

Acts 15_pt1

by Bill Gallatin

The sermon explores the importance of understanding the Gospel and the role of the Holy Spirit in living in freedom and overcoming sin, and warns against the danger of legalism and the importance of trusting in the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Duration: 1:02:48

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 12:30, John 11:25, Acts 2:38

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of apprehending grace in the life of a believer. He highlights that grace is more difficult to understand and embrace than getting rid of sin. The preacher encourages the audience to labor to enter into rest, referring to the perfect Sabbath rest found in Jesus Christ. He also mentions the transformative power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. The sermon concludes with a call to seek a deeper understanding of God's grace through prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

We're going to be looking at, excuse me, Acts 15, but I'd like to read a couple things to you that just came over the World Wide Web today. And one of the articles is from Time Magazine, this week's Time Magazine, if you haven't read it. But it's interesting concerning prophecy in the last days.

You know, it's amazing to me the things that are going on, how somebody could still be holding back from Jesus Christ. Wondering about, you know, what goals they have in the future, and not really realize that the times that they're in. You know, David's men knew the times that they were in.

And I'm kind of amazed that some of the lives that I've watched, Christians, and you can see they're still holding back. They just don't quite believe that we could be at the end. And they're just looking for that time, almost like, you know, the kingdom to be now without the tribulation period and the coming of Jesus Christ.

But there's two particular prophecies concerning the end. One is, you know, disease, pestilence. A horrible scourge of disease, one of the four major plagues that Jesus spoke of at the end.

They just had a news conference in Moscow today. And Dr. Peter Piot, he's the executive director of what is called UNAIDS, the way they're tracking AIDS around the world. And this is what they revealed today on the World Wide Web.

Every 60 seconds worldwide, five people between the ages of 10 and 24 become infected with HIV. That's 7,000 people a day. Almost 25, actually 2,500,000 people a year.

But between the ages of 5 and 24, every 60 seconds, there are five new cases of HIV. The report also warned that Eastern Europe now is set to become one of the next epicenters. It's just spread all over Africa and much of the Third World.

But now they say it's entering into Europe at an alarming rate. Since 1994, in the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union, the HIV infection rate has increased six-fold or 600% since 1994. It's approaching, now listen to this, 70-fold or 7,000%.

7,000% increase since 1994. By the year 2020, there will be 40 million orphans worldwide because of the death of their parents from AIDS, and most of the 40 million will have AIDS from their families. This was just revealed on the World Wide Web at the latest conference on AIDS.

Just shocking things going on around the world. And who knows? I personally don't know if we're ever going to have a cure for AIDS because that would open the door for every perversion you could ever think of. There would be no more fear or restraint.

I can't conceive God revealing a cure for it because then all the sodomites and the bisexuals and the drug users would have no more fear or restraint if there was a cure. So it's interesting. Now, here's another interesting thing.

This week's Time Magazine, this was on the World Wide Web today. Because of the bank mergers worldwide, in fact, I was just with a banking executive in Boston, and he's with a banking firm, and they made \$96 million in one day just by investing. It's an investment bank.

But the way money is being circulated around the world electronically, investments. It says, enter the electronic cash in society. The idea of digital money is simple enough.

Instead of storing value on paper, find a way to wrap it in a string of digits that's more portable and, most important, smarter than its paper counterpart. Now, remember, in 96 A.D., God Almighty showed John the Apostle at the end of the age that people would no longer buy and sell with money but numbers. Now, this is what's interesting.

This was in this week's Time Magazine. Well, yes, because digital cash is endlessly mutable. You can control it much more precisely than paper money.

Now, remember, they've already got the money in place for a worldwide economic system. The banks are already, they have the technology developed for a cashless society. That's a known fact.

On the 6 o'clock news tonight, Great Britain, who's leading in this technology now, has just developed, and they showed the person go up to their bank teller or the, what is it, the CNB, where you put your card in, you punch your PIN number in. Well, you don't have to have a card or even remember a PIN number anymore in Great Britain. They showed the person go up and put his eyeball in front of a camera, and they

scanned the iris.

You don't need a debit card or a bank card anymore to get money, and the cash went quickly, just like you and I get from our bank, the cash comes out. Now, they say because the iris never changes, and it's 100% full proof for identification, the human iris. But what if you don't have an eye? What if you're blind? The forehead to meet the needs of the people that are blind to get cash.

But now look what Time Magazine said today, or this week. Well, yes, because the cash is mutable, and you can control it better than paper money. Think about the \$2,000 check you send to your daughter at college for expenses.

How is that money really spent? Books? Beer? Electronic cash takes that relatively simple transaction, passing an allowance, and makes them do a much more intelligent process because, you see, then there's receipts for everything when you have electric money. Everything you purchase, everything you do is electrically digitized and recorded. And so there's a record of every cent.

One that hardly requires an old-fashioned system as a bank. For starters now, you can send the money over the Internet encoded in an e-mail instead of sending a check. Right out of your own home.

This saves you the trouble of balancing the checkbook at the end of the month. And it gives you the option of transferring the money from wherever you want. Mutual fund, money market, even an old-fashioned checking account.

Your daughter can store the money any way she wants to. In her laptop computer at the university, on a debit card, even in the not-too-distant future, in a chip implanted under her skin. And perhaps best of all, you can program the money to be spent only in specific ways.

You might instruct some of the digits to go for books. Some for food, some for movies. Unless you pass along a few digits that can be cashed at the local pub, she'll have to find someone else to buy the drinks.

Everything is in place. Smart digital cash may also address some of the other problems of paper money. If you lose your digital cash, for example, you'll be able to replace it instantly by asking your computer to invalidate the disappeared digits and replace them with a fresh set.

And unlike paper money, which stops earning interest as it shoots out of the ATM slot, smart money in your chip, in your skin, or in your computer can keep earning interest until the moment you spend it. So we're right there. And probably within our lifetime, we'll start seeing it implemented.

And don't be surprised that if you're offered just as an experimental thing or for your own convenience because cars are lining up, you know, punching in the pin number or your bank card breaking, that the new system at Canandaigua National Fleet or some of the other banks around Canandaigua and Rochester, next will be the IRS. And it's interesting, again, when we first got here from California, we started teaching that we were going to be in that kind of a system in a short time. And you'd be amazed at the people that left the church and said I was some kind of a heretic or false prophet who didn't know Bible prophecy or weren't being taught the Bible in their churches.

God loves us so much. He speaks history in advance so we can be prepared. But what alarms me is so many Christians that we don't seem to think it's going to affect them.

They're just sitting around doing nothing, thinking the rapture of the church is going to snatch everybody out. Well, if we're that close to implanting the chip under the arm, and it's in Time Magazine, the banks are ready to do it. And they've got everything in place for a worldwide cashless society.

Remember, the mark of the beast starts in the middle of the tribulation, not in the beginning. So you see how rapidly everybody is being conditioned to receive the mark of the beast and how close we are to the end. Man, it is exciting.

And it's exciting to keep a light touch and not get so caught up in this world. So I've got this. If you'd like to verify it, you can get this week's Time or if you've got your computer who doesn't anymore, you can hit the Internet and get this information off ABC.com or Time Magazine.

It's whatever you want to do. So let's see if we get through this tonight. Acts chapter 15.

Now, you see the same problem in the Christian church today, the same problem that faced Paul. No one was given an understanding in the revelation of grace as Paul. And as he began to teach it, Satan began to follow him around to try and stop it, to keep Christians bound even though Jesus Christ came to set them free, particularly Jewish heretics.

Now, there's going to have your first so-called ecumenical council in Jerusalem or maybe church conference in Jerusalem with Paul and Peter in the center of it and James, the Lord's brother. And it's over legalism versus grace. Now, some 12 to 14 years later, Paul writes concerning this place in Acts 15 that we're in.

So I'd like to show you something, if you would. Turn to Galatians chapter 1. First of all, what happens and what Paul refers to in his Jewish religion. What had happened with the Jews, they did not apprehend the Mosaic law.

The law of Moses was not given to save them but to show them that they needed grace. It was the schoolmaster to bring them to the end, to stir up the sin that was in the natural man but never to free them. You remember in Galatians, Paul said, Received you the spirit by the hearing of the law or by faith, faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans chapter 4 and Galatians chapter 3 specifically, Paul lays it out beautifully and clearly what the purpose of the law was in the Old Testament, that it was temporary. And those that were saying that you have to keep the law even after you believe in Jesus Christ and keep the ordinances and most of all, the worst thing, the leaven of the Pharisees after the church was that traditions, they tried to maintain the traditions and then the traditions turned into rules and regulations and it was binding the people up. When Jesus Christ came to free everybody from that, He fulfilled the law and He was buried just as He buried the law and Hebrews tells us, disannulled the law.

It wasn't powerful enough to change the life or prepare anybody for heaven. In fact, Paul brings out in Romans chapter 4 and Galatians chapter 3, that Abraham was saved by faith. The father of us all, even the father of the Jews was saved by faith.

He believed in God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness 430 years before God even made the covenant of the law with the Jews. And Jesus Christ has come along and fulfilled it, set it aside in its demands and its grace now. Simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Not traditions, not rules, not any legalism, any outward ritual like washings, baptisms, and most of all circumcision and dietary laws and keeping the Sabbath, worshiping on certain days. There was this marvelous freedom now that my righteousness, all that is required is my faith in Jesus Christ. He fulfilled all the law which no human being and particularly the Jewish people could not fulfill.

The record of their failure is in the scriptures in the Old Testament. So look what Paul says about the Jewish religion. Now remember, he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

He was a Pharisee. He was steeped in the Jewish religion and traditions. He was a member of the Sanhedrin.

But look at the statement he makes after he's experienced Christ and been set free in grace. In verse 13, writing to the Galatians in chapter 1, he says, You have heard of my lifestyle. The old English word there is conversation.

It means lifestyle or manner of living, not just speech, but my actions. In time past in the Jews' religion. He's no longer a member of the Jews' religion.

He doesn't see himself under bondage to Judaism, the Mosaic law. He's a Jew that was steeped in it. He's been set free in Jesus Christ.

And now he refers to it as a different religion, the Jews' religion. He is a Christian now. He's no longer a Jew trying to maintain Jewish traditions, the nice things of Judaism or the Jewish ritual, trying to Christianize it and maintain it.

It's a different religion. He understands it perfectly that it's no longer binding on someone who's come to Christ. He says, In the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God and wasted it, what men were doing to this day, following Paul around.

Now, it's interesting. One thing is you watch a life in Christianity. When someone does not apprehend grace and puts themselves under some legal aspect of trying to please God by their own works or maintaining some kind of holiness in their own power or some dogmatic ethic or set of ethics, they lose their joy.

You see them become angry and they lose their joy. They lose their freedom and they lose their joy. And usually they become judgmental and unsatisfied as a believer.

It's easy to see it. They've been trapped in Galatianism, legalism, the law, their own set of rules. And the first sign that someone has not apprehended grace even after they've made a profession for Jesus Christ is they have no joy, no joy whatsoever.

The law is a heavy burden and a yoke. It was not given to give joy but to bring people to Jesus Christ. And Paul teaches it perfectly in Galatians.

And Paul can relate to this. He was just like these men that were following him around trying to destroy the Bible studies, destroy the church, stop people from simply having that freedom to trust in Christ for all of their righteousness, the finished work of Jesus Christ on Calvary. Another thing, a person who has not apprehended grace makes it very difficult for those around them.

They have set their own standard and because they're living that standard, they expect everyone else to come up to that level and they make it very difficult for people and it can just drain everybody around them of all joy and excitement for Jesus Christ. And there will be a lack of love, a lack of tolerance for someone who has not experienced or understood grace. The law usually makes them very rigid, unbending and inflexible and leads them into heresy, a misunderstanding of the Word of God.

And usually they'll form a sect rather than let go of this dogmatic principle that they're hanging on to, to establish their own righteousness. Like these Jews, they'll actually form a sect or some heretical movement with their aberration of the truth. And so then Paul again in verse 14 said, I profited in the Jews' religion above many mine equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

Now again, here's the tragedy of the Jews. They had taken traditions and made them rules for righteousness. And if you didn't keep their tradition, it was sin.

They had volumes, particularly concerning the Sabbath day, what is work, what is carrying a burden, worshipping on a certain day, eating a certain way, dietary laws, everything being incorporated plus the traditions. So in chapter 2, Paul writes about what happened in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15. He goes on to say, Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and I took Titus with me also, two Gentile believers.

And this is what's so amazing to me. Paul said, I profited in the Jews' religion above all. But this is what's amazing to me.

He is a brilliant man. The Jewish mind was superior to probably everyone in the Mediterranean. They didn't have the power and the might of Greece, maybe the culture, the arts of Greece, or the power of Rome.

But the Jewish mind was such an intellectual mind, a gift from God, superior to everyone. Here's this brilliant man, Paul, raised in two cultures. He was the Pharisee of the Pharisees.

He had exceeded everybody in his religion. You'd think he would be the one, since he'd experienced Judaism. He's a Jew.

He can relate to a Jew. God will use this dynamic, intelligent, powerful man to take the transition from Judaism to Christianity. He's the one that God will use to free people from Judaism.

And isn't it amazing? He sends him, Paul, to the heathen, who are under no requirement whatsoever of the Jewish religion. And who does he use for the brilliant Jew? The uneducated Galilean, the Apostle Peter, who couldn't write. Isn't it amazing? And Peter's the one who's called to the circumcision, the one who didn't have a formal education, didn't know nearly the Scripture of the Apostle Paul.

He wouldn't even be approached for the Sanhedrin, because he was an outcast. He was a Galilean. He was looked down upon, yet he's the one that shows you it's not by might nor power, what we sang tonight, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

And he chooses the foolish things that confound the wise. He goes after the heathen with Paul. He doesn't need Paul to relate to the Jews.

And you know what that shows us? It sets you free. We don't have to form all kinds of ministries in the church. Oh, we've got to relate to the sodomites.

Let's have a special thing for sodomites. We've got to relate to alcoholics. Let's have a ministry for alcoholics.

We've got to relate to thieves. Has anybody been a real thief before they got saved? Well, you know, let's have a ministry for thieves. We've got to have a ministry for every kind of problem there is.

No, you don't. There wouldn't be a building big enough to hold all the different sessions every night for some particular sin. God doesn't need that.

He doesn't need to have someone steeped in that sin to be able to relate to that type of sin, because it's not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Oh, now, who's had trouble? Who's had trouble with tobacco? Let's form a ministry for people trying to get off nicotine. It's amazing the things that some churches go after, and they go into causes, you know, got to help this group of people, help this group of people, help this group of people.

People have been married three times and divorced. Let's form a study. You've been married three times and divorced? Okay, we're going to have a study for people who've been married three times and divorced.

You've got to be able to relate to that kind of pain. No. Sin is sin.

It's just called sin. You see nowhere in the book of Acts or the Gospels where the Spirit of God or Jesus Christ, biblical hermeneutics or any of the apostles form specific type ministry for specific type sin. God didn't use the great apostle Paul or need him to relate to the Jew.

In fact, Paul tried to do Jews only, and God said, no, you're called to the heathen. And it got Paul in trouble continually. Beat up, thrown in jail, rejected by his brethren, his countrymen.

The Spirit of God having to afflict him just to keep him from going in certain directions. He was so strong-willed. God says, I can save the Jews without you, Paul.

I know you have a background in understanding what the Jew is like, but I'm going to use the apostle Peter for the circumcision. You see, it's the Gospel. It's the good news of Jesus Christ who conquered all sin, whether it's sodomy, drunkenness, adultery, bisexuality, pedophilia, whatever it may be, thievery, lying, pride, unforgiveness.

The plight of mankind. Every single one of us are open to any one of those sins. All there is is each one of us.

And it's the wonderful Gospel of Jesus Christ who sets you free. It's amazing how people get trapped. Oh, these people can't relate to me.

They don't know the sin. I've got to be ministered to by a person that came out of that type of sin. Not so.

That's a lie from Satan. It is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. It's the Gospel.

It's the love of Jesus Christ that will heal and deliver from any sin. So Paul goes on to say, Barnabas took Titus, and I took them both, went up by revelation, in other words, God told him to do it, and communicated unto them that Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which are of reputation, lest by any means I should run or had run in vain. So rather than make a big deal out of it, he just went up quietly at first to talk to the guys, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, and he was compelled to be circumcised, and that because of false brethren, unawares brought in who came in privately to spy out our liberty, which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage, to see if they're maintaining the traditions or the laws. To whom, and I like this about Paul, we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you. We didn't waste our time with these guys arguing about non-essentials, traditions.

Remember, Paul wrote the brilliant treatise in Colossians about feast days and dietary laws and months and Sabbaths. Don't anybody judge you anymore concerning those things. If you really apprehend grace, every day is a Sabbath.

You cease from your own works and your own efforts. You're walking in the Spirit. Christ is working in you.

Christ in you the hope of glory. It's the work of the Spirit inside of us. No more strain for me.

Jesus said, if you're laboring and you're burdened and you're troubled, come unto me and take my yoke upon you. It's easy, it's light. You'll find rest unto your souls.

Learn of me. I'll free you from that yoke of bondage, of the law, rules, regulation. You want joy in life? Apprehend grace.

One of the most difficult things for a believer to do, more difficult than to get rid of sin, to apprehend grace. The marvelous finished work of Jesus Christ for my righteousness and then the work of the Spirit in the life that sets you free. You remember in Hebrews chapter 4, the writer says if you're going to labor in anything, labor to enter into rest.

That perfect Sabbath rest, not just one day out of the week, but when you learn to walk in the Spirit, you're resting seven days a week. No more effort. No more strain.

No more anger and frustration. I can live a life of joy in the Lord. It says the joy of the Lord is my strength.

Jesus came to lift that yoke. My burden is easy. My yoke is easy.

I'll free you from the law. Well, boy, you see, Satan doesn't want a Christian to experience that. So what's he do? Well, you can't go to church dressed like that.

Why not? James says you can dress any way you want to. James says it doesn't matter what you have on the outside. God looks at the heart.

He's always looking at the heart, the motor, the love for Christ. Is love for Christ behind it? Or is it some stern duty? Because I feel that I have to. My heart goes out to people that live in a marriage relationship like that.

I do it because I have to, not because I want to, because of love. Love has set me free, and I desire to do it. I desire to show my love and my thanks just to express anything I can.

I just want to serve. I want to please you. Lord, whatever I do, I want to please you.

I'm so thankful. Paul goes on to say, But of these who seem to be somewhat, whatever they were, it maketh no matter to me. God accepteth no man's person.

Everybody in this room is equal, guys. There's no potentate in the church except Jesus Christ. We are all equal.

God esteems all people alike. And then there's his marvelous, blessed Son, Jesus Christ. God doesn't exalt someone above another.

Now, God has different ministries and different strengths, different capacities, administrations. Paul brings up in the book of Corinthians, it says, He accepteth no man's person. You're just as important as anybody else.

You have just as equal right to approach God when you have a need as anybody else in the church. No matter what your calling is, no matter what you're doing, it's a child of God. And if you get to the throne of grace, the mercy seat before Billy Graham, God's not going to say, Oh, Billy's here.

Sorry, step aside. The evangelist is here. No.

You go in just as you get there. Nobody. He's no respecter of persons.

And he's always there with the door open for you. So Paul said, Because God accepteth no man's person, for they who seem to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me. But contrarywise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, that's the heathen, the Gentiles, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter, the illiterate Galilean fisherman, God's going to use him to convert the intellectual Jew who probably knew the Bible better than Peter.

If you're going to argue doctrine or argue Scripture. But you see, Peter had the Holy Spirit. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And see, that's the advantage you have over any religious person. They may know the Bible. They may have gone in seminary or theology school.

They may have had some kind of a degree. But if you read your Bible and you're filled with the Spirit, you've got the advantage. You win.

The question is, are you filled with the Spirit? Are you baptized with the Spirit? He said, then God will honor all your reading, all your prayers, and give you power far beyond and superior to the person who doesn't have it. And so he can use Peter for the intellectual Jew. For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles.

And when James Cephas, which would be Peter, and John, who seemed to be the pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen and they go unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor. The same which I also was forward to do because there were many poor believers in Jerusalem.

Because they'd left the faith. They weren't getting the jobs. They were being persecuted.

They were being set aside. And so things were difficult for a Christian in those days. And so the church was to remember the poor.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles. But when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

So it takes a long time for the Spirit of God to free somebody from a tradition. Some long-held tradition. Now remember, Peter was raised in a society in a Jewish scheme of things under the law that you have nothing to do with the Gentile.

They were dirty and unclean. And there was no salvation for them. And so after he came to Christ and he realized that God loved the Gentiles, he wasn't afraid to fellowship with the Gentiles until important people of the Jews showed up.

And then he was intimidated of what these important people from his background might think. And he withdrew himself. And Paul heard about it.

And by Peter doing that, it says, other Jews disassembled likewise with him inasmuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. Then he began to be afraid. Well, I don't know if we should eat with Gentiles.

And when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou being a Jew livest after the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why compelst thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? Why try to put these things back on someone that Jesus Christ has set everyone free from those things for righteousness? Those traditions, those rituals. Now, that's what Paul wrote some 14 years later. Let's go back to Acts 15 and see what happens.

As Luke records it, that caused this council or this meeting to take place in Jerusalem. Certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. In other words, some outward ritual, whether it's sprinkling of water, baptism, you know, looking a certain way, putting yourself under some kind of a rigid rule to prove that you're saved.

In this particular case, they're saying, You must be circumcised. Now, all the circumcision was, was to identify with the Jewish people and their covenant with God. But salvation was given by grace, the father of the Jews, Abraham and the Gentiles.

Paul brings that out, remember. He's the father of us all because Abraham believed by faith. He wasn't told to be circumcised.

That had nothing to do. He was saved before he was even told anything about circumcision. So it's not necessary for salvation.

It was just a ritual, an external ritual. It had nothing to do with faith. And so they're following Paul around saying, Well, we know that Jesus is Messiah, but you've got to keep obeying all the Mosaic law.

You've got to be circumcised. You've got to have this, go through this ritual or you won't be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Now remember in Galatians, Paul says 14 years later that Barnabas was carried away himself with that fear. Well, maybe they're right. Maybe I should submit to it.

Paul says, No, you don't. It's not necessary. And so they got into a big argument and being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenice or Phoenicia.

That would be the coast of Israel from Lebanon down to the Gaza Strip. All along the Mediterranean, it starts up by Tyre and Sidon, the Lebanese border today, down through Haifa, down into Tel Aviv and to Joppa, right down to the Gaza Strip. That is what is Phoenice or Phoenicia in those days.

And notice they personally, purposely passed through there because of Gentiles. So as they're going to Jerusalem for this council to discuss these things, they're going to purposely go through these areas to share the gospel with the Gentiles, the heathen. And they're also Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles.

And they caused great joy unto all the brethren, leading people to Christ. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there arose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying that it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

So there's this powerful group of people who left the Pharisees like Paul, but didn't apprehend grace. They believed in Jesus the Messiah. They said, but you still have to keep all the rituals and all the traditions and particularly the laws.

Now that word sect is an interesting word. It means to make a choice that causes disunity. And the Greek word for sect there is heresy.

Someone who is a heretic, to teach falsely. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up and said unto them, Men and brethren, you know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

So Peter is saying, look, you heard what happened to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house back in chapter 10. Of course he didn't say that. There wasn't any chapter 10 then.

And God which knoweth the hearts bare them witness giving them the Holy Ghost even as he did unto us. There's the marvelous thing. Now, ask yourself this.

Do you have the Holy Ghost? I'm convinced you have the Holy Ghost if you wouldn't be here tonight. You know, one of the first night's balmy evenings of spring. There's so much to do.

You're hearing the lawnmowers going now before the sun goes down. Just think. And where are you? You're here fellowshipping.

You have the Holy Spirit. You have a desire to worship, to fellowship together with the saints. You know, I was thinking the other day.

I was thinking, Lord, I've been doing this for 20 years. Day in and day out. Week after week.

Sunday after Sunday. Thursday after Thursday. Sunday night, Thursday night.

Mid-week Bible studies. Traveling around speaking. Studying the Bible.

And once you're through it, starting all over again. Then going through it, starting all over again. And a lot of tragic things.

I'm thinking, Lord, it's obvious that I've been born again. And it's the work of your Spirit. Nobody could do this without the Spirit of God.

Week after week. Year after year. Day in, day out.

And then people say, Well, I've heard enough. I'm bored with this. And off they go.

And yet you have to continue feeding. Day in, day out. Week after week.

Month after month. Year after year. The same book.

Then go back to that book again. There's new sheep. The same meal.

And continue to learn and teach and pray and study and plead with God. Lord, you can see if a person wasn't born again and didn't have the indwelling Holy Spirit to energize them, Lord, you get all the glory. Lord, it can't be done without you.

Thank God. And you know what it is? It's a delight. The crazy thing is, it's a delight to see people get blessed.

To see a life that's turned around and a marriage saved. A marriage that was on the rocks. Or somebody turned around.

Sin defeated. Not because of some special Bible study. But just, you know, the more excellent way.

The Word of God. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, all through the New Testament. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Next year, the same thing. That's the more excellent way. There's millions of steps.

Not one, not twelve. After you come to Jesus, the more excellent way. You just teach the Bible.

And it's amazing how it transforms somebody on the inside. And I wonder sometimes, the people come, do you really have the Holy Spirit? Is it keeping you alive? The real person of the Holy Spirit keeps us alive. It conquered death.

It conquered the grave. It conquers sin. He is so powerful.

Thank the Lord. You can be filled with the Holy Spirit. And so Peter's really preaching to them now.

God which knoweth the hearts, bear them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as you know us. You can't live the Christian life. You can't stay excited about Jesus Christ without the Holy Spirit.

And another thing my heart goes out to people about. I've seen people think that it's the pastor, the minister, the radio teacher, or the TV guy. Now for a while, God may use someone like that, but I've seen people start to just kind of taper off and think, oh, it's just not what it used to be.

And they're backslidden and don't know it, so they run around trying to find a new exciting guy. That's what's going to turn me on. I've got to find a new guy that's exciting.

I've got to hear something new and fresh. You sure do, but it's from the Holy Spirit. It's the filling, the fresh filling of the Holy Spirit.

I've seen people get on and just running around thinking, oh, I've got to find somebody exciting to keep me excited. And you know, they never develop in a relationship with Jesus. They just start learning all the different people that God uses.

So they relate to this and now they know Him real well. And they go to His church for all. They listen to this guy for all.

They start quoting Him. They get excited about this evangelist. They get excited about this conference.

But never about Jesus Christ personally because it wears off. They've got to run around for someone new and exciting again. When God has given us His blessed Holy Spirit, Christ Himself, the power of the universe dwelling within us, He says, I can fill you every morning.

I can fill you during the day. I can give you fresh fillings. And it won't bill you like the dentist.

And it doesn't hurt. And it doesn't make you numb. It brings you life.

And notice what He says about Jew and Gentile. Because of the Holy Ghost, He put no difference between us and them purifying their hearts by faith. It's by faith in Jesus Christ, not keeping of the law, the precepts of the law, the traditions that the Pharisees made a sin issue.

They accused Jesus continually of breaking the law. No, He broke their traditions. He never broke the law.

They made their traditions a sin issue. There's no difference between us and them. Jew and Gentile.

Paul refers to it now as the Jew's religion. He's a born-again Christian. Now there's nothing wrong with a tradition, but it has nothing to do with sin or making a person more righteous.

Now therefore, notice what Peter said, Why tempt you God and put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? Why follow us around and you see the same tragic thing in the Christian church today in some circles where they're so legalistic that if you don't dress right, if you don't sing right, if you don't tithe right, if you don't pledge, and they pressure you, and they put this yoke on, that Jesus Christ is removed. In fact, He took it upon Himself, the yoke and the punishment of the law, like some animal in a yoke with this beam across His shoulders and His arms tied to it, tying the sacrifice to the altar, and they nailed Him to a cross. He took that yoke upon Himself.

You don't have to bear it. Why put that yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they. All we have to do is simply put our faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, if my faith in Jesus Christ is from the heart, my life automatically changes. Thank God I don't have to do it. It's not my power.

It's the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christ lives the life through me, through you, His gift. And a person who is still trying on their own, it's the most miserable experience.

And you can look at their lives, and they have no joy in their salvation. And they just cannot continue to go forward. Everything is a strain.

Everything is an ordeal. I don't enjoy singing. I don't enjoy serving.

I don't enjoy... What is it? It's that heavy yoke of the law. Not realizing the finished work of Christ. It has set you free.

Righteousness does not have to be established by you. The righteousness is imputed by Christ. Righteousness was imputed to Abraham because he believed.

Righteousness will be imputed to you. Christ will live His life in you if you ask Him to be your Lord and Savior, to come and dwell within your heart. That's all you have to do.

And He will fill you with His Spirit if you ask. It is so fantastic to be a Christian. Notice when Peter said, then all the multitude kept silence.

It's almost like they're hearing something, I never heard that before. Well, when someone's angry, they can sit in a service. Or if someone's wrestling with the law, they can sit in a service of grace and still not hear anything.

And say, I never heard that. It was taught last year. It was taught in the other epistle.

It was taught six months ago. They kept silence. They're hearing something wonderful.

You mean there is hope? Oh, there's marvelous hope. God wants to bless. The Lord wants to fill you with so much joy and freedom.

Freedom not to sin, but freedom to enjoy your Christian experience. They gave audience to Barnabas and Paul declaring what miracles and what wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me.

Here's the Lord's brother. Half-brother that Mary had after Jesus Christ. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

And to this agreed the words of the prophets that it is written, After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom My name is called saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. Now what they're saying here is, what you're seeing here is a fulfillment of the prophets of the Old Testament,

the things they're saying about Messiah.

When He would come, He'd begin to rebuild the kingdom of David after it was all been dismantled and scattered. You're seeing the initial stages of this. Now this is what's interesting.

You see, they're seeing the Gentiles be called out. Now Paul lays it out beautifully in Romans 11 that when the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, whoever that last Gentile may be to make up the Gentile bride of Christ, that body of believers out of the Gentile race, then God, what? Takes the church out, begins Daniel's 70th week, the Great Tribulation, the purging of Israel, and then He restores the kingdom exactly as the prophets prophesied. That they were seeing this preliminary stage right then before their eyes by God touching the Gentiles.

That Jesus was coming again. Amos chapter 9, if you want to make a note of this, verses 11 and 12, prophesied and Paul quotes it, or actually Peter in Galatians and Paul here quotes it. Now there's a very interesting prophecy in Deuteronomy.

I'd like to read it to you. If you want to turn there, turn to Deuteronomy chapter 30. Before I read it to you, I've got to tell you, this is the first year at the base of Mount Sinai when God released Israel all from the Egyptian bondage.

He led them out through Moses. Now they haven't even started their 40-year wandering to the Promised Land, but it shows you how well God knows the future. And when God makes a covenant for the future concerning His own, He's faithful to it.

Even though we may fail, God's going to abide faithful. It's like He'll abide faithful of His covenant in the blood for you, for your life, because He knows your future. Whether you're going to fail, whether you're going to grow, your struggles, He's going to be faithful to you.

Now, this is the first year after their deliverance from Egypt. They haven't started their 40-year wandering through the wilderness. God knowing Israel, knowing that they will fail the law, prophesies the second coming through Moses before they even start out.

Now look at this. The Palestinian covenant, the promised blessings of the Jews if they obey the law in the land. Deuteronomy 30, verse 1, Now, He just spent from chapter 28 on the blessings and cursings when they'd get to the land.

If they'd be obedient, He would bless them. If they were disobedient, they'd come under a curse as a people. And thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee.

That's 900 years in the future. The Babylonians hadn't come in and destroyed them. Titus, he's speaking here, Titus hadn't come in and the dispersion all over the world.

He's already predicting Titus in 70 A.D. And the dispersion of the Jews all over the world before they even get to their promised land and have their offspring in the following generations. Because He knows the future. And He speaks the future in advance.

He speaks history in advance. Just like He did the mark of the beast 2,000 years ago. That we'd be a generation, there'd be a society of people on the earth going into a one world government with horrible disease and then buying and selling with numbers.

Have the technology to buy and sell with numbers. To get into hospitals, to have utilities, to buy groceries, to have insurance. No more cash.

Here, He speaks and declares a dispersion worldwide before they even get to the promised land. 900 years down the road. And from that, another 2,000 that we're seeing since Christ was rejected.

Now look at this. The nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee and shalt return unto the Lord. You're seeing that take place today.

Thy God and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day. Thou and thy children with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity and will have compassion upon thee and will return. Not come the first time.

Return. He is already seeing that He comes the first time as rejected, returns, they're dispersed, and He says, I'm going to return. It's the second coming.

You have to come the first time to return. He didn't come to the earth personally and lead them into the promised land. He used Moses.

His presence was hovering over them in the desert. His presence was over Mount Sinai, but the first time was when He came in the form of Jesus Christ. He was rejected.

He's already seeing that He'll come. They'll be rejected. They'll be dispersed throughout the world and He's going to return.

The second coming. I will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. That's exactly what you're seeing today.

They're returning. They're being gathered. And He's about to build up the nation Israel again after the rapture of the church, the restoration of the city of David, the people of David, and the kingdom age.

And that's exactly what He's saying here. That's what Amos prophesied. And that's why the writer says, Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.

Remember, He's the Alpha. He's the Omega. He knows the beginning from the end.

He knows exactly where you're headed in your Christian experience. Now stop and think. God knowing the beginning and the ending, He knew what kind of a Christian life you'd be living right now.

And He still saved you. He still loved you. And He'll always love you.

He still went to the cross. He knows each one of you, what you're doing secretly. And He's allowing you to live.

He's watching over you. Some of you might be having a difficult time because you're in sin. Some of you are just being filled to overflowing with His blessings because you're yielding to Him and experiencing all the promised blessings.

But He's keeping you. Maybe some of you are saying, Are you really enjoying life? Since you've put your faith in Me, is it worth it, what you're going through right now? Don't you want more? I've got more for you. But I still love you.

He still died for you. He died for me. Knowing the way you'd be living tonight, the secret things, because He knows.

He's the God of the beginning and the ending. He says, I love you. I'm going to Calvary for you.

I'll make a covenant with you in my own blood that I won't break. Now you can enjoy your salvation or it can be miserable. I happen to be one who likes to enjoy it.

I don't want to wait for the rapture. I enjoy it now. It's getting better every day.

I'm enjoying it more every day. It is fantastic to be a Christian. I love it.

To be freshly filled with the Spirit and to understand and know Him in a greater way. To rest in His love. There's a scripture that says you can rest in His love.

It's fantastic. Take my yoke upon me. Learn of me.

I'm lowly and meek of heart. You'll find rest for your souls. Not some legalism.

Not rules and regulations. You see, and then to prove to Him, I can keep the rules. You've got to bless me.

No. Then that's worse. Then He's obligated.

Grace can't be obligated. Remember that. Grace is apart from anything you and I can earn.

God says, I just want to give. I just want to do things for you. I want to bless you.

Yield to the Spirit. And you'll enjoy your Christian experience. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.

He knows everything about you. Read Psalm 139. He knows your down-sitting, your up-rising.

He knows your thought of far off. That doesn't mean He's far away or you're far from Him. He knows what you're going to think before you think it.

And He still hasn't killed you. I don't deserve to be alive. I deserve.

There's so often I look back, I think, Lord, you could have taken me to the woodshed and you didn't. Now He has, and there are certain things that I don't even go near anymore. I've learned.

I thank God, like David said, it is good that I've been afflicted, that I might learn my statutes, O Lord. I know that in righteousness Thou hast afflicted me in His perfection. It says, by His stripes we are healed.

Well, there's the stripes that He received on Calvary for my sin, but sometimes, you know, the scourge is upon us as our Heavenly Father. By His stripes we are healed. So notice what they decide when they realize what Paul is saying, the beauty of grace, that God has poured out His grace, and there's a difference between Jew and Gentile in God's eyes.

Now they may want to load themselves with traditions, but it's not a sin issue. It's not necessary for salvation or blessings from God. Remember, Paul brings it out clearly in Romans chapter 14.

It's not meat or drink. The kingdom of God and the righteousness of God, it's not meat nor drink. It's the marvelous righteousness of God through Jesus Christ.

It's not meat or drink or holy days. It says, Lord, here I am. I love You.

Fill my heart with Your Spirit. I yield to You. I offer myself up as a living sacrifice.

God said, that's all I want You to do. Now, I can do the rest. Try it.

It's wonderful. Lord, what do You expect me to do? Just offer Yourself, and then You can expect me to do. I want to do for You and through You.

Remember this. Grace is such a mystery. That's why they followed Paul around.

They hated him, the legalizers. They couldn't comprehend it. It was easier to acknowledge sin and get free from sin than to apprehend grace and the power and the beauty of it.

It can't be that way. It can't be that wonderful. And they would keep themselves from it.

Grace is so marvelous. It's so powerful. My gosh, we're out of time.

Shall we stand and pray? Grab a hand. Let's ask the Lord to give us more understanding of His grace. Shirley, grab a hand.

God's no respecter of persons. We just learned that. We're going to pray together.

Just go across the aisle. We're one body here. Let's get right across the aisle and grab a hand.

We're going to ask God to give us even more wonderful understanding of grace. Everybody got a hold of somebody? Look at this beautiful body of believers. Fantastic.

Heavenly Father, here we are standing before you as your children and so often struggling with joy, trying so hard to please you when you want to please us. We ask, Lord, as individuals tonight and as a church to understand and apprehend even more, as the Apostle Paul did, the marvelous work and beauty of grace. And, Lord, I pray that you'd free anybody from legalism and law tonight as a means of blessing or seeking to establish righteousness.

Lord, give them that breakthrough, that marvelous liberty that you gave Paul in Romans and what you teach us in Galatians and what the men had to gather about in Jerusalem. Lord, we come to you now and ask you to fill us. And grant to us new understanding of grace.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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