

Acts 15:1-32

Implications of the Gospel

Image Church // Study Through Acts#11

MPT: Is circumcision necessary for salvation? How do Jews and Gentiles commune together when they come from different backgrounds?

MPS: The gospel is Jesus plus nothing equals everything, and that's the foundation that the church is built on.

Introduction

Well, welcome to Image Church! My name is Mike McKee and I am one of the Pastors here, if you're a first-time guest, we want to welcome you here tonight, we hope that you feel loved and welcomed!

Tonight's a very special night for us and we're excited that you're here with us! We're a new church start-up here in the greater Atlanta area, and right now we are in what we call the "soft launch phase" as we build toward our official launch **on January 21st**.

We wanted to create a runway as we head toward our takeoff as a church, and one of the things that we are doing is hosting what we call "Preview Services" so that you can come check us out and see what we are all about!

Tonight, is one of those Preview services. ***It's our hope that you would come and see a Preview Service, and then come and stay and be part of Image Church!***

We meet every week at the same time, here at the same place, and our services look just like this. But we have these "Preview Services" as a specific connecting point for you to come experience a weekend with us!

So I hope that you enjoy tonight and that you will consider coming back again next week! [Pause for transition]

Well, over the past several weeks we've been walking through the book of Acts looking at the 1st church together. **We believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, and so our goal every week is to hold it up so that we can learn more about who God is and the implications that has on our lives.**

- So as a "new church" it only made sense that as a new church we look at the 1st church.

Now, I know for some of you, you're getting worried about how that video that keeps playing right before I come up, you're thinking: "It keeps growing" ... Don't worry, it's not going to be like 35min. long and I walk out and say "And... THAT was the message for today" and then head on back to my seat!

The reason that we're showing that video is that we want everyone to be able to be on the same page with where we are, whether it's your first time with us or you have been coming every week. So, let's go ahead and dive in...

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Acts 15. If you don't have a Bible with you today, the passage will be on the screens behind me so that you can follow along.

And as you turning there I want to share with you one of the biggest pet-peeves that I have... I mean it just really bothers me... And I just can't understand why people do it...

- They go to a nice restaurant and they order a steak... the steak come out and then ***they ask for A1 Sauce!?!***
- When I hear someone do that I am like: "***WHAT?! WHY?!?!***"
- I want you to know when you do that it is an absolute slap in the face to the Sheaf... it is...
 - The guy bring me my steak and then he says would you like, and I go "***SHHHHHHHshhh***" Don't even say it.

And don't even get me started on the Ketchup folks... the waiter should slap you! Can I please have KETCHUP- POP! Fires me up!
And if that doesn't fire you up you must be a Vegan...

I just don't understand why in the world people want to take a perfectly good, medium-rare steak—***cuz that's the only way to get it, it you want it more done than that get a hamburger***— And then feel the need to add something else to it! It's just beyond me...

*** But steak's not the only place that we feel the need to add something... we do the same thing when it comes to God...

Can I tell you one of the biggest observations that I've made during my time as a Pastor??

There seems to be something inside of us, that makes us take what is the best news in the universe and we add to that, and in adding to that best news in the universe, we literally take the greatest news in the universe, from being the greatest news that we could ever hear, and twist it to being useless news that's not good at all¹...

Now, there are ***some of you*** that know what that GREAT NEWS is, there are ***others of you*** that think you know what it is but you're not sure what it means or how it works, you might even be confused about it... ***And then there's another group*** of you that have no idea what I am talking about...

That's OK, you're not alone, the exact same thing was true for the people here in the book of Acts...

Up to this point in chapter 15, there's been a massive expansion that's happening, as the very first church continues to grow...

God was using ordinary people like me and you to do extraordinary things through the power of the Holy Spirit for the sole purpose of furthering the message and ministry of Jesus.

And as this is happening, as the message of Jesus I being taught, like you might expect, there are questions...

I know that chances are many of you walked in with some kind of question about Christianity... and here is what I know, what we are going to be looking at tonight is going to help bring clarity to all of the questions that you have... (bold statement but just wait!)

So let's take a look at what's being asked and what the answer is because chances are you have asked or wandered things very similar to this...

Acts 15:1-32

Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved." **2** After Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this issue.

So, let me explain what's going on here. In the OT God picked the Israelites, also known as the Jews to be His chosen people. *Now*, He didn't pick them because there was anything innately special about them—He picked them as a means by which to display Himself to the World.

In doing that, *one* of the God-given distinctions, and a sign of God's covenant, that set the Jewish people apart from the rest of the world was circumcision...

- Now, don't ask me how people knew about this circumcision distinction, I don't know and I really don't want to think about it!

¹ Matt Chandler. Sermon; *The Nature of the Gospel*. March 30, 2014

So, there are **Jews** that are addressing **non-Jews** (called Gentiles- all non-Jews are Gentiles) at the church in Antioch if you want to be saved you have to be circumcised.

And Paul and Barnabas are not having it... there like "wo wo wo, no shot, you guys are out of your mind" ... and they're so frustrated, and this issue is such a big deal that they head back to Jerusalem to discuss this with the other early church leaders...

They want to get to the bottom of the question: *"Is there anything you have to do in addition to faith to be saved?"*

Let's keep reading, pick up in verse 6:

6 The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter. **7** After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them: "Brothers and sisters, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the **gospel** message and believe. **8** And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he also did to us. **9** He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

So, they get to Jerusalem and then start to hash it out- more than likely this was a pretty heated discussion... And then Peter stands up and says hang on a min.... do you no remember what happened to me?!?

- He's referring back to **Acts 10** where God uses Peter to share the gospel with a whole group of Gentiles (non-Jews) for the specific purpose of showing that the gospel was for all people...

And, Peter's like: *"They were all saved, and the Holy Spirit came to them just like it came to us and there was no ritualistic circumcision involved!!"*

Then he goes on in verse 10 and says:

10 Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? **11** On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are."

Peter's like, why in the world would we put Jewish laws on these Gentiles if we can't even keep them ourselves?!? You're trying to add something on them that we aren't even capable of pulling off!

See, circumcision was one of about **613** OT laws (can you imagine trying to keep all those?! Right, you wouldn't be able to- Peter and his ancestors weren't either...

Now I know there are a lot of questions surrounding these laws- this is one of the first places sceptics like to ask about... I don't have time to get into a lot of details on this, but here is what you need to know.

When you boil it down, all of the laws given in the OT were designed to do one major thing: **to show the separation between God and Man**. To point to the fact that man is sinful- dirty and broken and God is Perfect, righteous and Holy...

Listen, the OT law was **NOT given as a means of salvation, rather as an indicator of the need for salvation, with the recognition that mankind cannot accomplish it!**²

But God can and He did through Jesus! Remember I said that Israel (i.e. the Jews) were God's chosen people as the means to display Himself? Well the pinnacle of that display was Jesus- born as a Jew who came and fulfilled the law perfectly because we couldn't!

- So, the reason that we don't follow the rigorous, and seemingly strange **OT ceremonial laws** is because for those who believe in Christ there is no separation between God and man... There's access to God through the blood of Jesus! Everything those laws pointed to was resolved in Jesus!

² Adapted from Matt Chandler. Sermon; *The Nature of the Gospel*. March 30, 2014

That's why Peter says with confidence that: **Salvation comes by grace alone through Christ alone**... not through actions or rituals!

Then Peter sits down... verse 12:

12 The whole assembly became silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. **13** After they stopped speaking, James

[who by the way is the half-brother of Jesus- which is one of the single greatest proofs that Jesus raised from the dead and really was who He said He was... I mean let's be honest, I don't know how many of you have an older brother, but what would it take him to convince you he was God? I would say the evidence would have to be VERY compelling to say the least!!]

[So, James] responded: "Brothers and sisters, listen to me.

14 Simeon [Peter] has reported how God first intervened to take from the Gentiles [that word there is *ethnos*= nations] a people for his name. **15** And the words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written:

16 After these things I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent.

I will rebuild its ruins

and set it up again,

17 so the rest of humanity

may seek the Lord—

even all the Gentiles

who are called by my name—

declares the Lord

who makes these things 18 known from long ago.

James takes a little different approach on his conclusion... He says: "Look, God told us this was how it was going to be from the get-go!" And he quotes **Amos 9:11-12**... What was ruined because of sin, God would make new... And you see very clearly that it's the Lord who makes this happen, NOT man!!

[James goes on] **19** Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God, **20** but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood. **21** For since ancient times, Moses has had those who proclaim him in every city, and every Sabbath day he is read aloud in the synagogues."

Ok, wait, this seems like kind of a strange response given what we've looked at so far?? It's actually not though, let me explain what James is doing here.

Of this list, the "odd man out" is sexual immorality so let me address that one first... in that day, just like today, sexual immorality was running ramped... but specifically, within the spiritual circles- The Pagans had "*Temple Prostitutes*" and people would actually go and hook up with them as part of a Spiritual Practice.

James is reminding them of the "*moral law*"- ceremonial law is gone but the moral law never changes or goes away because God never changes or goes away- these are the right and wrongs that the Bible lays out through the 10 commandments that Jesus affirms and summarizes in Matthew 22...

- Bottom line: as a Christ follower, you are not to practice sexual immorality- and ***it's not by that, that you're saved, it is because your saved you run from that as you run toward Jesus!***

Then there's the sacrifice situation with blood and idols... You're like: "I thought we punted the ceremonial law?" We DID, but what James is getting at is the beauty of Christian community...

Matt Chandler says it like this: "*Christian community is my rights are gladly laid down for your good. By nature of God's covenant love [through Christ], we are a covenant people. We're not a contractual people; we're a covenant people. A contract is "If you do this, I'll do this." [Instead we say] "I'm going to become this for you."*

The Gentiles had the right and Biblical freedom eat those foods, but eating those things was causing division, and James is asking them to lay down their right for the sake of others. So that both groups of people could fellowship together without division...

Then in verse 22 They select some men to take a letter back with the answer to the question of *“Is there anything you have to do in addition to faith to be saved?”*

And the letter read: (Verse 24)

[23] Greetings.

24 Since we have heard that some without our authorization went out from us and troubled you with their words and unsettled your hearts...

[Jump down to Verse 28 where they give the verdict] For it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours—not to place further burdens on you beyond these requirements: **29** that you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you keep yourselves from these things. Farewell.”

30 So they were sent off and went down to Antioch, and after gathering the assembly, they delivered the letter. **31** When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. I can only imagine how all the dudes were feeling... fist-pumping, dancing! I mean this was a game changer for them!!

Here’s the deal, I believe that there are 2 major things that we need to learn from all this...

1. You have to have the right foundation

Listen, there are some of you who walked in here tonight and the foundation of your life is all jacked up because you are functioning under the assumption that there are things that you have to do in order to be saved...

You’re looking at Christianity as a law to follow and not a relationship to be in with the person of Jesus!

- What happens far too often is that the church holds up Christianity as a law to follow and then use fear and shame and hell as a way to manipulate people into following the rules...
- Some of you have been scared by that...

That’s NOT the gospel!! It is a distortion of the gospel- making what should be the greatest news not good news at all!!

The Gospel is not- do this and be saved!! **It’s you could never do what’s required of you and so Jesus came and did it for you!** And not only did Jesus do what you never could—perfect obedience—He took his perfect life and gave it up for your sinful one!

The gospel means good news, but the good news is only good if you understand the bade news- and the bad news is that **you’re not good**—you’re sinful—I know I don’t have convince you of that, no one in here would be like “Actually I am perfect” ... cuz we all know you’re not...

Our sin was against God because he is the one who made us, and our sin separates us from God because he is perfect and Holy and we’re not... And the penalty the sin we have committed is death and eternal separation from God... *just like if I steal something I have to pay by going to jail- we have to pay for our sin against God...*

And God could have left it like that- “**BUT GOD**”

- **Romans 5:8** says: ⁸ But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!
- **Ephesians 2:4-5** But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!
- **Romans 5:6** For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

- **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*****Jesus, in life did what we could not do, and in his death he paid what we owed, and in his resurrection He gave us new life in Him and access to God.**

The gospel is not about what you can do it's about what's been done through Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross he didn't say no go and follow the rules He said **"IT IS FINISHED"**

Regardless of where you are tonight, you need to hear that!

- What sin do you have in your life?
 - Apply: Premarital sex, drugs, alcohol addiction, pornography, prison, adultery, anger, pride, selfishness, lust??? What is it?

When you trust in Jesus he says **"IT IS FINISHED"** I have paid for that on the cross! What area of your life do you need to hear that for tonight???

And check this out: When my *heart* takes a *seat* and I rest on the finished work of Jesus it means that my posture changes- Posture change is visible to the people around you...

Example: If I were to sit down on the stage right now, you would be like 1.) that's weird and 2.) what's this guy doing 3.) if he sits Indian style I'm leaving...

- but the point is you would see a noticeable difference in my posture from standing to sitting

Listen to what I am saying: ***We don't work for salvation, but works will flow out of us because of our salvation!***

When you are impacted by Jesus it leaves a mark visible to the outside world!

Trusting in Jesus changes everything- as we respond to the grace that has been given in him... *that has to be the foundation of our lives from which everything else is built.*

Really quickly, that leads me to the second thing we need to see from this passage...

2. A right foundation is what the church is built on

The church is built on the foundation of the gospel, that means that it is built around the message and work of Jesus- The gospel is the main thing on which everything else is built!

The church gives us a chance to live out the gospel to one-another. We get the chance to lay down our rights for the good of others.

Now, I could go through and give you a list of rights Biblical rights that you could lay down, but the point isn't to give you a list, it is to challenge you to ask the question: "Am I seeking the good of others and am I willing to lay down non-essentials for the sake of unity?"

We have to care more about being unified around the gospel than we do about exercising our Biblical rights...

John Newton says: [Be] an iron pillar in essentials and a reed in nonessentials.

Example: So if you're a Veagan and steak is offensive... I will lay it down because I care more about you than I do my steak...

If you want to lather your steak up with A1 go on ahead, it will be painful for me but I am willing to lay it down.

One Scholar says it like this: *Christian fellowship means that grace should be shown for differences that are not central to the truth of salvation, as an expression of love. This deference preserves the church and protects it from fragmentation.*³

When the gospel's the foundation, a healthy, selfless, caring and loving community can emerge as we all respond to the gospel together.

That's what we want to do here at Image Church... Because at the end of the day, we recognize that Jesus laid down his rights for us, so it only makes sense that we can do the same with ours!!

This should be encouraging to you if you're not part of a Church family, because we're not going to hold up a list of rules, preferences, or political agendas, we're going to hold up Jesus!

One of our core values at Image Church is community. We believe that the church isn't just an event, it's a group of people living in pursuit of Jesus together. You were not created to walk through life alone, Jesus gave us the Church as a group of people to live life with.

I don't know where you are, where you have been, or where you are going, but what I do know is that we want to walk with you!

Conclusion

I know many of you have questions about end times, and about where the discourses play into all of this... And that's good... questions are good...

But the thing that you have to realize is that what you need is the gospel, period... *Everything's not the gospel, but everything should lead back to the gospel*⁴...

And the thing is, you will begin to get clarity in your questions when you make Jesus the center of your life...

Some of you have never trusted in the finished work of Jesus... and you need to do that for the first time tonight... You have been chained to the bondage of works... BELIEVE!!

There are others of you that have drifted back to the law in your lives and you're in bondage, you're working for God because you're thinking that God is evaluating you based on how you perform—

And tonight, you need to be refreshed by the gospel, that Jesus performed perfectly for you in your place! So that means when you trust in the finished work of Jesus when God looks at you He sees perfection, not because of what you have done, but because of what Jesus has done!

There are others of you that need to lay down your preferences and your differences and even some of your Biblical rights and become part of a local body- a church where you can do life with people and run toward Jesus...

You had a card on your seat when you came in, I want everyone to grab that card...

³ Bock, D. L. (2007). [Acts](#) (p. 508). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁴ Matt Chandler. Sermon; *The Nature of the Gospel*. March 30, 2014