

Let Us Not Burden Them

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Hey everyone, please return to your seats and we will continue our worship this evening with the reading and preaching of God's Word. It's good to see you all. For those of you who are visiting, my name is Sean. I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church.

It's my joy and privilege to preach God's Word to you this evening. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 15. We've been going through a series in the book of Acts and we are in chapter 15 today.

I originally intended to cover the entire chapter. Well, not the entire chapter, but up to verse 35. However, when I finished the sermon, it was twice as long as it was supposed to be. So, I'm just going to preach up to verse 21 today. It's because there's a lot of thorny, complex theological issues in this passage that it's going to take some time to deal with.

So, I'll address the rest of the passage next week. So, we'll just read from Acts chapter 15 verse 1 to verse 21.

[1 : 16] Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word.

We are often clawing our way, trying to earn and pay for the salvation you have freely given us in Jesus.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word.

But Lord, will you teach us in your Word that you have decided in your sovereign will not to burden us beyond our repentance and faith in Jesus.

that we might be saved by grace through faith in Him. We pray that you have decided in your sovereign will not to bring that truth home to every single person here.

[2 : 58] That they might experience the joy and freedom that comes only when we look to Christ and trust in Him alone for our salvation.

in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Acts chapter 15 verses 1 to 21.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers. Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers.

[4 : 12] When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders and they declared all that God had done with them. But, some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, it is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, Brothers, you know that in the early days, God made a choice among you, that by my mouth, the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us. And He made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will. And all the assembly fell silent and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and

wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

[5 : 45] 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, 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 and the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord. That the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord. And all the Gentiles were called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.

Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood.

For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim Him. For He has read every Sabbath in the synagogues. This is God's holy and authoritative Word.

[7 : 00] There's no shortage of issues that threaten to divide the church nowadays, whether it's issues of gender and sexuality, race and racism, or various responses to COVID.

It's comforting to know that we're not alone in experiencing these pools. Every local church deals with forces that threaten to divide them.

Even the first century church led by the 12 apostles themselves. In Acts 15, we see the early church grappling with a tectonic shift in their understanding, in their theology, in their understanding of the church, the life of the church.

Salvation has come to the Gentiles, evidenced by the falling of the Holy Spirit upon them in Acts 10. However, this raised some significant theological questions. Should Gentile Christian men be circumcised like their Jewish Christian brothers?

Were the laws of Moses, laws of Moses binding on Gentile Christians as they historically have been binding for the Jews?

[8 : 11] In this passage, we see in order the dissension caused by the Judaizers, the debate among the elders and the apostles, and then the decision rendered by the elders and the apostles.

So we see the dissension, and then the debate, and then the decision. And from this passage, we learn lessons not only about how to resolve disputes within the church, but even more significantly, we learn the liberating truth that God saves a remnant from both Jews and Gentiles by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

So let's first look at the dissension caused by the Judaizers in verses 1 to 5. After completing their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria, and they gave the church, they gave the church that originally sent them out, a report of all that God has done through them.

And it says in chapter 14, verse 28, that they remained no little time with the disciples. But while they were remaining with the disciples and continuing to teach them and to minister to them, they encountered some people who were undermining their teaching, who were opposing their work.

It says in verse 1, But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers. And this is what they were teaching. Quote, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

[9 : 43] Later in verse 24, the apostles and the elders of the church in Jerusalem say that these men had gone out from them, meaning that they were once part of the Jerusalem church.

So this association with the Jerusalem church, the first church, the first local church in the history of humanity, of which the 12 apostles themselves were a part, likely bolstered the credibility of these men who had come down from Jerusalem.

They have the proximity to the apostles. They came down from Jerusalem where most of the Jewish converts are, Jewish Christians are.

And they're telling us that we have to be circumcised and follow all the customs of Moses in order to be saved. So who's right? Paul and Barnabas who have been teaching us or these people from the church in Jerusalem.

They don't seem to occupy these men that came down from Jerusalem any office in the church.

They are not elders. They're just called some men. However, they nonetheless took it upon themselves to teach the brothers these contrary doctrines.

[10 : 55] And though circumcision is the main issue here, it's not the only issue. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. In Genesis 17, when God made a covenant with Abraham, He

gave the sign of circumcision for generations to come.

It was a sign that signified that those who are circumcised, those who are descendants, physical descendants of Abraham, are the promised offspring, that they are the heirs of the promise that God had given to Abraham.

And the covenant sign of circumcision signified that if you broke the covenant, if you violated the covenant, that you would literally be cut off from that line, that promised line.

That's what the covenant signified. And so it came very naturally to Jewish converts to Christianity to think, well, of course you have to be circumcised. That is the sign of your inclusion in the people of God.

But the issue is not merely circumcision because the circumcision is a sign that you are a party to the covenant that God has made with His people.

[12:09] And if you are a part of the covenant, you have to obey all of the covenant stipulations, all the laws that go with that, the laws of Moses. And we can see that clearly in verse 5 because they weren't merely teaching that they need to be circumcised.

They said that it is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses. So what these circumcision party people are arguing is that they not only need to be circumcised, they essentially need to become Jewish in order to be saved.

They need to obey the entirety of the laws of Moses. In order for you to be fully converted, a genuine Christian, you have to be circumcised and adopt the way of life of Jews.

Note well here that the issue at hand is not just how Gentile converts should behave when they're in the company of Jewish Christians. That's not the issue at hand.

The issue is a matter of salvation, criterion for salvation. They're saying, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

[13:21] So it's a critical issue. That's at hand. What does it mean for a Gentile to convert to Christianity? Not merely how should a converted Gentile behave.

Paul and Barnabas objected to this teaching from the men from Jerusalem church and verse 2 says that they had no small dissension and debate with them. This is a deliberate understatement. No small dissension means that they had a very big dissension.

In fact, the dissension was so significant that they were unable to resolve their differences among them through debate. So Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed by the church in Antioch to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

They're seeking arbitration from the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem. When you're unable to resolve a dispute with fellow Christians, it is wise to seek arbitration from proper authorities.

If it's a disagreement among fellow church members, they may seek arbitration from the elders. If it's a disagreement between church members and the elders themselves, we don't have the 12 apostles we can consult, but we are part of a larger denomination called Sovereign Grace Churches.

[14:33] In the northeast region of the denomination that we are part of, there is a committee called the Judicial Review Committee whose responsibility it is to, quote, hear and adjudicate any complaints or grievances against the local eldership by a member of a local church.

I pray that that day never comes, but if any of you believe that I am erring from God's will in my teaching and leadership, and if I'm refusing to listen to your earnest appeals, then that is the recourse that is available to you to settle the matter.

And the person to contact is Rob Flood. That's the name of the chair of the committee. His email address is rflood, F-L-O-O-D, at C-O-V-F-E-L dot org, cubfell.org.

You guys can take notes on that. That's fine with me. I think this accountability is good for pastors to have. So Barnabas and Paul set out for Jerusalem, and both of them, on their way to Jerusalem, on their way wherever they go, they're proclaiming all the things that God had done in the conversion of the Gentiles.

So obviously, you know where Paul and Barnabas fall in this theological debate. Unlike the Judaizers who are insisting that Gentiles become circumcised and essentially become Jewish, Paul and Barnabas believe that these Gentiles who have put their faith in Jesus are already saved.

[16:03] So that's the dissension caused by the Judaizers in verses 1-5. And then now let's look at the debate among the elders and the apostles in verses 6-18. It begins in verse 6.

Notice in verse 4 that Paul and Barnabas, when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders. So they were welcomed by the gathering of the entire church. But then look at who's involved in verse 6.

It says, the apostles and elders were gathered together to consider this matter. In other words, they're not having this debate with the whole church in the context of a members' meeting. Rather, they are having this debate among the apostles and elders in the context of a leadership meeting. It is the responsibility of the apostles and the elders to render a decision on this complex theological matter.

The witness of church leaders is one of the categories that this passage teaches us that is part of processing disagreements within the church. I'll mention two other categories as we're going, but first we see here the witness of church leaders.

[17:13] Verse 7 tells us that after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Peter is recalling his experience with Cornelius and his family and friends in chapter 10. There God showed Peter a thrice-repeated vision of a sheath being lowered with all kinds of unclean animals that were not fit for Jewish consumption on it.

And then a voice in the vision from God said, Peter, kill and eat. And when Peter refused out of a desire to stay pure and to avoid ritual impurity, said, No, no way.

I'm not going to eat any of that. And God said to him, What God has made clean do not call common. And in saying that, God was declaring that Gentiles, whom Jews considered unclean, are no longer to be viewed that way.

And right after that threefold vision, God had told Peter, Behold, three men are looking for you. He had threefold vision and three men show up from the Gentile Cornelius and they ask him to come with them.

[18:26] And so Peter goes without hesitation and he ministers to them. And while he's preaching the gospel there to Cornelius and his gathering of intimate friends and family, the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

So now, that was only five chapters ago, but a lot has happened since then. Peter refers to those as the early days. In the early days, if you track the time and place indicators throughout the book of Acts in those intervening chapters and then you reference other epistles in the New Testament to get an estimate of how many years have elapsed, it seems about seven years has already passed since that, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles in chapter 10.

So it has been a while. That's why Peter calls those days the early days. Those were the days when Peter was still the head of the church in Jerusalem. He left the church in Jerusalem to flee to another location in chapter 12 when King Herod was out to kill him.

Herod Agrippa. In those days when God chose Peter to preach the word of the gospel to the Gentiles, they believed and because of this pioneering role that Peter had in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, his is the first perspective that Luke notes at the conclusion of this debate.

Peter continues in verses 8 to 9, and God who knows the heart bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. And he made no distinction between us and them having cleansed their hearts by faith.

[20:01] Peter is testifying that God himself who knows the heart of every person bore witness to the Gentiles. because God peers into the human soul, because he looks into the human heart, he can never be fooled.

And yet, this all-knowing God himself bore witness that these Gentiles in chapter 10 are truly saved, that they truly belong to him because God gave proof of that by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to the Jewish converts to Christianity in Acts chapter 2.

And Peter is saying he made no distinction between us and them having cleansed them by their, cleansed their hearts by faith. So if God has not made a distinction between us and them, who are we to make such a distinction?

Peter contends that God has already cleansed their hearts by faith. The cleansing of sinful hearts is the work of the Holy Spirit and God granted this to the Gentiles in accordance with their faith in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior.

We might, we're so used to this truth that we might miss how radical this is, but this was a groundbreaking theological revelation, a radical statement that our sinful hearts are cleansed by the

Spirit, by the means of faith, not by works.

[21 : 38] The cleansing does not come through circumcision. The cleansing does not come through obedience to the Mosaic Law. The cleansing is obtained by faith in Jesus Christ.

Baptism is the outward sign of that inward faith. It outwardly, baptism outwardly signifies the inward cleansing of the Holy Spirit.

And these Gentile believers have already been baptized. Peter's point is straightforward. God has abolished the ceremonial distinction between clean Jews and unclean Gentiles.

He makes no such distinction and He Himself has given proof of this by giving them the Holy Spirit in response to their faith in Jesus. This is the second witness, the second category of witness to consider when we're processing disagreements within the church.

First was the witness of church leaders and the second is the witness of the Holy Spirit. Is the Holy Spirit Himself experientially confirming your convictions?

[22 : 47] The Holy Spirit confirmed the reality that Gentile believers were saved and included in the people of God apart from circumcision and the Mosaic law. Now, therefore, Peter says in verses 10 to 11, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will. To put God to the test is to push back against Him to rebel against Him His revealed will.

To see if God really means what He says. If He will really punish our sins. When God Himself has bore witness to the Gentile converts by giving them the Holy Spirit to add an additional hurdle that they must clear in order to be saved is tantamount to challenging God.

Oh, is that what God said? Well, this is what I say. You have to be circumcised. You have to follow all the laws of Moses. They were testing God.

And Peter implores his fellow apostles and elders, neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear this yoke of the Mosaic law. None of us, not even the Jews, will be saved by observance of the law.

[24 : 14] So why then do you insist on putting this burden on these Gentile disciples? Yokes back then were typically made of wooden beams and leather straps.

It's what joined two oxen together and enabled the farmer to control the oxen. The Mosaic law which God had given to Israel when He made His covenant with them was like a yoke that joined them to God.

But they were not able to bear it. Jeremiah chapter 5 verse 5 speaks of how God's people failed to submit to God under His yoke but instead they broke open the yoke.

They burst the bonds says in Jeremiah 5.5. They were rebellious people. Stubborn oxen useless for farming. It's not that the yoke itself was bad.

The law was a means of blessing to God's people. If they were if they could keep it but it became a heavy burden because they could not keep it.

[25 : 23] Romans 7 10-12 Paul writes about this. I think I have it to show you guys on the screen. The law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good but he argues the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me for sin seizing an opportunity through the commandment deceived me and through it killed me.

Paul's here describing the experience of a Jew under the law before Christ. The law which was intended to be a means of blessing a source of life to God's people instead brought death due to their sin because they failed to keep the law because they couldn't bear the yoke and burst the bonds in rebellion.

Even though the law of Moses did make provisions for making atonement for sin burnt offerings sin offerings guilt offerings and so on these sacrifices could not ultimately purify and save God's people.

Hebrews 10 1-4 teaches us that the Old Testament law was merely a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities.

It can never by the same sacrifices that are continually offered each year make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered since the worshippers having once been cleansed would no longer have any consciousness of sins.

[26 : 56] But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. The author of Hebrews is basing his argument on the

presupposition that if sacrifice for sin is truly efficacious it would have a decisive once and for all effect of cleansing our conscience so that we no longer have any consciousness of sin.

However the Old Testament sacrifices never had such an effect. Leviticus 16 stipulated that on the day of atonement once a year the high priest was to offer two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering on behalf of the Israelites.

The priest was to make atonement for the people after laying both hands on the head of the other live goat and confessing over it all the iniquities of God's people and all their transgressions and their sins he was supposed to send away the goat into the wilderness so that the goat might bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area.

However even this dramatic annual sacrifice on the day of atonement did not have the effect of cleansing the consciences of God's people once and for all. In fact the rituals were so designed to heighten the people's awareness of their sins and their state of alienation separation from God. In this sense the day of atonement functioned as an annual reminder of sins. Every year think about this guys every year they had to offer the sacrifice again.

[28 : 50] Every year they were reminded that they could not enter the most holy place within the temple where the sacrifice is to be made. Only the high priest may enter the most holy place and he could enter only once a year and even he couldn't answer until he had first offered sacrifice taking blood which was for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

And there was a veil covering the most holy place that separated the congregation from God a reminder that their sin still separated them from God.

They could not enter it even after the sacrifice was made. And they knew that they had to return again next year to offer the same sacrifice.

Can you imagine that sinking feeling? It's really sad to think about. I don't know if you've ever had the experience of feeling so dirty.

Maybe you were actually dirty. Maybe you had oil or some grime that's really hard to get out of your body on you. Or maybe you just felt dirty because of what someone else had done to you.

[30 : 04] And you tried to shower, wash yourself over and over and over again, but you never felt clean. similarly, though God graciously made provisions for atonement for their sins in the laws of Moses, they were reminded every single year that it was not enough.

They were not holy. clean. They could not enter into God's presence. They were not clean. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

And this is why God sent Jesus, His only Son, as the ultimate sacrifice for us to cleanse us once and for all.

All of the Old Testament sacrifices were foreshadowing and pointing to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. For, as it says in Hebrews 10, 10-14, it is only through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all that those who are being sanctified are perfected for all time because Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed because Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away for good the sin of the world.

And this is why it says in Mark 15-38 that when Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Praise God.

[32 : 00] That opaque curtain that we could never see through, that space beyond the curtain that most holy place which seemed so within reach yet so impossibly far away was torn open by Jesus Christ so that all of God's people may enter in.

Cleansed of our sins, purified in our conscience. That's the good news that we proclaim. That's why it is called the gospel in verse 7 because that means good news.

We could never bear the heavy yoke of the law, but now we have a different yoke to bear. So like Jesus says in Matthew 11, we Taylor read from this and we shared it in the call to worship, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Our Lord Jesus is not a harsh task master. He's not a slave driver. He's gentle and lowly in heart.

[33 : 32] He gives us easy yokes. I wonder how many of you are still laboring under the heavy yoke of the law. I wonder how many of you are bruised and battered, breathing heavily, bowed under the heavy burden, stumbling along, ever failing, when Christ is offering you an easy yoke and a light burden.

How do you know that you are saved? How do you know that you will go to heaven after you die? If your answer is, well, I've gone to church all my life, or, well, I'm a pretty good person, relatively speaking, or, of course, I've sinned, but I haven't done anything like those people, then you just don't get it.

Your obedience and good works are not the basis for your salvation. They can never be inadequate grounds for our salvation.

Only Jesus is sufficient for us. Only the crucified and risen Christ can save us. So verse 9 says that our hearts are cleansed by faith.

Now faith is a condition for salvation. But it is an instrument, it's an instrumental condition, not the causal condition.

[35 : 25] Imagine that you are dehydrated. Without a sip of water, you're about to kick the bucket, you're about to bite the dust. And then someone graciously comes over and pours some water on you.

You still have to open your mouth and drink the water, but it's not your act of drinking that saves you. That's just your way of receiving the water, which is what saves you.

Water is the causal condition. You're receiving it, opening your mouth is the instrumental condition.

Faith is not what saves you.

Faith is the means by which you appropriate the grace of God that saves you. It's Jesus alone who by his death and resurrection secures the cleansing water of the Holy Spirit on our behalf.

He alone can save us. That's why verse 11 says that we are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Grace means unmerited favor, unearned favor.

[36 : 52] It's a favor that God bestows on us even though he is not obliged in any way to do so.

Salvation is a gift, faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone.

It's all of these. You find all of these truths, wonderful truths, in these few short verses. Neither Jew nor Greek will be saved by obedience to the law.

Both Jew and Greek will be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. So then shall we put the yoke that we ourselves could not bear around the neck of others?

Shall we lay the burden we could not carry on the back of others? God forbid may be far from us. after Peter's testimony of how the spirit of God himself bore witness to this truth it says in verse 12 that all of the assembly fell silent.

They know that God has spoken through Peter. And then Barnabas and Paul further corroborate Peter's testimony by relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

[38 : 04] So they are bearing testimony that God has been authenticating the true conversion of the Gentiles by giving them granting them signs and wonders as they minister to these Gentiles.

And then after Peter, Barnabas and Paul, Apostle James starts speaking in verse 13. This is not James, the son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of Apostle John.

That James was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa in Acts 12. This is likely the same Apostle James that Paul calls the Lord's brother in Galatians 1.19. Not Jesus' actual immediate brother but a near kin.

He's the author of the book of James in the New Testament and he appears to have been the lead elder or lead pastor of the Jerusalem church. This is why he's named first among the elders of the Jerusalem church and this is why he's referred to as representative of the entire church of Jerusalem in Acts 12.17 and 21.18.

And it's James who will give the final verdict of the apostles and the elders. He says in verses 13-14 brothers listen to me Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name.

[39 : 23] Simeon is a reference to Simon Peter and James concurs that with what Peter said that God has visited the Gentiles in order to take from them a people for his name.

This is a significant acknowledgement because the word people is almost exclusively reserved in the Old Testament as a reference to God's chosen people.

Deuteronomy chapter 7 verse 6 says this for you are a people holy to the Lord your God the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

There were many nations in the world that served other gods but the Lord had chosen Israel in particular to be his chosen people a people for his special possession a people who would be his own inheritance people who would carry his name but James is here applying that special designation to Gentiles in Hosea chapter 1 God commands prophet Hosea to take for himself a wife of Hordom and through her to have children of Hordom God commands Hosea to do this as an object lesson for the unfaithful people of Israel to show them a picture of what God is doing for them that God is the faithful bridegroom and that they are the unfaithful bride whoring after idols it's such a sad scene and

God tells Hosea to name one of his sons literally not my people for God says you are not my people and I am not your God think about that it's such a sad scene imagine being married and you have these children that are born into your home only to realize they are not your children they are children of unfaithfulness illegitimate children that's what God's people were but there's still a gracious promise in the midst of all this in Hosea 1 verse 10 it prophesies and in the place where it was said to them you are not my people it shall be said to them children of the living [42 : 26] God if God says this of his chosen people who are unfaithful to him then how much more is this the case for most of us who are Gentiles nations who from the beginning have been whoring after the idols denying the worship that is due to our God alone we are the bastard children if ever there was one we were decidedly not God's people we were unwanted children if ever there was one but that God would take such a people and say that they are people for my name they are people for my special possession that's the wondrous grace that we find in our savior

Jesus Christ that's why first Peter chapter two verses nine to ten says but you are you are you Gentiles who have believed along with the Jewish converts you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light once you were not a people but now you are God's people once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy hallelujah James then cites and alludes to several other Old Testament passages to make the case from scripture itself that what Peter has just said regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles is true this is the third category to consider when dealing with disagreements within the church the witness of church leaders the witness of the holy spirit and finally the witness of scripture our own subjective sense of what the holy spirit is saying or doing should be corroborated by the witness of scripture if it contradicts scripture then we can be certain that our sense of the spirit work is wrong because the spirit of

God will never contradict the word of God this is precisely James point he says in verse 15 and with this with what with the testimony that Peter has just born of the work of the holy spirit and with this the words of the prophets agree the inclusion of the gentiles into the people of God attested to by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is confirmed by what is written in scripture by the prophets he cites Amos chapter 9 verses 11 to 12 and verses 16 to 18 he says 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 if you compare this quote in Acts verses 15 chapter 15 16 and 18 to Amos 9 11 to 12 in your own Bibles you'll notice a discrepancy in verse 12 in Amos 9 12 because there it says that they may possess the remnant of Eden which is different from what it says in Acts 15 17 where James mentions the remnant of mankind this is because James is citing the Septuagint which is an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament which is the remnant of mankind rather than the remnant of Edom but this is not a mistranslation because Edom can be used representatively to refer to all those who are not of Israel you can see this in Amos chapter 9 verse 12 where the remnant of Edom is parallel to the nations remember that Edom is just another name for Esau and remember also that Israel is another name for Jacob and Jacob and Esau were brothers in Malachi chapter 1 verses 1 to 4 it says this

I have loved you says the Lord but you say how have you loved us is not Esau Jacob's brother declares the Lord yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals forth of the desert Edom says we are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins the Lord of hosts says they may build but I will tear down and they will be called the wicked country and the people with whom the Lord is angry forever why am I reading this if Jacob or Israel stands for those who have been chosen by God Esau or Edom stands for all those who have been rejected by God however Amos chapter 9 11 to 12 prophesied that even from Edom even from

among the rejected nations that there will be a spiritual remnant who will seek the Lord just as not all

[48 : 21] Jews are saved but only a remnant among them are saved the spiritual Israel so not all Gentiles are saved but only a remnant of them God will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen and I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it this prophecy about the ruined tent of David that is rebuilt by God is fulfilled in the death the ruin and resurrection of Jesus Christ because Jesus is the true Israel and he is the son of David and he is the new tent of David he is the fulfillment of both the nation of Israel and the temple of Israel temple of David and he said in John 2 19 destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up when Jesus said that he was prophesying not about the literal temple but about his own body knowing that he will be crucified but raised again on the third day Jesus is the tent of David that will be rebuilt from its ruins so that we who are of the wastelands of Edom the Gentiles of ruined people of people without hope might call upon the

Lord and be called by his name I love the third verse of the worship song O Lord my rock and my redeemer which captures this sentiment it says O Lord my rock and my redeemer gracious savior of my ruined life my guilt and cross laid on your shoulders in my place you suffered bled and died but that's not all you rose the grave and death are conquered you broke the bonds of sin and shame therefore James concludes in verse 19 my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God remember I mentioned to you that the circumcision was a sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham but because of Jesus now the Gentiles who are not physical descendants of Abraham are being grafted in among the people of God and it is for this reason that circumcision is no longer the sign of the covenant and it's absurd to require Gentiles to be circumcised that's the main takeaway of this passage that God saves a remnant from both Jews and Gentiles by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone now some of you guys probably have a whole bunch of questions about what happens there at the end verses 19 to 21 because after all this the apostles will tack on a few requirements that they do expect the Gentile converts Christianity to meet in verses 20 to 21 that's the part that's complicated and unfortunately I don't have time to explain it to you until next week so this will be a cliffhanger and you guys will have to come back to listen to the sermon but I don't want you to walk away from today's passage and today's message thinking about those obligations rather than the free gift of the Holy Spirit the free cleansing of our hearts by faith and the salvation that is through grace of our Lord Jesus because if you walk away more preoccupied with those four obligations than this free gift of grace that they've been talking about all along then you're missing the forest for the trees notice how James puts it in verse 19 we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God so clearly whatever James stipulates in verses 20 to 21 he does not see those things as troubling the Gentiles these are not additional hurdles that the Gentiles must clear in order to be saved rather they are entailments of their repentance and faith in Jesus and I'll explain that further in the next next sermon I'm sorry I'm doing this to you guys but we have a presentation an update from Wes and Kendall our dear members who are going to be traveling on a short term mission trip to Romania on August 19th this Thursday and so they have an update for us which actually is surprisingly relevant

God somehow orchestrated this way to this sermon message so if you come up please share the testimony it would be great to Center who are on the call the █n YOU Thank you.