

Acts 15:1-21

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[0 : 00] I had a break. I think we were in Acts like three weeks ago, maybe, or something like that. I can't quite remember. But I appreciate you being patient with me. I got pretty sick a couple weeks ago. I should say three weeks ago.

I feel like I've been sick for over a month, really, and just kind of out of the game. So thanks for all your prayers. I really, really am grateful. Kathleen and I had a really great week at UAB Hospital, to be honest.

It was really a good time together, even though I wasn't feeling good. And during that time, whenever I go to the hospital, whenever I go back to Birmingham, it's a lot of memories of death, a lot of memories of wrestling with whether or not I was going to live or die, and contemplating eternity and all of that.

So I come back definitely renewed with a hope that I will live for eternity and not just what we see right here. Because what we see here is fleeting. It's short. It doesn't last.

And so I kind of come even with a lot of that in thinking about our text today. So just join me in a word of prayer. Father, this is your time to work amongst the hearts of your people who are gathered.

[1 : 23] And I just ask that our mind's attention and our heart's affection will be placed completely on you. God, just protect us from the heart of your heart. Not what happened before this time or not what's going to happen after this time.

That you would free us of all distractions. God, just protect this time. And may your word encourage, challenge, convict, and build up the body of Christ.

In his name, amen. Amen. So we're in Acts 15. And typical good preaching rules, just to read the text first.

And then we'll dive into it. So I'm going to just rewind a little bit though. Just so you know what's been going on before we dive in. But thus far, really, in Acts, if you look at chapter 14, you see that Paul and Barnabas have kind of gone into the Gentile world.

And they're preaching the gospel to non-Jews. Like the people in the Roman Empire, Greeks, and others. And the gospel is taking effect in people's hearts.

[2 : 35] People are coming to Christ. People are surrendering all they have to the gospel. And it hasn't really come easy. They've suffered persecution. Paul is even stoned, even to the point of death at one point.

And so let's just start at verse 27 of chapter 14. Then we'll go down to 15. So it says, When they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

And they remained no little time with the disciples. So that's sort of the backdrop, is the gospel is going forward to the Gentiles, and people are coming to Christ.

So, in chapter 15, we're going to see a kind of a hiccup, I guess you could say, to the whole mission going to the Gentiles. All right, starting in chapter 15, verse 1.

But 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.

[3 : 49] And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

So being sent on their way by the church, they passed by Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers.

And when they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, it is necessary to circumcise them in order to keep the laws of Moses.

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by the mouth of the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did. And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

[5 : 13] Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus, just as they will. And the assembly fell silent. And they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

After they finished speaking, James replied, Brothers, listen to me. Simeon, that's a form of Peter's name, has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name.

And with this, the words of the prophet agreed, just as it was written, After this, I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it.

And the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord. And all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who makes these things known from old.

[6 : 25] Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality and from things that have been strangled and from blood.

The ancient, excuse me, for from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him. For he is, excuse me, for he is read every Sabbath in the city of God.

So, we're going to unpack all this slowly, kind of scene by scene. But this is a kind of known church-wide as the Council of Jerusalem.

48 or 49 A.D. probably. And it was between the apostles and some other church elders, kind of against the backdrop of the Pharisees and what we would say as the Judaizers.

And I just kind of want to take a moment and say, I challenge you to to read church history, particularly looking at councils of the church throughout the ages.

[7 : 42] Some well-known ones that particularly reform people kind of hold very close. Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. That was when they condemned the Arian heresy.

So, Jesus isn't fully God. That was the heresy and they universally condemned that. Jesus is fully God but also fully man. The Council of Carthage in 418 A.D.

That's when St. Augustine and some other church leaders condemned Pelagius for saying that man was born with a clean slate.

Man was born sinless. So, that was universally condemned. And then also to a lot of people in 1618 the Senate of Dort which condemned Arminianism.

So, a lot of big councils out there but but why, right? Tell me why I should care. Why should I even look at or read these things? Well, look on your your church bulletin if you have it and this is a pretty great statement that R.C.

[8 : 54] Spurl made just about looking at our history, looking at our tradition, looking at church councils and so this is why you should care.

This is what I said. Although tradition does not rule our interpretation of scripture, it does guide it. If upon reading a particular passage you have come up with an interpretation that has escaped the notice of every other Christian for 2,000 years or has been championed by universally recognized heretics, chances are pretty good that you have better abandoned your interpretation.

Is it really good? There's no new truth, there's no new gospel, there's no new things added to what we believe. It's been passed down throughout the ages.

So if you come up with something completely new that has that no one's noticed before or has been universally condemned by the church, there's reason to fear.

So this is one of the earliest, really, church councils we see and it seems to be by those who are on the fringe of the church and not necessarily mainstream.

[10:11] And so for history people you could just say this is the Jerusalem council, the Magna Carta of the Christian church. For people of a more competitive nature you could say this is the apostles versus the Judaizers.

And then one of my favorites for you really, really nerdy theological Puritan types, this is the title of the message, man's fallen tendency to add or improve upon the grace of God in order to prepare himself there unto the final judgment.

If you like that title, personally I like that one. To improve upon the grace of God in order to prepare yourself unto the final judgment.

so, again, I'm going to tell you why you should care. Because if you knew that you were about to go through physical death and then spiritually entering to eternity and to the judgment, what are you placing your hope in?

It's all cool and theological just on paper, but deep down you're going to want to hope in something that's true and secure that gives your soul peace and not in the back of your mind is saying, I hope I did what I had to do.

[11:40] I hope that I did all the good things I could do and that I believed all the right things. Where is your hope going to be? Is it going to be in your own goodness and your works or is it going to be in the finished, completed, work of Jesus Christ?

So there's three points and then we'll get into some more application later. But I'm kind of doing this as a scene one, scene two, scene three of all this.

But in verses one through five you see the first point which is scene one, the dissension. So this is the problem that's going on. And as I said before, Paul and Barnabas have been out in the Gentile world preaching the gospel.

People have been coming to faith. Great things are happening. They have pressed on regardless of persecution or any other thing. And now all that they've done is being called into question by those who hold to the law of Moses.

So these are Jews who say, yeah, like Jesus, he was the Messiah, amen, but we have to keep all the old stuff as well if we're going to continue to do this.

[12:59] And we have to instruct the Gentiles to also observe all these things. So their mission was being called them to question. And so I guess in the early days you could say that you might think that the biggest threats to the church were from the outside, physical persecution, but really I'm fully convinced that the greater threats, the greater dangers come from within the church by way of false teaching.

It destroys it from the inside out. In 2 Peter chapter 2, Peter says, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

And among these destructive heresies, the longest living one, the longest living heresy ever, and it comes in so many different forms, religions, traditions, cultural ideals, it's the heresy that you can achieve the right standing and salvation with God by your own merit, by how you work, by how good you are, by the good things that you do, because it is within our fallen nature, it is the hardest thing for a fallen man to admit that he needs the grace of God.

We are so works-driven in all that we do, all of you are, no matter what you do. You do it in school, you do it in sports, you do it in friendships and relationships, you feel like you have to earn, you feel like people have to pay you back, it's a merited-based thing, you feel like you're loved by people based on your own goodness a lot of the time.

It's in us, it's in our deepest part to think that we can achieve this, and it carries into the spiritual realm, like we can do enough good in order to be right before God.

[15:10] that's in us very deeply, and I love how it kind of says there was no small dissension and debate, like they were ticked that these guys were saying this stuff, and so they kind of went right at them, and so what is the dissension, like what is the question?

And so you see that in verse 1 and in verse 5, these Jews were saying, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

Then in verse 5, it is necessary to circumcise them, the Gentiles, and to order them to keep the law of Moses. So that was a huge point of contention in the early church, and that is simply, how much does a Gentile convert to Christ, how much of the law of Moses did they need to obey?

Because Gentiles are sort of newcomers, right? Israel were the people that God had shown himself to, and given his law to. So this is a big deal. Should Gentile believers submit to all the requirements of the law of Moses given to the Jewish nation, especially circumcision, in order to be a part of the church?

You get asked that question today. I can't tell you how many times on the college campus you get asked a question by either a, you know, an unbeliever who will say, well, what about Leviticus?

[16:42] What about all those laws in there? You say you believe the Bible literally, so what about, are you supposed to do this, this, and this, and this? So it's applicable very much to everyone here.

How much of the law are we supposed to follow? So the Jewish law, I'm going to get into that more next week. I'm just going to talk about the law, and so give you a one-on-one on the law, but very simple, you know, glazing over it, there are moral laws, that's the Ten Commandments, that is like, tells us what sin is and how to honor God.

Those are actually still in effect for us today as believers, those have not been done away with at all. Other ones are a more ceremonial nature, circumcision, rituals, festivals, purity and cleansing that they had to do, the way that they dressed.

I love when I get asked the question about tattoos, like I love that question. So, like, so what do you do about that, right? So there's these things that God gave the nation of Israel to act like and to do, to set themselves apart from other nations.

So circumcision, though, seems to be the biggest one, a big one. And that comes from, really, Genesis 17, 9-14. And circumcision was an outward sign that you belong to the people of God.

[18:11] And it also was an outward expression that you were devoted to keeping the law of Moses. But, I'll just go ahead and throw this out there. Circumcision, in its truest form, was an outward expression of an inward need.

it was saying, like, I need God to circumcise my heart. What Daniel just read a little while ago is a perfect picture of that. We need new hearts.

God has to take out our heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh so that we can walk in a way that pleases God. So that's really what circumcision was. But these guys saw it as, like, a cultic right to be circumcised, to have male converts who are Gentile go through this process.

So, here's the danger. Here's the two points of contention. Okay? Number one, it's dangerous to the gospel, the true gospel, because they were arguing that Gentiles had to do all this stuff in order to be made right with God.

So, therefore, it is a works-based righteousness and salvation. So, the true essence of the gospel is being threatened. Secondly, a big one, the church's unity.

[19:31] The church's unity is being threatened. So, Gentiles have to adhere to all of the Mosaic law. That means that they have to leave their own communities and leave the Gentiles to be separated from them.

They wouldn't be able to eat with them, to have fellowship with them, because they would be considered ceremonially unclean by Jewish law.

And even taking the Lord's Supper, they wouldn't have been able to do that with their fellow Gentiles who believed. So, just for further reading on that, look at Romans, you don't got to turn there, but just write Romans 2, 25 through 29, for just some more reading on just the law itself.

So, false teaching was threatening the gospel itself and the church's unity. So, this is a big deal. And the attitude of the Judaizers seems to be like self-appointed leaders.

Seems to be haughty. Seems to be superior. We are holier than you guys. And so, we're going to come down here and inform you, you ignorant Gentiles, that that's great you have Jesus, but you also need this other stuff in order to rightly honor God.

[20:50] Like, your faith is not sufficient. You have to have this plus. And in their minds, you've got to think about where they're coming from. They're like, we're the Jews.

Like, we are the people that God has disclosed himself to for thousands of years. Like, he's given us his laws, given us his statutes. And even when Jesus was here, he was a Jew, and he upheld the law of Moses.

But he did it to fulfill it. Insert that. But surely, right, they must be thinking, it's God's will for us to go and educate and teach these ignorant Gentiles about all the stuff that they don't know in order to make them more holy, acceptable, and devoted to God.

Yeah, Jesus is good, but you need plus the Mosaic law to be right before God. So, big deal. So, this didn't go without opposition, as we see.

The apostles, I love that, like it says, that Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them. So, they're like, whoa, if you think you're going to go and corrupt them, think again.

[22 : 01] We're going to go to Jerusalem, we're going to sort this out. So, that's where they go. They're going to go deal with this. It's just an issue that's too big for just a small local congregation to figure out.

So, this is a church-wide thing. So, that's what, that's the problem. That's the dissension. That's the question that's being asked. I'm going to tell you why you should care later if you don't already care. But then let's just move into scene two. Scene two is the discussion. So, the dissension and now the discussion. And that's seen in verses six through eighteen.

So, just sort of setting the scene. It says the apostles and the elders. So, they're providing like the main opposition, the main debate in leadership over the council.

But I want you to kind of see this. Okay? This is why we are an elder-led, but we are also congregational here at Christ's Family. But if you look at verse twenty-two, it says that the whole church was present for this momentous occasion, and they also gave consent to the final outcome.

[23 : 16] It wasn't like, we're just these humble people down here and we have to rely on these apostles to be like a direct connection to God. So, it was a church-wide thing that was consented to.

So, whenever there is a serious spiritual, doctrinal issue under consideration, congregation, okay? How should we deal with it?

Think about it, just here in our own congregation. Our example is right here in our text. Look at verse seven. It says, after there was much debate. So, important decisions are not decided by haunches we have, feelings, our opinions.

They are decided by prayer, humility, wisdom, careful logic, and reason from the scriptures. That happens right here. They use the scripture to back up what they're trying to say.

So, the first guy to kind of weigh in is Peter. So, if I could think I have some guys on my team, I would want Peter on my team and I would want Paul on my team. And I think that would be probably it in regard to dealing with, in terms of how much of the Jewish law do we have to obey.

[24 : 30] I just wish I could have been there, but this is a big deal. So, Peter kind of weighs in. And he says, like in the early days, probably referring to when he was used to go to the house of Cornelius and to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

But I'm going to show you, just with Peter, three arguments that he kind of uses to say, no circumcision for the Gentiles, no mosaic law for the Gentiles.

So, you see the first argument in verse 8. And he's saying that like God has given approval of the faith of the Gentiles, who placed their faith in Christ by giving them the Holy Spirit.

So, they received the Holy Spirit without being circumcised and without the mosaic law. So, he was saying, they didn't do those things.

And God himself, through the power of the gospel, regenerated their hearts and gave them the Holy Spirit. Maybe today, you might compare it to people in the church and say, you have to be baptized in order to have, in water, in order to have the Holy Spirit, or at conversion.

[25 : 46] So, that's his first argument. God gave them the Holy Spirit. Argument 2 is in verse 9. And he's referring to the reality that God had cleansed their hearts by faith, not by works of the law or by circumcision.

He might have even had a memory of Cornelius again when God spoke to him in that vision and said, hey, what God has called clean, do not call common. God has cleaned them, so don't look on them and say that your faith is not good enough and that you are still unclean.

That Spirit-born faith. Okay? God had cleansed them. The third argument in verse 10, and I love this because he just kind of poses a rhetorical question, kind of like revealing that no human being can keep the law of God perfectly.

perfectly. So, again, the law, we're going to give you a quick rundown next week, but I hope it was more appropriate for next week. But Peter says in regard to the Mosaic Law, like, why in the world are we Jews trying to place such a heavy burden, a heavy yoke, on the shoulders of the Gentiles when none of our forefathers, and we, cannot carry it?

Like, are you crazy? We cannot place this burden on them. And the metaphor, just look at the word in the verse yoke, it's like this heavy burden, something that an oxen would carry.

[27 : 26] It refers to the law, not just circumcision, but the entire Mosaic Law. Paul refers to the law as a yoke of slavery.

And by speaking of the law as an unbearable yoke, Peter is not denying that the law is still a good thing.

It's a good thing, because it tells us what dishonors God and what pleases God. It was a gift from God, but it was not intended to be the means by which you were made right with God.

It's to expose the reality that you can't be made right with God according to your own works. you can't keep the law perfectly. The law itself never provides people with the spiritual power to keep it. We need something else in order to keep the law. It's what Daniel read earlier. It's like we need God to change our hearts. We need to be born again. We need to be regenerated by the power of the Spirit to keep the law perfectly.

[28 : 30] So, that's what he's trying to say. This law was to show you that you can't do it. It was to point you to the Savior who could do it.

You need deliverance. You need the Savior. So, then he kind of wraps up in verse 11 with that closing, kind of going back to the thesis here. He kind of closes and he says, but we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will.

the only means of salvation for both Jew and Gentile comes only as a gift of God by his grace. And the connecting point of that is our faith, our complete trust in the Savior to save us.

So, that's Peter. Then he does a mic drop and everybody's quiet. And then Paul and Barnabas stand up and they speak out in defense of God's work through them and the Gentiles.

Look at the verses. They related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. So, he had given them great success in their mission to the Gentiles.

[29 : 44] And I want to be clear here. Paul and Barnabas aren't using experience to prove what happened or to prove something true. They're just trying to say like, this happened and we experienced it because God said it would.

He promised that this would happen and now we're seeing it. He's not saying, well, these good things happen so it must be true. They're saying, he's saying, God promised these things would happen and now we see them and God is true.

Big difference. So, that's what they kind of say. We saw God work among us. He did wonders among the Gentiles. And then lastly, James stands up.

And this is James, the brother of Jesus. He kind of weighs in on the argument. And he says, well, you heard Peter, you heard Paul and Barnabas, but I want to tell you that what they just said is supported heavily by Scripture.

That's kind of what he stands up and says here. And he refers to the prophets in verse 15. And he really could appeal to many, many, many Old Testament texts that defend the inclusion of the Gentiles and the people of God.

[31 : 01] Isaiah 45, 21 is one verse. Isaiah 45, 21. But James refers to Amos 9, 11 through 12, the prophet Amos.

And Amos is speaking of a time when God would include the Gentiles called by his name. If you were called by God's name, it implies relationship.

It implies salvation. And he's saying that the Gentiles will be included in the people of God. They will be included in the rebuilding of the house of David.

Pretty awesome. So this was foretold. So he kind of is saying, you know, I concur with them, but I just want you to know that God is always foretold this. He was going to do it, and now we're seeing it.

It's happening right now. So that's the, you know, the discussion, the debate. Brings us to the third thing, scene three, is the decree, the decree, or he could say the decision.

[32 : 10] So what's the outcome here? That's verse 19 through 21. So here's the final decree. How much of the law, the mosaic law, does a Gentile believer have to obey to be saved?

Does he have to be circumcised? And the answer is a resounding no. Keeping the mosaic law, rituals, sacrifices, customs, are not required of a Gentile believer to be a part of the church.

the only part of the law that's really valid, which we'll get into next week, is the moral law. And the next few verses are evidence of that, to keep the moral law.

But God has clearly chosen to include people of all nations in the church. So the old restrictions that set Israel apart don't apply anymore. Only by faith and trusting in Christ.

So I'm just going to read to you Acts 13, 28, real fast. It says, Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes or has faith is set free from everything from which you could not be free by the law of Moses.

[33 : 30] Couldn't happen. So, James goes on, and he proposes a solution. So, we know that Jews and Gentiles are going to come into contact with each other.

So what do we tell them? How do we move forward without saying you have to keep the whole Mosaic law? What do we tell them? How does the mission go forward? And so, that's what we'll get into a lot more next week.

But he kind of has a condition. It's like, this is what we need to do. This is what we need to tell the people out there in order to interact with one another. other. So he humbly offers a suggestion for the fellowship of Jews and Gentiles.

And this letter goes out to all the different churches as the gospel goes forward. So, that's kind of unpacking our text.

So, some application. question. Why should you care? Okay? There's a few things I have for you. But one is, in a room this size, I can guarantee that there are some of you here who are still convinced that you will be made right with God, that you will be saved by your own goodness and by your own works.

[34 : 50] You're convinced, like you're even not liking what I'm saying right now. You really are convinced that as long as your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, or as long as you go to enough religious events, that you try to do good to all people, that you're moral, that you will be okay before God one day.

If you've been baptized, if you take the Lord's Supper, if you're just a good person, then God will accept you. No. You need to hear this short verse, Romans 3, verse 20.

Listen to this. For by the works of the law, you can insert good deeds or goodness, for by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in God's sight.

You will not be made right with God at all by how good you are. Because the Bible says you are rotten. Jesus says you are a slave to sin. You may be good compared to a lot of other people in this world, but you're not compared to God.

God is perfect. He is holy. He is flawless. He can't abide evil. Some of you may be in the group of the Pharisees. What other churchy laws have you added to the gospel?

[36 : 15] He can't be a Christian if he has a beer. He can't be a Christian if he has a cigar. He can't be a Christian if he doesn't wear a suit and tie. Or you can flip it the other way around very easily.

What other laws have you added? It's very dangerous. The gospel of Jesus plus this is not the gospel. It's adulterated.

It's not pure. Some of you are the older brother who is angry at the father who gives salvation to unworthy prodigals. does that bother you that God gives salvation to unworthy people?

Do you think, oh no, well, I've been good so I deserve it? You don't. For by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in God's sight. Your righteous deeds are filthy rags before God.

So abandon it. Give it up. Lay it all down and only come to God on God's terms, which is by faith in Christ alone. Some of you, kind of stepping it down a tiny notch from there, some of you may have a partial trust in your own goodness and behavior, just as a little extra security, just in case you fear that your faith is not going to be enough.

[37 : 37] I hope it is, but in case it's not, I'm going to go to church every Sunday. I'm going to feed the poor. I'm going to be nice to everyone around me. You may have a partial trust in your own goodness and you're afraid that your just plain, naked faith in Christ is not enough.

Turn to, I finally said it, turn to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8. I just want to use a very familiar text. Ephesians 2 verse 8.

This is good for everything we've said so far, but if you're afraid that you're afraid to come before the throne of God one day, the just faith alone, and you feel like you have to have some other good stuff piled on it, chapter 2 verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith.

All right? So let's look at this. Grace, why has this happened? Because of the sheer undeserved, unmerited favor of God.

He decided it out of his own goodness, though you don't deserve it. For by grace you have been saved. Saved from what? The wrath of God, the judgment of God.

[39 : 03] That's what you've been saved from. And what was that instrument? That connected you to the Savior? Faith. Faith. Trust and confidence in the body of Christ that was destroyed on the cross.

And then his resurrection. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And he says, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

So if you think that your works are what saves you and makes you right before God, you could boast before God like, look how good I did, look how terrible this guy did.

I have more than he did, and God says that he will not share his glory with any of you. He will not. He is the only Savior. He's giving you no grounds to boast.

Right? So where does good works come in? Verse 10, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[40 : 09] So that is a purpose that we do as believers. We do good works out of an overflow of our thankfulness and goodness towards God, not because it saves us.

He just says it's not a result of this. true faith, true belief, is not just, oh yeah, I know that.

I get it. It's such a deeply hearted conviction that it changes how you live. It's not just, I ascend to this and I understand it.

I believe this so deep in my soul that it's going to affect how I live out here. That's what real faith is. That's how the Bible uses the term. Some of you are timid and confused.

You don't really know what to kind of think of all this. But if you've been told that your faith in Christ alone isn't enough, that you just feel the weight of your sin, you're like, I can't be made right with God.

[41 : 08] I stink at this. I break the rules all the time. I break my own rules. I can't much less keep God's rules. And you feel that burden, that yoke crushing you down.

I can't do it. Well, let it go. And simply place faith in Christ. When Peter calls the law a yoke, he probably is referring to what Jesus said about it.

Turn to Matthew 11. It's the last place you've got to turn to Matthew 11. Matthew 11, verse 28. And this is what Jesus is referring to when he uses this verse.

He's referring to the law. So do you feel that? Do you feel like you're not good enough? That you're being crushed by trying to live up to God's standard?

And you're afraid to face him on the judgment? Well, listen to what Jesus says. Verse 28. He says, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[42 : 21] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. He's saying, give it to me and you take mine because I'm the only one that can keep the law and I kept it perfectly.

Allow me to take that, you, and I will give you mine. It's an invitation. God always favors the weak and the despairing, the burden.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those of you who are bankrupt spiritually, come to Jesus and he will carry your burden.

Okay? So two others. There are some of you here who are relying on your own goodness and I'm guilty of this one. Okay? Some of you who are relying on your own goodness to possibly earn a greater favor with God.

[43 : 25] Like you know God loves you. You know God has saved you by his grace, but you just think, you know, if I'm just a little better than the average Christian, if I just try hard, God will give me a little extra favor, a little extra love.

I'll be the favorite and he'll give me something I really desire. So do you seek to earn God's approval through your own efforts? And you kind of said to yourself, I know he loves me, but if I work extra hard and don't sin as much as some others do, he'll love me even more.

Or do you rely on a strict list of do's and don'ts to, on the daily flow to gain higher approval from God? Listen, like, if that's how you feel, just hear these words echo in your head.

Don't look any further than the cross for any evidence that God loves you. If he's given his own son for you, if he's given you his son, like, what else could he give to prove that he loves you?

And if he gives you something good, it's because he's good, not because you deserve it. Jesus said, if you who are evil, give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father give you all good things, right?

[44 : 46] Trust in his goodness. Don't think it's going to gain you a higher favor with God. And then, if your heart's kind of right this morning, if mine really hasn't been, in regard to some of this, it's the people here who are rejoicing in the true gospel and the true Savior.

You're at that piece. You've said, I boast of nothing I've done before the throne. I only have the righteousness of Christ to come before the throne of God on the final judgments.

I will plead what Jesus has done and not what I have done before the throne one day. I will trust in his merits. That's the only place to be.

We have to fight to be there even as believers because you're going to be convinced on a daily basis that God's going to love you by how good you are and how much you read your Bible or how much you pray or anything.

You're going to think, I've done all these things so God must be really pleased with me today. His love doesn't go like this. It's steady. It's constant. He's faithful to us.

[45 : 52] So, next week we're going to unpack this peculiar letter that still applies really for us today. And what should we, as most of us Gentile believers, what should we follow?

What should we think about moving forward as a church? So, let's trust in the undeserved favor of God and his grace alone, only in the true Savior.

And when you close your eyes one day and final death, that's where your hope's got to be.

Because you're never going to be good enough. You're never going to do enough good. Only in Christ.

Just pray with me.