

THE DISPENSATIONS OF THE LAW AND GRACE

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 15:1-41; Romans 14:1-6.

LESSON 333 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 15:1-41

¹ And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

² When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

³ And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

⁴ And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

⁵ But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.

⁶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

⁷ And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Law or Grace

1. The Judaizers tried to enforce the Law of Moses upon the Gentile converts, Acts 15:1;

Galatians 1:6

⁶ **I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:**

Galatians 1:7

⁷ **Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.**

2. Paul and Barnabas would not swerve from the standard of Christian grace, Acts 15:2;

Romans 10:4

⁴ **For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.**

Galatians 1:8-12

⁸ **But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.**

⁹ **As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.**

¹⁰ **For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.**

¹¹ **But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.**

¹² **For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

3. A deputation was sent to Jerusalem with the question, Acts 15:2-5.

II The Council at Jerusalem

1. The Apostles and elders gathered to consider the question, Acts 15:6.

2. Peter expressed his convictions, based upon God's previously manifested will, Acts 15:7-11;

Acts 10:44-48

⁴⁴ **While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.**

⁴⁵ **And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.**

⁴⁶ **For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,**

⁴⁷ **Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?**

⁴⁸ **And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.**

3. Paul and Barnabas declared God's wondrous workings among the Gentiles, Acts 15:12.
4. James added his sentence and summarized the opinion of the council, Acts 15:13-21; Romans 14:1-6.

III Triumphant Grace

1. The council decided that the Gentile Christians were free from the Law of Moses, Acts 15:22-29;

⁸ And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us;

⁹ And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

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?

¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

¹² Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

¹³ And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me:

¹⁴ Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

¹⁵ And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

¹⁶ After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

¹⁷ That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

¹⁸ Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

¹⁹ Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

²⁰ But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and

Galatians 2:14-16

¹⁴ But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

¹⁵ We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

¹⁶ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

2. Letters were written and brethren were sent to convey the message, Acts 15:23-33.

IV Second Missionary Journey

1. Paul determined to leave Antioch and go through the cities previously visited, Acts 15:34-36.
2. Barnabas preferred to take John Mark, and departed with him to Cyprus, Acts 15:37-39.
3. Paul Chose Silas and departed to Syria and Cilicia, Acts 15:40, 41.

NOTES:

"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Jesus spoke the words that every Jew zealously believed; for many centuries ago the promise had been given to faithful Abraham by the Lord, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Covenant at Sinai

The nation of Israel was the direct result and partial fulfilment of that promise to Abraham. At Mount Sinai, God outlined His Covenant with the Children of Israel; and they, in turn, endorsed the Covenant wholeheartedly as Moses related it to them. Stated in a simplified form, the great and wonderful call of God to the Children of Israel meant that God desired the Israelites to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests — a peculiar treasure unto God. They were to be messengers of God's Covenant and evangelise, or win, the world and bring all men into God's Covenant. God revealed Himself to the Children of Israel in an unmistakable and unforgettable way. He gave them the Ten Commandments, written with the finger of God upon the tables of stone, and certain laws, which Moses wrote in a book. God made the Israelites the custodians and guardians of these oracles of God, and marked the Children of Israel as the family and means whereby the Abrahamic Covenant would be finally fulfilled to the whole world through the birth of the Messiah.

The whole economy that God outlined to the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai became known as the Law of Moses because Moses was the instrument that God used to deliver the Law to Israel; but truly the Law was the Law of God. In studying the Law and the period of time in which it was given, one must admit that only God could have inspired such a set of exemplary rules of conduct. The Law instituted a mode of living and worship of God for the Children of Israel that no other nation had begun to approach. The Law was a greater revelation of God than had been previously given, and through the Law the Children of Israel learned what God expected of them in acceptable worship of Him.

The Purpose of the Law

The Law was beautiful and glorious because it pointed to the perfect Sacrifice to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. God intended

from things strangled, and from blood.

²¹ For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

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 Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

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:

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:

²⁵ It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

²⁶ Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁷ We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth.

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

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.

³⁰ So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the

that the Law should be educational in nature to the Children of Israel — not that the Law in itself could bring salvation. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. . . . For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:1,4).

Truly there were some outstanding examples of righteous men under the Law — men who were saved and sanctified; but their righteousness stemmed not from the works of the Law but from their faith in God and obedience to His Word. "Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who **through faith** subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, . . . these all, having **obtained a good report through faith**, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:32,33,39,40).

The Dispensation of Grace

The "better thing" that God provided for us is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Time and again the Scriptures foretold the day in which the Lord would open the door of grace to the whole world. "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee" (Isaiah 55:5).

The birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, marked the beginning of a new dispensation in God's dealings with men—the dispensation of Grace. The time had come when all limits were swept away, all bounds of nationality were passed over, and God's grace was carried directly unto all men. Jesus said to the woman of Samaria: "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:21, 23). No longer was there any need for the earthly priesthood; no more did acceptable worship depend upon the centralised Temple ceremony; no more was animal sacrifice or ritual needed to gain the approval of God and the forgiveness of sins. The honest heart, in any country, can come to God with faith in Jesus Christ and true repentance of sins and receive the witness in his heart that his prayer has been heard and his sins forgiven.

New Covenant

God established the new Covenant to fulfil the old Covenant, having planned the new Covenant from the foundation of the earth. The great price of the new Covenant was that which led the Lord out to Calvary's cross and caused Him to be crucified there, that through the Blood that was shed, through His life surrendered and yielded up, a Covenant could be made — not only with the Jews but with all mankind individually — by which they might be reconciled to God.

That Covenant was for the purpose of bridging the gulf that was made by sin, which separated man from God. The only means by which it could be bridged was the price that Jesus paid, the Blood He shed, the offering He gave, the Atonement He made by which humanity might be reconciled to God. It is a wonderful

epistle:

³¹ *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

³² And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*.

³³ And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

³⁴ Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

³⁵ Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

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.

³⁷ And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

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.

³⁹ 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;

⁴⁰ And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Romans 14:1-6

¹ Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.

² For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

³ Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him

thing that God has made provision by which man can overcome sin and be restored to Him; and, above all, can have love planted in the heart — love toward God, love toward man. The law of love is the new law under the dispensation of Grace.

Law and Grace

The Law was very stringent in its demand for obedience. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). "thou shalt not" was the basis of the Law's commandments, and the Children of Israel learned through the commandments that sin was exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13). **Do or die** was the spirit of the Law.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14,15). The dying Children of Israel looked upon the brazen serpent in the wilderness and lived. In like manner, dying sinners may look to the crucified Son of God and find life; therefore, **look and live** are watchwords of the Gospel. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Many of the precepts of the Laws, as high as they are, fall short of the standard set up by Jesus. The Law was a shadow of good things to come, but when the full light of the Gospel in Jesus Christ shone forth, the shadow disappeared. The Law said, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth"; but Jesus commanded, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). The Law said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; but Jesus lifted the standard higher: "I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21, 22).

A careful study of the Scriptures will reveal that the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament are reaffirmed in the New Testament on a higher plane than in the Old Testament, with the notable exception of the Fourth Commandment. Nowhere in the New Testament is the commandment concerning the Jewish Sabbath reaffirmed.

Controversy

It was often hard for the Israelites to realize that their God was no respecter of persons. Many of the Pharisees, and also some of the converts to Christianity in the apostolic days, clung to the idea that salvation was of and for the Jews alone. They looked upon the people of the Gentile nations as heathen, without hope in this world or in the world to come, unless they became Jews and subscribed to Israel's Law. "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5).

Paul and Barnabas, chief ambassadors of the Gospel to the Gentiles, could not countenance such teaching for a moment, for they had seen multitudes of Gentiles come directly to God in sincere repentance and receive transformation of life in answer to their prayers. The question was taken to Jerusalem, that the Apostles and elders there might settle the matter.

The Guiding Spirit

that eateth: for God hath received him.

⁴ Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

⁵ One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

⁶ He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

The Apostles and elders, guided by the Holy Ghost, realized that the Law had been fulfilled in Christ and was no longer in force. "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: . . . We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication" (Acts 15:24,27-29). They ruled that there was no necessity for circumcision. No mention was made of keeping the holy days, the new moons, or the Sabbath Days; nor was there any mention of eating or of not eating meats, except abstinence from meats offered to idols.

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16,17). "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks" (Romans 14:5,6). "Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6). These are but a few of many passages of Scripture that show how irrevocably the Truth in Jesus Christ has replaced the Law of Moses.

Who settled the question? "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us." The Spirit of God moved upon the hearts of the councilmen — they were of one accord — and inspired the verdict that God had ordained from the foundation of the world.

QUESTIONS

1. Who were the Judaizers? and what was their doctrine?
2. Why could Paul and Barnabas not agree with them?
3. What was the doctrine that Paul and Barnabas preached?
4. How was the question settled?
5. What was Peter's vote on the question?
6. How did Paul and Barnabas help in settling the question?
7. Who summed up the opinions of the council?
8. What was the outcome of the council?