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A Vision of the Big Picture

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Acts 15:1-21 ¹Then some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ²So Paul and Barnabas engaged these men in sharp debate. The two of them were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³Sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, recounting the conversion of the Gentiles and bringing great joy to all the brothers. ⁴On their arrival in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and apostles and elders, to whom they reported all that God had done through them. ⁵But some believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and declared, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." ⁶So the apostles and elders met to look into this matter. ⁷After much discussion, Peter got up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that the Gentiles would hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸And God, who knows the heart, showed His approval by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for He cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now then, why do you test God by placing on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹On the contrary, we believe it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." ¹²The whole assembly fell silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul describing the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they had finished speaking, James declared, "Brothers, listen to me! ¹⁴Simon has told us how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people to be His own. ¹⁵The words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written: ¹⁶'After this I will return and rebuild the fallen tent of David. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷so that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does these things ¹⁸that have been known for ages.' ¹⁹It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not cause trouble for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood. ²¹For Moses has been proclaimed in every city from ancient times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." (BSB)

I. Here are the details of this passage.

- A. Some well meaning Christians came from Judea to tell the Gentile Christians that they have to become **Jews** first before they can be saved. V. 1
- B. Paul and Barnabas **debated** with them about this issue. V.2
- C. Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to present their case to the **church leadership** there. V. 2-4
- D. The church had a group of self-righteous believers who insisted that the new believers fit the **Jewish Code** before they can be accepted as believers. V.5
- E. The leaders met and after **much** discussion, Peter stands up and reminds the leaders about His experience with Cornelius. V.6-10
- F. His conclusion was that it is by grace that a person is saved and not by **works**. V.11

- G. Paul and Barnabas then **testify** that the Holy Spirit has been coming on the uncircumcised Gentiles in large numbers. V.12
- H. James then stands up as their leader and shows that Scripture foretold this new thing that God would do and that the new believers should be required to do just a few things from the **Old Testament**. V.13-21

II. What can we learn from this?

- A. **Self-righteousness** has always been a problem in the Christian church.
- B. It is important that we all realize that none of us are worthy of **being saved**.
- C. We must all deal with these issues that the early church wrestled with. Here are some questions to ask yourself: Is this **beneficial**? Is it **constructive**? Is it **addictive**? Does it cause my **weaker** brother to sin? And can I do it in a clear conscience with **faith**?
- D. The key question to ask ourselves as to the legitimacy of our salvation is not "What do we do?" or "What do we not do?" but is the **Holy Spirit** evident in our life.