

Acts 15:1-12

“Salvation Is by Grace through Faith!”

Sunday, June 29 at 9:00 + Monday, June 30 at 7 PM

St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles – 2014

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Today, *on June 29*, we remember the faithful Christian lives of Peter and Paul. We remember them **FOR** our own instruction and encouragement, but **NEVER** to pray to them (1 Tim. 2:5) or worship them (Rev. 22:8-9)!

Today’s text, *from Acts 15*, includes → both Peter and Paul, → a dispute about the way to be saved, → consideration of that topic, and → a definite answer.

1. **Some Insisted on Circumcision for Salvation:**

a. **Vv. 1-3:** ¹ Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. //

- i. From Judea to Antioch: A distance of about 300 miles; those who made the trip were very determined to emphasize that *circumcision is necessary for salvation!*
- ii. Circumcision: Regarding salvation, is it required or not? We will come back to that. But what are some people asking today:

What about church attendance **or** Bible study **or** doing good, *are such things required or not?* Some are wondering: *Am I really saved?*

- iii. Salvation – nothing is more important: Therefore, they were willing to travel about 300 miles to fully settle the matter.
 - iv. Traveling and telling: Earlier (*as recorded in Acts 13 and 14*) Paul and Barnabas had witnessed the conversion of many uncircumcised Gentiles; so, *as they traveled to Jerusalem*, they shared that good news **“which made all the brothers very glad!”**
- b. **Vv. 4-5:** ⁴ **When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.** ⁵ **Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.”** // So what about circumcision – required or not?
- i. The LORD said to Abraham: ¹⁰ “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you...: Every male among you shall be circumcised... ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male... will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” (Gen 17:10, 14 NIV)
 - ii. Earlier Peter had been criticized: Some Jews, who were circumcised and prominent, had heard that Peter had brought God’s Word to Cornelius – *an uncircumcised Gentile*. **“So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him...”** (Acts 11:2 NIV)

- iii. The key question: God certainly required circumcision, **but for how long?** For all time OR only until the Savior came and finished His work? The Lutheran Study Bible gives this explanation: “By removal of the foreskin, males received a visible sign of God’s promise to send a Savior... No Hebrew male could live a day without being reminded of the promise God had made... Finally, the shedding of blood [from each circumcision] pointed to our final redemption by the shedding of Christ’s blood.” (41)
2. **The Question of Circumcision was Considered:** ⁶ **The apostles and elders met to consider this question.** //
- a. Dr. Kretzmann wrote: “It is the same false and dangerous doctrine which has cropped up in the Church at all times, namely, that the keeping of the Law is essential for meriting salvation.” (NT I:608) In other words, if we say that salvation is Christ plus anything – circumcision, attendance, Bible study, etc., then we have turned God’s gift into our work☺ and separated ourselves from the only Savior!
- b. So on what basis was the question answered? Not on human thoughts, feelings, or assumptions, **but** on ♦God’s Holy Word (Ps. 119:160) and ♦God’s powerful work – *in the lives of many uncircumcised Gentiles.*
3. **Peter Gave the Answer:** ⁷ **After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe [Acts 10].** ⁸ **God, who knows the heart [1 Chronicles 28:9], showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.** ⁹ **He made no**

distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ **Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?”** ¹¹ **“No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”** // Two key realities:

- a. No distinction between us and them: Between the *circumcised* and the *uncircumcised*, **God made no distinction** – *so neither should we!*
- b. We are saved by grace through faith: Peter could have said: Since we are saved by grace through faith, *so are they!* The law condemns all of us – *Jews and Gentiles*, since none of us can keep it perfectly! Therefore, God loved us and gave His Son – *even though we are undeserving*; that is grace! Then God went further by uniting us to His Son through faith!
4. **The Congregation Listened:** ¹² **The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.** // So after Peter had spoken, Paul and Barnabas went on to tell of God’s work to save many Gentiles (as recorded in Acts 13-14) – not because of their works or circumcision, **but by grace through faith!** We are also saved **by grace through faith!**

Conclusion: Peter and Paul were powerfully used by God to spread the essential message of *our sin* and *God’s work of salvation!* This is the account of the end of their lives according to the book: “Foxes Christian Martyrs of the World,” pages 8-9...

As they lived by faith and died in Christ, *may our Father in heaven grant us the same!* And all God’s people said: **Amen!**