



A just weight  
and balance

are the  
LORD'S:

Thus saith the Lord...

- **Acts 15**

- We have been tracing in the book of Acts the wonderful story of **how this radical gospel** began to break out upon a decadent, pagan society,
- How it captured the **hearts of men,**
- How it began to waken hope, **in a hopeless world.**

- But amid that hope the **“Roaring Lion”** is not asleep.
  - In this chapter we learn of those **“those who would pervert the gospel of Christ”** (**Galatians 1:7**)
    - Some **intentionally**
      - Some **not!**

- There is a true Christianity and false Christianity.
- Unfortunately, false Christianity is believed by millions who think they have understood the true, and have rejected the false.

- Therefore their minds are closed to the truth when it comes.
- Luke gives us the background:
  - Acts 15:1-2 RSV
- **But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren,**
  - **"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."**

- It all began with the introduction of a very plausible and attractive heresy which came disguised as Christianity.

- **2 Corinthians 11:13**

**For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.**

- 11:14 **And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.**

- These Gentiles believed they had been saved.
- Now they are learning that they are not saved!
- **"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."  
(Acts 15:1)**
  - A crushing blow!

- This introduced an issue which would split the church at Antioch wide open.
- So the first really serious internal strife within the church was over race and ritual
  - Over the question of Jews versus Gentiles,
  - And of circumcision as the sign of acceptance.



- This specific issue has long ago passed away as a concern to us; but the principle behind it is very present with us yet today.
- The enemy has simply changed the players on the program.
- He has substituted some new issues on the same old divisive platform.

- This issue had great power over these new Christians.
  - They were relatively untaught,
  - And the whole idea appeared very plausible,  
on several grounds:

- First

- These men who came down from Jerusalem were evidently sincere.

- They were not simply trying to cause trouble;

- They were deeply committed to the belief that unless a Gentile complied with the Law of Moses and was circumcised, he had no right to call himself a Christian.

- **Second**

- It looked as though it had a great deal of **scriptural support.**
- There are passages in the Old Testament **which seemed to imply that idea.**
- They went through the Scriptures and **selected these verses,**
  - Ignoring others **that balance them,**
  - With it they **shook** the faith of these people in Antioch.

- They were failing to allow God to reveal new truth.
- They were basing their position on the assumption that all truth had been given already in that day.
  - But the Scriptures were not yet completed.

- The whole truth about the Jews and Gentiles becoming one body in Jesus Christ **was never mentioned in the Old Testament.**

- For this reason, it was difficult indeed to prove that this **was not a violation of the Scriptures.**

- James,  
the brother of our Lord Jesus,  
was prominent in this meeting.  
(**Galatians 1:19**)

- Having been raised with Jesus
- He could testify to the fact that  
Jesus obeyed the Law  
and was circumcised  
according to the Law of Moses.

- Using these arguments  
they had great power  
in the preaching of this heresy.
  - It is no wonder  
that Luke says  
they caused  
no small dissension  
and debate.  
(Acts 15:2)



- Though we are not told so here, this is unquestionably when occurred that incident which the Apostle Paul records in his letter to the Galatians.
  - The Apostle Peter had gone down to Antioch
  - And ate with the Gentiles.
    - He was rejoicing in his freedom in Christ.

- Paul says,  
when certain men  
came down from James.  
(Galatians 2:12)

- And began to preach that you cannot be saved unless you are circumcised according to the Law of Moses,
  - Peter was carried away by this dissension.
  - And Barnabas was carried away likewise.

- These men were sincere,  
but they were  
sincerely wrong.
- As Paul explains  
in Galatians 2:6,  
they preached a “gospel,”  
an incomplete gospel.

- Paul rebuked the Apostle Peter publicly for his inconsistency.  
(Galatians 2:11)

- You see what Luke means when he says this was no small debate.

- So Paul and Barnabas were appointed by the church to go up to Jerusalem.
- Be careful not to read that as though Paul were uncertain as to the truth and had to consult with the other apostles before it was settled.

- The purpose of the meeting in Jerusalem was that of correcting the religious position of the majority in that church

- Including, it may be presumed, most if not all of the apostles, as well as James the Lord's brother.

- The notion that Paul needed their approval is wrong.
- Except in the limited sense of his hoping to retain the unity of the Church.
  - Paul did not need the "council"; they needed him.

- Paul never had a moment's doubt over this issue.

- He tells us in Galatians that he went to Jerusalem by revelation.  
(Galatians 2:2)

- Gal 1:11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*,  
but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.



- The sectarian idea that this was a General Council of the Church, convened to settle true Christian doctrine, misses the point altogether.
  - The council was in error, not the apostle Paul.
- In Galatians, Paul flatly affirmed that:
- **They ... imparted nothing to me; but contrariwise ... when they perceived the grace that was given unto me ... gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship (Galatians 2:6-9).**

➤ **Titus**

had come to  
Jerusalem with Paul

➤ So he became the  
**focus of contention.**

➤ Being a Greek

**did he need circumcision.**

➤ Paul tells us that this was the  
**issue,**

➤ And there was a great deal of  
**debate** as Luke records.

- And, as always, there are two kinds of speakers:
  - those who have something to say,
  - and those who have to say something.
- So it went on and on.

- Finally, Peter stood up.
- It is important to note that Peter did not convene this council.
- If he had been the first pope, that would have been his responsibility.
  - But he did not.
- James, the Lord's brother, was the chief speaker,
- And Peter was merely a spokesman.<sub>2</sub>

- Notice also that they did not settle anything by majority vote.
- They were seeking the mind of the Spirit.

- John 16:13

“...when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth:

- That is why the issues had to be clearly aired.

- And Peter finally rises to speak.
- He has three things that he wants to say:

- First

he reminds them again of  
how he had learned  
something new about  
the heart of God.

- He learned that at the  
house of Cornelius.

(**Acts 10**)

- Second
- Acts 15:10

**Now therefore why tempt you God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?**



- Nobody ever came to God by trying to be good.
  - No Jew, no Gentile,
    - The effort to do so results in crushing despair.

- **Third**

- **But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.**

**Acts 15:11**

- Now, Luke tells us that it had impressive effect.

- "All the assembly kept silence..."

(Acts 15:12 RSV).

- Even these Judaizers

were silenced

by that argument.

- **"They listened as Barnabas and Paul related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles..."**  
**(Acts 15:12 RSV).**

- James, the Lord's brother, replied,
  - "Brethren, listen to me. Peter has related how God first visited the Gentiles,
    - to take out of them a people for his name.
- And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written,..."  
(Acts 15:13-15)

- **Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.  
(**Acts 15:13-21** RSV)**

- These **Judaizers** had been saying to the Gentiles,  
**"Without circumcision you cannot be saved."**
- But they were ignoring the fact that **God had already been saving Gentiles** without asking anybody's permission to do so,
- And he was doing it without **any reference to the Law of Moses.**
- And with this point they **could not argue.**
- **God had already overruled them.**

- Today

both Jew and Gentile  
stand on the same ground  
as sinners before God,

- And the program of  
“to the Jew first”  
no longer applies.

(**Acts 15:14**)



- James defines the supreme purpose of God today.
- This is most important of all.
- He says these amazing words:

- "Peter has related how God visited the Gentiles,  
**“to take out of them a people for his name...”**  
**(Acts 15:14).**
- That is **what God is doing** in history.
- There **is the focus** of history.
- This is the **great program** of God.

**The doors of the church  
are open.**

**The Spirit and the Bride  
Say  
“Come”.**

**Revelation 22:17**



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