

Series: Acts

Lesson #: 52

Title: The First Lie

Scripture: Acts 15: 1, 2

Date: January 15, 2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

The first lie to enter the world was introduced to turn Adam from following the rule of the triune God to following Adam's own rule. God's law was used to do it.

By pointing Eve to that one law, and by perverting the word of God, she was tricked into turning from God to her own wisdom and work. Through this, Adam broke the law by taking the law into his own hands and thus separated the entire human race from God into spiritual death.

Therefore, it is no great wonder that the first lie introduced into the New Testament church is the same.

TITLE: THE FIRST LIE

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.

THE ABSURDITY OF THE LIE

This doctrine was brought to believers who were already perfected forever by Christ's one offering. These brethren were in a state far better than that of Adam and Eve when this lie was first, presented to them in the garden.

Paul and Barnabas, along with the brethren at Antioch, had their conscience purged with the blood of Christ. (Heb 9: 14.) The God Man, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, had re-created these brethren, ETERNALLY BETTER than how Adam was first created.

Hebrews 9: 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?

1 John 1:7: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

After Paul gave that list which the law condemns he said to the Corinthian brethren: **I Corinthians 6: 11: And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.**

Adam was created upright. The inner man, which is born of God, is created in righteousness and in TRUE HOLINESS. That is, these brethren were created through Christ—that Righteousness in whom God declared himself just and at the same time Justified his people from their sins—created in the Holiness of God manifest in the person of the Son of God, Christ Jesus.

That means, Christ Jesus the Son of God bought the right to have the dominion in the hearts of these saints which he has created, and this right which he has purchased with his own blood, can only be forfeited at the expense of God's holy character.

You believer—as were thee saints at Antioch—are eternally secure in Christ. And they knew it because of the testimony of Christ to their hearts.

Now here is the folly of this lie. These men came declaring to the saints—to saints who were already in this state of righteousness and holiness in the new man in Christ Jesus—saints who because of Christ's work of grace performed in them were made willing to look away from themselves to Christ alone in whom they were complete—saints who were satisfied with Christ even as God their Father was satisfied with Christ—and these blind men had the audacity to say, **“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”**

The lie comes down to this. After all that Christ has done, there is yet something man must do.

Such absurdity was received by our first parents, but such a notion is continually cast out by the inner workings of Christ in those whom he truly reigns in Spirit. It can never prevail. The eternal security of Christ's hand is at stake if such a lie prevails. Christ will not allow it.

Romans 8: 1: *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* 2: For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Micah 7:19: He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Hebrews 8:10: For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

WHO WERE THESE MEN?

Now hear how Paul described these men.

Galatians 2: 1: Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also. 2: And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. 3: But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: 4: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: 5: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

1. First, Paul discerned by the same Spirit of discernment given to all believers, that by the doctrine that these men INSISTED upon, these men were **“false brethren”**--liars, men who did not know the truth of God, who had not submitted themselves to the Righteousness of God--Christ Jesus.

2. Secondly, Paul did not blame those in the church at Antioch. These men wore a disguise which made them appear, at first, as true brethren—therefore they were **“unawares brought in.”**

3. Thirdly, after speaking to the church at Jerusalem, Paul knew they did not send these men out, but that these men sent themselves and were spreading this work privately, even as Satan worked his lie in the beginning—**who came in privily** to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.

These men did not appear at first to be liars.

These fellows claimed to believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You recall the serpent which beguiled Eve is described as being, **more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made (Gen 3: 1.)** YET, by declaring that **“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”**—THEY DID JUST WHAT THE SERPENT DID IN THE BEGINNING—THEY QUESTIONED GOD’S TRUTH. BY THEIR DOCTRINE THEY DENIED THE WHOLE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, THE WHOLE DOCTRINE OF GRACE, AND DEFENDED SALVATION AS THE WORK OF MAN. THEY POINTED MEN AWAY FROM GOD BY MERELY POINTING MEN TO THE LAW OF GOD.

THE VERY PRINCIPLE OF THE LIE WHICH DENIED GOD IN THE GARDEN AND PLUNGED US INTO SPIRITUAL DEATH, IS THE SAME PRINCIPLE AT THE HEART OF THIS LIE. IT DENIES NOT JUST ONE DOCTRINE, BUT ALL OF THEM—FOR THEY ARE IN FACT, THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST—IT IS THE UTTER DENIAL OF GOD. That is why the apostle Paul could say without any danger, that these were false brethren—that their gospel was another gospel, which is not another. That it is bewitching.

LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT FLESHLY CIRCUMCISION WAS GIVEN TO TYPIFY?

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.

There is much indication of the lie they propagated by the fact that they defended, not the circumcision after the manner of Abraham, but “after the manner of Moses.”

Circumcision of Abraham?

Romans 4: 9:...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.** God commanded Abraham to be circumcised 15 years after Abraham believed God. **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.**

When the LORD gave Abraham life and faith to see and believe on Christ the coming Messiah, the LORD cut away the polluted spirit—did not remove the old nature—but created a new nature and thus freed him from that dead, corrupt flesh. It was a thing performed by the LORD in Abraham’s heart. Later the LORD gave the outward sign of circumcision as a token to remind Abraham of what the LORD had done in his heart, of the everlasting covenant made by God to Abraham.

This outward circumcision typified how Abraham was sealed--circumcised--in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

Paul states this earlier in Romans 2: 28::For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: **29: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.**

Colossians 2: 10: And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

That is why the LORD said in the law of Moses such things as this:

Deuteronomy 10:16: Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

Deuteronomy 30:6: And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Circumcision was passed on to Abraham's children so that they could teach their children the gospel of what it signified. Instead, they used it unlawfully to say they were saved by it.

The dead sinner is a legalist who thinks that perfection—the final capstone—the final work—to make the believer perfect lies in what men do by the work of their own hands.

The work they chose to promote this doctrine was—circumcision. But this very thinking that a man must do something is the fifthly foreskin of the heart which God alone must circumcise.

THOSE WHO HAVE NOT BEEN BORN OF THE SPIRIT, HAVE NO IDEA THEY SERVE A LIE. THEY SINCERELY, AS ADAMANTLY AS THESE LEGAL, DEAD JEWS, THINK THAT THE TRUTH IS THAT MAN HAS TO DO SOME WORK TO BE SAVED.

Circumcision is an internal work performed by God through the Holy Spirit. Believers are circumcised in Christ, or by Christ—CIRCUMCISION MADE WITHOUT HANDS.

Notice the backward thinking of the flesh—these men said that though a man be a believer from the heart, unless he do something by the work of his hand, he could not be perfected.

The truth of Christ is, though a man do something by the work of his hand, unless he be perfected in the heart he is yet unclean.

WHAT DID THESE MEN MEAN BY “THE CIRCUMCISION OF MOSES?”

This language indicates a misunderstanding of the original meaning of circumcision. They considered the circumcision of Moses to include the entire law. Any time you hear a man say that the believer is yet under the law of God—let it be a sign to you that something is wrong.

It is important to understand. These fellows—as well as those in our day—put a man under ALL the law of Moses by declaring the believer is under even one law—ceremonial or moral.

Paul knew this and that is why he said to the Galatians, **Galatians 5: 4: Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. 5: For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6: For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.**

Paul's gospel is that Christ, being made a curse for us has delivered us from the curse of the law—what part of the law cursed us? All of it—therefore Paul declares Christ has delivered us from the curse of all of it. The curse is that selfish nature, dead nature, which makes men use the law to excuse themselves by claiming themselves righteous while accusing others as being guilty by the law. It is called “self righteousness.” It is anti-Christ.

Those who teach that the keeping of the law of God is necessary, for salvation, break the law of God. (Be sure you understand no believer advocates that believers are to be lawless, that we live contrary to the law of God, **BUT WE LIVE UNTO CHRIST**—with no thought that we are able to fulfill the law of God.)

Let me show you a clear illustration of this taught by the Lord Jesus himself:

John 7: 18: He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. 19: Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me? 20: The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? 21: Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. 22: Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the Sabbath day circumcise a man.

Remember, the lie which is another gospel is that “**Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.**” They were saying you must keep the whole law of God. Oh, they would pick and choose which ones they meant, but they meant you must conform to what they taught as being true godliness. Men today don’t say except ye be circumcised, but they still say, except ye keep the law.

Now listen to what the Lord Jesus teaches about the law?

John 7: 19: Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?...21: Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel. 22: Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision;...and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. He uses a ceremonial law—circumcision—as well as one of the ten commandments—the Sabbath. He is declaring that we can’t require one without requiring the other.

Now the Lord Jesus asks a question—one concerning ceremonial law and one concerning the 10 commandments: John 7: 22: **Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision;...and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man.**

Many a child reached 8 days old on the Sabbath. Now what? If we observe the Sabbath day, we must break the law of circumcision? If we observe the law of circumcision we must break the Sabbath? God’s law was designed by God to make the sinner throw up our hands and confess, “I can not keep the law.”

Christ is the fullness of our circumcision—when the Spirit circumcises us in heart we behold that Christ fulfilled the whole law in taking away the body of sin by his death at Calvary. Also Christ is our rest—our Sabbath—we no longer work to please God but rest in Christ in whom we are accepted of God. In other words, Christ has made us every whit whole.

That is exactly what he is declaring to the Pharisees. John 7: **23: If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken;** (that is why Christ died, why he circumcises us in heart, that his why he came and why he does the whole

work—that the law be not broken by those he is Surety for. He says, now if that is what you are declaring I have done for my people when you circumcise a man on the Sabbath) **are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?** (Because I have shown you how thoroughly I complete this work by myself) **24: Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.** (Discern not according to the letter, to the flesh, to the outward—but judge righteous judgment, spiritual discernment, heart love in spirit and in truth.)

But Christ said by attempting to keep the law they broke the law. They could not see Christ because they were not made whole. That is why he said, Ye seek to kill me. He knew their heart. Then he shows that unless he circumcises the heart so that you can behold that he is indeed Christ our Sabbath—in whom we are every whit complete—that no man can know him. John 7: **25: Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill? 26: But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? 27: Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.**

The reason some know him and rest in him while others do not is due to the circumcision of the heart—the reason is because of him who kept the law and satisfied the justice of the law on our behalf—who has now come and made us to see that we are complete in him.

This is why he says, **Joh 8:36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.**

PAUL AND BARNABAS HAD NO SMALL DISSENSION AND DISPUTATION WITH THEM

Paul knew that if a man insisted that the believer must add his hand to the work of grace then the truth had ceased.

Let's be clear on the essence of this error. The doctrine of Christ allows no meritorious effort whereby any man, by his own hand, may ascribe glory to himself. The triune God receives the glory. The doctrine which mixes man's effort plus grace includes all error whereby the sinner is made to be the cause, or even partly the cause, of his salvation.

Listen carefully.

- The principle which makes man's obedience a basis for his acceptance with God is the same principle included in the lie which teaches that God's election of grace is due to God foreseeing merit in the one chosen;
- It is the same principle which allows man to glory in giving himself spiritual life;
- The same principle is included in the lie which teaches that man is quickened by God then given the choice to either choose or reject the Savior;
- The same addition of man's glory is included in the lie which says that by believing on Christ the sinner makes Christ's blood effectual for him personally rather than declaring Christ's atoning work was particular, effectual, and limited to the elect of God alone;

- The principle represented in this error is one with the error which gives the glory for the believer's perseverance in faith to the believer's will and strength rather than to the power of God by whom we are kept;
- The principle which makes a work of man necessary is a perversion with any perversion which makes even one of all the spiritual blessings freely given us by God in Christ to be by the sinner rather than by the free and sovereign grace of God Almighty.
- The vessel of mercy has absolutely nothing of which to take credit for but the sin from which Christ alone can save—but this truth is even denied because the essence of this lie is that there is some merit in the sinner—some claim it is put there by God—God's gift of faith and repentance is to turn us from ourselves to Christ, not from Christ back to the law!

With Paul this was not merely a difference of opinion, this was altogether a lie designed to populate hell. **Galatians 5: 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.**

Martin Luther--This passage may well serve as a criterion for all the religions. To teach that besides faith in Christ other devices like works, or the observance of rules, traditions, or ceremonies are necessary for the attainment of righteousness and everlasting life, is to make Christ and His salvation of no benefit to anybody.

The position of those in favor of making the Gentiles be circumcised was this, that except were *circumcised after the manner of Moses*, and thereby bound themselves to whole law, *they could not be saved*. And I submit to you that the same polluting sin permeates all who would attempt to make believers attempt to sanctify themselves by their obedience to the 10 commandments. All such teaching causes the preacher, the church, and each individual sinner to look to the flesh and away from Christ.

So this is why Paul and Barnabas had **no small dissension and disputation with** these folks over this false teaching. Paul called their gospel another gospel.

It would be utter hypocrisy if on one hand, Paul to claimed men could never be saved by such false teaching—for he knew and preached that such a gospel counts Christ's death vain—but it would be hypocrisy for Paul then on the other hand, to accept this teaching and even promote it among the brethren. This is the same doctrine which Paul once thought was his salvation. But when Paul was truly converted—he renounced it all as dung. Any gospel such as these Jews came with—makes Christ death of no effect unto any sinner—it must be renounced by those who have truly been converted by the power of God.

Note: If we would use the law, lawfully, we must continually declare that no sinner—not even one born of God—can keep the least of the Mosaic law. That is why Christ came. That is why we were given faith to trust Christ alone. He fulfilled the law and in him we establish it. Now he rules in us not by fear of punishment and desire for reward—but by love, and love covers a multitude of sins.

CONCLUSION:

They determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Not to debate, not to negotiate, and not to reach a compromise. But to notify those at Jerusalem that this lie was coming out of Jerusalem, unawares, by men who were going out of their own accord to spy out our liberty, to bring us back under the yoke of man.

In Paul's own words, Galatians 2: 5: **...that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.**

Therefore we do not tolerate the doctrine of the great lie—whether law-obedience is said to be a means of justification, a measure of sanctification, the believer's rule of life, the motive for service to Christ, or the ground of reward in heaven. It is the precept of men which denies, total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, preservation of the saints, salvation by grace, through faith in Christ alone, because it denies Christ who is All in the believer.

Chris is ALL OF THESE THINGS in the heart of the believer—our Justification, the measure of our Sanctification, our Rule of life, his Love for us constrains us and he is our Reward in heaven.

The law is the “ministration of death” and the “strength of sin”.

Christ is our Liberty and Salvation.