

Acts 15:1-22 School's Out

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[0 : 0 0] Father, thank you so much for the word you've placed before us. Lord, we just can't get tired of it. It's always good. Lord, I thank you that you are always at the ready to not only hear our prayers, Lord, but to speak to us through your word. And Lord, I just thank you that great grace is upon us, Lord, as we sang, Lord, that it's your grace. And Lord, I thank you that you have called us up higher, Lord, that the natural ceiling of our own abilities and makeup does not prevent you from taking us up higher, Lord, because with you, it is limitless what we can do, Lord. You've given us your Holy Spirit, and we trust now that through the Holy Spirit, you'll speak life to us. In Jesus' name, amen. Okay, so my, I guess my theme today tonight is school's out. So in Judaism, in the law, let's see if I can get this up, there are 240, there's 613 commandments, there's 248 positives and 365 negatives. The reason today that we come to a building like this, that we're not wearing phylacteries, that we're not having to ceremony wash our hands, that the women aren't on one side and the men on the other, the reason is because of Acts chapter 15. If it wasn't for this chapter, if it wasn't for this council that the church got together, we very well could be Christians living under the law. And so today we're going to look at, or tonight we're going to look at, a big part of what we're going to look at is this idea of legalism, which is the imposition of a law and grace. And the school's out theme comes from Galatians. In Galatians 3, chapter 3, sorry, verses 24 and 25, Paul writes, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith has come, school's out. There's no longer a need for our schoolmaster. So we dive into chapter 15. If you remember, Paul and Barnabas, they've been hanging out for a while now in verse 28 of chapter 14, and there they abode long time with the disciples.

They're back in Antioch, back in their sending church, and they are abiding a long time there to wear away time. You know, they're getting filled up, refilled, ready for what God has as next for them. And certainly they're being used by the Lord. But then here comes certain men, which came down from Judea, and they taught the brethren and said, except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. I don't know if they heard about Paul and Barnabas going to the Gentiles, or if this was just some guys in Jerusalem who were like, you know, we better get up to Antioch and let them know how to be true Christians, because I don't think they're getting it. And so here they come in, and they're going to teach them this wonderful news. And what does it say there? Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. And I just sat there, and I was thinking about that.

Think about what you have right now, the freedom you have. Think of when you're a new believer, maybe. And the freedom that comes in, or maybe a new work of the Spirit in your life. It's like, wow, and God opens up a new avenue of grace. And then someone comes and tells you, no, it's not going to work. You have to be under this law. Wow, that must just like quench the joy, the heaviness, the, oh, really? And so I was looking at legalism, this idea of legalism. What is legalism?

Legalism, the definition, a strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law, right? And over abundant desire to keep the law. But I think this last one is more in keeping with what we would call legalism in Scripture. Dependence on moral law. So our dependence is upon the law. It's on the moral law. Can I keep this? And what these guys were saying is, your ability to keep the moral law is going to directly affect your standing spiritually. So what does legalism lead to?

So if you think you're these Christians, right, and someone's just come in and said, you have to keep this law. Most people don't tell us today we have to keep the law of circumcision or the, the 613 commandments of the Jewish law. But they put other laws on us. You know, don't braid your hair, don't wear jewelry. Men, don't do that either. But, right, they put laws on you. You know, are you working on the Sabbath? Are you watching certain things, listening to certain things? How often are you reading Scripture? Are you out evangelizing? What are you doing? Just different things where they will essentially say, if you don't do this, this moral duty that I'm expecting of you, well, then your spiritual standing is in, in dire straits. But legalism. So if you think, you think about this, you're these Christians, right? You're sitting there. Legalism would do what?

[4 : 59] It would cause great confusion. Great confusion. Because the simplicity of grace that has just liberated you, now someone's coming in behind that and saying, no, you've got to be under this system and this law. It'd be so confusing. Because in your heart, which is crying for the freedom that grace brings, and yet these expectations of the law. Legalism dares detract upon sacred ground of which it knows nothing of. Legalism, it thinks, it's always after the fact, right? Everybody's saved by grace through faith. But after the fact, people will impose and say, well, actually, you got saved by grace through faith and baptism in First Communion. And it always comes in after the fact, you know, of always wearing button shirts, you know, of never wearing jeans, right? There's something that's always after the fact. It's never along with salvation. So it dares to tread upon ground it knows nothing of. And legalism replaces God's promise with conditions. The freedom that comes with the promise, then there's a condition all of a sudden that's now attached to you. Legalism encourages the flesh. It is not of the spirit. There's, there's no law now except the law of love, the greater law, but there's no law, moral law of conditions. And so the only part of our being in our makeup that could in any way attempt to keep that is going to be the flesh. And legalism entraps what God has set free.

So here's these men coming in. There's, you know, there's great joy, there's great freedom, and now they're like, meh, no, this isn't going to work. Paul says in Galatians 3 verse 3, he says, oh, you, are you so foolish? Having begun in the spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?

What does he not say? Having begun in the flesh, are you now made perfect by the flesh? No, you've begun in the spirit. There's no other entrance into this. You are entering in through the spirit, and that's the only thing that keeps us going. Legalism builds a wall between us and God.

It firmly planted, plants a barrier. What Jesus has removed at the cross, legalism builds back, brick by brick, brick by brick, brick by brick. And so that's, that's what I feel like these people are feeling at this moment. When these Judaizers are coming in and saying, this is what you need to do. I think of their confusion. I think of how, what they felt so free, now they're feeling so trapped.

The free access they had to the Lord, they're now like, oh, I have to do that? That doesn't sound too fun. Oh, 600 some precepts. Okay. Where do we start? I'm sure there was some of them. Some of them in Antiochus Prime were like, I knew it. Give me the list. Let's do the list. But when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, no small, that means what? It's big.

[7 : 50] It's like, did you have an, did you have a, an argument? We didn't have a small one. Oh, it was a big one. They had no small dissension and disputation and they determined. I didn't make that up. That's three words of alliteration right there in the Bible. Let's just note that.

They had no small disputation, no small dissension. And they did. And so the church here then determines that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem under the apostles and elders about this question. So they've been, they're going at this. Paul's not holding back. Paul did not withhold the good news of grace, right? He, he was like, no, no, no, no, no. I'm, I'm sorry this is going to hurt your feelings. I'm sorry about that, but this is the truth. And where, you see, Paul was more concerned about the effect of the doctrine this was going to have, of these people's doctrine, what it was going to have upon the church than he was about their feelings. Then he was, if they left the church, then he was, if they went back and told on them because he knew that what they were doing was attempting to undo what God's grace had done. And so they went up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders. And here we have this word elders. The first time we see elders in the book of Acts is Acts 11 30. And then we see it again in Acts 14 23. There's the idea there's elders along with what the apostles. You know, we're going to see, we saw here in verse, I'm sorry, in chapter 14, verse 23, that Paul and Barnabas, when they had ordained them elders in every church and prayed, well, what's the elder? Well, it's another name for Bishop, uh, or when we see in, in like Timothy, or what we would call the pastor. Um, but it's interesting because you have the apostles, you have God's first moving and work of the spirit and there's the apostles. They didn't right away run out and figure, well, we need to create this large tier system, right? It was as the, the need grew, they recognize we need support. And so God brought support to the work that's taking place. We're going to see later that James is going to speak up with the final word. You know, this isn't a congregational vote, congregational, it's not negotiable. It's not congregational vote. And, and clearly James is like the one out leading in front. And I think so often, you know, there's been churches I've been a part of where I've watched as the pastor, the movement that God is doing a work of the spirit. And he puts a calling on a man who begins to lead. And then others come along, um, side of him to support that work that I've seen where, um, those that have been raised to leadership now think it's their place to try and lead the church. The problem is that is if you have a church leadership and a pastor and a board, as soon as someone says, no, we need to do it my way.

Guess who's now leading the church? Guess who's the pastor, right? So you see this unity as they discuss all these things, they're trying to figure them out, but there's certain voices that rise above the rest where they recognize not you are important, you are authority, you are in charge.

No, but where they recognize this is God's work and this is the way he's leading. Obviously through James, Peter was the guy for quite a while, wasn't he? And now we see back in Jerusalem, we're going to see where it's James and nobody has a problem with that. So it's just interesting. I find as a pot, there's apostles and then it's being joined with elders and just seeing how this, um, church government is playing out. You know, in America, in the West, we have a corporate mindset. So as soon as you start putting that, those words together, board, president of the board, CEO, or whatever, we get this corporate mindset of almost like, well, I'm an usher. If I could become a deacon and work my way on up, maybe eventually I could be Pope.

[11 : 39] Right? That's what we think. When I was, when I was, uh, I was 30 something. I don't know, a good number of years ago. Too many now. But, um, and a young deacon and asked to come on the board of the church, it was like, oh, right. I've been meaning to make a few changes around here. You know?

Now look, there's no junior Christians in the kingdom. I say that to my kids all the time. There's no junior believers. The Holy Spirit is going to work through you just as powerfully as he did through, through Chuck Smith, Billy Graham, or the Pope, definitely more than the Pope.

Right? It's the same Holy Spirit. We have the same potential, but there's different calling. And then many times when God puts a calling on the person, you watch and he will then surround that person with support. Right? Um, so it's more of a support team, a pastoral care team, a church, you know, I don't know, agape team, instead of where we would think, oh, this mentality of this corporate structure. So I don't, I don't think they had the corporate structure here. I think they just had a unity of the spirit, recognizing what God was doing and desiring to support that. But anyway, enough of that tangent. Um, so in verse three and being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenix and Samaria, declaring conversion of the Gentiles. And they caused great joy unto all the brethren. I wonder if they were journeying together with these Judaizer guys, because as they sent them all together, they must've been so frustrated. Like, oh, they're not telling them again. Don't tell them about what God was doing. We're not sure it's a work of God yet, because it might need a law. And Paul didn't withhold the good news of grace for the sake of saving face. Right? The truth breaks the bonds of legalism and stands alone. So Paul is putting the truth out there, and it doesn't matter what these guys said, because the truth stands by itself.

So there's great joy. How do we know the difference between the spirit and legalism? What's the difference? God's spirit is recognizable. Paul is saying right here, he's declaring the conversion of the Gentiles. He's saying, guys, this is a recognizable move of God. I don't have to convince you of this. God's spirit brings joy, says, and they cause great joy unto all the brethren.

Legalism. Legalism does not witness to the spirit, but to the flesh, right? It's always a work of the flesh. And legalism replaces joy with jealousy. And that's where these guys are at. They are so jealous.

[14:12] And I bet this was eating them up. And I got to think Paul liked it a little bit. Like, guess what God is doing? Mm-hmm. Did that ever happen to you guys? No? Didn't think so. You and your law? Nope.

Now, is the law good? Yes. The law is good, right? It has a purpose. We're going to see that a little bit in Galatians. The purpose, or we already looked at that one verse, but we'll come to it again, that it brings us to grace. It has a purpose, not to liberate us, but to bring us to the point of liberation. And so, when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church. I like how both in verse three and four, it mentions the church kind of collective. It says being brought on their way by the church. And when they were come, they were received of the church. And again, there's this understanding, the church seems to have an understanding of the work that God is doing.

And they are receiving them. You know, they're happily affiliating with them. They're choosing to be a part of what they're doing. So, when they were come to Jerusalem, they received them.

And of the apostles and elders, there they are again together, and they declared all things that God had done with them. We saw that in the end of chapter 14, where they declared all that God had done with them, verse 27. Again, they're not taking credit for this. Another sign of legalism is ownership, right? This is what I've done. Look what I've done.

I've made this. You know, when we first started the church, when I first started teaching Sunday to Sunday, it was such a huge thing. And it still is, don't get me wrong. But to get done preparing for Sunday morning, it was like, wow, it worked. And then to teach, and then it was like, it's over. And I'd start throwing out all my little sticky notes and start over. And I was like, oh man. And I'd be so stressed out on Monday or Tuesday. Like, I don't have a message yet for Sunday. Oh no. What if it breaks and it doesn't work? And the Lord's so faithful, right? Just, I found, it's been such a season of just stability with the Lord. Not a lot of highs and lows. Just, I go to the Word and I open it and I know He'll speak. And it's very, it's very replicable each week. I read the passage in the beginning of the week, the first time through, and I'm like, there is nothing here. I'm like, okay. But I'm used to that now. And then it's like, read it again. And then a word catches your eye. I wonder what that word means. You start breaking that word down. Ooh, that's over here. That's over here. I wonder what they're feeling at this point. And all of a sudden you begin to observe these different things in the scripture. I wonder what it means. You begin to interpret it. And then God brings the application.

[16 : 57] Whoa, that's kind of like what's going on in our world. And God's just so faithful to deliver His message. We just came back from the Deep South Pastors Conference and Leadership Conference.

One of the guys was talking about our potential, that our ceiling. We each have natural giftings and abilities, right? Natural aptitudes. Some of us a lot less than others in some areas, right? You're not going to ask me to help you build your house in certain areas, right? You don't want me doing anything precision. You know, if you want me to do something and I need to large chunks of things or painting or finesse, I'm your man. If you want precision, no, that's not good. Then I'll be in the flesh, right? But our own natural abilities and aptitudes, there's a certain level and you're never going to go past that. I don't know how much you believe in yourself and follow your heart. You're only ever going to get so far in that. But the Lord, He was saying, removes the ceiling. That with the Holy Spirit, there's limitless potential. And like He said, He goes, I far surpassed and exceeded my ceiling a long time ago. He's not taking credit for that. He's just recognizing that the work God's doing in His life is the work of the Spirit. It's nothing He can do as far surpasses anything we can do. And so when they declared with them all things that God had done with them, it's a recognition that it's not them. Where legalism places our focus on man's accomplishments for God instead of God's accomplishment for or through man, right? So legalism says, look what I've done for God.

God. Flesh says, look what I've done for God. The Spirit, the recognition of the Spirit is, it's what God has done in me and through me. But they rose up when they get to Jerusalem now. They've traveled. They've traveled with these guys.

You know, they're coming from Antioch. It's what it's like a three-day maybe journey, three or four days from Antioch. They arrive. People are excited to see them. Excuse me. They declare all things God had done with them. And then there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, which believed. That's a fantastic scripture. You know that? You know, once we get past the gospels, you never see the Pharisees again in a negative light. You see, they're not presented to us in a negative light. They seem to have responded in large number to the gospel. And so here it says, the Pharisees which believe. This is wonderful. But what are they saying? That it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses. They couldn't let go of this and get past this. They said they have to do this.

They need to do this. Galatians chapter 4 and verse 16 says, am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? Paul's saying this to the Galatians. They zealously affect you. Who's they?

[19 : 44] Those who would bring them under the law. But not well. Yea, they would exclude you that you might affect them. What does that mean? Well, it essentially means they're trying to put something on you to make themselves feel better. Right? They would exclude you that you might affect them.

They want you to have to be excluded. Oh, no, no, no. You can't partake in this. Legalism says this. But that you might affect them. They're trying to validate themselves through what they convince you to do.

They're trying to convince them to circumcise and keep the law. Is that too small? Galatians chapter 5. It's a large section. But I think it sums up this whole dispute.

Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, say unto you that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. I just picture him saying this here at this council.

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he's a debtor to do the whole law. Christ has become of no effect unto you. All 600 and some precepts you got to keep.

[20 : 50] Whosoever of you are justified by the law, you are fallen from grace. They've replaced grace and put a wall between them and God. But you're not going to climb that wall. That's a problem with the law. It doesn't give you any ability to get over that wall. It just keeps adding layer and layer and layer.

Christ has become of no effect to you. Whosoever of you are justified by the law, you are fallen from grace. For we, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision put any moral law in there you want, but faith which works by love. You did run well. Who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth? And this is why Paul's standing so hard against these guys, because it's not the truth.

This persuasion comes not of him that calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord that you will be none otherwise minded.

But he that troubles you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. I just picture him, you know, writing this at some point to the Galatians as he's recalling this moment when he's standing there in Jerusalem, disputing and having dissension with these guys, right?

[22 : 03] And the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter in verse 6. Why did they come together? Because the church should always take seriously anything that has the potential for division. Any potential for division. The church should hit its brakes and deal with it. Guys, we need to be that. Any potential for division, we need to hit the brakes.

There's a lot of division out there. We can divide over food. We can divide over medical ideas and policies, right? We can divide over what we think we should each be doing in our lives as Christians.

We need to hit the brakes whenever there's an opportunity. We see an opportunity for division. Like, wait, let's recenter and refocus on what brings this unity. So they took this very seriously.

They all came together. The apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter. We're going to see later. The whole congregation is in agreement. But right now, it's the apostles and elders. It's not just everybody. There's times for everybody's involvement.

And there's times where, you know, while there's no junior Christians, there are those that are not at a place of discernment and ability yet to handle certain matters.

[23 : 13] Paul says, lay not hands on any man too suddenly. And then he talks about him being a novice. But he puts in there any man. And so here they come together. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up and said unto them, Men and brethren, you 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.

So Peter gives space here. This is a changed Peter. Like, as soon as there was an argument in the past, he would have been the first one there. But he's giving space for grace. He kind of lets this play out.

And when it seems like there is no fruit coming from it, then what does he do? He kind of begins to speak. Proverbs 18, 13 says, He that answers a matter before he hears it, is folly and shame unto him.

So before you've heard the whole story, you hear one side of a story, I knew it, that person. And then you finally hear their side. And you're like, oh, sorry. He that answers a matter before he hears it, it's folly and shame.

Peter's going to give us some insight here. He's going to give us an insight into a true move of God. How do we verify a true move of God? Remember we just said, what are some differences between moving in the spirit and legalism?

[24 : 27] Well, Peter's going to give us a way to verify what is a true move of God. Because he stands up and he says, hey, you guys remember how that a good while ago, God made choice? Hint, hint, it wasn't my choice.

This wasn't something we decided to do as a board, as a body, as a church. This is something God did. He said, men and brethren, you 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.

And God, which knows the hearts, bear them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

So what do we see here? Verifying the move of God. Well, verse seven, there's a credible source, isn't there? Peter is a credible source. He says, guys, remember me?

I went. It was me. It's me. It's Pete. Guys, I've been here a while. It's a credible source. He's not just quoting something he saw on Facebook. He said, that I went, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and do what?

[25 : 33] Believe. True move of God leads to faith. It will end in faith and believe in verse seven. Verse eight, and God, which knows the hearts, bear them witness, giving them what?

The Holy Spirit. There's the witness of the Spirit. And it's consistent with who God is, even as he did unto us. He's like, hey, this is a true move of God.

It's a credible source. It led to faith. It was a move of the Spirit in the same way God moved in our lives, right? They didn't do something crazy. Like it was a move of the Spirit.

They all ran out and jumped off a cliff, but I know it was the Lord. I don't really see that anywhere in scripture. I mean, the earth opened up and ate some people. That was a move of the Spirit, but not really the same thing. And then in verse nine, and he put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

So there's an evident change of life in turning from sin, right? There was a purifying of their hearts by faith and a work of grace because we are saved by grace through faith.

[26 : 42] Not of ourselves. It is a gift of God, the unmerited favor of God. And so there we see a credible source leading to faith, a witness of the Spirit. It's consistent with who God is.

There's an evident change of life, and it's a work of grace. So Peter stands up and kind of presents this. And then he says in verse 10, Now therefore, why tempt you, God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we are able to bear?

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they. Why tempt you, God?

Tempt God? What does that mean? Temptation means to try whether a thing can be done, to attempt endeavor, right? So they're saying, they're saying, why are you putting God in a position saying, God, can we be saved this way?

Is it possible? Could we do it this way? To endeavor, to put God in a position where you're striving with what you already know is true. You're pushing back against grace and attempting to see if there's another way around the cross.

[27 : 57] They're tempting God saying, hey, maybe we could end around the cross. Again, Galatians 5, verse 1, Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Don't tempt the Lord in the sense of, don't try to figure out a way around him.

The law weighs down where grace sets free, doesn't it? Because he says here that neither our fathers nor we were able to bear this law.

It weighs us down. But what has grace done? Grace has freed us. We are free now. Then all the multitude kept silent. Interesting. So they have a whole multitude.

In verse 6, the apostles and elders came together to consider the matter. But it seems like there is a bunch of people there listening. So almost like the whole church seems to be there. Like, man, this is important.

[28 : 54] This is so important. We all need to be here for this. But yet recognizing that these are the people God has called to lead and we're going to wait and see what he does through them.

Because we recognize it's a work of the Spirit. Then all the multitude kept silent and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles.

It's funny, isn't it? They all kept silent after that. Peter declares, remember when God did this? God did this. God did this. Work of the Spirit. It was grace. And they all quiet down.

Hmm. Because grace silences the law. The law has no response to grace. There's nothing it can say. The other thing that's interesting, I thought, when they begin to declare the miracles and wonders. Legalism denies the miraculous because no miracle ever came by the law.

I can't accept the miraculous. And you picture these guys telling them, and then these miracles were done. And these guys, you got any miracles? None of those either, huh? Thought so. And then this was done.

[29 : 55] You know, there's no, there's nothing miraculous in the law. And so it has to deny that miracles take place. Because miracles are outside of our own ability.

The law we can bring within our own abilities. And they gave audience unto them as they declared all the wonders that God had done. And after they had held their peace, James answered, whoa, who's this?

Where's he coming from? James answered, saying, men and brethren, hearken unto me. This isn't just anybody jumping up and being like, I got a word from the Lord, right? This is a man who had respect and authority and position, not because he was Jesus' half-brother, not because of his, maybe, skill at organization or because of his booming voice, but because of God's calling and anointing upon his life.

And the church is recognizing that. And James answered, saying, men and brethren, hearken unto me. Simon has declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.

And to this agree the words of the prophets as it is written. After this, I'll return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and I'll build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.

[31 : 15] So he's quoting there from Amos chapter 9, verses 11 through 12. Who's he referring to? It's Jesus. There's a double meaning here.

The time when Amos is prophesying this, you know, he's saying, hey, the captivity is going to happen, but I'm going to come back and I'm going to rebuild Jerusalem. And then we see again another foretelling of that.

Israel's in the land again today. But he's going to raise up this tabernacle of David, and that is Jesus. And then the residue of the men, that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who does all these things.

And so we see a work of God is also verified by the word of God. Because James says there, to these agree the words of the prophets as it is written. And he has scripture to verify and back it up.

The men who are coming and saying, keep the law, well, they have scripture in the sense that the law is in the scripture, but it's pulled out of context. There's no more any context for it. They deny, essentially, the finished work of the cross when they apply the law to these men today.

[32 : 19] Where James is correctly taking the scripture, this Old Testament scripture, and leaving it in context and applying it to the situation here. James was a pretty good guy. First Peter, chapter five, tells us about elders.

Verse one through four, says, the elders which are among you, I exhort, whom I'm also an elder. So my favorite scripture is because it says, the elders which are among you. I like that. Because you think, people say, well, the body of Christ spans the whole world.

We're all part of the body. We are, yes. But then there are those that we are among. There are those that God puts us among, that we live among, we dwell among. And so he's saying here, the elders, hey, pastor, the one that you're put among, I exhort you, whom also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed, feed the flock of God which is among you.

Taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, or like pay, but of a ready mind. Neither is being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. That's not something I want to take to myself. Right? As you read through that, I don't want to stand before the chief shepherd and be like, well, I just tried it all on my own strength and, you know, ended up harming your sheep.

[33 : 34] And obviously, this has to be a work that the Lord does. So what's the characteristic of an elder? I'll put this one up there for you. Characteristics of an elder, as we see in James, what James is doing here. He's perceptive, isn't he?

He understands the situation. He's perceiving what's going on as he interjects himself. He's discerning. He's able to apply the scripture to the situation. He's able to interpret and apply the word.

He's willing to speak up on difficult issues. He could have just been like, you know what, Paul, Peter, you're doing a good job. But he realized as he recognized how God's word applied to the situation, I need to speak on this for the sake of the church.

He was called to give, he was called to give church altering direction. He knew his calling and he knew it was his place to give direction to the church. And he had the respect and trust of faithful men because they're all going to go along with him.

They're not going to be like, no, I vote this way. He had the respect of faithful men. And this is who James was as he verifies this work of God by the word. Verse 18, known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

- [34 : 43] Wherefore, my sentence is that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God, but that we write unto them that they abstain from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood.

So he tells them not to trouble them, not to give them more than they can bear. God's new work will always align with God's old work. Right?

He's saying, known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Guys, it's not going to be, it's not going to be some out there thing that God's doing. Right?

We can verify this work of God as we see his old work and his new work aligning. It actually fits to do away with the law because of the fulfillment of the cross.

It does not fit with God's order to keep the law in place. And so he says, hey, here's what I say we do.

- [35 : 41] My sentence is this or my determination, my resolve is this. We don't trouble them or literally that we don't annoy them. I like that. Not to annoy them with this.

Not to put something in their life that's not going to edify them. He says, once the law has done its part in bringing us to Christ, it adds no value anymore. It's time for it to go as we read in Galatians.

But before faith came, we were kept under the law. We were shut up under the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

But after faith has come, we're no longer under a schoolmaster. Once the law has done its part, once it's brought us to Christ, it adds no value in keeping it around. It's done its job.

When you've completed your studies, you've got your degree, you've got your education, you've been trained in that area, and you go into that field, there's not a lot of value of going back through the same course you just did.

- [36 : 42] It's like, well, it's time to move on from that. You know? Unless you didn't understand it the first time. But Jesus completed our course for us. So we don't have to. That's the idea. But we write that you abstain from idols, from pollutions of idols, fornication, and from things strangled and from blood.

That sure sounds like a law. What's he talking about? Well, he's talking about the law of love. He's saying here, guys, all of these things apply to the Jews. We don't need to unintentionally offend them.

Okay? There's a couple. That's one meaning. The other is, I think it's just straight up what he's saying because I think it was natural and normal for the Gentiles to take part in the activities of society, which were pollutions of idols.

Same for fornication. So if they didn't understand how marriage worked because in the culture it was, hey, just go live with the person you love. From fornication, from things strangled, and from blood.

So it would seem, 1 Corinthians chapter 10 tells us in verse 6 through 9, now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted, speaking of Israel.

- [37 : 51] Neither be you idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. He's speaking to the church. Don't be idolaters. Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed and fell in one day, three in 20,000.

Neither let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted and were destroyed of serpents. So he's saying, hey, guys, live in a way that's one pleasing to God and one not stumbling your brethren around you.

And he says this about the law. He says, For Moses of old times has in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.

If the law was going to change the world, guys, it would have already done it. Okay? The law has been read week after week. And what has it done? It's not changed the world. All systems that rely upon man will have their opportunity to be proven ineffective.

All systems that rely upon man are going to have their opportunity to be proven ineffective. Even the law, which relies upon man. It's ineffective in what way?

[38 : 54] To create righteousness. To bring about in society or our own lives a place of righteousness or righteousness. Then it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church to send chosen men of their journey, I'm sorry, chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas, named Barsabbas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.

And they wrote letters by them after this manner to be continued. So Silas eventually is the Silas that will go along with Paul when him and Barnabas split. Here it tells us they're chief men among the brethren.

That's what Silas, he was, along with Judas or Barsabbas as he was named. My guess was every dude back then named Judas took a nickname, you know, who was in the church. Hi, my name is Barsabbas. Nobody wanted to be, you know, Judas.

But so the early church, they did not have congregational rule, but they did have congregational agreement. They were united. There is unity. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 10, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you all speak the same thing.

There be no divisions among you, but you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Again, whenever we see anything that has a potential for division, we need to stop and address it in love and in the spirit.

[40 : 15] They send these messengers. They don't just send a message. The messenger is just as important as the message. They didn't just send it by anybody. You know what? We don't need him around here. He doesn't do too much. Just send him.

No, they sent some of their best guys because they recognized the messenger needed to back up the message. There's no hypocrisy. Their judgment for the Gentiles was verified by an example of those whose lives were willing to abide by the same standards.

They said, guys, these guys who are bringing this letter, live by this same law. There's no hypocrisy. I'm not going to ask you guys to do something we don't. James 1.22 says, but be you doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

So there is a law. A law of what? Liberty. And then they, lastly, they sent men that were, they chose men of their own company.

[41 : 20] Men that were in the end of chapter, I'm sorry, end of verse 22, chief men among the brethren. Among, not above. We're not above each other. So each person has a different calling, has a different role to fulfill, but they're all among one another.

There's no hierarchy here. A move of God among God's people will always operate along the lines of grace. Always. There's no other alternative.

When God moves in his people and you see a move of God, it's along the lines of grace. If it's emotionalism, if it's self-effort, then it's not a move of God. Grace removes the imposition of legalism and replaces it with the joy of the liberty of the Spirit.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. If God's Spirit is not there, there's not going to be liberty. If you find something in your life beginning to pull you in, reign you in, keep you, I don't mean reign you in from sin and putting boundaries on your life.

I mean an idea of a moral law that I have to somehow keep to reach a spiritual position. Then it's not the Spirit. Paul and Barnabas had a hard task if you look through what we've been going through with them.

[42 : 38] It's like, man, guys, it's rough. But they only took things as they, they didn't know what was coming. They just took things one at a time and did the next thing and the next thing and the next thing.

You know, we only can do what God puts in front of us, but there's a way to go about it that brings joy and liberty and freedom for us and others when the Spirit moves in our lives.

And as Paul said, don't be entangled again to a yoke. What did Jesus say about a yoke? My yoke is easy. My burden is light.

Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I'm meek and lowly in heart. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. God wants to put a yoke on you, but only one that's going to lead to liberty, right?

We think boundaries mean containment, chains, but it's freedom. It's freedom when we are encompassed by the Holy Spirit.

[43 : 39] So Father, thank you for your word tonight, Lord. Just an amazing picture and Lord, an amazing reality that without this, without these men doing this hard work, taking the time to sit down, to sift through this stuff, to hit pause in their lives and go, you know, we can't just let this slide.

This could divide the church. You know, this could bring men from the place of freedom and grace and it could bring them back to a place of bondage and despair and discouragement. We need to address this.

And how did they address it? There is some back and forth, there is some much disputing, but you know, you don't see a lot of anger. You don't see people railing on each other.

And then you see when they clearly saw you moving, they took that advice and said, okay, that's the Lord. I recognize that. I recognize that as the Holy Spirit.

Lord, even these Pharisees that believed and thought you should keep the law, when it says here that all, it pleased the apostles, the elders, and whole church, the whole church is in agreement with this.

[44 : 46] Because Lord, who can say no to grace? And how terrible, Lord, to think that we can frustrate your grace. And Paul says, I do not frustrate the grace of God. Well, that means it's possible to frustrate your grace.

And Lord, we saw tonight what that looks like. It's attempting in our own efforts with moral effort to try and attain a spiritual position or a place spiritually in our lives that can only come through the Spirit, that can only come through you and the work that you do.

So Lord, I pray that we remove the ceiling off our lives, that Lord, we would look up and see that you have so much more for us than our own efforts and abilities. And Lord, I pray that you keep division out of our church, Lord.

I pray that we would recognize the work that you are doing among us, and that as one collective, united voice, we would say yes to the work of the Holy Spirit among us. And God, I pray you work powerfully through your grace in our lives to lead to greater freedom, Lord.

And Lord, as you call us to different things, as you raise up one to this ministry and raise up another one to over here, that Lord, we would not try and lord it over one another. But Lord, as stewards and ambassadors for Christ, stewards of the gift of God that you've given us, the grace and the truth, the word, the spirit, that we would look to edify and encourage one another, to come alongside and support and say, I see that work of God in your life.

[46 : 02] I see his hand on you. I see what he's doing. How can I support you? What can I do to help you? Lord, legalism always has a word, but it's not a word of freedom.

It's a word of bondage. It will always tell us what we have to do or else. Jesus, thank you. Grace comes in and tells us what you did, therefore. Lord, you have set us free on the cross, therefore, we can live free.

Pray you bless my brothers and sisters. I just thank you for this opportunity, Lord, again, to hear your word spoken to us and in Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.