

## **Unstoppable Kingdom**

### **Globally: It's All About Grace**

Acts 15:1-35

We have reached a very important moment in our study through the book of Acts and for the Unstoppable Kingdom of God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David had sent his son Jesus to be born of a virgin, live the perfect life that we couldn't, to die the death we deserved, rise again, and commission his followers to advance his Kingdom around the world. But, two fundamental questions had to be answered at this point...

- 1) Does everyone have to be Jewish before they can be Christian?**
- 2) Do non-Jewish Christians have to obey the whole Law of Moses?**

Early in the Unstoppable Kingdom, the majority of Jesus Followers were coming from Jewish backgrounds taking their logical next step by embracing Jesus as the Messiah. The men had been circumcised, they all had followed the law of Moses to the best of their ability, they observed dietary restrictions, they practiced typical worship rhythms, and they still found the pagan gentile world completely offensive to their way of life.

*“The trickle of Gentile conversions was fast becoming a torrent. The Jewish leaders had no difficulty with the general concept of believing Gentiles, for many Old Testament passages predicted their inclusion. But now a particular question was forming in their minds: what means of incorporation into the believing community did God intend for Gentiles? So far it had been assumed that they would be absorbed into Israel by circumcision, and that by observing the law they would be acknowledged as bona fide members of the covenant people of God. Something quite different was now happening, however, something which disturbed and even alarmed many. Gentile converts were being welcomed into fellowship by baptism without circumcision. They were becoming Christians without also becoming Jews. They were retaining their own identity and integrity as members of other nations. It was one thing for the Jerusalem leaders to give their approval to the conversion of Gentiles, : but could they approve of conversion-without-circumcision, of faith in Jesus without the works of the law, and of commitment to the Messiah without inclusion in Judaism? Was their vision big enough to see the gospel of Christ not as a reform movement within Judaism but as good news for the whole world, and the church of Christ not as a Jewish sect but as the international family of God?” John Stott*

#### **Answers to these questions shaped the Unstoppable Kingdom forever!**

*“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers*

*who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” 6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” 12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, 16 “‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.’ 19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, 23 with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” 30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. 32 And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. 33 And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” **Acts 15:1-35***

**Main Idea:** Grace is Our Greatest Need and Jesus is our Only Provider

**Three Types of Grace found in Acts 15:1-35**

## I. Saving Grace

Peter, Paul, and Barnabas argued that people are not saved by any symbol like circumcision, but by grace alone. **Grace is the favor of God.** It is a free expression of the love of God with no repayment. It is the unearned and unmerited favor of God. There is only one way to be saved...by God's grace!

*"But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."* **Acts 15:11 – Everybody gets saved the same way: Grace!**

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* **Ephesians 2:8-9 – Saving Grace is a Gift from God that we receive!**

If you have not yet been saved because you think you aren't good enough, or aren't ready...you ARE ready because you understand the most important truth of being saved and that is YOU CAN'T SAVE YOURSELF! God's grace is extended to you through the death and resurrection of Jesus, not because you deserve it but because he is just that graceful. If you are saved, never forget the lavish grace of God extended to you!

*"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."* **Galatians 4:4-5**

## II. Sustaining Grace

Once someone is saved, they are not done with the grace of God. Not only did the Judaizers want the men to be circumcised before they could get saved, but they also wanted everyone to fully submit themselves to the 613 laws of the Old Testament that governed the Jewish way of life (Acts 15:5).

*"And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.'" **Acts 15:7-9 – Gift of Holy Spirit!***

Grace isn't the diving board to jump into the pool of Christianity, it's the whole pool itself. The Christian life is one wholly dependent upon grace.

*"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" **James 4:6***

If you're considering how you will ever faithfully follow Jesus before you receive his gift of grace, the answer is that God gives the Holy Spirit as your helper, your encourager, and your convicter. When you receive his grace, you receive it all. If you are floundering in your faith, unable to resist temptation or walk faithfully with Jesus...the call is to a deeper awareness of God's sustaining grace by the Holy Spirit. Humble yourself to ask, humble yourself to receive! His grace is sufficient for you!

## III. Sufficient Grace

The Judaizers were concerned that, without circumcision and the law of Moses that these new gentile converts would lapse into total apostasy in every way. But, the solution was worse than the feared disease...

*"Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?... 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 things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood."* **Acts 15:10, 19-20**

God's all-sufficient grace is what allows us to navigate the many ways we could offend one another and cause one another to stumble. For instance, there are varying opinions about alcohol within many churches (including Salem). Everyone agrees that drunkenness is sinful, but some choose to drink carefully in moderation, others avoid it completely. How do we have grace for one another as we navigate differences like these?

*"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."* **Philippians 2:3**

The Jerusalem council has spoken. No, you do not have to become Jewish before you become a Christian. And, no, the Law of Moses does not apply to Christians. We have been set free from the law (Romans 8) so that we can live by faith in the grace of God.

*"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."* **Romans 6:14**

Not only is God concerned about our sound doctrine and moral character, but he's also concerned with how we welcome outsiders into our fellowship without unnecessary roadblocks! *The gospel is offensive, but nothing else about us should be!*

### Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *The Message of Acts* – John Stott (1994)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)
- *The Kingdom Agenda* – Tony Evans (1999)