

Acts 14:27: *'And when they (Paul and Barnabas) were come, (to Antioch in Syria) and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. ²⁸ And there they abode long time with the disciples.'*

There is great excitement upon realizing that God is also granting Salvation unto the Gentiles of which are many in the church in Antioch. This is the turning point, the point of inflection when God opens, to the World of Gentiles, His Saving Grace unto Eternal Life and it will be, for the next nearly 20 centuries, mainly Gentiles whom God will have chosen to make up His elect Bride for His faithful Son.

There are two main groups in God's Eternal Plan: Israel, as the wife of God, the Father, as seen in the Book of Hosea, and the True Church, the Bride of God, the Son, comprised mostly of Gentiles drawn from every nation, tribe and tongue, as seen throughout the Books of the New Testament. The two are completely separate; God has His Plan for each one but His plans for each are different and separate: Israel will reign forever as the 'Head of the Nations,' ruled by their king, David while the True Church, the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, will rule and reign with Him forever over His ever expanding Kingdom: throughout all the Universe.

Now we will begin to see the divergence; the True Church will grow and expand throughout the Earth while Israel will shrink back to dormancy when Jerusalem is destroyed, a few years later, by the Romans. Israel will lie dormant, scattered around the World until finally, in the Last Days, God will draw them back and plant them, once again, into the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants forever.

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.'*

And here we go again; Jews, who've all their lives adhered to the Mosaic Law, even though none of them had ever really kept the Law, are seeking to draw Gentiles away from the Truth of the simplicity that Salvation is only according to God's rich Grace through His Gifts of Repentance and Faith to believe as they seek to pull them down under the yoke of bondage which is the Law. 'You must become more holy, as are we, who pretend to keep the Law, because we pretend to keep the Law!'

Jesus said: *'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.'* Matt 23:27

Verse 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.'*

Paul and Barnabas, along with these Judiazers, decide to go to Jerusalem, to the Apostles and elders, those to whom Paul is still submitting as regards doctrine... 'We'll let them decide' even though Paul already knew exactly what God's Gospel of Grace entailed.

Verse 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.'*

'Brought on their way by the church: remember, they are in Antioch in Syria which is a wealthy city; undoubtedly, there were believers of means who did support Paul and Barnabas financially, on their way. Antioch is in southern Turkey; Phenice is on the Island of Crete, to the west. This more probably refers to Phoenicia (the Phoenicians and Sidonians in western Lebanon), through which they would have naturally traveled on their way down through Samaria and finally to Jerusalem. Both areas are made up of Gentiles in Phenice and mixed blood sort-of-Jews/Gentiles in Samaria; they would naturally have been overjoyed to learn that the Gospel of God's Grace really was meant for them and all the Gentiles.

Verse 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.'*

Paul and Barnabas tell the main Church Body that, contrary to what they've thought, the Gentiles are loved

and received by God as are the Jews who believe the Gospel and... the Gentiles were given God's gift of the Holy Spirit, just as the Jews were, on Pentecost, signifying His complete acceptance of them without their ever having to be circumcised or adhere to the Law of Moses! This was Earth shattering to the Jews!

Verse 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.'*

These are Pharisees who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and, yet, cannot untether themselves from their ancient security blanket of the Law; there has to be more! It just can't be as simple as believing on Jesus Christ and His finished Work on the Cross... there has to be more!

These will be some of those to whom Jesus will say, 'Depart from Me; I never knew you!' These may very well be the Hebrews to whom the Book of Hebrews was written: Jews who believe but are unable to break free from the Law; when persecution or rejection arose, they would defect and go back to the safety and security of Rabbinic Judaism which will, tragically, take them, finally, to hell.

Any so-called Christian group which teaches that our own good works or lack of bad works are a necessary, fundamental component of our Salvation, are not understanding or teaching the Truth of God's Word. Some examples would be: Mormons, JW's, Catholics, SDA's and... and... even, to a degree, Charismatics:

Yes, Charismatics are true believers (most of them) but let's examine: Charismatics and other groups teach that you can lose your Salvation; if you sin, you are outside of God's Grace until you confess it and come back to Him and since Jesus said that if you break any commandment, you are guilty of all; therefore, every sin is as deadly as any other sin.

So... if you can lose your salvation by sinning, then, by definition, your salvation depends upon you, upon your being good enough to be saved and good enough to stay saved; in other words, your salvation depends upon your good works; in other, other words, you may boast in your salvation because it is only possible because you have worked to accomplish it and to keep it!

'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.' Eph 2:8

Now... here, however, is the difference between Charismatics and these other groups: Charismatics teach and believe on the True Lord Jesus Christ whereas the others believe on a different Christ and the real and genuine Lord Jesus Christ's Grace is sufficient to cover errant belief. And, above, I mentioned SDA's: if you look just beneath the surface, there is far more than enough really screwy teachings from Ellen G. White, whom they revere as a true prophet of God, to cause SDA to be really suspect. She does not lead toward true Salvation!

I've known far more than enough Charismatics to know that they are, for the most part, in fact, saved. Not all of them, of course, are saved but then neither are all Baptists saved; there are those in the pews of every church that are not really saved because True Salvation is a matter of the heart before God and not according to one's connection to any group or building.

This is their argument: *'no small dissension and disputation...'* Either God's Salvation is by His Grace alone or it is by man's works; there is no compromise or middle ground; Truth is Truth; error is error, no matter how 'Christian' any person or group happens to appear.

If Salvation is based on our effort then it means that our becoming saved and our staying saved is according to our own power and ability but if, rather, our Salvation rests in God alone, then my being saved and staying saved rests in Him! He chose me; He saved me and He alone will carry me safe until physical death or the Rapture. One belief glorifies and relies upon God while the other belief glorifies and relies upon Man which is all part of Satan's original lie: 'You can be like God!'

Verse 6: *'And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.'*

Were they all of one accord? Were all the Apostles and elders in agreement? Did they all understand and believe the Truth of the New Covenant? not hardly...

Verse 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.'*

Remember: Peter was led to the home of Cornelius, a Roman Gentile; the Gentiles believed God's Word through Peter and were all given the gift of His Holy Spirit... just like He had done with the Jews at Pentecost, after Peter had preached his first sermon as a suddenly born again, Spirit-filled believer.

Verse 8: *'And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; ⁹ And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.'*

That's the point: God purifies the hearts of Jews and Gentiles in the very same way: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ - Faith alone, in Christ alone, through God's Word alone, to the glory of God alone. Anything else is a false gospel brought by false teachers creating false hope in false *christians*.

Verse 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?'*

These are Pharisees who have believed the Gospel but have not been taught the whole and true Gospel. Peter says that they are tempting/trying God in wanting to bring these new Gentile believers under the yoke of bondage which is the Law, which they, themselves, have never been able to keep. Some of these may have even been the very ones whom Jesus castigated for their hypocritical demands under the Law.

Peter says that no one has ever been able to keep the Law, since it was given through Moses 1500 years before. Only the Lord Jesus Christ kept the whole Law, perfectly, and He did it on our behalf which is why we can be saved and declared righteous in God's sight. It would be left to Paul to clearly delineate the Truth of Salvation by God's Grace: *'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'* 2Cor 5:21

No one could ever achieve the Righteousness of God by works of the Law.

Verse 11: *'But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.'*

We have discussed it; we have prayed about it; we have fasted and sought God's Wisdom: this is the Truth.

Verse 12: *'Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.'*

All that we've studied since Peter first went to the Gentiles has been God's working through Paul and Barnabas, saving Gentiles by faith and giving them the Holy Spirit. Notice that Paul has been humble in submitting unto the Apostles; his had been a spectacular conversion experience followed by the unimaginable honor of having been taken up into Heaven, Himself, to be taught personally, face to face by the risen, Glorious and Majestic King of kings and Lord of lords. Paul knew and understood far more than any of these, Apostles and elders alike, and yet he trusts God to the point of staying silent and allowing the Holy Spirit to give the correct illumination to Peter, James and the rest: *'Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.'* James 4:7,9

Now he is invited to tell all that God has done through him and through Barnabas.

Verse 13: *'And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:'*

James, the brother of Jesus Christ, is recognized as the de facto leader of the Church on Earth even though Peter and the other Apostles had trusted in and followed Jesus significantly longer than had James.

'His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea... ⁵ For neither did his brethren believe in him.' John 7:3

And it's possible that James never did believe in Him until after His Resurrection: *'After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.'* 1Cor 15:7

Verse 14: *'Simeon (Peter) hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.'*

Notice the wording: God visited the Gentiles in order **to take out, from them**, some Gentiles for His Name... not that He saved those who chose to come to Him but, rather, He reached in, bypassing some and picking out only those whom He had chosen for Himself, long, long ago.

Verse 15: *'And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, ¹⁶ After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: ¹⁷ That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. ¹⁸ Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.'*

James is quoting from Amos 9; his main point: God has always promised take for Himself a people from the Gentiles. As much as some Jews might refuse to accept that Truth, yet, it remains and now we are watching the fulfillment of that great and eternal promise.

Verse 19: *'Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:'*

To tell the Gentiles that they must act like Jews is against their nature; it is against anyone's nature: the spiritual man seeks the freedom, the liberty offered in the Lord Jesus Christ; the carnal man seeks bondage: whether it is the bondage of sin or the bondage of a supposed righteousness gained by self effort: that is, through struggling to gain acceptance through the Law... to be recognized as good enough, thru good works.

'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. ² Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. ³ For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. ⁴ Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith... For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another... ¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself... ¹⁶ This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.' Gal 5:1

Verse 20: *'But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.'*

That's it! No Ten Commandments, no circumcision, no dietary laws, no animal sacrifices...

This is all that is required of Jews, as well, but to their ears, it is but heresy which is why it is so difficult to bring a Jew to faith except that God, Himself, draws that Jew to Himself; the same is true of Catholics, of Mormons, of 7th Day Adventists, of Jehovah's Witness and Muslims and every other false religion based on works. If a person is steeped in the lie of self righteousness which comes from obedience to certain rules, it is impossible to bring them to Salvation unless God reveals Himself to them and calls them to Himself; then, any person can be saved but only through the supernatural revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, through His Word.'

Verse 22: *'Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren:'*

James is sending a crowd to make certain that Gentiles and Jews alike understand this foundational Truth from God's Word: Gentiles are not Jews! They never have been and they never will be. The Law of Moses was never given to the Gentiles. How could James think it was enough to simply tell them: no idols, no fornication, no strangled or blood? Because James and Paul understood: when a person is born again, God's Holy Spirit indwells them; He will guide them into all Truth; He will teach them right from wrong; He will convict them of sin. He will teach them to love God and to love others; the Gentiles do not need to have the Ten Commandments nailed to their kitchen wall: *'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. ¹⁴ He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.'* John 16:13