CAMPUS
BIBLE CHURCH

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"The Jerusalem Council"
Acts 15:1-35
Acts: The Unstoppable Gospel

Introduction

During the first several centuries of the church, there were a number of Councils that met to resolve doctrinal questions and disputes. They were called "ecumenical" because they represented the church throughout the known world, and they produced authoritative Creeds that defined the essential doctrines of the Christian faith (E.G. Nicene Creed, 325 AD).

The Jerusalem Council was the first ecumenical council (ca. 49 AD), and it addressed one of the most important doctrinal questions of all: "What must a person do to be saved?"

I. The Conflict (vv. 1-5)

Acts 15:1 – "Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

We must understand what the gospel is in order to be saved (Galatians 1:6-9). It's a matter of eternal life or death, and it determines whether a person will end up in heaven or hell.

During the Reformation, Protestants identified *Five Solas* which preserved the truth and purity of the gospel:

1. Sola Scripture – Scripture alone
2. Sola Fide – Faith alone
3. Sola Gratia – Grace alone
4. Sola Christus – Christ alone
5. And Sola Deo Gloria – for the Glory of God alone

In short, this means salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace that no one deserves, and the only way it can be received is by faith in Jesus Christ.

TRUE GOSPEL = SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE
FALSE GOSPEL = SALVATION FAITH + ANYTHING ELSE

If you rely on anything beside the death and resurrection of Jesus for your salvation, you're saying his atonement wasn't good enough. If you rely on your own good works or righteousness to get into heaven, you're saying you don't need Jesus.

II. The Council (vv. 6-21)

A. Peter's Defense of the Gospel (vv. 7-11)

B. Paul & Barnabas' Testimony of the Gospel (v. 12)

C. James' Declaration of the Gospel (vv. 13-21)

1. The Council identified no conditions or requirements for salvation other than faith.
2. The Council provided a list of four things to abstain from:
   - Things contaminated by idols –
   - Fornication –
   - What is strangled –
   - Blood –

Why did the Council specify these restrictions?

- They had nothing to do with salvation. They had to do with fellowship between Jews and Gentiles in the church.
- 3 out of 4 prohibitions were related to kosher dietary practices. If Jews and Gentiles were going to fellowship and eat together in the same church, this issue had to be addressed.
- Additionally, fornication (*porneia*) was a huge stumbling block for Christians in the first century.
- Lesson: Do nothing that causes a fellow believer to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:13). Show consideration for the conscience of others. Relinquish your rights for the sake of promoting peace and unity in the church.

III. The Conclusion (vv. 22-29)

The Council reached a consensus and sent a letter to the church in Antioch.

IV. The Celebration (vv. 30-35)

The chapter began with dissension and ended with unity. It started with conflict and concluded with joy.

Lesson: Grace brings life, but legalism brings death. If we know the truth of the gospel of God's grace, we will experience the joy of salvation. The good news of the gospel is this:

We Lost It All. He Did It All. We Get It All.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

1. Have you ever read or studied any Creeds from the early church, such as the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) or Chalcedon (451 AD)? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the best ways to spot a false gospel?
3. In your own words, explain the true gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. What did you find fascinating, confusing or helpful in Acts 15:1-35?

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