

The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-29

MEMORY VERSE

ACTS 15:11

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Two cups full of beans or two baskets filled with blocks.

Pink Pearl erasers, 7mm wiggle eyes, pony beads, Elmer's glue and cupcake papers.

A sheet of cardboard with the words printed "Free Pass" and a bottle.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Law vs. Grace

Divide your class into two teams; law vs. grace. Give one child on each team a paper cup full of dry beans (a basket of blocks could be substituted for smaller children). This child will be the dispenser (each team should have the same items). Have the two teams line up as for a relay with the dispenser at the far end for kids to run to. Each member of the team must walk to the dispenser for his team and get a bean or block. The Law team must first bow to the dispenser, then hop three times, then turn around one time, and then ask for a bean or block. The Grace team only has to ask. Obviously, the Grace team should win.

When the game is over, explain to your class that the yoke of the Law is impossible to bear. God's grace, marked by the fruit of a yielded life to Him, always comes out ahead of a life lived by legal, fruitless ritual.

LESSON TIME!

In today's lesson we will see how the early church dealt with a very divisive issue; grace versus the law. As they witnessed the phenomenon of Gentile converts to the church, they encountered the question of how much Orthodox Judaism should the church recognize and practice. To stop the controversy and bring unity to the church, Paul and Barnabas were dispatched to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders. We learn from their example in this matter that **The Holy Spirit always brings unity to those that seek God's will.**

ACTS 15:1-2

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."

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.

Jesus had given His disciples the great commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Some Jewish men were adding to the gospel message, insisting that circumcision was necessary for salvation. They based this on the Levitical law of circumcision that indicated a man was a follower of Jehovah God and a Jew. These "certain men" were teaching the Gentile converts that their faith in Christ was not enough to be saved; they added circumcision to the requirements. It was agreed that Paul and Barnabas should go to the apostles and elders to discuss this disagreement in Jerusalem.

ACTS 15:3-4

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.

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.

Paul and Barnabas traveled about 200 miles where they were reunited with their brothers and sisters with great joy. Added to this joy was the recounting of all of the Lord's work among the lives of the Gentile converts in Phoenicia and Samaria. Not even the disagreement they came to settle could take away from their joy! **The Holy Spirit always brings unity to those that seek God's will.**

ACTS 15:5-11

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."

So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

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.

"So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us,

"And made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

"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?

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Eraser Cars

Use pink pearl erasers as car bodies and pony beads as wheels. You can use wiggle eyes as headlights. Use a small section of twist wire for the car's grill or mouth, or have the kids draw one on. Set the cars aside in cupcake papers so the glue has a chance to dry. Have your children take the cars home for a friend.

Explain that they must give the little cars they have made to a sibling, friend, or neighbor. Explain that it is a free gift, given with nothing expected in return, just like our gift of salvation; we can't do anything to earn it, because it's free.

As everyone gathered, this question regarding circumcision and the keeping of the Law of Moses was brought up by those still believing Pharisees who still followed the letter of Levitical law. Peter answered them that by his own mouth the Gentiles heard the gospel, received it, and were given the Holy Spirit. God made no distinction between the Jew and the Gentile in regards to response of the gospel message.

Peter knew it was not possible for any of them to carry out the letter of the law. He describes the law as a yoke that had always been impossible to bear. A yoke was used by a farmer to harness an ox to a plow for plowing fields; a yoke had to fit just right to be most productive. Peter was saying that the Levitical law had been an impossible yoke and that Jesus had done all the work necessary for us to be saved!

ACTS 15:12-18

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.

And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me:

"Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of 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 will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up,

' 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.'

"Known to God from eternity are all His works."

After hearing about the wonders God was doing among the Gentiles, James reaffirms from prophecy that what was being described was exactly as God said it would be. **The Holy Spirit always brings unity to those that seek God's will.**

ACTS 15:19-27

"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,

“ but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.

“For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

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.

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.

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—

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

men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth.

The apostles and elders of Jerusalem determined that the yoke of the law should not be placed around the necks of the new Gentile believers, but rather that they should abstain from things that would cause their neighbors to stumble or misunderstand the changed lives of the believers. They were so committed to encouraging the Gentile believers that they wrote a letter and sent an envoy to verify its authenticity. **The Holy Spirit always brings unity to those that seek God’s will.**

ACTS 15:28-29

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

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.

All the leading men among the brethren agreed upon this representation of God's heart toward the new Gentile believers. They chose teams, wrote letters and by word of mouth made reassurance and encouragement to all the small churches far and near. They were taking new instructions to the churches that would further separate the early church and Orthodox Judaism, but **The Holy Spirit always brings unity to those that seek God's will.**

Grace For Sale

Grace cannot be bought. Show the children this fact by playing this game. Make a large "Free Pass" by covering a sheet of cardboard and writing in large letters "Free Pass." Seat the children in a circle and choose a child by spinning a bottle. The chosen child must do some silly action like pat his head or rub his tummy or touch his index fingertips together with his eyes closed (you can choose according to the age of your children). If they cannot meet the demand they must go in the mush pot (center of the circle) and cannot get out without the "Free Pass." They receive the pass by asking the child who has it, "May I please have the free pass?" The other child must give it to him to get out.

Explain to your class that grace is free. We ask God for it and He gives it to us. Jesus already paid the price for our sins; when we receive His free gift of salvation, we are under grace. God's forgiveness is complete.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer to seek the unity of the Holy Spirit. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.