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Acts 15:13-35 – Saved By Grace, Fellowship By Works

March 8, 2026

1. Background

A. The Division

B. The Discussion

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” Acts 15:11 (ESV)

- In the past, with Cornelius, salvation was by grace alone. Acts 15:7
- The Gentiles were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 15:8
- God purified the Gentiles’ hearts through faith alone. Acts 15:9
- The law never saved anyone. Acts 15:10
- God accompanied Paul and Barnabas’ message with miracles. Acts 15:12

2. More Discussion

A. The prophets promised Gentile salvation outside of Judaism.

After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written... Acts 15:13–15 (ESV)

“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, 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 known from of old.” Acts 15:16–18 (ESV)

...the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord...

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...

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!... God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew... Romans 11:1–2 (ESV)

...who makes these things known from of old.

3. The Decision

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,... Acts 15:19 (ESV)

A. **What was the danger of grace?**

"...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. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." Acts 15:20-21 (ESV)

B. **Why abstain from food polluted by idols?**

...abstain from the things polluted by idols...

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." 1 Corinthians 8:4 (ESV)

However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 1 Corinthians 8:7 (ESV)

But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 1 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)

Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 1 Corinthians 8:12 (ESV)

For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. Romans 14:15 (ESV)

It is good not to eat meat or **drink wine** or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. Romans 14:21 (ESV)

C. **Why abstain from fornication?**

...and from sexual immorality...

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." 1 Corinthians 6:15-16 (ESV)

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have

from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:18–20 (ESV)

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 (ESV)

D. Why abstain from animals that were strangled?

...and from what has been strangled...

Then they told Saul, “Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood.” And he said, “You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here.” And Saul said, “Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, ‘Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.’” So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there. 1 Samuel 14:33–34 (ESV)

E. Why abstain from blood?

...and from blood.

F. Why is the law of liberty/royal law/new commandment important?

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. James 2:8 (ESV)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. John 13:34 (ESV)

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

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... Acts 15:22 (ESV)

...with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles...” Acts 15:23 (ESV)

...to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 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,
Acts 15:23-24 (ESV)

...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, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 15:25-26 (ESV)

We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 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." Acts 15:27-29 (ESV)

4. The Development

So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. Acts 15:30 (ESV)

And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Acts 15:31 (ESV)

And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. Acts 15:32 (ESV)

And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. Acts 15:33 (ESV)

But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. Acts 15:35 (ESV)

Life Group Questions

1. **Read Acts 15:1-34.** Why do you think people struggle with the idea that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Jesus? What makes it tempting to add requirements to the gospel?
2. James quotes the Old Testament prophet Amos to show that Gentile salvation apart from Judaism was always God's plan. How does it affect your confidence in the gospel to know this wasn't a "Plan B" but was God's intention all along?
3. What's the difference between a salvation issue and a fellowship issue? Why is it important to distinguish between the two?
4. Pastor Kurt used the analogy of gladly giving up your preferences to win your spouse's heart. How does that picture help you understand what it looks like to limit your liberty for the sake of others?
5. Jerusalem didn't just send a letter — they sent respected leaders in person to deliver the message. What does that tell us about how seriously we should take efforts toward unity in the church?
6. The "royal law/law of Christ/new commandment" is to love your neighbor as yourself. What is one specific, practical way you could apply that this week — especially toward someone who is different from you?