

Series: Acts

Lesson #: 53

Title: Purified by Faith

Scripture: Acts 15: 3-11

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Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

Acts 15: 1: And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2: When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3: And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4: And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and *of* the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

Notice the joy that fills the believer's heart to hear that Christ has been gracious to a multitude of Gentiles.

Acts 15: 5: But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. 6: And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

What a contrast! How cold! How hard! How calloused! This is the spirit of bondage with which every sinner is born into this world. It is the spirit in those whose religious devotions are created out of legal, binding fear of having to confess to God that I am a sinner and salvation is totally in God's hands. It is the same fear that caused Adam to further cover himself in the trees because he was afraid his fig leaves were not enough. This spirit is constantly at work to make a better covering. It is toilsome, hard bondage that will not cease until the sinner is brought into the complete, fullness of rest, which Christ is.

So Peter stands up as the ambassador for Christ through whom the people hear the voice of the Lord on this matter.

Acts 15: 7: And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

PETER IS SPEAKING OF THE GENTILE CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD.

When God was ready to send the gospel of Christ to his chosen, everlastingly loved, Gentile-child Cornelius, along with those elect Gentiles in his household, God did not send Judaizers which preached jesus plus your work which makes his work effectual—which is altogether another jesus, another gospel, the lie of hell itself. No!

Out of all the men whom God had called out, taught the gospel, strengthened in the Spirit, and made ready-able preachers of the word in spirit and in truth, God made the choice to send Peter—*that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.*

Let's review just how easily God removed every obstacle in order to bring Cornelius to hear the truth concerning Christ Jesus his Lord. And notice that God really is able to make men heed him—

- Cornelius: Acts 10: 5-8
- Peter (the Lord instructed Peter out of his law which put a DISTINCTION between the clean and unclean animals): Acts 10: 9-16—the law was given to teach that only the Lord cleanses—*What God hath cleansed call not thou common.*
- Then the Lord showed that this doctrine applied to his elect—**Acts 10: 19-20.**
- Peter understood the doctrine—**Acts 10: 27, 28**—therefore Peter preached Christ to them.

Acts 15: 8: And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us;

Watch where Peter is going here: The Judaizers were saying that something yet needed to be done in the flesh or these Gentiles could not be saved. But Peter says,

GOD HIMSELF—God who is jealous for the truth of his own glorious name—would he have bore witness to this if it were not true?

AND GOD WHICH KNOWETH THE HEARTS—this had to have made these Jews recall how their beloved king David was called out and what the scriptures say the Lord told Samuel: **1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.**

AND GOD, WHICH KNOWETH THE HEARTS, BARE THEM WITNESS—we saw Christ is the Counsellor the legal Representative—he is also the Witness.

AND GOD, WHICH KNOWETH THE HEARTS, BARE THEM WITNESS, GIVING THEM THE HOLY GHOST, EVEN AS HE DID UNTO US

The way God bore witness that Cornelius and the other Gentile believers were pure and accepted of him by faith in Christ alone—was by baptizing the Gentiles in the Holy Ghost—no one but God could have done this. **Acts 11: 15: And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16: Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17: Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18: When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.**

WHAT DID THIS MEAN?

Acts 15: 9: And [God] put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US AND THEM

The legalist is looking for something he can do to put a difference between him and everyone else before God. These Judaizers wanted to use the law to put a difference between the Jews and the Gentiles, between the believer and unbelievers, even between believers (that is what legalism always results in.)

But Peter drops a bombshell on the legalist: God gave to the Gentiles the same graces and privileges as he gave to the converted Jews. God makes the believer to differ by pure, sovereign, free grace and not because of something done in the believer. This was a blow to the pride of their race--it mattered not that the Jews were natural sons of Abraham and the Gentiles were not. It mattered not that they had the law and the Gentiles did not. Something Peter was thankful for--God's favor and grace was not in respect of the way they conducted themselves in civil matters or religious--Peter denied the Lord 3 times--but Christ came to him in love and brought him back. **Romans 4: 8: Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. 9: Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. 10: How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 11: And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: 12: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had* being *yet* uncircumcised. 13: For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14: For if they which are of the law *be* heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:**

PURIFYING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH

Proposal: Purification is the subject of this entire controversy. Circumcision of the heart is the purging of the conscious whereby the sinner is brought to believe that Christ is all his Perfection.

Hebrews 9: 13: For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

LET'S LOOK AT THE LAW OF PURIFICATION:

- Numbers 19: 1-9-- The Red Heifer is a type of Christ--no spot; never came a yoke(willing and he makes his people willing, his yoke is light and easy); burned without the camp

Why was there a need for these waters of purification?

Numbers 19:13: Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; 14: This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. 15: And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. 16: And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

This law teaches us we have no way to keep ourselves from defilement--not before conversion and not after!

- They could come into a tent, not even be aware a dead man is there—defiled!
- Plowing your fields and unknowingly run over a grave—unclean!
- These are good deeds and yet they were defiled in their best deeds. They were in constant contact with death.
- This is what we are in this body of death—dead men. Our dead flesh is what we have to be purified from.

But the legalists were saying that there was yet something to be done by the believer, using this dead flesh, to make him pure--namely circumcision (which typified the taking away of the defilement) and they also said they must keep the whole law of Moses. They made no distinction between the ceremonial and the moral law--the whole law of Moses is the whole law of Moses. Men use the moral law this very same unlawful way just like these Judaizers wanted to use the ceremonial law.

But in the law of purification the Lord taught clearly--**Numbers 19:13: Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD;**

What is the tabernacle of the LORD?

- For the believer, our body is what? 1 Corinthians 6:19: **What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?** Our bodies are bought with the blood of Christ and we are to keep them separate and undefiled from the harlot.
- But for the believer, the body is yet what? **Romans 8: 10: And if Christ *be* in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.**

Get this now: If I live after the lusts of my flesh then I defile the tabernacle of the LORD—yet if I bring my body into subjection outwardly and count that as my purification (as the Judaizers insisted upon, as the legalist, the law-man, the free-will, work monger teaches) I also am touching the dead body and defiling the tabernacle. Both of these--lawlessness and legalism--is all that I am in the body of this death. So how do I mortify these deeds of the flesh? How do I purify the tabernacle? Look at the rest of the law of purification—“**and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him.**” The water of separation? I want to know about that!

Read on: **Numbers 19: 17: And for an unclean *person* they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel:** (this is typical of Christ our Perfection) **18: And a clean person** (we are defiled and we can not make ourselves pure—what God calls purifying ourselves is really depending upon another to do it for us. What did Peter say in his first epistle? *1 Peter 1:2: Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...*) **18: And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: 19: And the clean *person* shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even.**

How then am I purified? What is obedience? It is to be purified by the blood of Christ--forensically at the cross and in the conscious as the truth is applied by the clean person, the Holy Spirit, whereby I do the one thing Christ commands--I am made to simply trust God my Savior to perform the whole work.

Romans 8: 10: And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11: But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. (The Spirit who is now keeping you pure will also raise your mortal body pure so don't you look to your flesh--like the Judaizers were doing and expect to purify it. This whole work is through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ through the sanctification performed by the Holy Spirit by whose work the believer is brought to merely trust Christ and cease from his work. That's what we read here, read on) **12: Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.** (the flesh profits nothing) **13: For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye** (the new man, the inner man) **through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.** (Through the Spirit we treat our body as if it were dead and buried—how do we do that? It is by what the Holy Spirit does in us--not listen to this carefully! When we begin to be overtaken by the lusts of the flesh or by the self-righteousness of the flesh or even when do not even know it, the Spirit of God continually purges us, so we do one thing:) **14: For as many as are led by**

the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 15: For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Let me see if I can give you an illustration to make this clear:

Will—5 years old—likes to climb. Sometimes he gets into a situation where he finds himself falling.

- The law of gravity has him and that law will have its way with him even though he tries all he can to stop himself from falling—we're legalists by nature.
- He knows he has broken my law by climbing up there in the first place—we're antinomians by nature.
- But because I rule my children in love, he has not the spirit of bondage to fear, but he knows he is my son. Therefore he cries out, Abba, Father!

Romans 8:14: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 15: For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

BUT THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MY ILLUSTRATION AND HOW THE LORD PERFORMS THIS WORK:

Notice the first word “spirit” is in small letters—the spirit of bondage is what we received from Adam—the Spirit of adoption is the Holy Spirit which the believer is born of, walks in, and is led by and WHEREBY we cry, Abba, Father.

It is this work of the Holy Spirit within the believer which the Lord spoke of when he said, Matthew 18:3: And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Little children do not try to clothe themselves, they do not try to feed themselves, they do not try to walk by themselves...they cry out, to the one they trust to do it all, “Father, father.”

In the flesh, we have a legal, binding, fearful spirit which blocks all hope of being able to call on our heavenly Father—the flesh demands we look to ourselves--and our flesh attempts to deceive us into thinking we are righteous by what we have done--defiled!

From the first hour on--the Holy Spirit--purges our conscious so that we are continually reminded not to go back--every time we find ourselves looking to our own hand to save ourselves out of even the smallest trial, we begin to touch the dead body, we join ourselves with the harlot called “our flesh, our will, our strength”—that defiling flesh is the uncleanness which causes our blessed hope of calling on our Father to begin to diminish—but it is by the Holy Spirit of adoption—the Spirit of sanctification, the Spirit of separation, the sprinkling of the water of separation, the blood of Christ, continually purging us from dead works to serve the living God. The Spirit never lets us forget we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption, **Romans 5: 1: Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2: By whom**

also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope...(through tribulation this hope is increased) **5: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.** The hope we have is due to knowing we are the sons of God--this is by the shedding abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost--thus having this hope we cry out to our Father, instead of looking to our flesh, and by calling on the name of our Father---**1 John 3:3: And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as [God our Savior] is pure.** How so? By calling on the father...Listen to it described: **Hebrews 10:22: Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.**

The sinner who is purified believes God the Father and casts all his care on Christ Jesus the Son of God our Savior. Those who believe God the Father call on him to keep them and not themselves. By casting ourselves on God our Savior, crying Abba, Father!

That is what it is to call on the name of the Lord--having the heart purified by faith is to begin by calling on the name of the Father, then we call on his name in every trial, and we live in the spirit in a continual dependence (a continual calling upon him) and whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Peter said, God bear witness of this and God purified their hearts by faith. What did the Lord tell Peter when Peter tried to use the law to put a difference between him and Cornelius? **“What God hath cleansed, call not thou common.”**

Which is why Peter asks this next question:

Acts 15: 10: Now therefore why tempt ye God,

- Christ cried out, "It is finished!"
- The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the Sons of God!
- God himself bears witness that we are pure by faith in Christ our Perfection!
- **WHY TEMPT YE GOD BY SAYING, THERE IS YET SOMETHING TO BE DONE BY THE BELIEVER.**

Acts 15: 10: Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples,

Whose yoke do believers wear? We wear Christ's yoke. The government is on his shoulder.

- Did you just see how the Lord ruled in the hearts of Peter and Cornelius to bring Cornelius to hear the gospel? When the Lord spoke in their heart they obeyed, did they not?
- When the Lord taught Peter that the law of various forbidden meats was given by God to show that he is the Lord who puts a difference between clean and unclean—Peter began to understand something of what the law had been saying all along. And who did he look to God or did he go on insisting in his law obedience? He obeyed the Lord.

- The yoke is Christ's not man's. He rules in the heart.

Acts 15: 10: Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Peter says that furthermore, neither we, nor our fathers ever kept the law of God. Did you know that not one child of Abraham—true believers—not one ever kept the Sabbath or any other law. Not before they believed, not after they believed. Not one! Not themselves.

Peter is saved. If it were true that once a believer is born of the Spirit he can then obey the law of God then Peter would have never made this announcement. He is saying: what we could not bear then we can not bear now!

NOW BE SURE TO CATCH WHAT PETER SAYS NEXT:

Acts 15: 11: But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

The legalists were saying, “The Gentiles shall be saved, even as we. Through the works of the law, the work of our own hand—we have sought righteousness by the law for generation after generation after generation.”

Peter says, “Not so! You see these Gentiles who have never even heard of circumcision until you brought it up; these Gentiles who have never even heard of the ten commandments written on tablets of stone; these Gentiles have what father Abraham had. They had the circumcision of the heart, the covenant of God written on the inward parts, not on tables of stone, not in letters of man's making, but in the fleshly tablets of the heart, they are the epistle written by God himself.” Peter says, ‘No, these who do not have the law of God shall not be saved through the law of God and neither shall we, but we shall be saved, even as they—THROUGH THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST!’”

Application: Have you sinned today? I would like to be able to say I have not. But to even think that I have not sinned—much less say that I have not—would be nothing but hypocrisy.

Yet, the blood of my Savior washes me from even being able to gain any comfort from the dead-work-thought that by my own abstinence I have made myself perfect. “You can't tell men that. What will you use to keep them obedient to Christ”—yes, his blood purged me from that dead thinking as well.

Peter said, His blood makes me to behold him, to preach him, to point sinners to him, and to trust him to do all that he has promised me he shall do. AND HE SHALL DO IT, NOT BECAUSE OF SOMETHING IN US, BUT THROUGH THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST!”

That is what we believe when God purifies our hearts by faith. Amen!