and discernment for not only yourselves, but for your church and community.

# Works Cited

\*\* All references to Biblical scripture came from these two sources below

“Bible Gateway Passage: Acts 15:1-35 - New American Standard Bible 1995.” 2019. Bible Gateway. 2019. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2015%3A1-35&version=NASB1995>.

“Bible Gateway Passage: Amos 9:11-12 - New American Standard Bible 1995.” 2019. Bible Gateway. 2019. https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Amos%209%3A11-12&version=NASB1995.