

June 13 2010 Acts 15:13-35 Works added to Grace (or Saved to sit?)

In Acts 15 we looked first at the strong affirmation of grace. We are saved by grace alone and there is no man-made law or stipulation that could ever merit that grace!

“Certain men” (Pharisees) had taken it upon themselves to demand circumcision of the Gentile believers. After “much debate” the Apostles and Elders decided to listen to Peter and James. They chose to “send chosen men of their own company to Antioch,” to deliver a letter (vss. 23-29). The letter welcomed them into the fold of salvation, encouraged them with teachers, and instructed them with four “necessary things.” (28).

The works added to Salvation? Evidence of a changed life!

1. The Apostles (James) command four “necessary things” of the new Gentile converts
 - a. All four pertain to public testimony and/or example of believers
 - i. They are explaining that people will see your faith by the works you do and determine whether you are true believers as much by action as by words.
 - b. The Apostles are explaining both the work of grace and the cultural significance of living out the faith.
 - i. Works do not save a person – grace alone saves
 1. Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.”
 - ii. The “EVIDENCE” of grace is works – following salvation experience
 1. Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”
 2. We are not saved to sit or be eternally satisfied! True salvation will be demonstrated by a changed life.
 - c. The Jews perceived all Gentiles to be barbaric people enslaved to these passions
 - d. James explains the Jews will not accept Gentile converts who continue to live under these condemned lifestyle choices.
 - i. Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city...
 - e. He explains that while the Apostles have participated in the debate and now see by Peter’s Divine Vision; Paul’s miracles and wonders; and Old Testament prophecy (Amos 9:11,12) that grace has been extended to the Gentiles; still the average Jew will not receive them while they live a public life enslaved to these sinful exhibitions.
2. What is the significance today to the four necessary things? Each of these needed further explanation than just the letter. Paul, Barnabus, Judas (Barsabas) and Silas went to explain.
 - a. Abstain from things offered (polluted) by idols.
 - i. This follows the great Old Testament commandments forbidding idolatry in any form. Do not even eat the meat offered to idols (or sit with idolaters at their pagan feasts)
 - ii. What are the idols of today?
 - b. Abstain from sexual immorality

- i. Clear and straight forward teaching. Sexual immorality covers all form of sexual sin including, but not limited to, those practices displayed in idol and pagan worship such as prostitution, homosexuality, adultery, etc...
 - ii. The sexual revolution of the 1960's has come home to haunt this current generation.
 - 1. We need fresh revolution of morality and sexual purity in our age.
- c. Abstain from things strangled
 - i. Referring to animals killed for idol worship wherein the blood is preserved or to sacrificial animals killed outside or away from the entrance to the Tent of Meeting
 - 1. This most problematic for our hearing is related to Leviticus 17 explanation of the need for blood sacrifice. Blood must be on the altar for atonement to be made.
 - a. Hebrews 9:22 Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (of sin)
 - 2. Lev. 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement."
 - 3. Jesus shed his blood as the once and for all time sacrifice for the sin of humanity. Do not reject or deny the blood!
- d. Abstain from blood – Violent shedding of innocent blood. Murder.
 - i. Possibly a synonymic for strangled animal blood; but early church fathers understood this to mean cruelty related to manslaughter, murder, and fighting to shed blood.

3. The Works of Grace

- a. We are saved by Grace – alone. We are set free from the curse of sin by the grace of God because of the sacrifice of Jesus' blood on the cross of Calvary
- b. We are subsequently empowered to live out that grace by the infilling of the Holy Spirit.
- c. The disciplines of the Christian life are not a hardship or a "yoke" of heavy burden.
 - i. Vs. 31 – "When they had read it (the letter), they rejoiced over its encouragement."
- d. Calling us to a more disciplined lifestyle – apart from the worldly lifestyle – is an encouragement to live free in His grace.
- e. Christ calls us today to a mature faith and a lifestyle of holiness apart from this present world.