

# The Truth Series

## Part 3

### Acts 15

By Gary Hoffman

**Matthew 5:17-19** *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 **Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**”*

**Matthew 24:35** *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*

**James 2:8** *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; <sup>9</sup> **but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.** <sup>10</sup> For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*

The main question that will be asked is if the Law was nullified for the “New Testament” believer. This will ask “Did the LORD through Paul nullify the Law for the Gentiles in Acts 15? Did Paul make ALL FOODS (those previously listed in Leviticus as unclean and an abomination the LORD) now OK for followers of Jesus to eat?

- *1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “**Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.**”*
  - The issue that stirred the disciples to go to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders was that certain Judeans were saying that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. They were applying the Jewish oral law called the “ritual of the proselyte,” which meant that you had to become an Israelite, in order to be saved. The only way to be saved, according to the traditional view was to go through the ritual of circumcision. They believed that you were not and could not be saved outside this ritual. This meant that you were now a part of Israel and thus saved. This was in contradiction to the written law, which said that one must be joined to Yahweh.
  
- *2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, **about this question.***
  - The question of circumcision as necessary for salvation. To transform the Jerusalem council into something more is adding to the text.
  
- *3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. 4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and **they reported all things that God had done with them.***
  - “These things” are that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles 14:27. Yahweh saved gentiles who had not gone through this ritual. He did it by His power through faith.

- 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, **“It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”**
  - Now in Jerusalem some from the Pharisees said that it is necessary that they be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The issue here is not whether the Gentiles should follow Torah after receiving the Holy Spirit, but that they must follow all Torah including circumcision in order to be saved and receive the Holy Spirit, etc... They could not believe that a Gentile could go through this transformation until they had converted to Judaism. This is the essence of the Judaizers. It was not an issue making a "no law for the Gentile" rule, but a clarification of the doctrine of "by grace you have been saved, not of works..." which was the Torah way. See Hebrews 11. It was grace in the Torah for the patriarchs and it is Grace for the gentile.
  
- 6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: *“Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*
  - Peter states the case for the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit by faith. They received the same Holy Spirit that Paul and the other Jews received, even before they did one thing in alignment with the Torah. God sees the heart. Salvation was always a heart issue and still is, and He saved them because of their heart, not because of their fulfilling the law. This was the same heart issue of Deuteronomy 6 and Matthew 26:37-40. It is the same way to Yahweh. It was and is and always will be a heart Issue. With the right heart we then follow Yahweh's commands. To say that the Gentiles had to do anything else to Attain salvation is false.
  
- 10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a **yoke on the neck of the disciples** which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
  - What is the yoke and whose neck is it on? Note: The Jews were into evangelism prior to Jesus. They knew that they were to be a light to the Gentiles, all the way back to Abraham. The problem was that they required the Gentiles to follow Torah and be circumcised in order to be completely converted or accepted into Judaism. And this did not even make you an equal with a Jew. As a reminder again, the Herodian era Jews even erected a fence around the Temple that no Gentile, convert or not, could go beyond. This was the middle wall of partition spoken of in Ephesians 2:14. The yoke is likely the burden of conversion by works. The yoke was possibly the burden of trying to evangelize while making the Gentile keep the law first, when God saved them irregardless of keeping the law. Keeping the law was a life long transition of the true convert who came by faith to the LORD. Once accepted by Gods grace He gives each the power to pursue a life of obedience to His law.
  
- 11 But we believe that **through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.**”

- Paul points out that all are saved in the same manner. Just like Adam, Abraham, Noah, David, etc... were saved by faith, so are we and so are these Gentiles. SAME WAY as always. Saved by grace. Check out Strong's definition of grace: The divine influence upon the heart reflected in the life.
  
- *12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. 13 And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: 14 Simon has declared how **God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.** 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:*
  - God has taken individuals out of the gentiles as a people for His name. The Gentile was coming out of from among gentiles and into the household of Israel. God did not bring the Jew out of Torah to become more like the gentiles, but was opening a door that the Gentile could enter into the faith of the Jew. The Gentile was expected to come OUT of the pagan life and into the Torah life, which is the same today. The question is what does Torah life mean or even look like?
  
- *16 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD WHO DOES ALL THESE THINGS.' 18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works. 19 **Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,***
  - The important word here is "turning". Do not trouble those from the Gentiles who are turning to God. This is an "in process" transition of repentance. These are NEW believers who are coming out of their pagan life without God and placing their trust in the God of Israel. Do not trouble them by telling them they have to be circumcised and keep the law to be saved, when God has decided that they already are.
  
- *20 but that we write to them to **abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.***
  - Are these the four things that a gentile must do forever? Does this make sense? What about all the other things like the 10 commandments? Or is this it? This statement cannot be an all encompassing standard for the gentile follower of Jesus. It is however the four main elements in most pagan temple worship. It is a first step away from the pagan world of cult worship. It is very important to note that all four of these commands are Torah commandments given to Israel concerning the separation from pagan idolatry. Is it possible that the council was giving application of the law to these new converts? Giving them a "most important" list of things to do as they are coming out of paganism.
  
- *21 For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*

- The key and summation of this issue is in this verse. One that few ever remembers reading in this context. What does this mean? To paraphrase: The Torah/law/word of God is preached every Sabbath in a systematic weekly reading schedule. If you come to the synagogue each week, you will learn the word of God. It will all be covered. Yahweh has redeemed these Gentiles from death. They have received the Holy Spirit. They have been chosen by Gods grace "period". As they turn and come out of their pagan life, they will here the truth of God's Way each Sabbath as they gather with the congregations. They will be fed the word regularly. They will learn how to live over the long haul. They will grow, as they learn and apply the Word of God to their life. This is the same rule of evangelism today. The new, weak believer needs milk first, then hopefully moves on to eating meat. The new convert will choke on meat. The Gentiles are being saved by faith. God looks at the heart and is giving them the Holy Spirit. Don't burden the disciples with making them have these new converts be circumcised and keep the whole law as they are turning to God. At least get them out of the pagan worship system for now. They will hear the word weekly as they assemble with us. They will learn how to live through the teaching of God's law. In time the same God, who has saved them by faith, will transform the rest of their lives, through the Holy Spirit whom they have received. And God forbid that they have to go through the ritual of a proselyte and follow the man made doctrines of our fathers.
  
- *22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. 23 They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment— 25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. 30 So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. 31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. 32 Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. 33 And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.*<sup>1</sup>

- These verses are not license to break the commands of the God of Israel.

---

<sup>1</sup>*The New King James Version*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982.