

“What Have You Learned?”

Acts 15:1

August 23, 2015

Intro:

How important is your training?

How important is it to trust your trainer?



How does the truth of that statement apply at home... as well as in the midst of the Himalayans?



***25**And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, **26**and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. **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.*



- 15% fatalities in going up...
- Proclamation from the peak... “Beware!”
- Acts 15:1 = same proclamation (cf. Galatians)

1***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.”

BROTHERS:

- Love - "...by your love for one another"
- Learn - Romans 12:1-3
- Live - 1 John 3:18; Hebrews 12:1-2

- Word - 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Walk - John 20:21; Acts 1:8;
- Will - Matthew 28:18-20

- Faith - Ephesians 2:8-9

- Miracle - John 3; & 6:44
- Messiah - John 14:6
- Mission - John 20:21

VIDEO: "How Did We Get Here #4"

MEN

- Like - Ananias & Saphira (Acts 5); Demas...
- Lie - Nehemiah 6:3
- Leave - Judas; 1 John 2:18-19

World - 1 John 2:15; John 15:19
Words - 1 John 2:6
Won't - John 14:15 (*"If you love Me you WILL..."*)

Formula - Acts 15:1

Middle-road Matthew 7:13ff
Me See Galatians 2:20
Motion Titus 1:16

Re: ***"When Discernment Leads to Disaster"***

By Dr. Albert Mohler (President of Southern Seminary)

An article in response to First Baptist Church of Greenville, SC
Tuesday • August 18, 2015

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The move came after the church had undergone a "discernment" process under the leadership of a "LGBT Discernment Team." That team brought a report to the church's deacons, who then forwarded it to the congregation. The church then approved the statement by standing vote.

...The congregation, now more than 180 years old, is one of the most historic churches in the South. It participated in the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 and its

pastor, William Johnson, became the SBC's first president. The church was largely responsible for the birth of Furman University and its old "church house" became the first home of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859. Few churches in the South can match its historical record.

...The church and the denomination (however,) were set on a collision course, and the congregation voted to withdraw from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1999. (For the record,) If that had not happened, the SBC would have moved to withdraw fellowship on the basis of the church's announcement in May.

(Moving on) ...The central issue of dispute was the inerrancy of the Bible. The more liberal faction in the SBC affirmed that the Bible is "authoritative," but would not affirm inerrancy. Conservatives focused their arguments on the necessary affirmation that the Bible is completely without error. Both sides knew that the issues at stake ranged far beyond inerrancy, but both sides also knew that inerrancy was the central axis around which all other issues revolved.

(It is worth noting) ...On the masthead of the church's newsletter, announcing the report of the LGBT Discernment Team, the church states: "We believe in the authority of the Bible." BUT the church's affirmation of biblical authority did not constrain it in any way from rejecting the clear teachings of Scripture or from employing interpretive arguments that relativized the authority of the biblical text.

The lesson — once a church or denomination is untethered from the inerrancy of the Bible, there is no brake on the relativizing effects of cultural pressure.

Amazingly... Jim Dant, the pastor of First Baptist Greenville. announced that (he & the church) were officially ready to ordain gay ministers and celebrate same-sex weddings, *but* the pastor told his church “we made no decision regarding the issue of homosexuality.”

That is theologically, biblically, morally, and even logically incoherent. The church most certainly *did* make a decision regarding homosexuality. Every single member of that church is now a member of a church that will accept same-sex couples as members, celebrate gay weddings, and ordain LGBT ministers. That *is* making a decision.

(Closing)

The congregation assigned a LGBT Discernment Team, but there is no evidence that the team made any effort to discern the Scriptures. Instead, it discerned the congregation itself, determining that “being open and welcoming to all is a part of the essential nature of our community of faith.”

There are big lessons here for every church, every denomination, and every Christian institution. Once biblical inerrancy is abandoned, there is no brake on theological and moral revisionism. The Bible’s authority becomes relative, and there is no anchor to hold the church to the words of Scripture and 2,000 years of Christian witness.

The discernment process at First Baptist Church in Greenville offers us all ample lessons that should lead to a more fundamental discernment: Without the affirmation that the Bible is inerrant, “discernment” leads to disaster.

Survey of GALATIANS:

Galatians 1:6-9 (NASB)

- ⁶ *I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;*
- ⁷ *which is really not another; only **there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.***
- ⁸ *But **even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!***
- ⁹ *As we have said before, so I say again now, **if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!***

Galatians 2:1-9 (NASB)

- ¹ *Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.*
- ² *It 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.*
- ³ *But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.*
- ⁴ *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.*
- ⁵ *But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.*
- ⁶ *But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well,*

those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.
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
⁸ (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),
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 (koinonia)**, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Galatians 2:11-13 (NASB)

- ¹¹ **But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.**
- ¹² **For prior to the coming of certain men from James, 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.**
- ¹³ **The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.**

Galatians 3:1-5 (NASB)

- ¹ **You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?**
- ² **This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you**

receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

³ *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*

⁴ *Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?*

⁵ *So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?*

Galatians 4:15-20 (NASB)

¹⁵ ***Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.***

¹⁶ ***So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?***

¹⁷ ***They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them...***

¹⁹ ***My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—***

²⁰ ***but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.***



“False brothers” = “men” in Acts 15:1

1. Galatians 2:4ff
2. 2 Corinthians 11:26
3. Weeds amongst wheat
4. Matthew 24:7-14

7For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

9“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. **10**And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. **11**And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. **12**And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. **13**But the one who endures to the end will be saved. **14**And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

5. John 16:1-4

1“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. **2**They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. **3**They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. **4**I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them.

6. Korah vs. Moses

7. Minions disguised as “angels of light”

8. Demas vs. Paul

9. Judas vs. Jesus

10. What about today? (take every thought captive)



Second Peter

By Chuck Swindoll

Where are we?

Peter wrote this letter from Rome soon after he wrote 1 Peter in AD 64–66. So what would have prompted another letter to the same group so soon after the first? From the contents of the letter, it appears that Peter had received reports of false teachers in and among the churches in Asia Minor. The apostle warned them about the insidious presence of those who spread heresies among the people ([2 Peter 2:1](#))... Peter wanted to encourage his people to stand firm and to instruct them on how best to do that.

Why is Second Peter so important?

The churches of Asia Minor were not just struggling with the persecution and suffering addressed in Peter's first letter; they also had strife and dissension within their ranks. In an effort to stem the tide of heresy and false teaching among the Christians, Peter emphasized the importance of learning and clinging to the proper knowledge of God. In fact, this concept was so important to him that the word *knowledge* appears—in one form or another—some fifteen times in the span of this short, three-chapter letter.

What's the big idea?

...When false teachers begin to whisper their sweet words into the ears of immature Christians, the body of Christ begins to break apart, to lose what makes it distinctive...

(To that end...) Peter repeatedly points to the Word of God as the primary means of growth for the Christian (1:4, 19–21; 3:1–2, 14–16).

Peter encouraged his readers to apply themselves to acquiring the true knowledge of God and living out the life of faith with “all diligence,” so that they may “be found by [Jesus] in peace, spotless and blameless” (1:5; 3:14). And if believers did not follow his advice, they would be giving their Christian community over to the heretics, people who look to “exploit . . . with false words” (2:3).

How do I apply this?

As with the recipients of Peter’s letter, we all go through difficult times. Those trials seem to hit us even harder when the source of the struggles comes from somewhere or someone close to us...

To guard against discord—both in our families and our churches—God’s people need to know who He is. Our knowledge of God through His Word is the first line of defense against the conflicts that threaten to tear us apart. As Peter wrote: “Be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men . . . instead, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” ([2 Peter 3:17–18](#)).

With that in mind, what means are you taking to grow in your faith? Let’s take the time to guard our minds with the proper knowledge of God so that we may not drift off from the path that God has laid out for us.

1st John

1:1-7

The Incarnation of the Word of Life

1That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. **2**The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. **3**We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4**We write this to make our **a** joy complete.

Light and Darkness, Sin and Forgiveness

5This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. **6**If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. **7**But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all **b** sin.

2:3-7

Love and Hatred for Fellow Believers

3We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. **4**Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. **5**But if anyone obeys his word, love for God **a** is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: **6**Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

7Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.

3:7-12

7Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. **8**The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. **9**No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. **10**This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

More on Love and Hatred

11For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. **12**Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

Jude

(open & close: vv.1-5 & 16-25)

Greeting

1Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,

To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

2May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Judgment on False Teachers

3Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. **4For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people**, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

5Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe...

...16These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

A Call to Persevere

17But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. 18They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." 19It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. 20But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22And have mercy on those who doubt; 23save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Doxology

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Matthew chapter 7 (unedited)

Judging Others

1 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Ask, Seek, Knock

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

9 “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

10Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The Narrow and Wide Gates

13“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

True and False Prophets

15“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

True and False Disciples

21“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ 23Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

VIDEO: “How Did We Get Here #8”

The Wise and Foolish Builders

24“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

28When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

CLOSE:

Orthodoxy begets Orthopraxy

“you will know them by their fruit...”

*“if you love Me you will
obey My commands...”*

James 2

Let's Pray!

What Problem Is Paul Contending With In Galatians

*** Most important issue in Galatians! ***

A. Polemical - even angry...

1. Very Key:

- a. No thanksgiving mentioned
- b. No prayer'
- c. He is ready to give them a scorching rebuke!!!

1). Paul tells them to let these people (the false prophets) "go to hell"

2). Anathemia = "go to hell" (literally means eternal damnation)

2. Judaizing problem: the false prophets are telling the Galatians that they must become a Jew (live by the law) in order to be saved...

- a. Foreigners must be circumcised
- b. Must live by Jewish worship calendar
- c. **MUST LIVE BY THE LAW OVER FAITH!**

*** A salvation of works

*** Reason why Paul's theme is

"justification by faith" (2:15 - 4:31)

B. Who were the **Judaizers (false prophets)**

1. (3) Theories:

a. Baur = official representatives of Jerusalem church (for Peter)

1). Most radical

- 2). Forces one to say Acts is unreliable
 - Acts 15 tells us that Peter is Paul's greatest fan...
- b. Mainstream = Jewish Christians BUT not backed by the apostles
 - 1). "Mavericks"
 - 2). Dr. Polhill's view
- c. Munck = gentile Christians who were applying the O.T. laws to Christians
 - 1). Least popular position
- C. Gnostics = another view of the false prophets
 - 1. Schmithels father of this thought
 - a. Libertine behavior in ch. 5-6 is his reasoning

MAJOR THEMES OF GALATIANS

I. Justification By Faith

- A. Galatians (and Romans) top epistle(s) in this regard
 - 1. Note many O.T. quotes to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the O.T.
 - 2. Paul's response to Peter at Antioch (2: 15-21)
 - a. Paul says he told Peter ("regardless of who he is... even if he is a pillar apostle, he's wrong!")
 - b. Key of Paul's message is that Peter was giving the gentiles the wrong impression of what it takes to be saved
 - c. "Faith is the key to salvation... not the law..."

3. Paul's direct response to the Galatians (3: 1-25)
 - a. Telling them that they are putting too much weight on the law
 - b. He chastises them to refocus on the Holy Spirit
 - 1). It was the Spirit that saved you...
 - 2). Are you now working through the flesh (the law) toward your salvation
 - 3). You were led to the Lord by faith... not the law
 - 4). Paul then quotes Gen. 15:6 (as he did in Romans) to show that it was "faith" that made Abraham worthy in God's eyes
 - Shows that ALL who have faith are children of Abraham
 - Shows that it is faith, not the law that God responds to....
 - Shows that God told Abraham through this passage that the children of Abe. would someday include gentiles
 - 5). Paul says: to be "accepted as just or right by God" is our goal and can only be achieved via faith - not law
 - 6). 4: 21-31 = Allegory of Sarah & Hagar
 - Child of the law
 - Child of faith

II. "Christ In Me" (2: 19-20)

- A. No longer living in the law that I may live him.... and Christ now lives in me...
- B. Obviously = the Spirit of Christ living in us...
- C. "Christ Mysticism" = term for this language
 - 1. Never be "overly possessed" and/or losing one's self to the spirit
 - 2. Describes what we understand to be "having the power of the Holy Spirit"
 - 3. Living by faith is the undercurrent message

III. Christian Freedom

- A. Paul tells Jews that they are not held hostage by the law anymore
- B. Paul tells gentiles that they are free from the superstitions of the Greek gods and that lifestyle
- C. Paul asks both groups: "why would you give up the freedom you have received through Christ..."
 - 1. Don't live like slaves (to these useless traditions) anymore....
 - a. The law was supposed to be "a custodian" over us for a time... designed to point us to God until a perfect connection is available
 - b. The law was replaced by Christ who represented the perfect way to God
 - 1). Jesus was our curse - he died on a tree (O.T. says all are cursed who die on a tree)
 - 2). This was the price required to offset our sins and gain access to the perfect God

2. We are sons/heirs of God's kingdom

D. Key Scriptures:

1. 4: 1-11

2. 4: 21-31 (allegory)

E. Freedom is most strongly preached in Galatians -
over all other books

IV. Ethic of Freedom

A. It is not an absolute freedom where we do whatever
we want

B. It is a "responsible freedom"

1. Paul's paradox = "slaves to Christ are truly free"

2. Slaves to Christ = only when we live our lives
completely to God's will

3. Key passage = 5: 13-26

a. "Works of the flesh" - things/ways to be
avoided

b. "Fruits of the Spirit" - how we should live

*** Note: Paul changes the word "works"
to "fruit" when discussing the Holy Spirit

- Fruit is a natural result of
something

- Fruit never comes by work

- He never says "work" of the Spirit

c. Note: freedom does not mean "liberty"

V. Apostle And His Call (1:1 - 2:10)

A. Living response to revelation

- B. Independence from the apostles
- C. Voluntary response to God

VI. New Creation In Christ

A. Key passages:

1. Ch. 3: 26-29

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, *27* for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. *28* There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. *29* If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

2. Ch. 6:15-18

15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

*** Galatians = Epistle of FREEDOM

* Luther found "Justification By Faith" in Galatians
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...The church and the denomination (however,) were set on a collision course, and the congregation voted to withdraw from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1999. (For the record,) If

that had not happened, the SBC would have moved to withdraw fellowship on the basis of the church's announcement in May.

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The discernment process at First Baptist Church in Greenville offers us all ample lessons that should lead to a more fundamental discernment: Without the affirmation that the Bible is inerrant, “discernment” leads to disaster.

THE FALSE TEACHING from Jerusalem. Nearly twenty centuries after the battles with the Judaizers were fought in the church, they may seem rather irrelevant to us. But they were important

at the time and won for succeeding generations formulations of Christianity that clarified key issues about the nature of saving faith. The Jerusalem Council affirmed that Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to be Christians. While that fact is no longer disputed, there are many things that we can learn from this passage regarding false teaching.

(1) As in the first century, the issue of people wanting to do something to earn salvation and the church adding to a list of conditions for salvation has been a continuing problem.

(2) The false teaching was powerful because the teachers came from the mother church in Jerusalem, probably claiming the support of the leaders there for their views.

(3) Just as the Judaizers tried to take away the scandal of the gospel, there have always been people who have tried to do this in their efforts to make Christianity more relevant to society.

(4) The church considered this teaching a grave threat and therefore dealt with it in great seriousness. Paul and Barnabas and their team made the long trip to Jerusalem to battle for the gospel. When the resolution was reached, the Jerusalem church sent some of their own leaders to the Gentile churches with an official letter to do all they could to offset the damage.

(5) Note too how the false teaching was combated. The incidents in Antioch "brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them" ([v. 2](#)). But individuals were respected in the way the issues were discussed at the council. The Judaizers had a chance to say what they wanted to say, for Peter got up to speak only "after much discussion" ([v. 7](#)). Yet in the end, the

letter to the churches was uncompromising in the way it condemned the false teachers ([v. 24](#)). The situation was too serious for polite acceptance of this teaching or for allowing it to stay alongside other teaching as an option, as would be the case in the pluralist model of theologizing. False teaching was roundly condemned after it had been shown to be wrong.

Contemporary Significance

ADDING REQUIREMENTS FOR salvation. When the Reformers rediscovered the biblical insistence of salvation by faith, they realized that the church had almost completely obliterated this doctrine by adding other requirements for salvation, making it into a salvation by works. John Wesley had to rediscover this doctrine again since he had been trusting in his strict Christian discipline but found no assurance of salvation through it. Even today many people would like to do something so that they may feel satisfied that they have earned their salvation.

Religious peddlers are only too willing to accept the gifts that are given to them in order to merit a favor from God. This may be a trap that Satan uses to keep people from surrendering their lives to God. Many who are unwilling to entrust their lives to God to be Lord of their lives are nevertheless willing to give generous gifts for God's work. Many temples and shrines of other faiths and even some churches thrive on such giving. But we must resist such giving, for it keeps people from the way of faith.

The Judaizers in Jerusalem felt that Gentiles should become Jews if they were to become true Christians. Similarly, some early missionaries felt that converts to Christianity should take

on the culture of their own homeland. While they may not have insisted on these things or taught them as conditions for salvation, people assumed that if they became Christians, they would have to take on the English, or German, or American culture, or whatever. Some knew that they would not be able to become leaders of the church if they did not speak the language of the missionary. Often the missionary was from the same country as the colonial rulers, who were imposing their culture in their colonies. Today will Hispanic Christians have to renounce some of their culture if they want to become leaders in churches dominated by Anglo-Saxons? Have we unwittingly made things we are comfortable with, but which are not taught in the Bible, into basic prerequisites for Christian involvement? It can easily happen, and we must constantly be on guard about bringing in extrabiblical requirements into the church.

The appeal of false teaching today. When false teachers came to Antioch, what they said could not be easily dismissed since they had come from the mother church in Judea. In the same way today teachers from reputed seminaries can come and cause great damage in the church by false teaching. This type of thing has happened in this century to many churches in the Third World, when liberal teaching came from the mother churches in the West, either through missionaries or through the seminaries where Third World ministers studied. It has caused havoc in older churches, resulting in spiritual death.

Just as the Judaizers sought to remove the scandal of the gospel, throughout the history of the church people have tried to remove the unpleasant aspects of Christianity. In the aftermath of the scientific revolution, many tried to divest Christianity of its

miraculous element, since it did not harmonize with the so-called scientific worldview. Today, when pluralism and religious tolerance hold sway, people have tried to divest Christianity of its claim to uniqueness and its doctrine of eternal punishment.

In situations closer to what happened in Acts, some teachers have avoided the unpleasant doctrine of Christ's breaking human barriers and encouraged instead the growth of segregated churches or refused to speak up against racism. The message of integration in Christ is one of the most revolutionary features of Christianity in this world torn by strife. Those who proclaim it get into trouble with extremists. Consequently, many choose to play safe and ignore it, and Christians end up with racist attitudes. If there is no exposure to the Christian view on this issue, people will tend to go with the crowd in their racist thinking.

Opposing false teaching. We said that there was no tolerance of false teaching in this passage. This may sound strange to our ears in this age of pluralism, where opposing viewpoints are permitted to stand side by side and the formulators of new theology are praised for their creativity. But as Bishop Stephen Neill has pointed out, in Christianity there is "the awful and necessary intolerance of truth." Christianity is a religion of revelation. We believe that God has spoken a definite and eternal Word to humanity. Any teaching contrary to that Word within the church must be rooted out with utmost urgency.

The practice of contending for the truth, of course, has been abused much in the past, especially when people brought in sharp personal attacks on those whom they were opposing.

Therefore people nowadays shy away from such battles. But we can argue for truth without insulting people whose views we oppose. Heretics must not be allowed to continue to influence the church. Thus, when all else fails, disciplinary action must be taken against them, and that may mean excommunication ([1 Tim. 1:19-20](#)).

The practice of contending for the truth has also been abused when people have contended for things about which the Bible is not clear—for example, the time of Christ's coming and the exact interpretation of the signs regarding this coming. Our commitment is to truth, and if God has chosen not to show something clearly to us, we should not be afraid of being tentative in our understandings on that issue.

The New Testament church took immediate steps to attack the false teaching. This is the consistent pattern in Scripture. [Galatians 2:11-13](#) relates how Peter vacillated in Antioch on the same issue of [Acts 15](#) and withdrew from eating with the Gentiles. Paul says, "I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong." There had been a public display of serious error by a top leader, so Paul had to confront him in public, because many would otherwise be led astray. We would like our Christian communities to be places without strife. Indeed, we are committed to peace ([Rom. 12:8](#)). But often troubles come that must be confronted head-on if the purity of the church is to be maintained.

If we do not confront these problems, we may be able to keep the peace for a time by ignoring the problem. But if we fail to confront serious issues at all, we plunge the church along a path downward, which is increasingly more difficult to arrest. Note

how many denominations allowed people to remain in leadership after they departed from the truth. By the time they dealt with it, it was too late. As a result, the church had to develop a structure that allowed people with such views and practices to remain.

There is a warning for leaders here. It is painful to confront error in doctrine and behavior. But we must do it if we think about error as God does. And because of love for God and his church, we must be willing to confront the error and pay the price of it. This is painful, and often we come out of the battle with wounds that take time to heal. But should we not be willing to be wounded in order to maintain the purity of the church, which Christ bought with his own blood ([20:28](#))? Christ himself said, "Love each other as I have loved you." But immediately after that he went on to describe what he meant by this love: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" ([John 15:12-13](#)). We must be willing to lay down our lives for the church by confronting error and paying the price of that confrontation.

- NIV Application Commentary,

Principled Question: *How is one saved?*

BY FAITH ALONE (160+ in N.T.)

Romans 1:16

1 Corinthians 15:1ff

John 3:16

Galatians 2:16

John 1:12

John 5:24

Romans 4:5

Galatians 3:26

Ephesians 2:8-9

15:1 *certains men.* Judaizers—false teachers who were self-appointed guardians of legalism, teaching a doctrine of salvation by works. *from Judea.* See note on [1:8](#). ***Unless you are circumcised... you cannot be saved.*** Cf. [verse 24](#). The heresy propagated by the Judaizers.

- **The MacArthur Bible Commentary.**

Even when things go on very smoothly and pleasantly in a state or in a church, it is folly to be secure, and to think the mountain stands strong and cannot be moved; some uneasiness or other will arise, which is not foreseen, cannot be prevented, but must be prepared for. If ever there was a heaven upon earth, surely it was in the church at Antioch at this time, when there were so

many excellent ministers there, and blessed Paul among them, building up that church in her most holy faith. But here we have their peace disturbed, and differences arising. Here is,

I. A new doctrine started among them, which occasioned this division, obliging the Gentile converts to submit to circumcision and the ceremonial law, [v. 1](#). Many that had been proselytes to the Jewish religion became Christians; and they would have such as were proselyted to the Christian religion to become Jews.

1. The persons that urged this were certain men who came down from Judea; some think such as had been of the Pharisees ([v. 5](#)), or perhaps of those priests who were obedient to the faith, [ch. 6:7](#). They came from Judea, pretending perhaps to be sent by the apostles at Jerusalem, at least to be countenanced by them. Having a design to spread their notions, they came to Antioch, because that was the head-quarters of those that preached to the Gentiles, and the rendezvous of the Gentile converts; and, if they could but make an interest there, this leaven would soon be diffused to all the churches of the Gentiles. They insinuated themselves into an acquaintance with the brethren, pretended to be very glad that they had embraced the Christian faith, and congratulated them on their conversion; but tell them that yet one thing they lack, they must be circumcised. Note, Those that are ever so well taught have need to stand upon their guard that they be not untaught again, or ill taught.

2. The position they laid down, the thesis they gave, was this, that except the Gentiles who turned Christians were

circumcised after the manner of Moses, and thereby bound themselves to all the observances of the ceremonial law, they could not be saved. As to this,

(1.) Many of the Jews who embraced the faith of Christ, yet continued very zealous for the law, ch. [21:20](#). They knew it was from God and its authority was sacred, valued it for its antiquity, had been bred up in the observance of it, and it is probable had been often devoutly affected in their attendance on these observances; they therefore kept them up after they were by baptism admitted into the Christian church, kept up the distinction of meats, and used the ceremonial purifyings from ceremonial pollutions, attend the temple service, and celebrated the feasts of the Jews. Herein they were connived at, because the prejudices of education are not to be overcome all at once, and in a few years the mistake would be effectually rectified by the destruction of the temple and the total dissolution of the Jewish church, by which the observance of the Mosaic ritual would become utterly impracticable. But it did not suffice them that they were herein indulged themselves, they must have the Gentile converts brought under the same obligations. Note, There is a strange proneness in us to make our opinion and practice a rule and a law to every body else, to judge of all about us by our standard, and to conclude that because we do well all do wrong that do not just as we do.

(2.) Those Jews who believed that Christ was the Messiah, as they could not get clear of their affection to the law, so they could not get clear of the notions they had of the Messiah, that he should set up a temporal kingdom in favour of the Jewish nation, should make this illustrious

and victorious; it was a disappointment to them that there was as yet nothing done towards this in the way they expected. But now that they hear the doctrine of Christ is received among the Gentiles, and his kingdom begins to be set up in the midst of them, if they can but persuade those that embrace Christ to embrace the law of Moses too they hope their point will be gained, the Jewish nation will be made as considerable as they can wish, though in another way; and "Therefore by all means let the brethren be pressed to be circumcised and keep the law, and then with our religion our dominion will be extended, and we shall in a little time be able to shake off the Roman yoke; and not only so, but to put it on the necks of our neighbours, and so shall have such a kingdom of the Messiah as we promised ourselves." Note, It is no wonder if those who have wrong notions of the kingdom of Christ take wrong measures for the advancement of it, and such as really tend to the destruction of it, as these do.

(3.) The controversy about the circumcising of the Gentile proselytes had been on foot among the Jews long before this. This is observed by Dr. Whitby out of Josephus-Antiq. 20. 38-45: "That when Izates, the son of Helen queen of Adiabene, embraced the Jews' religion, Ananias declared he might do it without circumcision; but Eleazar maintained that it was a great impiety to remain uncircumcised." And when two eminent Gentiles fled to Josephus (as he relates in the history of his own life) "the zealots among the Jews were urgent for their circumcision; but Josephus dissuaded them from insisting upon it." Such has been the difference in all ages between bigotry and moderation.

(4.) It is observable what a mighty stress they laid upon it; they do not only say, "You ought to be circumcised after the manner of Moses, and it will be good service to the kingdom of the Messiah if you be; it will best accommodate matters between you and the Jewish converts, and we shall take it very kindly if you will, and shall converse the more familiarly with you;" but, "Except you be circumcised you cannot be saved. If you be not herein of our mind and way, you will never go to heaven, and therefore of course you must go to hell." Note, it is common for proud impostors to enforce their own inventions under pain of damnation; and to tell people that unless they believe just as they would have them believe, and do just as they would have them do, they cannot be saved, it is impossible they should; not only their case is hazardous, but it is desperate. Thus the Jews tell their brethren that except they be of their church, and come into their communion, and conform to the ceremonies of their worship, though otherwise good men and believers in Christ, yet they cannot be saved; salvation itself cannot save them. None are in Christ but those that are within their pale. We ought to see ourselves well warranted by the word of God before we say, "Except you do so and so, you cannot be saved."

- Matthew Henry's Commentary

Verse 1.

Came down from Judaea. To Antioch, and to the regions adjacent, which had been visited by the apostles, [Acts 15:23](#). Judea was a high and hilly region; and going from that toward the level countries adjacent to the sea, was represented to be descending or going down.

Taught the brethren. That is, Christians. They endeavoured to *convince* them of the necessity of keeping the laws of Moses.

Except ye be circumcised. This was the leading or principal rite of the Jewish religion. It was indispensable to the name and privileges of a Jew. Proselytes to their religion were circumcised as well as native-born Jews, and they held it to be indispensable to salvation. It is evident, from this, that Paul and Barnabas had dispensed with this rite in regard to the Gentile converts, and that they intended to found the Christian church on the principle that the Jewish ceremonies were to cease. When, however, it was necessary to conciliate the minds of the Jews and to prevent contention, Paul did not hesitate to practise circumcision, [Acts 16:3](#).

After the manner of Moses. According to the custom which Moses commanded; according to the Mosaic ritual.

Ye cannot be saved. The Jews regarded this as indispensable to salvation. The grounds on which they would press it on the attention of Gentile converts would be very plausible, and such as would produce much embarrassment. For,

(1.) it would be maintained that the laws of Moses were the laws of God, and were therefore unchangeable; and,

(2.) it would doubtless be maintained that the religion of the Messiah was only a completing and perfecting of the Jewish religion; that it was designed simply to carry out its principles according to the promises, and not to subvert and destroy anything that had been established by Divine authority. It is usually not difficult to perplex and embarrass young converts with questions of modes, and rites, and forms of religion; and it is not uncommon that a revival is followed by some contention just like this. Opposing sects urge the claims of their peculiar rites, and seek to make proselytes, and introduce contention and strife into an otherwise peaceful and happy Christian community.

(* "certain men" [Galatians 2:3](#))

(* "be circumcised" [John 7:22](#))

(* "after the manner of Moses" [Leviticus 12:3](#))

- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.

The so-called New Perspective on Paul has taken hold in many places, including strong evangelical fortresses within the Reformed faith. This new perspective suggests that the dispute over justification in the Reformation was completely unnecessary because what Paul was really teaching about justification was not how somebody is saved but how someone is to be included in the visible church. In other words, Paul's teaching on justification really had nothing to do with ultimate salvation but simply with one's status in the covenant community. This issue is by no means a new one, as this portion of Acts makes clear. It was the issue that provoked the first great church council, the Council of Jerusalem. As we look at the text, we will see that Paul's mighty concern in terms of the Judaizer heresy of the first century was not about how one is included in the visible church but how one enters into the kingdom of heaven.

War on Heresy

Before we look at the text of [Acts 15](#), we will do well to consider some of what Paul wrote to the Galatians. Paul devoted basically the entire letter of Galatians to the very issue that was being discussed at the Council of Jerusalem in [Acts 15](#), the threat of the so-called Judaizers. Reviewing a portion of Galatians will give us some sense of the importance that Paul gave to this matter:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. ([Gal. 1:6-10](#))

Then in [Galatians 3](#) we read these words from the Apostle: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: 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?” ([vv. 1-3](#)). The Apostle Paul had a pastor’s heart. He was willing to give his life for the sake of those whom God entrusted to his pastoral care. For that reason, his harsh tone here in Galatians is uncharacteristic of the Apostle. What provoked such strong language and admonition from Paul’s pen? His epistle to the Galatians was a circular letter, which means it was meant not just for one congregation but for every congregation in the area from which the Judaizing heresy had been spawned.

We learn about that heresy in [Acts 15](#). **Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”** ([v. 1](#)). Throughout our study of the book of Acts we have seen that those in the first-century church wanted to know how Gentiles, Samaritans, and the God-fearing Greeks fit into the New Testament church. Were they to be second-class citizens? Was there to be a certain secondary rung like there had been in Israel, with an outer court for the Gentiles and an inner

court reserved for the Jews? As we have seen repeatedly, the overarching theme of the book of Acts is that there is no second-class citizenship in the New Testament community. Samaritan believers, God-fearing believers such as Cornelius's household, and Gentile believers such as the Ephesians, were all numbered among the people of God and had equal status in the New Testament church. There is no preference for the Jew or the Greek, the male or the female. All people are on even ground at the foot of the cross. Later Paul will labor the point that salvation through justification by faith alone is the same basis for salvation in the Old Testament as in the New Testament.

Some from among the Jews saw the Gentile conversions and how these converts were baptized, given the Spirit of God, and made members of the household of God. These messianic Jews said that the Gentiles' faith was insufficient for entry into the family of believers and that, in addition to faith, circumcision is a necessary condition for salvation. When Paul addressed this claim in his Galatians epistle, he wrote, "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" ([5:12](#)). He meant that he wished God would cut them off from the kingdom of God because of the damage they were doing to the gospel by preaching this other gospel, saying that faith is not enough. Paul said that no flesh shall be justified by the works of the law, whereas the Judaizers said that apart from works of the law, no flesh shall be justified. So a serious controversy arose over what is necessary for salvation. Are believers justified by faith alone, or is it faith plus something else?

- St. Andrew's Expository Commentary