

I. Historical Background of Text

A. Pauls' Travel Experience

1. First missionary journey
 - a. Pisidian Antioch
 - (1) Jews reject the gospel - Paul rejects the Jews
 - (2) Gentiles rejoice
 - (3) Jews run Paul and Barnabas out of the city
 - b. Iconium
 - (1) Great number of Jews and Greeks believe the gospel
 - (2) Unbelieving Jews stirred up the populace against Paul and Barnabas and eventually devised a plan to stone them
 - (3) They left for southern Galatian cities of Lystra and Derbe
 - c. Lystra
 - (1) God heals the crippled man in Lystra through Paul
 - (2) People mistake Paul and Barnabas for gods
 - (3) Unbelieving Jews show up again
 - (a) They stone Paul and leave him for dead
 - (b) But Paul gets up and heads out to Derbe
 - d. Derbe
 - (1) They preached and made many disciples
 - (2) Retraced their steps back through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch
 - (a) Strengthened the churches
 - (b) Appointed elders
2. Continued travels until they returned to Syrian Antioch where they started
3. **Acts 14:27-28 (ESV)** ²⁷ *And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.* ²⁸ *And they remained no little time with the disciples.*

B. Beginning of the controversy

1. **Read Acts 15:1-35**
2. Controversy (Luke reports it twice for clarity)
 - a. v. 1 "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
 - b. v. 5 "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

II. The Controversy Over The Nature of True Salvation

A. What is the real issue?

1. Is this merely a manner of custom, or is the gospel at stake here?
2. Two questions
 - a. What does it mean to be saved?
 - b. How does one get to be saved?

B. Two Questions

1. What does it mean to be saved?
 - a. This question deserves more than a simple answer because salvation involves more than just being delivered from sin and guilt
 - b. But, for the sake of keeping with the controversy at hand, to be saved means to be delivered from guilt and the power of sin by God through faith in Jesus Christ
 - c. Result of “being saved” is
 - (1) a right standing before God,
 - (2) forgiveness of sin, (“If we confess our sin, . . .)
 - (3) a new life and a new heart and a new spirit,
 - (4) and the bestowment of eternal life.
2. How does one get to be saved?
 - a. The controversy: by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ or by some work or effort the sinner makes on his/her own behalf?
 - b. Some believers were teaching that you have to do something to gain your own salvation
 - (1) Judaizers:
 - (a) have to join the covenant community through circumcision (become a Jew because only Jews can be saved by the God of the Jews)
 - (b) follow the law of Moses
 - (2) Paul and Barnabas
 - (a) Salvation by God’s grace alone through faith in Christ alone
 - (b) **Who is right?**
 - c. Importance of the question
 - (1) If the Judaizers are right then the Old Covenant of works is still the means of grace
 - (a) Under the law, if you break any of the law, you are guilty of breaking the entire law
 - (b) If you are a lawbreaker, then under the law you must make sacrifices for your guilt in order to receive forgiveness and right standing before God
 - (c) But what sacrifice could you make that would be greater or better or more worthy or more perfect than the sacrifice God made of His own Son, Jesus?
 - i) That’s why the Roman Catholic Church says Mass every day of the week.
 - ii) They crucify Jesus day after day because they think they have to cover their own sins and the only sacrifice they have to make is Christ.
 - iii) The Eucharist is the sacrifice of Christ by the church for the removal of sin for those

who receive the bread and the wine (which they believe to be the crucified body and blood of Jesus.)

- (d) But others are asking the same question:
 - i) Today many believe there is no need for personal forgiveness; there is only need for personal goodness.
 - ii) They do the work of love as a transaction with God.
 - iii) If they do enough good, God will honor their efforts and take them into heaven when they die.
- (e) Still others teach you have to say a pray or respond to a particular gospel invitation or invite Jesus into your heart; that you have to do something that triggers the application of God's mercy in your life.
- (2) All of these efforts at self-saving nullify the cross, deny the efficacy of Christ's death, and gut the power of the gospel, making the good news nothing more than invitation to more self-serving hard work the sinner is not inclined to do anyway!

C. Peter and the Last Word

1. Acts 15:7-11 (ESV) ⁷ *And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."*
2. Four Observations
 - a. God acted to send the gospel to the Gentiles
 - b. God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles
 - c. God cleansed the hearts of Gentiles through faith
 - d. God saves Gentile and Jew alike through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
3. James, the leader and brother of Jesus, concurs with Peter and grounds the final response on the word of God.
 - a. **Salvation is by grace alone**
 - b. **Through faith in Jesus Christ alone**
 - c. **According to the word of God alone**
 - d. **For the glory of God alone**

III. Why point this out to you? (Three Reasons)

A. In obedience to the Scripture admonition to teach and maintain sound doctrine

1. **Titus 2:1 (ESV)** ¹ *But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.*
2. Sound doctrine secures believers in biblical truth
 - a. Know God's truth
 - b. Love God's truth
 - c. Live God's truth

B. In hope of preparing all of us for gospel witness

1. **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*
2. "Jesus loves me" is true, but it also directs the attention of grace on you as the recipient and says little about Christ and what motivates His love for you, namely His passion for the glory of God.

C. In deep concern that we are all actually saved

1. **2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*
2. What are you trusting?
 - a. God's saving grace or are we attempting to barter a trade with God
 - b. Are we relying on grace through faith for God's glory or an effort/choice of our own.

D. In great desire you will freely rejoice in the grace of God.

1. The burden of your eternal destiny rests not on your shoulders but on God's mercy and grace!
2. Every moment of life is wrapped in grace as sufficient as the grace that saves.
3. **Acts 15:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."*