

## Acts 15 - Saved by Grace and Faith alone

As we look at the different denominations there are in the Christian Faith, we see that there are a lot of differences between them.

In our Baptist denomination we believe that full emersion baptism after profession of faith follows the biblical example and instruction of Jesus Christ.

In the Church of England they believe in child baptism and later as an adult confirmation as a rite of initiation that is carried out through prayer, the laying of hands or anointing, with the aim of bestowing the Gift of the Holy Spirit. after profession of faith.

Two very different types of baptism, of course we think we are right and they are wrong. I know people who were brought up in the Church of England who have been baptised by full emersion as adults.

It is not important how it is done, what is important is the individual coming into a knowledge of Jesus Christ and accepting him as Lord and Saviour.

Even at the end of this passage there is a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that sends them in different directions to continue spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

There will always be different opinions, different priorities but they should not detract from the goal of bringing people into a knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 15 we have a similar situation. There are those who are teaching Gentile converts that they must be circumcised in accordance with the Law of Moses to be saved and others who say that it is not required.

Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question and try and sort it out.

The question to be answered in these two opinions is 'how are people saved'? The answer is found in Peter's opening words:

*Acts 15 v 11*

*'We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.'*

In the example at the beginning we are not saved by the way we baptise people or how we are baptised or confirmed, salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. This is the priority and any disagreement should not detract from this.

In the same way, are we saved by the old covenant laws and following them to the letter or by the new covenant in Jesus Christ. Following the laws is important but salvation through Jesus is what counts.

Peter, when he speaks, seeks to level the playing field when it comes to being saved, notice in verse 11 'We are saved just as they are saved'. It is as if the Gentiles came to faith before the Jews.

In other words, we religious Jews are saved in the same way as these non-Jewish Gentiles are, namely, through the grace of the Lord Jesus.". If that is the case then there is no need for them to follow our traditions.

I am focussing on verse 11 as the key verse in this passage and for us to look at Grace and Faith. By these two alone we are saved.

### **Grace**

Grace is a gift from God and can be defined as undeserved favour. I am sure you have heard Grace stated as **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**.

God has given us something that none of us have earned or deserved. It is by Grace that we are saved from certain eternal death because of the sin in our lives. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Grace allows us to be forgiven and earn eternal life. We should be grateful to God that we are sinners saved by Grace. If that was not enough, we get to share in God's riches for eternity.

Paul writing to the Corinthians in his second letter makes a lovely point in this matter:

*2 Corinthians 8 v 8*

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to come to us and walk the path that we walk, but was sinless, and died the death of a criminal that we might have life in all its fullness on Earth and with him for eternity.

No wonder John Newton penned Amazing Grace in response to what God had done for him in his life and through Jesus Christ.

He was pressganged into the British Navy, became a slave in West Africa and was rescued by another Navy Captain sent to find him. During his return voyage to England the ship encountered a great storm that was sinking the ship. He prayed and the storm died away and they made port in Ireland. He became a slave trader, then became a strong abolitionist. After this Spiritual experience on board the ship in the storm and his later conversion, he became an Anglican Priest in 1764. In 1772 he wrote Amazing Grace.

Nothing he did and nothing we can do can gain us salvation, it only through God's Amazing Grace.

## **Faith**

*Hebrew 11 v 1*

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

Faith is an active trust in God, a belief in what he says is true that results in action. Faith is more than just believing; we can all read the bible and follow what it says but this is not enough for salvation.

As someone who was in the airline industry, I learned the theory of flight and understood how a 400-ton jumbo jet stays in the air by the difference in the air pressure over and under the wing. I believe it in theory, it is only when I get on board an aircraft and it takes off will I know it to be true.

It is the same with faith we have to take an active step that goes beyond just believing. We need to invite Jesus into our lives, asking him to forgive our sins, and to take control of our lives. I need to trust Jesus more than I trust a pilot in control of an aircraft.

Faith is based on the absolute reliability of God's character, that he is trustworthy and will honour all his promises; past, present and future.

The first part of Hebrews 11 says that faith is a 'confidence in what we hope for'. What is it we hope for as Christians? Forgiveness of sins, God's blessings, eternal life, the Holy Spirit's power working in us, and I am sure other things too.

The problem is that all these are unseen and not tangible. The second half of the verse says 'an assurance of what we do not see'. God is invisible. We can't see heaven. Eternal life, is also something we can't see. Our faith in God makes us certain of these things.

It is important to emphasise that we are saved by faith alone, not by faith plus our good deeds. None of our good deeds count as brownie points to God unless there is Faith first. Before we all stop what we are doing and lead an easy life, James reminds us that they do go together but in the right order.

*James 2 v 18*

*But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds*

First comes Faith and this is then followed by the good deeds, these good deeds come as a result of our Faith in God and wanting to please him.

It is by Grace and Faith in Jesus Christ alone that salvation comes and not by keeping the law as Paul argues in his letter to the Galatians:

*Galatians 5 v 2 to 3*

*Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law.*

If a person argues that circumcision is necessary for salvation, he puts himself under obligation to keep the whole law. If you stumble over just one point, you become a law-breaker, guilty of breaking the whole law.

If we add anything to faith as being necessary for salvation, then it is by works and not by grace alone that we are saved. Salvation by keeping God's law is impossible, since the Law demands purity in the heart, mind and body.