

Jews, Pharisees who have believed, to a point, but they also believe, and are teaching the new Gentile Believers that along with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they must also be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses in order to really be saved. This is the same lie of so many false teachers today: faith in Jesus plus obeying all the rules and doing all the christiany-type things in manufactured rules and regulations: go to mass and eat the eucharist, don't eat meat, be sealed in the mormon temple, go out door-to-door every day, give all your money to be blessed, etc...

But the Apostles and Elders were having none of it!

**Acts 15:22:** *'Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barnabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren:'*

To make certain that the Gentiles understand and believe the Truth of the Gospel, the New Covenant, with the idea that they might need more convincing than just Paul and Barnabas, the Apostles send men from their own company with them; after all, these are genuine Pharisees, doubtless still wearing their regal, pharisaical robes who are superciliously spouting their dangerous and deadly false teaching.

Soon, we will see Paul and Silas going to the churches of Galatia; Paul's letter to the Galatians was sent to combat these same types of Judaizers, those who seek to draw new Believers away from the simplicity of the Gospel of Grace and enslave them under the terrible yoke of The Law.

**Verse 23:** *'And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.'*

The Apostles begin this most important letter, this written Word of God, with two crucial points: those writing it are the genuine Apostles, the men who walked and talked with the Lord Jesus Christ during His entire Earthly Ministry; they were the first to be Born Again, the first to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the ones through whom God would dictate His Word to Man and they are joined by the Elders and the whole Church in Jerusalem. The second crucial point is that they address all these new Gentile Believers as 'Brothers;' the Gentiles are equal and complete Christians. No Apostle, no Elder and no believing Pharisee has any higher standing in Jesus Christ than the seeming lowest Gentile slave or businessman - we are all one in Jesus Christ and one with another!

**Verse 24:** *'Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:'*

Yes, these false teachers were here in the Jerusalem Church but what they are telling you is absolutely false! We, and especially God's Holy Spirit, never said these things: you are not required to become circumcised or to observe Jewish Law!

**Verse 25:** *'It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.'*

All of us, the True Church together, in agreement with the Holy Spirit are sending you this Word of Truth in the hands of our chosen representatives and be assured that Barnabas and Paul are one with us and have our full confidence and authority to present to you God's Word.

**Verse 28:** *'For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;'*

And here it is! This comes directly from the Holy Spirit to you: The only requirements laid upon you Gentiles is this:

**Verse 29:** *'That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.'*

That's it! No Jewish Law; no 10 Commandments; no dietary Law; no animal sacrifices; no laws of clothing and mixed fabrics; no nothing else but these few commands along with Jesus Christ's own commands to Love God with all your hearts and to love each other as yourselves.

How could the Apostles and the Holy Spirit think that we Gentiles would fare well while only being commanded these few simple instructions!?! Don't people need laws and rules to live by? Don't they need to have listed alllll the things that they must do and alllll the things that they must not do? Won't they all slip off into dissolute lives of sin?

The reason the Apostles are confident in the simplicity of these commands is that they know Who is it Who has taken up residence within each and every Gentile Believer; God's Holy Spirit lives within each Believer, Jew and Gentile alike; He is the One Who will lead them and guide them every minute of every day:

*Jesus said, 'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. <sup>14</sup> He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.'* John 16:13

*'I will send (the Holy Spirit) unto you. <sup>8</sup> And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.'* John 16:8

Now, as to these four specific commands to the Gentile Believers... they all had to do with pagan religious practice out from which these Gentiles had been saved; these all came under the heading of 'conscience:' their own conscience and the consciences of Jewish Believers. The Gentiles were being instructed to make a clean break from paganism. It would be as if, today, someone were saved out of Catholicism or Mormonism; the Holy Spirit would draw them away from their past false religious practice.

Here's the application: if Gentiles were eating blood, etc., the Jewish Believers would be offended. As well, if a Gentile Believer is witnessing to his unsaved neighbor and joins him in a pagan practice, his witness is harmed and other Gentile Believers will be offended.

None of these commands are issues of Salvation.

*'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. <sup>24</sup> Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth (good). <sup>25</sup> Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, (meat, in the marketplace) that eat, asking no question for conscience sake'* 1 Cor 10:23

*'As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.'* 1 Cor 8:4

*'Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. <sup>9</sup> But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. <sup>10</sup> For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; <sup>11</sup> And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? <sup>12</sup> But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.'* 1 Cor 8:7

We have complete liberty in Jesus Christ; we can eat rare meat and even blood sausage (if you can) but if a weaker Christian would be offended by that, then we must not do so around them.

So... that must mean we also have liberty concerning fornication... right? Well, not exactly...

*Paul will later write: 'Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. <sup>19</sup> What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'* 1 Cor 6:18

**Verse 30:** *'So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:<sup>31</sup> Which when they had read, **they rejoiced for the consolation.**'*

The Gentiles rejoiced greatly, were very consoled to be out from under the yoke of bondage of the Law with which the Judaizing false teachers had sought to bind them.

Why did they? If I can convince you that I am doing things which make me more holy than you, then my pride is nourished greatly; you will see me as holier than thou and you will want **to become my disciple.**

Paul will write: *'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, **to draw away disciples after them.**'* Acts 20:28

**Verse 32:** *'And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. <sup>33</sup> And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. <sup>34</sup> Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still; Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, also, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others as well.'*

Those who had come from Jerusalem all stayed on for awhile to further teach and ground the Antiochians in the Word of God. Eventually most of them left to return to Jerusalem while Silas, Paul and Barnabas stayed even longer.

**Verse 36:** *'And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the LORD, and see how they do. <sup>37</sup> And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.'*

Paul suggests that he and Barnabas go back to all the places they've preached and established churches to see how they're all doing and Barnabas says, 'Great! And lets take Mark along; he feels bad about having left us before and wants to make it up to us... what do you say?'

**Verse 38:** *'But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;'*

Paul says, 'No! Mark's a quitter, I can't trust him!' Barnabas says, 'Fine! I'll take him myself! This disagreement caused a complete split in their once close relationship; it was like a divorce: 'What God hath joined, let no man put asunder.'

Eventually, Paul will have forgiven Mark; from his prison cell in Rome, just before his death in AD 67, Paul will write: *'Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: <sup>10</sup> For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. **Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.**'* 2Tim 4:9

This split shows the pride in both Paul and Barnabas; neither is willing to submit to the other and yet, it is surely according to God's plan as it results in two missionary teams.

**Verse 40:** *Barnabas took Mark 'And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. <sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.'*

And we don't hear much of Barnabas again except as Paul mentions him in his letters while referring back to these times.

Paul and Silas travel on to more Gentile areas: establishing and strengthening churches. As the Lord Jesus Christ was the One Sacrifice to create the True Church, through individual faith in Him, and His Holy Spirit is the One Who indwells the New Believer to lead and guide, it was Paul's life poured out in sacrificial love for Jesus' Body and Bride whom God used to establish churches and to especially write down so much of the Truth and Doctrine of God's New Covenant, His Gospel of Grace poured out on His Bride.

**Acts 16:1:** *'Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: <sup>2</sup> Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.'*

Remember, Paul had wanted to return to the churches to strengthen and 'confirm the brethren.' Here he is back in Lystra. When Paul and Barnabas were persecuted in Iconium, they left to Derbe and Lystra where he healed a lame man. The Priest of Jupiter sought to sacrifice oxen unto Paul and Barnabas whom they called Jupiter and Mercury. Jews stirred up the people who stoned Paul, leaving him for dead but he got up and went back into the city to preach the Gospel and establish elders.

Now he has come back to Lystra with Silas and they find Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father. In 2Tim 1, we're told that Timothy's mother and grandmother had taught him Old Testament Scriptures from early childhood, preparing him to recognize the Messiah when He came (2Tim 3:15). Timothy, Eunice and Lois probably received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior as the result of Paul's previous time in Lystra. Now he is back and Timothy catches his attention; doubtless, the Holy Spirit told Paul to take Timothy with him. Timothy will become a very important figure in the life of the 1st Century Church; he will serve as Paul's representative to several churches and later to pastor the Church at Ephesus. He died around AD 97, an old man, probably having been retired from the Ephesus pastorate for some years. When Jesus gave His Revelation to John at about the same time as Timothy's death, the first of the seven churches He addressed was Ephesus which He commended in most things but then said, *'I have this against you; you have lost your first love; return to where you were!'*

Very quickly, after Timothy's pastorate, the Church was beginning wane.

But, back to the beginning of his ministry relationship with Paul and Silas:

**Verse 3:** *'Him would Paul have to go forth with him (Timothy); and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.'*

Timothy was half Jewish and half Gentile but since 'Jewishness' is passed down through the mother, he was legitimately a Jew. To head off unwarranted persecution of Timothy, Paul circumcised him so that Jews would not be in an uproar when Timothy would enter towns and synagogues; it had nothing, whatsoever, to do with adherence to the Law but it has everything to do with Paul's later writing: *'For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. <sup>20</sup> And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; <sup>21</sup> To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. <sup>23</sup> And this I do for the gospel's sake.'* 1Cor. 9:19 He was teaching Timothy this very important aspect of his ministry.

**Verse 4:** *'And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.'*

The letter, from James and the Church at Jerusalem, which Paul had brought back to the Gentiles stating their absolute freedom from the Law and from circumcision, which caused such joy and relief in all the Gentiles... Paul didn't just bring back a single copy; he brought many, many copies, all exactly the same, all hand copied by able Scribes, to be delivered to every church he had ever established or visited and they were to keep them as the Word of God, delivered through Paul. This is the very first writing of the New Covenant, the New Testament. And, so, all the churches were established in the Faith and they all grew daily.

**Verse 6:** *'Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, <sup>7</sup> After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. <sup>8</sup> And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night;'*

Now they will visit churches to whom he will later write letters: to Galatia, to Philippi, to Thessalonica, to Ephesus, to Colossae and Corinth and lastly, to Rome where he will die.