

The First Battle for Salvation
by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone
Acts 14 & 15 – August 29, 2010

➤ **A Healthy Perspective Concerning** _____

At Antioch and Iconium God delivered Paul by saving him _____ the stones. At Lystra God delivered him _____ stoning

God has a marvelous plan both when He _____ us from danger and when He _____ us to experience tragedies.

Psalm 34:7, 19

Sometimes God gets us _____ of difficulties
At other times God gets us _____ difficulties
Psalm 103:3
I Thessalonians 5:18
Hebrews 13:15

➤ **When Religious Men Were** _____
Acts 15

Important Observation:
_____ told Paul to take this issue to the saints in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-2)

Luke 5:36-39
Matthew 27:51
Hebrews 10:19-22
Ephesians 2:14-16

- Peter's approach: He reviewed the _____ (Acts 15:7-11)

Peter's Conclusion: (15:11)
Jews are saved the same as Gentiles through the free gift of grace which cannot be _____!

- Paul and Barnabas' approach: They reviewed the _____ (15:12)

- James' Approach: He reviewed _____ (15:18-21)

Crucial to understand:
The final decision was not determined by _____

Wrap Up

The First Battle for Salvation by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone

Acts 14 & 15 – August 29, 2010

Intro: Before we enter into our study of Acts 15 ... I want to draw some very practical applications to what happened in Acts 14

You see ... there were good times ... all ordained by God ... and there were bad times ... all ordained by God

➤ A Healthy Perspective Concerning PROBLEMS

- In Iconium they'd have a wonderful reception ... and things were great for a while (Acts 14:1 ... a great multitude believed)
- But Christ's enemies made things dangerous for Paul ...

Acts 14:2

But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren.

- But Paul and his friends wouldn't back down ... they spent a long time there

Acts 14:3

Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly **with reliance upon the Lord**, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.

- But things heated up and God would get word to them that they needed to flee!

Acts 14:5-6

And when an attempt was made ... to stone them, 14:6 they became aware of it and fled ...

God kept Paul and his friends safe ... so they wouldn't be killed ...

- But in Lystra ... Paul did NOT escape!

Acts 14:19

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

The Point:

We cannot say that God **FAILED** Paul at Lystra.

II Tim. 3:11

{You know of the} "...persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me!"

A Healthy Perspective:

At Antioch and Iconium God delivered Paul by saving him **FROM** the stones.

At Lystra God delivered him **THROUGH** stoning

A Principle To Remember:

God has a marvelous plan both when He **DELIVERS** us from danger and when He **PERMITS** us to experience tragedies.

A principles of life

God always rescues His people

Sometimes in this life ...

Sometimes by death

Turn to Psalm 34:7**Psalm 34:7**

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, And **rescues** them.

2 things to note

1st – God’s presence in our lives is also God’s protection

“encamps around”

2nd – Even in times of trauma – God will rescue us

Psalm 34:19

Many are the afflictions of the righteous; But the Lord delivers him out of them all.

We must learn

Sometimes God gets us **OUT** of difficulties

At other times God gets us **THROUGH** difficulties

Psalm 103:3

“... who heals all your diseases;

Our attitude must always be the same regardless ...

I Thessalonians 5:18

in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 13:15

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

Transition: We enter into the most heated discussion thus far over the offer of salvation by grace.

Two strategies of Satan throughout the ages ...

1. Get the church confused over the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone
2. Get the church confused over the person of Jesus Christ

The church has on occasion been known to close doors when God has opened them.

William Carey, known as the father of missions, back in 1786 laid a burden of world missions before a ministerial meeting in Northampton, England. A great preacher, Dr. Ryland, responded by saying

"Young man, sit down! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine!"

We are wise to consider ...

Good men can occasionally be terribly wrong!

In Acts 15 we come on an issue that must be completely understood by a believer. We learn much of the history behind the writing of the Book of Galatians.

The events recorded in Acts 15 led to the doctrinal discussion of law versus grace in the Galatian Epistle.

I entitled this sermon ... the first battle for salvation by grace alone because it would not be the last. For the same battle would erupt when Martin Luther on October 31, 1517 nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the church in Wittenburg, Germany.

➤ **When Religious Men Were MISTAKEN**

Acts 15:1

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

The Setting:

These Jews were **ASSOCIATED** with but not **AUTHORIZED** by the church at Jerusalem

They have come to clear up perceived errors in the presentation of doctrine

To these Jews salvation could be seen in this mathematical formula

Salvation = grace + faith + keeping the Law

In reality ... their perspective of salvation was ...

Salvation = grace + faith + good works

Acts 15:2

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

- Here's a concern. It appears that thorough explanations were given by the Apostle Paul on this subject ... yet these Jews are not convinced.
- These Jews would not accept this doctrine unless the Jewish believers in Jerusalem confirmed it.

- This tells us that Paul's apostleship was not recognized by everyone in Jerusalem
- They did not consider him the authority ... and left the authority for doctrine with the Jerusalem church leaders. Hmmm ...

Acts 15:4-5

When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Acts 15:5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

Transition: Acts chapter 15 is about **20 years** after the time of Pentecost. God is behind this major show down to establish once and for all (though it was lost again and revived under Martin Luther) that salvation is by grace alone ... not the works of the Law.

The Declaration of War:

Paul and Barnabas had to declare war on this issue

If these legalists (Judaizers) are correct then Paul and Barnabas have **DECEIVED** Gentiles
Paul and Barnabas were then heretics ... leading Gentiles into a false salvation ...

In verse 2 it indicates that the Gentile believers sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem ...
Galatians 2 indicates that God was behind the move!

Important Observation:

GOD told Paul to take this issue to the saints in Jerusalem

Gal. 2:1-2

"Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also."

And it was **because of a revelation** that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

The leaders at Jerusalem were recognized as the most pre-eminent internationally

* Several of the Apostles still dwelled their (Peter, James the half brother of Jesus, John)

The church at Jerusalem would be the place for this council.

THE CRUCIAL POINT

THIS DOCTRINE OF SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE IS NO SMALL MATTER.

Salvation by grace is the major point of divergence in Christianity

Mormons = salvation comes through their church and the following of commandments

Jehovah's Witnesses = salvation comes by sharing the news about Jehovah ... not by merely faith

Roman Catholics = salvation by faith plus taking of the sacraments, going to confession, attending church at least once a year ...

The argument in the early church was salvation by faith + CIRCUMCISION and the following of ceremonial laws and dietary restrictions! **WRONG!**

The Difficulty for Jews:

1. They had been taught to seek to keep the Law
 2. They had labored to avoid eating unclean foods
 3. They spent years and years of training in the O.T. and in study concerning the law of Moses
 4. They believed that a relationship with God and man was initiated through the rite of circumcision ...
- **AND NOW THEY ARE TOLD THAT OTHERS CAN KNOW GOD WITHOUT BEING CIRCUMCIZED OR FOLLOWING THE CEREMONIAL CODES OF THE JEWS!**

A hard doctrine for Jews:

Grasping salvation that is absolutely free of **WORKS**

The Ugliness of Legalism:

Adding something to the work of Christ on the cross is:

#1 - Likened to the pouring of new wine into old **WINESKINS**

Luke 5:36-39

- * Jesus prepared the Jews for some changes
- * Jesus told them they would need to understand their teaching in a different light!
- * Jesus prepared their heart so it would be ready to accept others ...

(The ugliness of legalism)

#2 - Likened to stitching up the veil that was **TORN** in the **TEMPLE** (Matthew 27:51)

Heb. 10:19-22

"Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh

(The ugliness of legalism)

#3 - Likened to **REBUILDING** the wall between Jews and Gentiles that God destroyed

Ephesians 2:14-16

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,
2:15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

2:16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Transition: This was no small matter. It had to be confronted head on. This is not a negotiable truth. It is absolute and completely an undeniable truth ... those who do not adhere to salvation by grace through faith are not our brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is not simply a matter of whether one should be circumcised or not, whether one should eat meat or not.

The Central Issue:

What must one do to gain or have **ENTRANCE** to heaven?

* What must one do in order to be saved?

The Work of Jesus on the Cross:

Is the work of Christ adequate to save or must a ritual be observed?

Church Councils:

Throughout history ... other church councils have decided important issues

1. Issues such as the **validity** and the **inerrancy** of the Scriptures
2. The **Deity** of Christ

The Deliberations:

Handled by the apostles and the elders ... They were intense and probably very heated ... but they were handled very honorably!

Peter is present ... and responds to the issues ...

- **Peter's approach:** He reviewed the **PAST** (15:7-11)

Acts 15:7-11

After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

15:8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

15:9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

15:10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?"

15:11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

What We See:

1. God **INITIATED** the outreach to Gentiles (15:7)
2. God determined to use **PETER** as the spokesman

"... that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel ..."

Matt. 11:28-30 - Peter is given the key of the kingdom to open the door for the salvation of many

3. God gave them the same exact **GIFT** (15:8) - **The Holy Spirit**
4. God recognizes no **DIFFERENCE** between Jew and Gentile (15:9)
5. (15:9b) God accepted them and cleansed them by **FAITH**

That which is abundantly clear ...

There is extreme **DANGER** in not accepting God's plan for salvation

“why do you put God to the test ...”

Peter's Conclusion: (15:11)

Jews are saved the same as Gentiles through the free gift of grace which cannot be **EARNED!**

The Reaction of the Multitude: (15:12)

* The multitude kept silent ... and listened!

- Paul and Barnabas' approach: They reviewed the **PRESENT** (15:12)
 - * Their emphasis is on the **MIRACLES** that validated God's approval of Gentiles
- James' Approach: He reviewed **PROPHECY** (15:18-21)

Acts 15:15-18

“With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

15:16 ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT,

15:17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’

15:18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.

Acts 15:19-21

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

15:20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

15:21 “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

He sites prophecy to show that this has been in God's plan from the beginning

The Key Thought: AGREEMENT!

1. James concurs with **PETER** (Simeon)
2. James shows that prophecy **VALIDATES** the salvation of Gentiles

Crucial to understand:

The final decision was not determined by **MAN**

It was realized or discovered by man ... but determined by God.

These men did not say after consultation ... that James was speaking EX CATHEDRA = A statement demanding acceptance both by God and man!

James is saying:

- ✓ All the evidence is in
- ✓ All the evidence agrees with God's word
- ✓ All the evidence agrees with itself ...
- ✓ God has provided salvation to all men by His grace completely through faith

Don't miss this

This doctrine was not determined by a **VOTE**

This doctrine was merely recognized and **ACCEPTED**

The Recommendation: 15:20

Acts 15:20

but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

A letter should be drafted ...

1. Gentiles should be encouraged in their **FAITH**-only-salvation!
2. Gentiles should be encouraged in a life-style of **OBEDIENCE** not license
3. Gentiles should demonstrate love by **AVOIDING** offensive habits with Jews

The Precious Response:

1. (15:22) Paul and Barnabas are commissioned to bring a letter
2. (15:30-31) The congregation rejoiced because of its encouragement!

The issue is settled ...

Legalists better change and not add anything to salvation ... it is by pure grace!

Wrap Up

- I see grace as the divine side of salvation
- I see faith as the human side of salvation ... (a mystery I have not figured out)

I see that *"faith is the hand that receives grace"*

3 truths we observe again

Salvation is by **grace** alone through **faith** alone by **Christ** alone

Hymn: Wonderful Grace of Jesus

Wonderful grace of Jesus,
Greater than all my sin;
How shall my tongue describe it,
Where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden,

Setting my spirit free;
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.

Refrain

*Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea;
Wonderful grace, all sufficient for me, for even me.
Broader than the scope of my transgressions,
Greater far than all my sin and shame,
O magnify the precious Name of Jesus.
Praise His Name!*

Wonderful grace of Jesus,
Reaching to all the lost,
By it I have been pardoned,
Saved to the uttermost,
Chains have been torn asunder,
Giving me liberty;
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.

Refrain

Wonderful grace of Jesus,
Reaching the most defiled,
By its transforming power,
Making him God's dear child,
Purchasing peace and heaven,
For all eternity;
And the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.