

054b - Do You Have to Follow the Old Testament Laws? Part 4 - Acts 15:22-31 - 2017-08-20

Call to Worship: 1 Chronicles 16:31

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 60:1-5

Sermon: "Do You Have to Follow the Old Testament Laws? Part 4" Acts 15:22-31

Benediction: Psalm 117:1-2

INTRODUCTION

The first Lord's Day in July, I had the privilege of preaching as a substitute at one of the other churches in our association, because that church's pastor had to be out of the pulpit recovering from surgery. The richness of that experience prompted me to speak to you from Acts chapter 15, describing how we, the pastors in our association of churches, try to model our cooperation after the cooperation shown among the churches of that first generation.

Having opened Acts 15 with you, I then thought it fitting to follow up with an exposition of that wonderful passage, which describes how the apostles and elders of the churches dealt with a controversy that arose in those days, a controversy that people still try to make an issue of all these years later.

The question before that church conference in Jerusalem can be stated simply as this:

"Do you have to follow the Old Testament laws?"

The first message, I looked with you at how we answer that question when it comes as, "Do you have to follow the OT laws *to be saved*?" We studied how God caused the gentiles in the household of Cornelius to be filled with the Holy Spirit even before Peter's sermon to them was over, proving definitively that no law-keeping or rule-following or ceremony of any kind is necessary for the sinner to be saved by God's grace. No OT ceremony, such as circumcision is required; no man-made ceremony is required, such as saying a certain prayer; not even any NT ceremony, such as baptism or the Lord's Supper, is required. Salvation is by the grace of God toward us in our Lord Jesus Christ. He works saving faith in us by His Holy Spirit. By that faith He cleanses us in the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross. And so by God's grace, through faith in Christ, we are saved and shall be saved.

The next week I spoke to you about how the process the Jerusalem church conference went through shows us something of our great liberty in Jesus Christ. You are at liberty to obey the perfect moral commandments God has given to all people, and the instructions the Lord Jesus has left for His New Covenant church, and ignore all the rest. You need not obey laws particular to the Old Covenant. You need not obey rules made up by men. You need not be tied up in knots by a vain effort to "hear from God." You may live in liberty under the blessed rule of the King of kings, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Last week we looked at how the apostles and elders in Jerusalem produced a list of four requirements for the gentile Christians to obey. James and the apostles and elders Judged that While They Should Not Trouble the Gentiles By Imposing the Law of Moses, They Should Affirm Its Teaching Against Idolatry. They saw that, even as they ruled against imposing the Old Covenant laws given through Moses on the gentiles, it was necessary for them to reiterate to the gentile Christians the universal moral laws of God against the practices of idolatry, lest anyone think that their presence in the Old Testament scriptures mean they do not apply to all people. We saw, also, that in Revelation, our Lord Jesus personally confirmed that doctrine in His letters to the churches.

Today's message is the conclusion of this study in Acts 15. I plan to speak to you from the scriptures on our receiving of this verdict from the conference in Jerusalem. Those men wrote their findings into a letter and sent it out. We, the gentiles turning to God through Jesus Christ, are the recipients of that letter. What does it mean to us to have received that letter?

TEXT

Acts 15:22-31

BODY

I. Why Have We Received This Message?

We have received this message as a help with a perpetual problem in God's church. (24)

- A. Believers in Christ are settled into God's church, wherever that might be
 - 1. having understood themselves sinners before God
 - 2. having heard the good news of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, by His death and resurrection
 - 3. having believed, repenting of sin
 - 4. having professed that faith to the church
 - 5. having been baptized
 - 6. now considered a member of the local church
 - 7. now meeting with the church, including taking the Lord's Supper
 - 8. being taught to obey all that our Lord Jesus has commanded us
 - 9. looking forward with hope to the return of Christ
- B. Someone comes from elsewhere, or rises up from within the church, with seemingly-strong credentials
 - 1. he is Jewish, so he really knows; or he is learning from people who are Jewish
 - 2. he has been to bible college or seminary, so he really knows
 - 3. he has studied Greek or Hebrew, so he really knows
 - 4. he is a very interesting speaker, so he really knows
- C. He agitates us with words, unsettling our souls

1. illus. You had to move, and life was in an upheaval. Finally you settled into your new home. You put all the furniture in place, put all the dishes in the cabinet, put all the clothes in the drawers, put our some nice decorations. Then someone charges in the front door and says, "You can't have that there---it has to go over here. That can't hang there---hang it over here." or maybe "You can't move in here. This isn't the right address. You need to move out."
 2. You have settled in to the Christian life, now you are told you need to move.
- D. He does this by adding requirements
1. to be saved, you must do some ceremony
 2. to live as a Christian, you must follow some set of rules
 3. to experience God's best for you, you must do these things
 4. to fulfill the Great Commission, you must go somewhere
- E. This is a perpetual problem in the church; we have received this letter as help for whenever that problem shows up among us.

II. How Have We Received This Message?

- A. We have received this message by the hand of beloved men (22b, 25b, 26, 27)
1. Judas Barsabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren in Jerusalem
 2. Paul and Barnabas
 3. APPLICATION: Whenever questions come up about what is required for you to be saved, or by what rules you have to live as a Christian, consider that we have already received the necessary message about that by the hand of four beloved brothers.
 - a) not Jeff and Dale
- B. We have received this message both in writing and by word of mouth (23, 27)
1. We are sure about this message, as well as the rest of the bible
 2. It has come to us in writing
 - a) known, not secret
 - b) stable, not changeable
 3. It has come confirmed by tradition passed down from one faithful man to another
 - a) even when there is no one in person to confirm what is written, there are men in other generations who have written down their confirmation of the truth of it
 - b) Luther and Calvin were able to read Augustine
 - c) we are able to read the 1689 Confession

Why have we received this message? as a help for a perpetual problem

How have we received this message? in writing, confirmed by beloved men

III. What Is the Message We Have Received?

- A. The apostles and the whole church in Jerusalem are agreed on this matter (23a, 25a, 28)
 - 1. the apostles
 - 2. the elders
 - 3. the brethren
- B. This message is first from the Holy Spirit (28)
- C. As Christians from among the Gentiles, we are the brethren of the Christians from among the Jews (23b)
- D. Those who try to trouble you by telling you to keep the Old Covenant laws have no authorization from the apostles or the Jerusalem church to do so (24)
- E. Requirements that our Lord Jesus has not laid on you should be considered a burden you are not required to carry (28) “no greater burden”
- F. Some of the things that our brethren from among the Jews abstain from are not just Old Covenant rituals, but necessary parts of Godly living for everyone (28b) --- “necessary things”
 - 1. things offered to idols (pollution of idols)
 - 2. blood (Gen 9:3-4)
 - 3. strangled
 - 4. porneia
 - a) whether considered literally, but that is not the point here
 - b) or, as meant here, figuratively for the people of God continuing to worship idols

Why have we received this message? as a help for a perpetual problem

How have we received this message? in writing, confirmed by beloved men

IV. How Should We Respond to the Message We have Received?

- A. We are to gather and read it (30-31a)
 - 1. Look---here we are! Praise God for that!
- B. We are to rejoice over its encouragement/exhortation *paraklesis* (31b)
 - 1. If this message is from the Holy Spirit, is it any wonder that it is encouraging/comforming/exhorting/helpful?
 - a) Jesus promised the Spirit would come a *parakleton*
 - b) this message from the *parakleton* provides us *paraklesis*
 - 2. What should we rejoice in more than this message!?

Why have we received this message? as a help for a perpetual problem

How have we received this message? in writing, confirmed by beloved men

How should we respond to this message? gather to read it and rejoice in its encouragement

- V. What Can We Expect from the Lord Jesus If We Read and Rejoice in This Message?
(read 16:4-5)
- A. the church will be strengthened in the faith (16:5a)
 - B. the church will increase in number (16:5b)
 - 1. interesting evangelistic method!

CONCLUSION

- Why have we received this message? as a help for a perpetual problem
- How have we received this message? in writing, confirmed by beloved men
- How should we respond to this message? gather to read it and rejoice in its encouragement
- What can we expect from the Lord Jesus if we read and rejoice in this message? the church will be strengthened in the faith and increased in number

Acts 15:23b-29 The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles . . . Greetings. (24) Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "Be circumcised and keep the law"--to whom we gave no commandment-- (25) it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (26) men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (27) We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. (28) For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: (29) that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

Prelude Trinity 212 "A Hymn of Glory" piano to tune down 2 half steps

Camille - Piano

Noah - Trumpet

Anna - Clarinet

Trinity 81 "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

Camille - Piano

Noah - Trumpet

Anna - Clarinet

Grace 2 "A Debtor to Mercy Alone"

Camille - Flute

Noah - Trumpet

Anna - Piano

Trinity 187 "It Is Finished" piano to tune down 2 half steps

Camille - Sing

Noah - Trumpet

Anna - Piano

Grace 40 "Down at the Cross"

Camille - Piano

Noah - Sing

Anna - Sing