



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Don't Close the Door!

FEBRUARY 23, 2017

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Acts 15:1-5 *“And certain men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ 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. 3) So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversation of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. 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. 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.’” (NKJV)*

“BUT EVEN IF WE, OR AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN PREACH ANY OTHER GOSPEL TO YOU THAN WHAT WE HAVE PREACHED TO YOU, LET HIM BE ACCURSED. AS WE HAVE SAID BEFORE, SO NOW I SAY AGAIN, IF ANYONE PREACHES ANY OTHER GOSPEL TO YOU THAN WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED, LET HIM BE ACCURSED.” (GALATIANS 1:8-9)

Who had sent these from Judea? Is one group proposing circumcision of believers and the others unbelievers? In what way was this question similar to that which was dealt with in the Reformation? Is this the first heated debate in the church? Why is this first church council most important? Did they go through a capital on the way? Was their report received with joy in Jerusalem like it was in the other places they visited? How do these demands clarify the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

FOCUS ON FUTURE SATELLITE BIBLE STUDIES:

- APRIL 19-21: ACTS 15:6-12 **IS JUDIASM OR JESUS THE PATH OF SALVATION?**
- APRIL 26-28: ACTS 15:13-21 **GOD'S WORD IS THE FINAL AUTHORITY**

Paul had suffered severe persecution for opening this door to the Gentiles. He had not only won the Gentile king of the island of Cyprus after seemingly no results in the synagogues, successfully seeing it become a Gospel lighthouse of the Mediterranean, but he had preached in Pisidia Antioch so powerfully that *“almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God”* (Acts 13:44). The response was due to Paul giving the Gentiles equality with the Jews eight times as he preached the Gospel to them. Of that capital population of probably around 70,000 people, *“as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”* (13:48), which must have been over half the city. The Jews not only responded with antagonism, but they soon manipulated the leaders to expel Paul and Barnabas from their city. In the next capital, Iconium, which was almost the same size, there were similar numbers believing so that *“the multitude of the city was divided”* (14:4). Now they wanted to lynch Paul and stone him, which they accomplished in Lystra, yet *“he rose up and went into the city”* (14:20). After suffering so much outward persecution for the Gospel, Paul and Barnabas are again faced with those opposing the Gospel from within, seeking to close the open door to the Gentiles.

“THIS WAS A DECLARATION OF WAR THAT PAUL AND BARNABAS COULD NOT IGNORE.” WARREN WIERSBE

I. YOUR DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL **ACTS 15:1-2**

These men had the credentials of being from the right location. They deceitfully claimed to be sent by the mother church in Jerusalem (15:24) which gave them immediate credibility with this much younger church in

BIBLE STUDIES

THURSDAY @ 6:30 AM—PRAYER MEETING – GAB 3RD FLOOR EAST CONFERENCE ROOM

THURSDAY @ 7:00 AM—BIBLE STUDY – GAB 3RD FLOOR EAST CONFERENCE ROOM

THURSDAY @ 4:30 PM—BIBLE STUDY – GAB 330-SENATOR CARRICO'S OFFICE

Virginia

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the capital of Syria. Paul describes them as “*false brethren secretly brought in (who came by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage)*” (Gal. 2:4). These self-appointed guardians of legalism required the rites of Judaism for salvation. They taught that “*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.*” Instead of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, they, like every false religion, prescribed some kind of works as necessary for salvation. Instead of trusting the finished work of Christ upon the cross and His gift of grace (Eph. 2:8-9), they required a way to earn salvation. Paul, in speaking of these same false teachers, said that “*we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you*” (Gal. 2:5). He knew that this was dealing with the most important doctrine regarding the church—a clear understanding of the Gospel. Thus, they “*had no small dissension and dispute with them.*” These stubborn leaders met with the faithful defense of truth by Paul and Barnabas and both were unmovable so “*they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.*”

“FOR YOU ARE ALL SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS.” GALATIANS 3:26

II. YOUR DECLARATION OF GOD'S WORK ACTS 15:3-4

Even though those who have attacked the Gospel being taught by Paul and Barnabas are along for the trip down to Jerusalem, they still boldly and constantly described in detail “*the conversion of the Gentiles.*” It is obvious that they are confident of the outcome and decision that will occur when they get to Jerusalem in that they fully declare to all the churches on the way how God had so richly blessed their work in seeing so many lives transformed by faith in Jesus Christ alone. The Phoenician churches were in Gentile territory and were probably full of Gentiles who were thrilled to hear how so many other Gentiles had

come to faith in Christ. Even the half-Jewish Samaritans were excited to hear that God had “*opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*” (14:27) so that Paul and Barnabas “*caused great joy to all the brethren.*” There is no lack of welcome at Jerusalem as “*they were received by the church, and the apostles and the elders.*” And giving their missions report in the same way so that God received all the glory, “*they reported all things that God had done with them.*” They declared the truth of God's work, without concern for the response.

“FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES, FOR THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO FOR THE GREEK. FOR IN IT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM FAITH TO FAITH; AS IT IS WRITTEN, ‘THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’” ROMANS 1:16-17

III. YOUR DISCERNMENT OF FALSE DOCTRINE 15:5

The response in Jerusalem was certainly not what Paul and Barnabas might have expected. Rather than all in the mother church rejoicing, they immediately met resistance. These were true believers, but were “*of the sect of the Pharisees,*” so they were focused on the same legalism. Because they were true believers, they got the truth of the Gospel correct regarding salvation by faith alone, but they then “*rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’”* They sought the same path through Judaism but expected that the Gentiles submit to this because they were already Christians. Paul both discerns and answers this false doctrine as well. “*Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*” (Gal. 3:2-3ff). God's narrow path of salvation is not just begun by faith, it is continued by faith. Mere external rituals or legalism can neither save nor sanctify anyone.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) When others twist or spurn the truth of God's Word or the Gospel, are you a leader who is willing to defend it?
- 2) Do you declare the wonder of God's work of grace in the lives of others, even when there is opposition to it?
- 3) Are you discerning enough to deal with false doctrine, particularly regarding salvation by grace through faith alone?