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A0909 – March 1, 2009 – Acts 15:1-12 – The Council Of Jerusalem

All right, Acts 15, the first ecumenical council of the Christian church convenes at Jerusalem in response to the questions raised in vv 1 and 5 Antioch. And what we're observing here is how the early church solved doctrinal differences. This doctrinal problem, as we said last week, has to do with the gradual revelation of the new entity, the Church. Up to the point of Acts 15 it still was not officially acknowledged that something new was happening. Obviously, experientially something was happening but no one really got it together doctrinally and said this is, in fact, what is happening: the kingdom of God that had been so highly emphasized in the OT, so highly emphasized in the Gospels and so highly emphasized in the early days of the Book of Acts is now fading out and gradually you're having a situation develop where the Church is being realized.

There are lots of lessons to learn; as we said last week, a lesson about what Dispensationalism is all about, how important that is to the discussion, because here they're facing a dispensational transition, a shift from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ. Notice, not a shift in the way of salvation, but a shift with respect to their way of sanctification. Nevertheless there were those who disputed the way of salvation and they have to hash out certain of these details. We'll see more of that today as well as more detail about how to solve doctrinal differences.

So to see the differences let's analyze starting in v 2. The unauthorized crew from Jerusalem have already arrived in Antioch and been teaching, that's v 1. **V 2, And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them,** that's a nice way of saying they had an all out fight about this. To see what the all out must have been like turn to Gal 2; this is the epistle written to the very churches that are the center of dispute. Now there is some

scholarly disagreement as to whether Gal 2 refers to Acts 15 or Acts 11; we're not interested in answering that problem right at the moment. All we're interested showing you is the general turmoil that was involved in the early church.

In Gal 2:1 Paul says, "then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also." Now Titus was a Christian but he was a Gentile; he was not a Jew, and he was uncircumcised. So this is the same situation. ²It 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. ³But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." In other words, Paul says isn't it strange that when I went to the apostles they didn't demand that Titus be circumcised. So not only can circumcision not have anything to do with salvation, apparently it has nothing to do with sanctification, because if these guys are interested in Titus spiritually, they would have said, "Hey Titus, you know, if you want to grow spiritually the next things you have to do is be circumcised..." but they didn't.

So therefore that is an admission that Titus, as a Christian, was not saved by the Law of Moses nor was he under the Law of Moses. "But *it was* because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage." And notice the attitude of verse 5, it shows you how the apostle Paul handled these types, "But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you." He wasn't going to put up with these legalists trying to mess up the new converts. Verse 7, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised," verse 9, "and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." There was no problem. Paul solved it, his gospel was the same as Peter's, not a particle of difference. But a little incident happened shortly thereafter.

To show you there were still problems with the new truth: verse 11, “But when Cephas came to Antioch,” (remember, earlier, Acts 12 we saw Peter was broken out of the Antonia Fortress prison and he was running from Herod, Herod was trying to kill him. Well, Peter ran up to Antioch, and that’s when Peter and Paul have this argument), “I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.” You’ve heard of Peter being the first Pope and how the Pope is infallible? Not according to Paul. Paul recognized no Papal authority, he recognized God’s truth as the authority and he’d take you to task in public. “¹²For prior to the coming of certain men from James,” (that’s the group that came up in Acts 15:1 apparently), “he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. ¹³The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.” Now everything was going along fine until these legalists arrive and then what’s the problem? You guys are uncircumcised, you’re unclean, and apparently everybody didn’t buy the thing that happened at Cornelius’ house, so now we’ve got a Jew/Gentile division. How in the world can you have Christian unity and fellowship in this situation? What about communion service? Can a circumcised Jew get together with an uncircumcised Gentile and eat that meal? Now the whole communion table is spoiled. That’s what this group of legalists did to the early church. And Peter and Barnabas are in on the thing, they’re causing division. Verse 14, here’s some more of Paul’s feistiness, “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” In other words, he said Peter, what were you doing yesterday before these guys showed up? Tell them Peter. And Peter didn’t have a thing to say. Gratefully Peter received the rebuke with grace, he knew he was in the wrong and he got back in line with the gospel. But this is how Paul solved the theological problem.

Now come back to Acts 15 and you get appreciation more in depth for this dissension, great dissension. And so, **the brethren**, v 2, who were largely uncircumcised Gentiles, **determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.** But why does Paul need to go to the apostles, I thought Paul was an apostle? Why couldn’t he just pronounce this is the way it is and this is the way it’s going to be and that’s it, I’m an apostle! Yes, he

was an apostle, but not of the twelve, so the brethren think it wise that he go up to the twelve apostles. And so **Paul, Barnabas** as well as **some others** were sent by the church of Antioch to the church at Jerusalem to speak with **the apostles and elders**. Had they run in vain? Was their work null and void? Verse 3, **Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria**, these are the areas along the Levantine trade route, they'd already been visited by Jewish believers who scattered out after Stephen was martyred. Many of them came up this way and established churches along here. So Paul, Barnabas and others were passing through here visiting the churches and **describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren**. They pass on the report of what happened in Asia Minor, "We went to Lystra and we preached the good news and Gentiles came to faith in the Messiah, do you see any problem with that? And then we went over to Derbe and we preached the good news to them and more Gentiles came to faith in Jesus, they weren't circumcised, what do you think about that?" And they went into all the detail - sort of testing their case. And it brought them **great joy**; they were excited about the movement of God in history. And so you see a principle here that Paul tested their theological case before he got to Jerusalem with other Jewish believers so he doesn't go into Jerusalem looking like an idiot. "Are there any preliminary objections to this? Do we have our stuff together?" And apparently they did, they all agreed with Paul and Barnabas, and by so doing they were gathering a coalition. Verse 4, **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**. So they go through the reports again, the same ones they'd tried out in Phoenicia and Samaria and they seem to have had a good hearing, but verse 5 some of them weren't buying it. They were from the believing element of the Pharisees, **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."**

And with that we enter into the halls of the first ecumenical council and a discussion of the principles used to solve church problems. The first observation we make in v 6 is that it was the leaders of the church that solved the problems; it was not every Tom, Dick and Harry. Now there are people who are meant to lead and there are people who are meant to follow; everyone must finally agree that there must be leaders. This goes for every

area, for government, for the military, for the local organization and this goes for the Church. There must be leaders in the NT Church just as in OT Israel. And the leaders who solved the first church dispute were, vv 6, 7, 12, 13 and 19, apostles and elders. Now there's nothing wrong with having a small group of men making the decisions. Some of us who are conservative get antsy about a small group of men who sit around in dark corners making decisions that affect us all. But in and of itself there is nothing wrong with a small group of leaders. It's simply a principle of doing things in an orderly manner. Besides, not everyone is a leader, in fact very few of us are leaders, and most of us are followers and simply aren't equipped to lead. But what do we do with the problem of the insider job, the man or men on the inside who have a deceitful agenda, who wish to manipulate the masses and have the power and influence to do so. Well, you don't elect that man into the office. But in and of itself electing people into office is not wrong. So the issue is not do you have a group of leaders but who are the leaders? What's their character like? How long have they been involved in the organization? There needs to be a continuity of involvement so they have their hands on the issues. What are the issues? How do they handle the issues? What's their track record? This is true for every organization.

The second principle, and here we narrow things down to the church, here we're talking the elders of the church. The issue is here whether they're making their decisions by man's word or by God's word. There are only two routes in decision making, either man or God is the standard in decision making. To illustrate decision making on the part of man, starting on an autonomous base with man and man alone there are two extremes. There is what we might call the ultra-right wing conservative where every man is free to do whatever he wants. This is the anarchistic route and no government can operate under anarchy. As long as every man is doing what he wants there will be chaos, instability and eventually civil war. In such an environment the masses will eventually call out for order, we want law and we want order, and so they swing to the other extreme, what we might call the ultra-left wing liberal idea where the cry is for more government. This is the trend toward totalitarianism. When the chaos level gets high enough, and this can come by economic recession, terrorism which creates fear in the average citizen's life (and that's the goal of terrorism, to get everyone upset, to destroy people, to terrorize until you agitate, agitate, agitate and agitate enough) and sooner or later people get fed up with the whole situation, vote away their

freedoms and go with marshal law. That's always the way it will go; that's the way it's going to go in this country. You will always have it; it's a law of history that it has to go this way, that is, on an autonomous base.

Now there is a third option, and this is the option the church elders should take. Both of these views, the anarchist and totalitarian routes, stem from man starting with himself and generating his own standard from his finite resources. The only solution and the only way out is when the elders, the men who are the real leaders, when they say I don't generate standards, I look up and I see God's absolute standards, this is the third way, the Biblical way. When the leaders of the core group, these men, are consciously aware of God's absolute laws over and above them and willingly submit to them.

Now this first ecumenical council in Acts 15 is a graphic illustration of a Christian group functioning, the leaders at work, the "insiders" if you will, working out the policy of the church, but what saves the group is not democracy, what saves the group is the fact that the people leading the group look to God's word; that's what saves the group, not the masses but the orientation of the leadership. As long as the leadership is tracking with God and His word you'll be all right.

So let's read vv 6-18 to get a feel for what goes on, **"The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. ⁷After 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. ⁸"And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; ⁹and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 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? ¹¹"But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." ¹²All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. ¹⁴"Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people**

for His name. ¹⁵“With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶AFTER 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, ¹⁷SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’ ¹⁸SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.

This is how they solved the doctrinal dispute. And the first thing we want to observe is the quotations of prior revelation. Starting in v 7 Peter quotes from Acts 10:19ff, the events at Cornelius’ house, “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,” a clear reference back to the events at Cornelius’ house. Verse 8, the phrase, “giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us” comes from 10:44, 47. Verse 9, “He made no distinction between us and them,” that is Jew and Gentile, reference to 10:28, 34 and 11:12. Now drop down to James’ address, vv 16-18, a composite quotation from Amos 9:11-12, Jer 12:15 and Isa 45:21. So what are they going to base their decision on? What’s their basis for decision making? Do they run out in the streets of Jerusalem and say, “Hey, would you take our poll. We want to know what you think. Should we let the Gentiles in with full status or not? What say ye?” You see nothing like that, there is no link with what men think in this discussion, that’s wholly absent. The whole discussion revolves around the word of God and is solved on the basis of the word of God alone. So let’s watch the development of Christian decision making in a group.

Verse 6, **The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.** Notice, not every believer, this is not a democracy at work, other believers are present as you can see in v 12, but they’re listening, they’re not engaging in the discussion, they’re silent. They’re watching and learning how the mature believers, the true leaders are going to resolve this thing, and so verse 6, there are your leaders, **the apostles and elders**, the small group of “insiders” if you will, but importantly doing things out in the open and not behind closed doors in smoke-filled rooms.

Verse 7, **After there had been much debate**, another little principle, all viewpoints are considered in the decision making. Real decision making must consider all viewpoints; they may be rejected but they must be considered, else we overlook something that may be important to the issue. And so the

elders and apostles allowed opposing viewpoints to be aired, they considered them and debated them *inside* a Biblical framework. Does this line up with the word of God? Because that's what matters, not my opinion or your opinion but God's word. And so they get it all out on the table and start slicing away at man's solutions. And **Peter stood up and said to them.** Now the first thing to observe is that Paul and Barnabas did not stand up first to address the issue. What they have done is the issue and it would not be expedient for them to stand up in Jerusalem where they have very little authority and are the subject of the vitriolic attacks and try to defend themselves, they've already had the dispute in Antioch, they've already said their peace in v 5, now it's time for someone who is a recognized authority to stand up and address the council. Notice how the Holy Spirit works, he doesn't pick some unknown. Granted that some unknown could have made the same argument Peter made, but a real question is, "How would it have been received from an unknown vs how would it be received from Peter." Now we should all agree that if two people give the same argument it will be better received when given by the person who holds rank. Think of the military: if some kid in boot camp gives a speech and General Patton gave the same speech; same content in the speech, who are you going to be more receptive too? Obviously General Patton, he's a recognized authority. Now it shouldn't be that way, the issue should be the content of the message, not the messenger. But such is human nature, we tend to respond to those who hold rank, who we are familiar with and are well recognized. And there's nothing essentially wrong with that, they've earned their position, it's simply that even then the content must be critically analyzed because all men can be wrong, regardless of rank. But the Holy Spirit seems to use a principle here of creditable witness. Peter is a creditable witness, a well-known authority, he's one of the original twelve disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was from the land of Israel, Jesus Christ lived in his house up in Capernaum, he was there in the upper room, he was there crucifixion week and he was at Cornelius' house. So who is a more creditable witness than Peter? And so the Holy Spirit chose Peter to be the one to stand and make this initial address. Peter on the human side listened very carefully till all the views were on the table and now he stands up as the creditable witness

and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, in the early days, clearly referring back to Acts 10, the expression **in the early days** means "a long time ago". And you

say, a long time ago, that was just five chapters back, yeah, but five chapters ago was 10 years ago. So God **made a choice** ten years ago, meaning God elected Peter out of all the other Jewish believers to go to the Gentiles, and the way he did that was Peter was up on a rooftop in Joppa waiting for lunch. Lunch was being prepared and he got hungry and he had a vision of food up there, the Holy Spirit showed him the most disgusting menu he'd ever seen, clean and unclean all mixed together and just at the time he saw the vision the third time a dispatch from Cornelius' house arrived. And we said then it was all about the timing, everything was perfectly timed by the Holy Spirit in that event, that was God making this choice in Acts 10. And then he states bluntly what he was chosen for; **that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.** And notice the beginning of the verse, **Brethren, you know** this, this was not new knowledge. Peter was not giving them any new information, they'd known this for ten years. So in the initial argument verse 7 he does two things. First, he appeals to prior knowledge, **you know** this and second, what they knew is what God had done, He had chosen Peter to go to Cornelius' house. So don't give me another line. We have precedent for how Gentiles are saved, we have divine precedent for solving this dispute.

Verse 8, **And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;** that refers to that scene back in Acts 10. What happened? When Peter arrived, with six Jewish witnesses we might add, not the traditional two but six, he wanted to make sure he had so many witnesses that whatever happened his ministry would not be in jeopardy. And Peter crossed the threshold of Cornelius's house, his whole household was gathered waiting for the word, what's the word of God Peter? And they all stood there and they listened to the word. And what happened as they were listening to the word? Suddenly Peter's talking and the Spirit is falling, simultaneous action in the Greek, Peter didn't stop, he wasn't through with the message, Peter's talking, the Spirit's falling and there was a tremendous manifestation of the Spirit, just as it happened on the day of Pentecost, the people spoke in tongues, in Peter's estimation another Pentecost, just what happened in Acts 2, except this time the Spirit was being poured out on Gentiles and not on Jews. But Jews were nonetheless present on both occasions. And when Peter saw this he says, "Now who will refuse them from being water baptized for they have received the Holy Spirit just as we." That's the sequence, Peter preached, the people believed at which

moment they were Spirit baptized and after that they were water baptized, which shows you that Peter knew water baptism wasn't necessary to receive the Spirit of God. They'd already received the Spirit. Peter looked back to his disciples and said, seeing what God has given them (the Spirit) who are we to forbid them from being water baptized? So water baptism doesn't save.

Now another issue is raised by certain groups who assert that every time a person "genuinely" believes there will be this tremendous manifestation of the Spirit by tongues, and if you have not had that experience then you are not truly saved. But they don't read too carefully because in Acts 11:15 when Peter talks about this spectacular baptism of the Spirit, what does he say? "15" "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning." In other words, he only enjoins these two instances. There were many Jews who believed after Pentecost. Did the spectacular manifestation occur with them? Just read Acts 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and you will not find it once. That's because this manifestation of the Spirit was not a constant thing; it did not happen every time. In short, what we're saying is that this happened in Acts 2 and it hadn't happened since, so when Peter sees it in Acts 10, he immediately links back to Acts 2.

To further this argument, what was one thing Peter could have said that would have ended the council right there? How could he have easily wrapped up the whole argument? All he would have to have said was, "When Paul and Barnabas went into Asia Minor and the Gentiles believed the Holy Spirit fell on them as on us at the beginning." But he never says that, and do you know why he never says that? Because it never happened, the Holy Spirit did not come upon the people at Lystra, at Derbe, at Antioch, like He came in Acts 2 and in Acts 10 for if He had, that fact alone, since it was acceptable in Acts 10, would be acceptable in Acts 15. The very method of the argument, in other words, in this first ecumenical council is proof that the stupendous manifestation of the Spirit in Acts 2 and 10 is not a normal occurrence, and therefore is an argument against those people who say that after you're saved you have to have this tremendous Holy Ghost experience.

Let's go further into his argument in verse 9, **and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.** Now that's a key part of the argument because the point in contention is how does God cleanse the heart? Does he cleanse the heart of a Gentile when he undergoes the

physical rite of circumcision? That never happened at Cornelius' house. And what's interesting is at the same time what else does Peter do here? **He made no distinction between us and them**, inevitably saying that a Jew's heart is not cleansed by circumcision either. The physical rite of circumcision never saved anyone, the people in v 1 had misconstrued the whole purpose of physical circumcision in the OT. It was never for that person and there will not be a single Jew in heaven because when he was eight days old the rabbi took a flint knife to that organ. The whole point of circumcision on the eighth day was to show that from the very beginning of life we are fallen, depraved sinners. Other nations circumcised too. Muslims circumcise but they do it when the boy is eight years old. Not in the word of God. Well why not? It has nothing to do with the pain factor at age eight, it has everything to do with communicating a spiritual truth, and that is that we are born sinners, we don't become sinners when we commit our first conscious sin, we are sinners from the very start and in need of spiritual surgery. So the physical surgery on day eight finds its archetype in the spiritual realm where spiritual surgery is needed to correct a heart problem. And apparently many of the Judaizers of the day had completely missed the spiritual import and were resting on the physical act. Peter denies it has any affect whatsoever on the **heart**. That all hearts in both Old and New Testament, both Jew and Gentile, both male and female, both slave and free are **cleansed by faith**. So once again we have Peter the apostle teaching the proper view of salvation.

Verse 10 he begins to close the case, **“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?”** In other words, here's the Mosaic Law, 613 laws, he says the Mosaic Law was a **yoke**, that means a heavy burden, yet the Lord Jesus Christ said, My yoke is easy and my burden light. And so by adding the law to the neck of the disciples they were contradicting Christ whose yoke is easy. And obviously His way was not the Law but grace. But before we get to grace let's talk about the Law. What was the purpose of the Law of Moses? Well, we can find at least three purposes. The first purpose of the Law is to reveal the standard of God. Rom 7:12, “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” There's no problem with the Law, sometimes the Law is held by Christians to be a bad thing. The law isn't bad, the law is holy and how dare you say the standard of God is bad. It's good and it's holy. The second purpose of the Law is to reveal sin. Rom 7:9, Paul says, “I was once alive apart from

the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;” So Paul says very simply when I was ignorant of the Law I was ignorant of the commandments of the Law but when I was no longer ignorant I saw my sin and it killed me, I was dead before God. It wasn’t the commandment that killed him, it was his sin that killed him, and it kills you, me and everyone else, we fall short of God’s holy standard. So it reveals sin which leads to the third thing about the Law and that is Gal 3:24, the Law is a tutor, “Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.” In other words a tutor has the purpose of helping the student realize new things, figure out how to balance his checkbook and so forth, a very great need in our government right now. Evidently they don’t teach basic mathematics anymore or else we wouldn’t be in this mess. Now the Law was just such a tutor to show people you can’t uphold this Law if you’re honest about it you see that the Law addresses deep down in your heart and your heart is all messed up. If we could take all our hearts and pour them out on this table up here we’d all get sick. It’s dark inside there, and if any Israelite was honest with the 613 laws he said, God’s not going to accept me and if God’s not going to accept me then what will He accept? Christ, that’s Gal 3:24, you have to look outside of your own soul and to Jesus Christ, He’s our righteousness and were it not for Him there would be absolutely no way any human being could ever be in God’s presence. But because of Christ, you place your faith in Him and you are justified, you are counted righteous, not on your own merits, not because you’re such a good little boy or girl, not because you took a bath in the Jordan River, not because you signed a commitment card, “I’m going to clean my life up or something,” not because you walked an aisle in the 5th grade, not because you said a special prayer, but because of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. You’re not going to add one thing to that equation; it’s Jesus Christ + nothing. And until you are stripped bare of all the great things you’ve done that require God to slap a salvation badge on your polo jacket, until you get over yourself and realize it is not about you, it’s about Jesus Christ. Only He satisfies, God the Father. And He came down here and He walked around in all your mess and He took all your garbage and He nailed it to the cross paying the price in full so He could say, “It is finished!” Salvation is finished, and until you realize that and you rest wholly on Him you will not go to heaven because God is holy and His character is the standard and He doesn’t compromise, there is only one way, Jesus Christ, so thank God for Jesus Christ who met the standard. The Law of Moses killed people, it didn’t make them alive, and it killed. And it is

therefore a **yoke** Peter says, it was a **yoke neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?** And if we could not fulfill the Law how can you turn around and put it on the Gentiles? It just doesn't make any sense.

Verse 11, his arguments finally amount to this, **But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.**" Now what's the main idea of that sentence? It's not difficult to see. The commonality of salvation. The way of salvation is common for all men; both Jew and Gentile share a common salvation. That means that Peter's arguing that **we Jews are saved by faith through the grace of the Lord Jesus** and **they Gentiles are saved by faith through the grace of the Lord Jesus.** There is only one way of salvation. What did we say last week about salvation, one of the hallmarks of Dispensationalism that the critics never can seem to get through their thick skulls? We do not teach multiple ways of salvation, we teach one way of salvation and here it is in black and white. So Peter is one with Paul. Paul's proof of how an OT person was saved is over in the Book of Romans. It's a simple argument. Paul had people telling him that you're saved by keeping the Law. And he said well now that's very interesting; wouldn't you agree that Abraham was saved? Yes. When was Abraham saved? Before or after the Law was given? Before the Law was given; then if he was saved before the Law, how could he be saved by following the Law? A devastatingly simple truth which shows that people in the OT always were saved by grace through faith, never by keeping the Law. And Peter's making the same argument here; **we and they are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.** There's no other basis on which to be saved. A commonality of salvation. So what right do you people have of coming in here and saying that the Gentiles have to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law? You have no basis.

So let's review the few principles we pick up today in solving a doctrinal dispute. The first thing we saw was the principle of leadership, v 6. There is nothing wrong with a small group of leaders IF, and that's a big IF, IF they solve problems on the basis of God's word and not on the basis of autonomous man. The world tries to solve problems on a finite autonomous base, working out of finite depraved resources, which simply cannot consider all the possible factors, and so he will swing either toward anarchy, every man do what is right in his own eyes, or totalitarianism, absolute control of the state. The word of God rejects both tendencies as problem solving devices, more

government and less government will not solve problems because man can't save and government can't save. The only answer is to look to God. He saves and when a leadership body will look to the will of God in Scripture then problems get solved on His terms. The second principle is that the leadership consider all the views, we're not hiding, we're not afraid of certain opinions. I'm not threatened by your opinion or anyone else's because I've got the truth in the word of God, so let's just get it all out on the table and see what our options are. The third principle to solving doctrinal disputes is evidenced by Peter's recognition of divine precedence. Look guys, this is what God has already done in history, it happened 10 years ago so what right do we have to reject it? A very simple question that leads to a very logical conclusion. We are all, Jew and Gentile, saved by grace through faith. And so we do not solve problems the way the world solves problems, by taking the latest poll, "How do you think Gentiles are saved?" We solved the problem of the way of salvation on the basis of God's prior work in history, which is a consistent work of salvation by grace through faith. All right, next time, vv 13-18 we turn to another argument that goes back to divine precedence, this time from the elder James' mouth, a powerful argument which we have to delve into hermeneutics some to resolve the issues.

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