

DEFINING SALVATION

Acts 12:1-18

Introduction

A new process was starting to happen in the Christian church- something which disturbed and alarmed many Jewish Christians. Gentile converts were being welcomed into the fellowship by baptism without the requirement of circumcision! They were becoming Christians without first becoming Jews! It was one thing for the Jewish leaders to give their approval to the conversion of Gentiles, but could they be OK with approving conversion to Christianity without conversion to Judaism at the same time? This week, we'll see the church leaders struggle to deal with this issue.

Scripture for study

Sermon Text- Acts 15

Paul confronts Peter- Galatians 2:11-16

Message Outline

Judaism or Christianity? (Acts 12:1-5)

The Difference Between Grace and the Law (v5-21)

Compromise For the Sake of Unity (v22-35)

Four action that were to be avoided:

- Food sacrificed to idols
- Blood
- Meat of strangled animals
- Sexual immorality

Discussion Questions

1. What were some of the fears of the Jewish Christians as they watched a stream of Gentiles come into the fellowship?
2. Do you think there was tension between the Jewish and Gentile Christians? If so, then what might have been some of the issues?
3. Suggest some modern ways in which Christians impose unreasonable expectations on new Christians.
4. What were some reasons why God gave the Law to Moses and the Israelites? (Hint: it wasn't for salvation!)
5. When the Jerusalem council made its decision, there was no mention of what the Jewish Christians thought about the outcome. What do you think their reaction was?
6. James, the leader of the church, suggested four actions that Gentiles should avoid if they wanted to be included into the fellowship. Why do you think he chose these four particular actions?
7. How does a church differentiate between what is critical to hold on to (mission) vs. what could and possibly should be changed (method)?

Review and Reflection

When we keep a good perspective on salvation and mission, we're poised to reach the world with the good news of Jesus. Let's not make it any harder than it needs to be on people who come to Christ, and let's do everything short of compromising truth or watering down our mission to reach them.