

051b - Do You Have to Follow the Old Testament Laws? Part 1- Acts 15 - 2017-07-16

Call to Worship: 1 Chronicles 16:28-29

Scripture Reading: Acts 10:34-48

Sermon: "Do You Have to Follow the Old Testament Laws? Part 1" Acts 15:1-11

Benediction: 1 Chronicles 16:31

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we looked into how the New Testament churches were associating with one another, as an explanation to you of how our own TAARBC operates. We studied from Acts chapter 15. But as we looked through Acts 15, of course the material is packed with good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and with instruction for the church in some things we are to do and not do.

We looked into this as a church four and a half years ago, in 2012, when I was preaching and teaching through the book of Acts with you. It was a delight to do so then, and I hope will be a delight to do so again now. The bible says, Acts 15:31, that when the churches of that first generation read this material, they rejoiced. I think we can understand why. It really is encouraging, and delights the soul.

This material in Acts 15, really starting in Acts chapter 10, and culminating in chapter 15, asks and answers this question: Do you have to follow the Old Testament laws?

Today we take up one aspect of that question: Do you have to follow the OT laws to be saved?

Thankfully, the answer to that question is probably already very clear in your mind. Seeing the question answered from the scriptures as it was answered in Jerusalem in Acts 15 will be a blessing to you nonetheless. Also, answering that question provides the answer to another question, that might or might not be as clear in your mind: Do you have to follow the NT laws to be saved? For example, do you have to be baptized to be saved? For another example, do you have to take the Lord's Supper to be saved? Do you have to go to church to be saved, or have to join the church membership to be saved? Yet if you already know the Word of God on those questions very well, I hope you will delight yourself in how our Lord answers that questions in His churches in Acts 15.

TEXT

Acts 15:1-11

BODY

- I. God already had chosen that, through the mouth of Peter, the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe (7)

- A. see Acts 10:38-43
- B. note that according to Peter these Gentiles believed
- C. Our 1689 Confession states this truth in these words (Chapter 14, paragraph 1):
The grace of faith . . . is the work of the Spirit in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word . . .
 - 1. that is the very thing Peter conveys in verse 7
 - a) he was preaching the gospel
 - b) the gentiles, hearing the gospel, believed

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II. God demonstrated the Gentiles' salvation by giving them the outward manifestation of the Holy Spirit (8)

- A. the Spirit of God works faith into the heart of the sinner; this cannot be seen by human eyes; but in this case, human eyes needed something they could see, so that Peter and the other Jews would know these gentiles were saved through faith in Christ; so God, who knows the heart, caused these gentiles to do something that could be seen and heard
- B. see Acts 10:44-46
 - 1. while Peter was still speaking, the Holy spirit fell on those who heard
 - 2. the Jews (those of the circumcision) were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles!
 - 3. How did Peter and the other Jews know that the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles? They heard them speaking in tongues magnifying God. (Acts 10:46)

Speaking in tongues, as on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, not as in the charismtic/pentecostal churches of today.

- 4. that is the very thing that happened to Peter and the other Jews who were gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-6)
- 5. Since this is the very thing that happened to Peter and the other Jews on the day of Pentecost, Peter rightly concluded that no one should stop these Gentiles being baptized as saved believers in Christ, so he commanded them to be baptized (Acts 10:47)
- 6. Here we may apply one of our favorite logical principles: One example of the existence of a thing disproves every theory that it cannot exist.
 - a) e.g. one example of a man resurrected from the dead disproves completely every theory that there cannot be a man resurrected from the dead

- b) one example of a gentile saved through faith, without being circumcised, definitively disproves the theory that there cannot be a gentile saved through faith without being circumcised
 - 7. Here is the crucial point: Since the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the gentiles happened while Peter was still speaking, think of all the things they had not done before being saved:
 - a) had not been circumcised
 - b) had not been baptized; had not taken the Lord's Supper
 - c) had not confessed with their mouth, "Jesus is Lord"
 - d) had not done any works in keeping with repentance
 - e) had not prayed a prayer
 - f) had not stood up or in any other way publicly professed Christ
- C. Peter understood and communicated to this council that the existence of Gentiles who believed, as shown to be by the Holy spirit, proves definitively that the Gentiles do not have to be circumcised to be saved
- D. It might be helpful to consider two other examples from the Bible
 - 1. Abraham
 - 2. the thief on the cross
- E. APPLICATION: make sure your definition of faith does not include any actions or words
 - 1. keep this passage and its lessons right in the front of your mind when you read James's doctrine of faith and works in the letter James; remember he presided over this conference, and was the main author of its conclusions; in his letter, he pressed hard against the error of saying you have faith, when you have no good deeds to prove that faith is real or living; but nothing he says, no matter how he stresses that point, should be taken to weaken the doctrine expressed in this chapter---sinners are saved through faith, before ever they have opportunity to do any good works
- F. APPLICATION: make sure your definition of repentance does not include any actions or words
- G. APPLICATION: You need not concern yourself with what some people today refer to as speaking in tongues.
 - 1. In that first generation, it was used as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. That use was fulfilled, and has expired.
 - 2. What is done today, and called speaking in tongues, is not speaking in tongues.
 - a) there are people who fake it, and so of course that is not speaking in tongues by the Holy Spirit
 - b) there are people who might sincerely think they are doing it; but they are mistaken; what they are doing is not speaking in tongues by the Holy Spirit
 - 3. So, do not feel under any obligation to take any of what is done under that name today seriously.

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- III. In this God made no distinction between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, cleansing their hearts by faith (9)
- A. God had said to Peter, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common."
 - B. In the Old Covenant, there had been a distinction between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, which distinction went back further than Moses, all the way to Abraham
 - 1. so that any man who was not circumcised could not be considered a part of Israel, a part of the covenant, because being in the covenant required a kind of cleansing, the circumcision of the foreskin
 - 2. but anyone who was circumcised, even if he were an infant, could be considered a part of Israel, a part of the covenant
 - 3. so it is understandable that the Jews, including Peter, would think that the New Covenant would operate the same way
 - 4. but the Lord Jesus showed Peter, and, through him, the rest of the Jews, that the New Covenant is different, in that membership in the covenant does not make a distinction between the circumcised and the uncircumcised; the distinction is between those whose hearts are cleansed by faith, and those whose hearts are not cleansed by faith
 - C. See that one of the things that salvation means is a cleansing or purifying your heart; there is a purifying or cleansing of the heart from sin in the blood of Jesus Christ
 - 1. sometimes we can be troubled by Jesus' saying, "blessed are the pure in heart," because we know that there is so much sin remaining in our flesh; but the sense in which Jesus describes His disciples as "pure in heart" is the sense in which Peter here says that all believers, from the first moment of faith in Christ, as washed, cleansed, purified in heart by the blood of Jesus Christ
 - D. APPLICATION: Note that the dream Jesus gave to Peter concerning the unclean food shows that the OT laws about unclean food
 - 1. had a purpose now no longer needed
 - 2. are no longer in effect
 - a) Jesus Himself commanded Peter to eat unclean food
 - b) do you dare say we must not?

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IV. To name additional requirements for salvation is wrong in more than one way (10)

A. It is to test God

1. there is a wholesome, good way to test God - to obey His commands, and see whether He will bless you for it
2. there is an evil, sinful testing of God - to disobey His commands, presuming that He will not punish you for it
3. to lay on people additional requirements for salvation is to disobey Him, testing whether or not He will punish you for it

B. It is to burden God's people

1. remember the terms of the Old Covenant: if you will obey all my laws, I will bless you in the land; if you will not obey all my laws, I will send conquerors who will kill many of you and take the rest into captivity
2. that was a great burden to Israel; they were not able to bear it
3. such a burden is not to be laid on the necks of those who come to Jesus Christ; those are not the terms of the New Covenant; the terms of the New Covenant are not what sinners must do, but what God will do for sinners through His Son

C. APPLICATION: this is what preachers or others do when they tell the disciples of Jesus Christ that they must do certain things to be saved

1. you need to raise your hand; you need to stand up; you need to walk down here; you need to pray this prayer

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To name additional requirements for salvation is wrong in more than one way (10)

- V. Anyone who is saved is saved not by any religious ritual, but through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. (11)
- A. Jews in whom God works saving faith, how shall they be saved? by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - 1. by OT ritual? no
 - 2. by NT ritual? no
 - 3. by man-made ritual? no
 - 4. through faith by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? yes!
 - B. Gentiles in whom God works saving faith, how shall they be saved? by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - 1. by OT ritual? no
 - 2. by NT ritual? no
 - 3. by man-made ritual? no
 - 4. through faith by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? yes!

CONCLUSION

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Anyone who is saved is saved not by any religious ritual, but through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. (11)

So, do you have to obey OT laws to be saved? No!

Do you have to obey NT laws before you are saved? No!

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.