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# GOD'S GRACE IS ENOUGH - ACTS 15:1-21

## STARTING THE DISCUSSION...

How excited do you get for a council meeting? Between strata meetings, PTA, charities, or organizations, you probably have had to go to one of these meetings before. You discuss budgets, what happened last year, and what the plan is for next year. They are necessary, but not usually the kind of things that we get excited for, and so when we open to Acts 15 and find a church council meeting, we are understandably apprehensive. However, what is being discussed in this chapter is far from boring, it is life changing! The church is at a crossroads of what to do with Gentiles entering the church, do they have to become Jewish to be saved? The very gospel hinges on this decision! Are we saved by grace through faith, or do we need to accomplish something else? It is the difference between legalism and grace. The difference between working for your salvation or it being given freely. This council meeting will set the stage for the Christian church for the next two thousand years (and more if Jesus delays coming!), and we are eternally grateful for the determination of these men to declare that salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone!

## KEY TEXT: ACTS 15:1-21

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**15** But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup> And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the



others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. <sup>3</sup> So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

<sup>4</sup> When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup> But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

<sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, <sup>9</sup> and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> 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? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

<sup>12</sup> And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. <sup>13</sup> After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. <sup>15</sup> And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

<sup>16</sup> " 'After this I will return,  
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;  
I will rebuild its ruins,

and I will restore it,

<sup>17</sup> that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,  
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,  
says the Lord, who makes these things <sup>18</sup> known from of old.'

<sup>19</sup> Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, <sup>20</sup> but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. <sup>21</sup> For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."



**Additional Texts:** *Matthew 23:15; Romans 3:9-10, 20, 14:7-8; Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 2:4-5, 5:1*

## UNDERSTANDING THE WORD

1. What is the significance of circumcision in the Bible? Look at Genesis 17:11-14, why were the Pharisees so concerned about keeping it? Now consider Deuteronomy 10:16-17 and Jeremiah 9:25, how does the Old Testament view the significance of circumcision? Finally look at Romans 2:25-29, how does the New Testament understand circumcision?
2. Verses 16-17 are a quotation from Amos 9:11-12, turn to the book of Amos and read the passage. What do you notice that is different between the quotation in Acts and Amos? What is significant about the change and how does it help them understand the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church?
  - a. Extra Notes: Amos 9:12 says, “the remnant of **Edom**” where Acts 15:17 says, “the remnant of **mankind**.” This change is a result of how the Hebrew language is arranged. Originally, there were no vowels in Hebrew words, therefore the word for “Edom” was “DM.” This is the same spelling as the word “Adam” as the only difference is the vowels. The word “Adam” is the Hebrew word for “man” or “mankind.” Only context could show you which was intended. Therefore, what James recognizes in the prophecy of Amos is that God intended for more than just the nation of Edom to turn to Him, but rather all of mankind!

## APPLYING THE WORD

3. What things do you identify in the way you live your life that are part of that legalistic tendency of our hearts?
4. What kind of freedom do you experience when you understand all the requirements of the law have been fulfilled in Christ?
5. Understanding we are called to sacrificial love, what practical things would you change in your daily living with those around you?



## PRAYING & ACTING

1. Share with your group the name(s) of one or two people that you would like the opportunity to share the gospel with in your life. Pray that God would give you opportunities to share and hold one another accountable to be reaching out.
2. How can your Life Group reach out to your community this week? Who can you invite to join your group?

