



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Great Lion of God, Acts 14:20 – 15:12

“Doctrinal Problems in Antioch”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the opportunity that is ours to study the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the way that they minister to us. Deliver us, Lord, from things that may be displeasing to Thee, and we pray that, if it should please Thee that, others too who have a longing to know Thee better and to have that one on one relationship that our brother is speaking about with the Lord Jesus may be led to come to churches where the word of God is proclaimed. And we pray especially for that brother and his family, Allan Abraham, and ask Lord that Thou wilt guide them into an assembly of believers in South Africa where he may be ministered to from the word of God and may grow in grace and feel the fellowship that true believers should have with one another in the things of Christ. We commit him and his family to Thee. In Jesus name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we're turning to Acts chapter 15, and our subject is “Doctrinal Problems in Antioch.” Paul's first missionary journey, remember, has concluded with the last few statements of Acts chapter 14, and I think I would like to read verse 20 through

25 again just that we might feel and sense the general context of this section. Luke writes about the apostles and disciples,

“Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, (now this is the Antioch in Syria, not the Antioch in Pisidia in Asia Minor) thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.”

So this is the conclusion of Paul’s first missionary journey, and it is probably around the year 49 or 50, probably 49 or so A.D. Now there is an interesting comment that the Apostle Paul makes concerning this in one of his letters, and I’d like for you to turn over to 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 10 and verse 11 in order that you might see that many of the things that the apostle wrote in his letters were things that were reflections and sometimes explanations of things that had happened in his ministry. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 10, speaking to Timothy now he says, “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.” You remember at Lystra he was stoned, and he was taken for dead, but the disciples stood round about him and he came

back to consciousness, and one of the interesting things about this statement here is that the persecutions that are referred to are described in the same order in which the apostle carried out his ministry according to the Book of Acts. We read, “At Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra,” and that was the order in which he made his journeys.

In other words, the Book of Acts written independently of the letter that Paul wrote to Timothy agrees with it. There is one other interesting thing too. Did you notice the omission of reference to Derbe? Now it was Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, but not Derbe was mentioned here. But the reason for this is likely this: that the apostle is talking about persecutions, and if you look back at Acts chapter 14, you will see that so far as Acts 14 is concerned, there is no reference to the effect that he suffered any persecutions in Derbe. So one can see again the harmonious way in which the apostle’s letters harmonize with the history that Luke has written for us in the Book of Acts.

Now, we read at the end of Acts chapter 14 and verse 28, “And there they abode long time with the disciples.” So he’s going to stay in Antioch now for no little time, the Greek text says. Now there are several important points here I think that we ought to note, and one of these is that the apostle will have a problem with some Judaizers.

Now he will describe this in some detail in Acts chapter 15 and also describe the way in which that was settled by the church in Jerusalem in consultation with the believers who came down from Antioch in Syria. But there is another passage in Paul’s writings that bears on this and it’s found in Galatians chapter 2 in verse 11 through verse 14, and I’d like for you to turn over there in order to see again how the apostle’s epistles should be integrated into the history of the Book of Acts. Now in Galatians chapter 2 the apostle writes of a visit that he took to Jerusalem. Scholars differ over this and some excellent scholars believe that when the apostle describes a visit to Jerusalem in Galatians chapter 2 that he is speaking about the visit described in Acts chapter 15. It is my opinion, and the opinion of a number of other scholars such as F.F. Bruce, for example,

that the visit to Jerusalem that is described in Galatians chapter 2 is not the visit of Acts chapter 15, but the visit described in Acts chapter 11.

Now, that's unimportant except in so far as harmonizing the details of the apostle's life and ministry. So we'll take it that this occurred before the third visit of Paul described in Acts chapter 15. But now you can see that at this period of time in the apostle's ministry he is troubled both where he is and also by the activities of men in the churches which he has founded. He is troubled by Judaizers. That is, individuals who have attached themselves to the Christian movement, more or less, some evidently true believers, but some not true believers, but all of whom are confused over the nature of the gospel. They want to add circumcision to faith in Christ.

And here in Antioch, they have come down to Antioch, and the apostle writes to the Galatians, evidently because he is concerned. He's heard reports that these churches Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, the churches that he had been involved in founding are being troubled by these men who are going in among the men whom he had taught and are telling them, “Now Paul is told you some things that are right, but Paul has told you some things that are wrong. And furthermore, we come from Jerusalem and therefore we're in touch with the pillar apostles. And Paul is something of an interloper so far as they're concerned. He wasn't an original apostle. And we come from Jerusalem, and therefore you should listen to us.”

Now, we read in verse 11,

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them

all, If thou, (Peter) being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?”

So, the apostle writes to the believers in Asia Minor churches that he had founded probably in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe and tells them about the dangers of the teaching of the Judaizers. But evidently Antioch, since it has become the center of the Christian movement, is to be rather continually plagued by individuals like this. So, at this time in the apostolic history and at this time in Paul’s ministry, he is troubled with Judaizers. And in some of his other books, like 2 Corinthians, written in the generally same period of time, he will write about the Judaizers.

Well, the problems evidently in Antioch became so great, and remember Paul is there for “no short time,” not brief, literally, “a time not a little.” He was probably there about two years, and so these incidents took place, the one involving Peter, and by the time the Jerusalem Council takes place Peter has evidently been straightened out by Paul, and so the Judaizers are still coming and they’re still troubling the saints in Antioch. And so they find it necessary then to have what we know as the Jerusalem Council.

Philip Schaff, who has written a very, very detailed church history, and one of the finest, even though it is rather old, says this about the men who were the Judaizers, he said, “They were Christians in name, but narrow-minded and narrow-hearted Jews in fact. They were scrupulous, pedantic, slavish formalists, ritualists, and traditionalists of the malignant type. Circumcision of the flesh was to them of more importance than circumcision of the heart, or at all events an indispensable condition of salvation. Such men could, of course, not understand and appreciate Paul, but hated and feared him as a dangerous radical and rebel. Envy and jealousy mixed with their religious prejudice.” Now let me hasten to say that some of these men evidently were believers as we shall read here in just a moment, but nevertheless they were confused concerning the gospel.

There are people today who are confused concerning the gospel, but are probably genuine believers.

On the other hand, there are people who are confused in the same way about the gospel who are not believers. It's very difficult for us at times to be absolutely certain of the salvation of some people who are confused doctrinally because logically, if we are confused doctrinally, logically we should believe things that are non-Christian and thus that would raise questions about our Christianity. But as we've tried to point out so often, not too many of us are completely and consistently logical. All of us have those difficulties of logic by which we hold things that are not really so consistent with one another. Some of us have big charlie horses between the ears and others have little charlie horses between the ears, and occasionally, even some of the best of us have just a little twitch every now and then that causes us to think inconsistently.

Now with that as a kind of introduction, let's think about the Council of Jerusalem because this is an extremely important event and were it not for the fact that the Apostle Paul and Barnabas and the others associated with them had stood for the truth of free grace, there is no telling what the history of the Christian church might have turned out to be. In fact one would think, as you read this particular period of church history, that there was really just one man who seemed to understand the grace of God thoroughly and was willing to back up his understanding with spiritual courage to stand in front of the other believers and rebuke even apostles for their false understanding of truth. And had not Paul stood in Antioch and rebuked Peter, who was living inconsistently now by refusing to have fellowship, table fellowship, with the Gentiles which he had been enjoying previously, if Paul had not done what he had done we would have had a very legalistic Christianity if we would have had Christianity at all by the time of the 20th century, speaking humanly. Of course, from the divine standpoint all of this is arranged by the Lord God and he's intended that we should have Christianity in the 20th century,

but Paul is the figure, the human figure, that God has used to give us so much clarity in the understanding of the word of God.

The Council of Jerusalem, we call it, but like so many other popular church expressions, it's somewhat misleading. We talked, for example, about the Great Commission, and we think of Matthew chapter 28 and our Lord's commission given to the apostles. But the Great Commission of the Bible is the commission that God the Father gave to God the Son. That's the greatest commission.

Or we talk about the Lord's Prayer and refer to the section that Jesus gave as a model prayer, never prayed by the Lord, only the Lord's Prayer in the sense that he is the one who gave this model prayer. And furthermore, when he gave it he said don't pray like the heathen do with endless repetitions, pray like this. And so what do we do, every Sunday morning in our churches we repeat the Lord's Prayer endlessly and repetitiously, not paying a bit of attention to how it was introduced, but it sounds so good.

Or the Apostle's Creed, the Apostle's Creed is a familiar expression, and I'm sure that in heaven the apostles will all stand around and say, “I never knew the Apostle's Creed,” [Laughter] because the Apostle's Creed is something that was invented after the death of all the apostles. But we call it the Apostle's Creed. It's not the Apostle's Creed. Well, it is the Apostle's Creed if we understand what we mean by that. It's a creed in which the teaching is largely in harmony with what the apostles taught, and so in that sense we can call it the Apostle's Creed.

Now the Council at Jerusalem, it was not a convention of delegates. It was a meeting of Antioch with Jerusalem, these two churches. The purpose was consultation. The purpose was not to issue an authoritative decree. They did issue an opinion and sent a letter around to churches, but it was not an authoritative decree like a denomination might issue after the general assembly has met which is officially binding upon all of the churches. We also may add that the authority was that of the apostles and elders and not the authority of the church. So, Council at Jerusalem is not really too great a name for

this consultation, but we’re not going to change what people call it. They will call it that. Therefore, we just, when we call it ourselves, we ought to understand actually what it was.

The consultation involved the principle of grace and human salvation, and therefore there was strife there. There can never be true presentation of the grace of God without strife. It’s important for us to remember that. And the more we understand the grace of God in its finest points the more likely we are to encounter just what Paul encountered there, static. In fact the Greek word from which we get the English word “static” is used here, translated “dissent.” So there is always dissent when the grace of God is proclaimed. It’s natural. The Lord Jesus, as I’ve said so often, calling your attention to a text that sometimes we overlook, “He came to bring division.”

So at Antioch they’re going to discuss grace, and so there is going to be a good bit of offense to the natural man because the natural man does not like grace, naturally. The cross, we have said, is an offense to morality because works cannot justify. Character will never take a man to heaven. It will however take a man to hell. It is contrary to philosophy because the appeal of the gospel is to faith and not to reason, although reason is proper as long as it is subjected to Divine Revelation. It is contrary to culture because its truths are revealed to the simple. It is contrary to our natural sense of cast because God chooses the poor and the humble. It is something that is an offense to our will because it calls for unconditional surrender. And it is an offense to our pride because it reveals the exceeding sinfulness of our heart. It’s an offense to us ourselves, to our persons, because it says you must be born again.

Now we might have thought that since Cornelius was saved through the preaching of Peter, and Cornelius was a Gentile, that that would have settled the problem of the Gentiles, but even Peter did not realize all of the implications of the salvation of Gentiles. And though he was the one who the Lord had used to bring the knowledge of the gospel to Cornelius and get him saved, he still didn’t understand the full implications of the

salvation that he had proclaimed, that dealt with the fact of Gentile salvation. That was evidence that a Gentile could be saved.

But now, of course, the question arises if a Gentile is saved, does he have to become a Jew in order to be saved, or here we come to the method of Gentile salvation, must they, as Gentiles in the Old Testament, when they came to the knowledge of the true God, Yahweh, become a member of Israel, become a proselyte? And so, the question arose is it necessary for them to be circumcised and thus united with those who belong to the Abrahamic covenant? That was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, and all who belonged to that covenantal people of God had to have their males circumcised. That was the sign. That marked a person out as being a true child of Abraham. Now, of course the Bible goes on to say that it's more than that. Not all who are of Israel are Israel because an Israelite must not only be circumcised and thus belong to the objective outward covenantal family, but he also must have faith in the redeemer to come in order to be truly one of God's elect Israel.

Now, that's what Paul argues in Romans 9, and you all know about that or at least you know in part about it, and so we don't have to talk about it here. Here the question is what about the salvation of the Gentiles and the method of their salvation? So I want you to notice first of all the dissension that arose at Antioch and mind you the Apostle Paul is there and Barnabas is there, you would think that there would be no one stand up in the meeting and say anything that was contrary to the doctrine of the apostles and seek to support it in such a way that even the apostle and Barnabas found it necessary to go up to Jerusalem to consult about the matter, but that's true. “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them.”

Now I think the events described in Galatians 2 occurred before this, and so, now Peter, from this account here, Peter understands by now. Paul has shamed him before

them all. Can you imagine that? Rebuked the first Pope in the presence in all of these people, [Laughter] embarrassing him, but nevertheless, he did. Now, “Certain men came down,” I don’t know how they looked, but I’ll tell you if I was an artist you know how I would paint them? I’d paint them, gloomy, long-faced. Kill-joys that go around hanging gospel crape because that’s what they undoubtedly were. They were legalists. Legalists are always like that. You never find a happy legalist. They just don’t exist. That’s one of the sad errors that has taken place in many reformed believers. They get so tied up with the Mosaic law because of their failure to understand the nature of the biblical covenants and the result is that pretty soon they are putting the congregations and the saints under the law. And the joy is gone, and in order to cover that up they say that we must preach the law and bring people under conviction of sin. All of that’s a half truth. And these individuals were legalists. And there were a lot of external battles that took place here in the midst of the churches. Even Peter was taken in at one time.

“Except ye be circumcised,” now this is the subject of the Epistle to the Galatians. I was tempted tonight for our study, very tempted, almost did it, and then I thought well Richard has come all the way from England to be in our meeting, and if I should do what I planned to do, it would be a wasted night for him because what I intended to do was to give you a brief exposition of the background of Peter’s conflict with Paul at Antioch and then say that it is likely that the apostle had written the Epistle to the Galatians to the Galatian churches out of concern both because of his conflict with Peter and also because of what he had heard about the churches that he had founded, and I was going to begin at Galatians 1:1 and read the entire 6 chapters of Galatians tonight for our time together. So you would understand, you see, what Paul was actually doing in the historical circumstances under which he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians. But Richard saved you from Bible reading, so you’ve got to go home tonight and read it for yourself. I was tempted because I have a little bit of legalism in me too. And it’s still there. It’s those little twitches of charlie horse [Laughter] between the ears that occasionally appear, and I

thought I will read this book, and they cannot say this week that they have not read the Bible because they have read it. So you've got to go home and read the Bible.

Now, “Except ye be circumcised,” is really the theme of the Epistle to the Galatians because that's what Paul attacks in the 6 chapters of that book. When you read Galatians, let me just say this about it, you discover this, so far as the Galatian believers were concerned the only thing that the Judaizers taught that was different from Paul's teaching so far as we can tell is essentially, Paul told you about Christ and you must believe in Christ. He told you about his death, his burial, his resurrection. You must believe those things. Told you about his Second Coming, you must believe those things. All that Paul said about the objective facts of the life and ministry of Christ is true, but Paul omits an important feature of the gospel. He does not insist upon your being circumcised in order to be saved. So far as we know that is the only difference between the teaching of the Judaizers and the teaching of Paul.

There is maybe one other thing. They evidently perhaps laid a great deal of stress also upon the observance of certain days and certain other legalistic practices. And that is referred to in the 4th chapter of Galatians. But essentially the thing that they disagreed with was simply Paul doesn't preach enough of the gospel. He doesn't say you must be circumcised in order to be saved.

Now, what would you say if there were two professing Christians standing here and one fellow says, “Do you believe in Christ?” the other says, “I do. Do you?” “Yes, I do.” “Do you believe he is the Son of God?” “Yes, I do. Do you?” “Yes, I do.” “Do you believe that he died on the cross for sin?” “Yes, I do. Do you?” “Yes, I do.” And you go on through the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, even talk about the Second Coming. And then one of them says, “But I do have one thing that maybe I differ with you on. I believe you must be circumcised in order to be saved.” Well let's bring it down to nineteen hundred and eighty-three. “I believe you ought to be baptized in order to be saved.” The other fellow says, “No, I don't believe that.” Now, do you think those

two Christians, those two professing Christians, do you think they're Christians, number one? And secondly, do you think they ought to just get together and just love one another? Now, come on. I bet if I hadn't put it on those terms even here in Believers Chapel there would be a lot of you who would say, “Yes, you ought to just love them and treat them as if they were believers.”

Now I want to tell you how Paul would have treated them. He said,

“I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto a different gospel: Which is not another; (of the same kind) but there are some that troubling you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. And though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him go to hell.”

That's what that word means “Let him be accursed.” That's what it meant. Now, that's the difference between the thinking of an apostle and the thinking of namby-pamby believers, professing believers, today. You see sometimes a little thing can actually destroy the grace of God, the free grace of God, seems so little, make so much over a little thing like that. So, these men came down, and they said, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Why not just call them the circumcised brethren, and seat them up front and the uncircumcised brethren, seat them up front on the other side and exhort them to love one another. They didn't do things like that in the early days of the Christian church. They were too close to our Lord.

So, incidentally, you'll notice they came from Judea. That was probably Satan's trick. If they had come from Tarshish no one would have paid them any attention. But they came from Judea, headquarters, the place where the movement began. So, today, the person who says, “I am (and you can put any name you like in it), I am of this particular church and that church goes all the way back for two or three hundred years or

more. Well, tradition stands behind that. Or I am, and tradition goes all the way back to maybe the 3rd or 4th century, well maybe we ought to pay attention to that. So, they come from Judea. That's Satan's trick.

They misuse the names of the saints to deceive the simple. They come from James according to Galatians 2. They came from James, the brother of our Lord. Well that's enough to make you think they're surely sound. If someone says, for example, “You go to another place,” and you say, “I come from Believers Chapel.” Well they'll know you're as sound as a dollar the minute you say that, but you're not necessarily. You see they came from Judea.

Now Paul and Barnabas had no small dissention. I said this was no sentimental namby-pamby milky effeminate spineless molly coddling jelly fishing love relationship that existed in the church. “One must not judge,” we say. Paul is just stubborn. He gets that way at times. No these words are very interesting. Dissention, that's static. Disputation, that's argument. So, they had dissention, not a little, and they also had argument. It was an explosion. Now, mind you, they had a lot they could say on their side. They could say, “Look, aren't we all in the family of the faithful? Doesn't this movement go all the way back to Abraham and to Adam? Doesn't it go back to the time when God gave a covenant to Abraham?” “Yes,” Paul would have to say. “Yes.” “Aren't those the fundamental biblical promises?” Paul would have to say, “Yes, because we're all children of Abraham,” he will say in Galatians. And then they will say, “But Abraham was circumcised wasn't he? And all the rest of those men in the Old Testament were told that they should be circumcised, why not we?” They had some things they could say. In fact they could even put the cap stone on it I guess by saying, “Was not our Lord circumcised? Surely we are to be circumcised.”

Now, the apostle protested for several reasons. He protested because if salvation is by the law, we're under the curse of death, so he said in Galatians. He said a man who puts himself under the law puts himself under the curse. Remember in Galatians chapter

3 in verse 10 he said, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The only way a man can get to heaven by keeping the law is to keep it absolutely perfectly. And if someone were to come to me right now and say, “Lewis, you’ve been altogether wrong for the forty years or so you’ve been a Christian and preaching. You must observe the law in order to be saved,” it would be too late. If I should live the rest of my few months, years, whatever perfectly, I’d still be lost. What about the past?

So, if a person is to be saved through law, then of course, we’re under the curse. If salvation is by works, then grace is destroyed, so Paul says in Romans 11. If it’s grace, it’s not works. If it’s works, it’s not grace. They don’t go together. They’re different. And in Galatians 2:21 the apostle also says, “I do not frustrate the grace of God,” by insisting on what I’m insisting on, “For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” Why did Christ die? It was a blunder, and a divine blunder. There is no purpose what so ever if a man may be saved by what he does. And furthermore if we’re saved by law works, by doing something, even something just like circumcision or baptism, then the glory of Christ is obscured. He’s not the only savior. He’s partially a savior, and my good works are the rest of the salvation, and Christianity is dead. We have fallen from grace.

So, the minute a man insists that one must believe in Christ and be baptized, or believe in Christ and be circumcised and be saved, he has fallen from the grace method of salvation. He’s become a legalist, historically. He’s become a Pelagian. He’s become a Pelagian if he believes that we can be saved by our works or even if we can be saved, a semi-Pelagian if he believes that he can be saved by the exercise of his free will plus what Christ has done. Oh I wish that we would have Paul among us for a while. It would be good. All of us would profit.

Now, this dissention was not a little thing in Antioch, and so they decide finally that they must go up to Jerusalem. And so, we read in verse 3, “And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” You must grasp that at this time a tremendous change in the divine program is taking place. Jesus remember had come not being sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When he sent out his apostles, he sent them out by saying, “Go not in the way of the Gentiles but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” There has been a dispensational change with the death of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit and the gospel to the Gentiles which was included in the promises made to Abraham is now to find its full geographical expression and expansion because of the disbelief of the generation of Israel in the time of our Lord.

Now, in verse 4 and 5 they arrive. As they make their way, it was a slow trip no doubt, as they stopped and met the little groups of Christians who were in the various places, they said, “The gospel is going out to the Gentiles, the great promises of the Old Testament. Those promises that the Suffering Servant of Jehovah would be a light to the Gentiles, as well as to Israel, they’re coming to pass.” And that was a means of tremendous rejoicing on the part of those early believers because they see the hand of God, and they see the march of God through human history. And it was an encouragement to them to know, then that all of the promises will ultimately find their fulfillment.

“And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed.” Now, notice, it is stated that these are believers. I would gather then that they are individuals who have a slight charlie horse between the ears. They are true believers, Peter says, but they don't understand that by insisting on circumcision they are actually violating the grace of the

gospel. They evidently don't see that this involves human activity, human work. And therefore is not a grace method of salvation.

So, anyway, they said, “It was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” So what they wanted to do is, they were happy about the Gentiles being saved, but they just wanted to insist in order for their salvation to be genuine that they also undergo circumcision. Now, so far as we can tell, there is no joy here, sour, somber, sepulchral, sanctimoniousness, whether they were sympathetic with the Judaizers who troubled the Galatian churches or not, we don't know.

Well, they decide they're going to have a special meeting, or they intend to have a special meeting and so we read in verse 6 through verse 11 of this special public meeting in Peter's final message. “And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing.” Notice that, “When there had been much disputing,” the church is present. The apostles and the elders are present and in charge. There's a great deal of disputing, and then finally Peter stands up on his feet to say something. He says to them, “Men and brethren, ye 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.”

He reminds them of what happened in Cornelius's house. And furthermore he reminds them that by that incident all ritualistic salvation was refuted. He said just think back to Corne's house, what happened there. That's what he called Cornelius, Come, in case you wanted to know. He said think what happened there. He said they were all gathered there and I said, if you remember in that introductory message that I was giving - I imagine Peter had a little aside at that point because I think Peter had a good sense of humor - and he said you know I had had all day to prepare a message and I intended to preach a rather significant message. I wanted to preach one that had three points like I was told to do in the rabbinical colleges, but anyway he said I was just in the beginning of my introduction and unfortunately I said to him, that is to Christ, “Give all the prophets’

witness that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” And while I was still speaking, I was just in the process of giving the rest of my message and the Holy Spirit fell on those people that were gathered there, including Cornelius, and everybody was astonished, they of the circumcision who were there were astonished too, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. So they had the gift of the Holy Spirit. They obviously had the forgiveness of sins, and I hadn't even gotten them to the baptistery yet.

You know Dr. Chafer used to tell us over at seminary, many years ago, in a class he called evangelism, it really was nothing but a kind of history of what happened among preachers and preaching in his past years, but it was very interesting. He said, “You know when I first began to preach I used to think we had to give an invitation. And we’d call people down to the front, ask them to raise their hand, sign a decision card, same kind of things you have in the Billy Graham meetings today, and other meetings. I was all caught up in that until I began to think about this in the light of the teaching of the word of God, and it seemed to me that that was something that was not in harmony with the Scriptures. It seemed to me that God saved souls, and furthermore he saved souls when he intended to save souls. And I became very concerned about it and while I was concerned about it,” he said, “I was holding a meeting one night, and I gave the gospel, and in the midst of the meeting and a man jumped up in the meeting and said, ‘Praise the Lord I’m saved.’ And my first thought was to say to him, ‘Sit down, it’s not time to be saved yet.’ [Laughter] When the meeting comes to its conclusion,” these are the exact words of Dr. Chafer, “I’ll grind you out then.” And he meant by that he would sing a half a dozen verses or stanzas of “Just As I Am” and plead with the people to come forward and that kind of thing. Well, that was illuminating for Dr. Chafer because it impressed upon him the fact that a man is saved when he believes the Scriptures.

I had that experience. I’ve had that experience a number of times, but I had that experience once when I was pastor of Grace Bible Church here, many years ago. It was

in a home Bible class. And a lady came and said she would like to join the church, and as our custom was, I would go around and visit her to find out about her Christian testimony. I knew her, and so I walked in, and I said, “Now tell me when you were saved.” And she said, “Well you were in the midst of a message in the Slaughter’s home, and in the message you said a person could be saved right then.” And she said, “Right then I turned to the Lord and believed in him and was saved right then.”

Well that’s something of what happened in Cornelius’s house. And so Peter reminds them of that. He says, “Men and brethren, ye 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,” now notice all that he says is, “And believe.” And then he says, “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; Now therefore,” Peter said, “Why are ye tempting God, to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples,” that’s the law, circumcision, “To put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” the law was a burden. The Law of Moses is a burden. Put a man under the law and you’re putting a yoke around his neck.

The Jews counted up six hundred and thirteen commands that a person must adhere to in the law. Think of it, keep six hundred and twelve, and still be lost. They even divided them up. There were three hundred and sixty-five negative ones and two hundred and forty-eight positive ones, six hundred and thirteen commands in the law. No wonder, Paul in Galatians speaks about a yoke too. We’ve been called to liberty. “Stand fast in liberty and be not entangled in the yoke of bondage,” Paul says. And so here, “Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” You see he recognizes that if you say a man must be circumcised in order to be saved, you’re putting under the law and you’re making him responsible to keep the whole of the law.

So he finally gives us, now here is the Apostle’s Creed. Listen to it. This has more claim for being the Apostle’s Creed than the so called Apostle’s Creed. Look, verse 11, “But we,” now that identifies others with Peter doesn't it? We apostles and elders, “But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” In other words, he and Paul agree. Paul says, “For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” Peter says, “We believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” He and Paul agree. Grace is the principle. It is power. It is love. It is gratuitousness.

If a man is on the legal principle, he must give one hundred percent obedience to God. When you go to college, university, high school, or whatever, seventy is a passing grade. Now, you know what that means? That means you were thirty percent wrong. Now God does not give out seventy percent grades and get you into heaven because that means you are thirty percent impure. He demands absolute purity, absolute righteousness. If you make ninety-nine percent on an examination in which you’re required one hundred percent, you’re one percent impure. You fail the test. So, grace is the principle. Salvation is a free gift. Faith is the means. He says, “We believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” And above in verse 7 he said, “The Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.” And verse 9, “And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” So grace is the principle. It’s a free gift. Faith is the means, not sanctity of life, not good works, not baptism, not circumcision. It is simply a hand of the heart that receives the free gift from God. Faith is the means, and saved, of course, is the result.

It’s an interesting way he puts it, isn't it? “We believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ,” you shall be saved or they shall be saved, “Even as we.” That’s really the way it ought to be, shouldn't it? After all he’s an apostle. Jerusalem’s with him. “We believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ,” they shall be saved. Wasn't he

talking about Gentiles? Wasn't he talking about how to treat them? They shall be saved, “Even as we.” He doesn't put it that way though. He says, “We believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” In other words, it's almost as if the apostle says the real persons that we ought to have doubts about are we. If we think, if we have any question about whether faith alone is sufficient means, and if we have any question about grace being the true principle, then maybe that Charlie horse is here with us. They understand. They're saved. They've received the Holy Spirit. They have the forgiveness of sins. They're happy in what they have come to experience. But here some of us standing up with questions about it, whether we should not lay some burden upon them. Ah, the ones we ought to have doubt about are not they. But we ought to have doubt about ourselves. I like the way he puts that. “We believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Well we're all familiar with the Apostle's Creed, at best a 2nd century product. This creed has a clearer right to the title. Are we saved by circumcision, baptismal regeneration, right, rubrics, etcetera? No. Peter says we believe. Is doing ones best turning over a new leaf religion? Are these the ways? No, we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved. That the morally good need him? Yes, moralists must come to the one fountain filled with blood drawn from Emanuel's veins. “We believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Wouldn't you have liked to have been there? Wouldn't you have like to have been there to hear Paul, “Amen,” Peter's preaching? And then turn to Barnabas and say, “It's what I taught him at Antioch.” [Laughter] Now, I don't think he would do that, but I think he would rejoice. So, let us have no questions about grace salvation. Anything that darkens the council of God by turning grace into works is suspect. We're saved by grace. May God help us to preach it. Believe it. Rejoice in it.

Sorry to keep you over. Richard came all the way from England in order to be here tonight. I had to give him just a little more time in the word. Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, We thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of the ministry of Thy word...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]