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W. O. Vaught

Ouachita Baptist University

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SIMON PETER'S GREAT CONTRIBUTION TO THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 62
ACTS 15:9-11

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.
Immanuel Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

ACTS 15:9-11 "And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a 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 the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."

Here in this passage Simon Peter is giving some of the principles which will clarify the issue of the status quo of the Gentiles during the Church Age. In the previous dispensation, the dispensation of Israel, the Jews were the custodians of the Word of God and were responsible for giving the Word of God to the world. The dispensation of Israel is something like this--

1. The period of the Patriarchs -- Abraham to Moses.
2. The period of the law -- From Moses to Pentecost.
(While the Jews are out under discipline the Church Age comes in at this point.)
3. The third part of the dispensation of Israel is the Tribulation -- which comes to a close with the return of Christ.

Please remember there is no doctrine in the Old Testament about the church. The truths about the church are called mysteries. This means truth that was previously hidden but is now revealed. This is explained in Ephesians 3:1-6. The Church Age was a total mystery to people of the Old Testament. There is no doctrine concerning the Church Age in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the Jews had a monopoly. In that era the Holy Spirit only indwelt a few people for special assignments. In the Church Age the Holy Spirit indwells every believer and this will also hold true during the Millennium. The filling of the Holy Spirit is open to every believer. The Jews no longer have the monopoly and all during the Church Age they will be under discipline, scattered. But remember, God always has his representatives in the world. He had the Jews in the previous dispensation and now in the Church Age he has born again believers who make up the church. Every believer is in the body of Christ and is an ambassador for Christ. One of the great problems they had in the early days of the church was the idea that Jews no longer had any spiritual advantage over the Gentiles. Neither Jew nor Gentile had any advantage and all stood equal before God. When either a Jew or a Gentile became a Christian, they were no longer Jew or Gentile, but members of the body of Christ. Jew and Gentile are one in Christ and the middle wall of partition has been broken down. Whether Jew or Gentile is spiritual or not depends on whether he is in fellowship with God or not. If either Jew or Gentile who has been converted is out of fellowship with God, he is known as a carnal believer. The distinction between Jew and Gentile has been erased. You see, this became a great problem in the early church. The reason for this is that Pentecost, the day the church began, began only in one spot, namely Jerusalem, and it only began with about 200 people and they were all Jews. So the Jewish people got the idea that the church was to be a Jewish monopoly. However, this concept was soon dispelled for soon after the Jewish Pentecost at Jerusalem, there was a second Pentecost in Samaria, and Samaritans are half-Jew and half-Gentile. A little bit later a third Pentecost took place in Caesarea in the home of Cornelius, and these people were not Jews at all but were 100% Gentiles. So in the Book of the Acts we have seen three Pentecosts--one Jewish, one half-Jew and half-Gentile, and one wholly Gentile. So these half-Jew and half-Gentile and these who were not Jews at all also became members of the body of Christ.

The idea is this--Gentiles have exactly the same footing before the Lord when they become Christians. There is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. It had already been demonstrated in the quarters of Cornelius in Caesarea that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ. This is the subject of Ephesians 2 as well as this passage. Now this

is the reason we are seeing this outburst on the part of these legalistic Jews. Paul and Barnabas had given their report of the first missionary journey and they were rudely interrupted by these legalistic Jews who thought that only Jews could be saved. These were Pharisees who had been saved by believing in Christ, but they were confused because they believed you were saved by grace plus something else. Keeping the law and being circumcised was necessary to salvation according to these legalists. Let us remember that even in the old Jewish dispensation keeping of the law and the ritual of circumcision was never necessary for salvation. Salvation has been the same in every age. In Genesis 15 we read, "Abraham believed in the Lord and it was accredited to him for righteousness". So belief in Christ has always been and will always be the basis for salvation. To be sure, in the Old Testament times Christ was revealed to people in a different way, but salvation then and now was exactly the same. Salvation has always been by grace through faith, for in salvation God does all the work and man simply receives the blessing. Belief is the only non-meritorious system of perception in the human race. So, in substance we are faced with two salvations here. The Jewish leaders were contending for a salvation that came by grace plus something, and the missionaries were contending for salvation by grace alone. Let us read again the main emphasis on Simon Peter's talk.

ACTS 15:9-11 "And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a 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 the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Simon Peter's emphasis is this--there is no difference between us Jews and those Gentiles. We are both saved the same way.

"Purifying their hearts by faith." Here the word "heart" refers to the soul--and the soul is made up of self-consciousness, mentality, volition, emotion, conscience, and the old sin nature. This is the only way God can deal with a sinful man, for in his sinful condition his human spirit has been blacked out by sin. So the Holy Spirit takes the gospel information and puts it into the mentality of the soul. Through self-consciousness and God-consciousness the unbeliever comes to realize God is adequate for salvation and through the volition, the unbeliever makes his decision to accept Christ. This act may be accompanied by great emotion or by little emotion. And for the first time the old sin nature gets a backset and is frustrated. At this very moment the human spirit is reactivated and becomes the recipient for Bible truth.

The word "Purifying" means having cleansed their hearts by faith. "By faith" is the dative of advantage and it means it is always to our advantage to have faith. At the moment we believe we are cleansed. At this very second we become saved.

Look for a moment at ROMANS 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." This verse doesn't say, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice", but rather "yield" yourself by the means of confession and rebound. There is no such thing as a man being able to present his body and life to God. This is works. This is what a man does, and the important thing is not what a man does but what God does for him. There is no such thing as a one shot dedication. This word "Present" as it is translated in the King James Version in Romans 12:1 comes from "Parhistemi" and in Romans 6:13 is translated "Yield". In that verse the translation is "Stop yielding yourself unto sin". So in Romans 12:1 the word should be translated "Yield". We are not to yield to the old sin nature. As long as we are controlled by the old sin nature we produce human good. But when we yield to God, we break out of our old sinful state and get back into fellowship and the mechanics for getting back is always the same, and it is by means of confession. The principle is yield. Yield and confess mean exactly the same. I expect this is the most misunderstood verse in the Bible. So many people use this verse for the basis for rededication. So this is where we separate works and grace. So Simon Peter here says, "Having cleansed our hearts by means of faith".

ACTS 15:10 "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" How do we tempt God? Simply by substituting works for grace. By substituting our miserable works for his perfect grace. Some people believe if you are not self-righteously miserable you can't be pleasing to God. They call this "giving God their best". The word "tempt" here means to test something, to analyze something for the purpose of finding whether it is good or bad. So the legalist says that God did right by saving the Jew but he didn't do right by saving the Gentile. So the motive and action of God is here questioned. The legalists are always inconsistent. They emphasize overt sins but the Bible always places the emphasis on the mental attitude sins. Spirituality to many is a system of morality. But it isn't. The issue is Christ and all our sins were poured out on him and judged. But we have a system of pseudo-spirituality called spirituality by morality. But many of these morality people are the possessors of the worst kind of mental attitude sins. Morality is the basis for the survival of the four divine institutions, but morality is for the whole human race. But morality can never be substituted for spirituality and cannot be substituted for salvation by grace through faith. The morality standard of human viewpoint is never a basis for salvation--never. Self-righteous legalists perpetually live out of fellowship with God and are always miserable. They are harder to deal with even than unbelievers.

So please notice--legalism is bondage. Peter said, "Why put a yoke on the neck of the disciples". In other words, legalism is bondage. These Pharisees who are legalists are trying to collar a system of bondage on Christianity and on Christians. Many times this is why it is so hard to win a believer who is morally clean. But the unbeliever who is moral uses his morality for a facade or a front. He is always a phony. He wouldn't think of going out on the town but he commits mental adultery every day. He wouldn't dare kill anyone but he commits mental murder everytime he sees someone he hates. So the moral man says, "I'm better than you are for I don't do what you do".

But there is no place for morality when I come to Christ. My righteousnesses are as filthy rags in his sight. What I did is nothing, for it is what Christ did on the cross that counts.

A lost and dying world doesn't want to hear about our morality. They want to hear about our Christ. Witnessing is not getting up and telling what a stinker you were before you were saved. So many get up and tell how terrible they were, how immoral, and how sinful. Then they say, "But look at me now. Look how sweet and great I am". Then they will add before they get through, "And incidentally, I met Christ along the way". That is not witnessing. We need to give gospel information and the good news is not what I have given up and how good I am, but rather how great Christ is and what he did for us on the cross. So many of these profile stories cause the unbeliever to believe that Christianity is morality and he doesn't know anything about the grace of God. It isn't what I have done for Christ that is important, but what Christ had done for me. Let people see your life, before you talk to them with your lips. If you talk, talk about Christ and make the issue of salvation by grace clear. So legalism in the life and legalism on the lips constitute the worst hinderance to Christianity in the earth. So we have something that is superior to morality. Morality is an overt system. When you get Christ in your inner life, then you are free from legalism and you begin to have real freedom, inner peace, inner calm, and you begin to let Christ live his life over again in you. When you have these great grace inner qualities, then the unbeliever will be attracted by your witness.

2 COR. 3:3 "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." This is the inner power by which we live.

Simon Peter is saying, "Why do you want to put the yoke of legalism on these missionaries and on these new Gentile converts?" Legalism is a yoke. Legalism puts the believer back in slavery. That's why in Galatians 5:1 we read, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherein Christ hath made you free". The yoke of bondage was the Mosaic law and neither Jews of the old dispensation could bear it and neither can we. Peter is looking at these mixed up Pharisees who have been saved but are trying to add something else onto the plan of salvation. In other words, Peter is saying, "No man can carry the load legalism places on him". No one ever had and no one ever will. Legalism can destroy a church or a denomination. Legalism and morality can destroy spirituality. They can't exist side by side. Spirituality does away with legalism and a dependence upon morality for salvation. The conclusion is verse 11.

ACTS 15:11 "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." It is grace and not legalism that is the basis for salvation. There is no place for human works here. Belief is the only non-meritorious system of perception in the human race.

"We believe" is a present, active, indicative and means that this is a firm apostolic pronouncement and this is the way it is and will always be. Peter is saying that this is final truth. There is no other way.

In other words it is this: Christ Is My Only Necessity

Christ Only

Salvation by Grace Through Faith

No Salvation by Works Ever--Only By Faith

The uniqueness of the person of Christ leads to the uniqueness of the work of Christ on the cross. Only the God-man can save. This is why Christ said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me".

Back in verse 10 Peter said, "Which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear". The word "to bear" means to pick up, to lift up. No man in all the history of the world has ever had the strength to pick up the Mosaic law and carry it. Then he says, "But" and this is a conjunction of contrast. Please notice the contrast "BUT WE SHALL BE SAVED BY FAITH".

This "Shall be saved" is aorist tense, passive voice, and is an infinitive. The aorist tense means that in a point of time we were saved and God has picked up that point of time and has perpetuated it forever.

Passive voice means that this salvation is something that was done for us and we, the subject, receives the action of the verb.

The infinitive denotes the purpose God had in mind by doing this for us. So it is God's eternal purpose to redeem us and keep us saved through all eternity.

In our next study we will see how Barnabas and Paul bring the concluding messages at this Jerusalem conference.