

36b ACTS

Let's pick up our study here in Acts chapter 15. We're looking at the visit of Paul and Barnabas with Titus to Jerusalem to answer and to try to resolve the charges of malfeasance and dysfunction that are being made by the Pharisaic elements within Christianity that they're not teaching the Gentiles the right kind of Christianity, that they have some rules that they need to conform with and to. And this brings us to sort of the headquarters of the church, which is still assumed to be at Jerusalem, even though the missionary journey and the sponsorship, if you will, of Paul and Barnabas going forth was from Antioch of Syria.

And so it's sort of like, well, this little subgroup has exceeded their authority. They've gotten out of hand and they're starting to do things that the mothership hasn't authorized, so we're going to bring them in and straighten this out. Well, this brings us to the issue of James.

And there are areas where actually, believe it or not, in most areas I'm an orthodox guy, but then there are some places where my understanding of what the Word of God gives us is sort of considered to be radically different. And this is one of them, so I tell you that in advance. And feel free to just sort of hum a song to yourself until I finish on this, and then you can come back when I'm done.

I believe that James, when he speaks here in Acts chapter 15, is wrong. Now, he quotes Scripture, as many wrong people do, and he renders his judgment in verse 19, as many wrong people do. And he starts out with a right statement.

And this is the worst thing to try to identify, is when you don't have an outright error, you have a twisted truth. And that's what James, I believe, delivers in verse 19. It is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles.

Amen, James, be quiet and sit down, and everything will be fine. But no. We should write to them, and we should tell them to abstain, and now we're going to get a little list of rules.

This is a compromise. They don't have to observe the whole law. We'll give them a mini-law.

We'll give them the Reader's Digest condensed version of the law. They just have to keep four commandments instead of ten. Well, a commandment is a commandment, and a compromise with grace is no grace.

These are not morality. Even if he had said, you know, we need to teach them the righteousness of God by faith. Well, faith will lead you into morality.

Faith will lead you into, if you love God, you're not going to violate His order. But these

are regulations. If you go up to somebody and say the following four things.

Obadiah, do not eat anything strangled. Do not eat any blood. Do not commit adultery.

And do not have anything to do with anything that's been around an idol. Where is the spiritual truth? Where is the substance from God in that? What if instead you go and say, do you know that you died with Christ? And the death He died, He died to sin. And the life He lives, He lives to God.

We are not our own. We are bought with a price, the precious blood of Christ. Therefore, we should glorify God in our body.

Now, there is some spiritual substance. This is what Paul presents to the Gentiles in Romans. What similarity do you see to the righteousness by faith that Paul preaches and teaches in the 16 chapters of Romans and this little edict here? They are poles apart.

This is just the mini law. This is the salve to get along with the Pharisaic party in the Jerusalem church and say, well, we didn't just throw over. But, I mean, after all, come on, they're Gentiles.

They're lower forms of life. We can't expect them to have the high and lofty obedience that we as Jews have. They'll always be sort of second-class Christians.

Well, James knows what he's doing here. He's playing psychology. This is going to appeal to the Pharisees because they can say, oh, well, you're right, James, of course.

We couldn't expect them to live up to the standards that a true son of Abraham could keep. We'll give them this sort of watered-down law because that befits their secondary standing. They can only keep three or four commandments instead of all ten like us.

So, James is crafty here. He's able to defuse the conflict. This will satisfy the Pharisees who are going to be restored to their standing as the superior Christians.

And it's going to throw a bone to Paul and Silas and say, well, you haven't really done wrong in not enforcing circumcision on these people. And it's a compromise. Well, people love compromise.

They love diplomacy. They love mixing in China. They love the different ones that do diplomacy.

And Kissinger was famous in his day for pulling off great feats of diplomacy and getting people to the bargaining table. And people have gone to the Middle East time after time trying to resolve that powder keg with little to no success. You remember the little film of the Israeli Prime Minister and an old nameless head of the Intifada over there shaking hands.

You remember that? President Clinton standing behind as Arafat and the somewhat startled Israeli Prime Minister shook hands. What good did that do? How many buses, how many lives have been blown up and lost since then? Well, there's more evidence in Scripture than just this passage that all is not well with James. First of all, and of course, this is kind of a double-edged sword because it kind of pulls the plug out of the boat of the Catholics.

Who is in charge of the Jerusalem Church? If Peter is the Pope, he doesn't seem to be the final word here because he makes his argument and then he sits down. James stands up and settles the thing. James throughout Acts is clearly the head and is considered in the early church to be the bishop of the church in Jerusalem.

Now, this doesn't really do much for the dignity of the Pope if he's sitting in the audience and James is the one pronouncing the final word. So, I'm not sure what the Catholics do with this but all you have to do is read Acts to realize that he wasn't the Pope and he was not ever the head of the Jerusalem Church. James was.

Now, we know from earlier on that James the brother of John and cousin of the Lord Jesus was the first of the disciples to lose his life. Herod killed him and was going to kill Peter next. We got that notice right before Peter was let out of the prison that James was executed.

So, this James is not James the son of Zebedee. This is James the half-brother of the Lord. Now, how does he come to be the head of the church here? Well, once he sort of jumps on board with his half-brothers, he comes to recognize who his half-brother was and obviously his faith was genuine.

He recognizes. I mean, you would think he would have had a ringside seat growing up with his older brother being perfect. It would just be so annoying.

You would have to come to terms with it in some way. And it wouldn't take a whole lot of... I'm sure this is the problem that my siblings have. But I mean, I can't imagine what the parents of the Lord went through.

You know, if you have a perfect child, he never sins. He never... I mean, you're messing up as the parent and the child is always right. I mean, it would be a really tough job to be the parent of a perfect child.

And I think it would be really hard to be the sibling of a perfect child. You can hear Mary talking to James and Judas and the rest of them. Well, why can't you be like your brother? So, it would just be extremely annoying.

So, you can see, I can understand why it might have taken them a while to kind of come around and get over that. You know, you're always throwing my brother up in my face. But he does, and he becomes a believer.

But now, what do you do? If you're an apostle, you're a Galilean fisherman here, and you were a disciple of the Lord. But then, here's a guy who grew up with the Lord, who knew him when, and who is the half-brother. And you get the idea that the early church was sort of bedazzled.

This is a terrible analogy, and I thought about not even bringing it up, but I'm going to anyway. You think about how much of a career would James Belushi have ever had if it wasn't for John Belushi? How much of a career would Frank Sinatra, Jr. have ever had if there wasn't Frank Sinatra, or even Nancy Sinatra for that matter? When someone is in the close family, either a brother or a son or a daughter of an exceedingly famous person, people tend to invest them with a lot of what really belongs to their famous relative. And they get a lot, whether they want it or not, whether they like it or not.

Do you remember Paul Drake in the Perry Mason series? This is something he fought his whole life. Do you remember the actor's name? William Hopper. His mother was Hedda Hopper, who had been an actress and went on to become one of the most famous columnists.

She and the other lady, they used to call her Head of the Hat, because she was known for her extravagant fashion ideas in the realm of hats. But she was a big power in Hollywood. Well, William Hopper was her son, and he tried to do everything except act, but he just inevitably got sucked into that world.

And he was always suspicious that the jobs he got were because his mother was pulling strings. I mean, she had power in Hollywood to make or break anyone just by what she said. And producers would swear up and down, No, Bill, you got the part just on your own merits.

And he never could hardly believe it because she was a real manipulator. Well, this is the kind of power that is invested in somebody who really has a lot of juice in a particular environment. Well, imagine after the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection, the ascension, and the day of Pentecost, and here is this living thing going on with the power of the Holy Spirit, miracles, and everything else.

And a guy comes in and says, Hi, my name is James, and I believe in the Lord also. And they say, Boy, you look familiar. And he turns out to be the half-brother of the Lord Jesus himself.

So most groups of human beings would have a hard time just having him sit in the pew and be a nobody. And so they're kind of like, James, how about you sit up front? James, how about you lead the meeting? First thing you know, James is leading the church. However, the Lord Jesus did not go to the mountaintop and call his half-brother James.

He called eleven other men, including, if you want to add the twelfth, Judas. Judas

climbed the mountain and was named a disciple. Judas was named a disciple ahead of the Lord's own half-brother.

James was never commissioned by the Lord Jesus. James did not have a Damascus Road experience. The Lord didn't come to him after he came to faith and said, Well, my brother, now that you've finally seen the light and gotten over your resentment of me, why, I want you to lead up my church in Jerusalem.

No such thing. So, with no commission and no mention whatsoever by the Lord Jesus, how did James arrive at this position? It is a work of man. It's the only thing we can conclude.

There is no divine commission. Paul the apostle, the Holy Spirit comes and says, Set aside to me Saul and Barnabas for the work I have for them. There is no record of any such thing.

Set aside for me James. He got elected in a popular vote. That's how he got to be the head of the church.

Every time you see James in the book of Acts, something bad happens. This James. For example, we've already looked at Galatians chapter 2. Go back over there again.

After an interval of 14 years, Paul says, I went to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. It was because of a revelation that I went up. I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles.

That's what we're looking at in Acts 15 right now. I did so in private to those who were of reputation. We saw that they gave the general report to the church.

Then they had a private meeting afterward. For fear I might be running or had run in vain. Not even Titus, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised because of false brethren secretly brought in, etc.

You get down to verse 9. Recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas, that's Peter, and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. This is what's happening at the Jerusalem council. James is mentioned first.

This is not the son of Zebedee who is already long dead. This is James, the half-brother of the Lord. He's running the show.

Then you have Peter. Then you have John, the two designated apostles of the Lord Jesus who are sort of subordinate to James. But not by any commission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not by any commission of the Holy Spirit. He's just a fact of life in Jerusalem. And you'll

notice that Paul makes no mention of the things strangled in blood and idols and sexual immorality.

You get the idea that he said, okay, fine, but he kind of lost that on the way back to Antioch. Because he doesn't even mention that here. He says, they only ask us to remember the poor.

Well, we don't even get that in Acts 15. The very thing also I was eager to do. Now look at verse 11.

But when Cephas, this is Simon Peter, came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when the men from James came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

The men from James are of the party of the circumcision. Now, if James is the leader that he ought to be in Jerusalem, the party of the circumcision is not going to be representing James on envoy missions abroad. James would say, you guys have got a big legalism problem here.

You all haven't figured out grace yet. I'm not sending you. I'm not commissioning you.

These are men deputed and authorized by James, the half-brother of the Lord, to go forth because James is all about works-based spirituality. He just can't shake it. Even after Acts 15, he just can't shake it.

And so these men take the inclination of James and carry it even a step further. And as soon as these men from James show up... Now, notice the relationship between James and Peter. Peter is afraid of the opinion of the men from James.

Now, you would think if he's the Pope, it would be the other way around. If he's the Pope, it's good to be the Pope. You can do what you want when you're the Pope.

You're the vicar of Christ. I think that's so funny. I've mentioned this before, but it's worth remembering that vicar, vicarious enjoyment, you watch somebody else eat the ice cream because you're on a diet, and you enjoy it vicariously.

Vicar means substitute. Well, in Greek, so does anti. And vicar of Christ and antichrist are just Latin and Greek forms of the same phrase, just for what it's worth.

So, Cephas came to Antioch. I opposed him to his face. He stood condemned because when the men of James came, he quit eating with the Gentiles.

He felt constrained. He was nervous sitting down with the Gentiles and risking the condemnation and the disapproval of these men from James. James and his men throw Peter out of grace.

Turn forward to Acts 21. Verse 17. This is the Apostle Paul.

Luke is writing because he's accompanying him. We'll get all the context of this. I don't have time to set the whole stage.

But they have arrived in Jerusalem. This is just shortly before Paul is going to wind up appealing to Caesar and having to go to Rome. After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

The following day, Paul went in with us to whom? To James. And all the elders were present. This is James and the James gang.

James and his boys. After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Are we having déjà vu here? Has this not happened a couple of times in the past? And when they heard it, they began glorifying God.

They said, Glory to God! Paul, good job! The Lord is blessing your ministry. Isn't that wonderful? They said to him, You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law.

They have been told about you that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses. Now we're not worried about the Gentiles. We've already lost that battle.

But there are Jews out there, and we think the Jews are not released from the law. This is sort of the fault. This is the plan B for the Judaizers.

Well, if we can't get the... Okay, the Gentiles are second-class citizens. But hey, you can't let the Jews out from under the law. I mean, surely the sons of Abraham still have to be circumcised, still have to keep their rituals, right? But these men who are zealous for the law have been told about you.

You're teaching the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs. What then is to be done? This is just a real problem, Paul. They will certainly hear that you have come.

Therefore, do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. Right away, they're doing a law thing.

And it's not even a law of Moses thing. The only thing the law of Moses says, if you make a vow, be sure and keep it. But this is like a Pharisee thing.

Take these men who are under a vow, verse 24, and purify yourself along with them. And pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads, and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, because you yourself also

walk orderly and keep the law. This is insidious.

This is a dastardly, underhanded compromise, sucking the apostle Paul out of grace and back under the law. You see, it's not me so much. Me, James, and my guys here, we understand all of this, but you're leading the brethren astray.

So for the sake of the Jewish brethren, who are all upset that you're leading the Jews among the Gentiles astray, go through this thing. Pay for these guys taking the vow. You go through the same thing with them.

But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, as he's throwing Paul a bone. We wrote, having decided they should abstain from the meat, the idols, and the blood, and strangle, and fornication. See how far we've come in your direction.

We've let the Gentiles off the hook, so you owe us a favor here. We had to move heaven and earth to get that compromise to keep the peace, and now you need to do your part. So you come back under this.

So look at verse 26. Then Paul took the men. This is the mistake of Paul's career.

He compromised grace. This is the Paul that jumped all over Peter for compromising by not eating with the Gentiles when the men from James came. But now here's Paul in front of the men from James, and James himself, and he does the very same thing in spades.

He's jumping back under the law for the sake of people who don't want to accept that the law has been superseded. The law has been fulfilled. It is no longer a requirement for righteousness, for a righteous life.

And so Paul takes the bait. And you can understand why when you read Romans. You read Romans 9, 10, and 11.

Brethren, my heart's desire for Israel is that they be saved. I will become all things to all men that I may by all means save some. That's his goal.

He wants everyone to come unto Christ. And his desire is good, but his implementation is faulty. And this is going to result in rioting, in his arrest, and in his eventual trip to Rome, which God is going to work together for good, but it doesn't make it right.

Many of us have had incidents in our life that God can work together for good. And we look back and we say, I can see where God has converted cursing to blessing. But it doesn't make the initial thing right.

For heaven's sake, God converted the betrayal of Judas into something good. But it doesn't make it right. The example of Peter denying the Lord and then being restored is a wonderful scriptural gift to us to see that even after egregious failure, there is

forgiveness, there is restoration, there is opportunity after failure.

But it doesn't make it right. We're not going to go up and say, boy, Peter, sure glad you denied the Lord three times. And he's not glad about it either.

Same thing here. God is going to use the arrests and the travails and the travels of Paul on his way to Rome, and he's going to work in it and through it. But it doesn't make this right.

This is wrong, wrong, wrong. As we go through the book of Acts, we're going to see that God warned Paul about this. But he didn't give him an explicit command to stop and to not go to Jerusalem.

Just like in many cases, God doesn't put a brick wall in front of us. He says, look, I'm going to give you enough information that you ought to be able to think your way out of this wet paper bag. And if you don't, the results are on your own head.

I'm not going to put an angel with a flaming sword in your path. I'm not going to stop the donkey you're riding on and force it to one side or the other. I'm not going to bar you in and prevent you.

I'm going to give you the information where you should be able to make the right choice. And if you don't, this is how we deal with adults rather than children. Children, have you ever seen that thing? It's like a dog leash.

You put it on the clothesline when they're outside. You just snap it on. They can walk back and forth.

They actually have that for kids. You can keep your child. You can physically prevent them.

You put them in a playpen. You put them in a crib. But older children, you give them an instruction.

You say, don't go out in the street. And you expect them to mind. You don't put them on a leash.

You give them an instruction. This is what God does with and who is more mature than the Apostle Paul. So God sends him a prophet.

He says, if you go to Jerusalem, bonds and chains await you. Are bonds and chains a part of your mission to preach to the Gentiles? No, they're not. They may accompany.

They may be concomitants. But if I tell you ahead of time that bonds and chains await you, this is not your mission. But Paul doesn't figure it out.

And he goes, anyway, this is the result. But what is the stumbling stone here? It is James and the men of James. Every time you see James, somebody stumbles and falls.

I don't think James should have been, and of course, he's going to care what I think, but my understanding of the Word of God, James should never have been the head of the Jerusalem church. There is no word from the Holy Spirit. There is no commission from the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's 11 other candidates ahead of him that could have and should have. A suggestion was made on the break, which I think is probably good, that you wonder why after, other than this one brief mention here in Galatians, where Paul says, after 14 years, I went up to Jerusalem. I saw John briefly.

Where is John in the Jerusalem council? Where is John when all of these legalistic things come up? Where is John when the party of the Pharisees starts taking over the church? Other than that one mention, for all we know, John isn't even in Jerusalem. Maybe he happened to be there to observe a feast or something. It could be that John took to heart the words that the Lord gave him from the cross.

He says, Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother. And Jesus says, John, I'm giving you the job of taking care of Mary for the rest of her life.

Why not James? Why not Judas? Why not Joseph? Those are the three half-brothers of the Lord that we know of. None of them is given that commission. Instead, it is who I think was Jesus' cousin, John.

By the way, Jesus didn't give that job to James, did he? Why? James isn't going to be around very long. James, the son of Zebedee. Nor to James' half-brother.

He gives it to his cousin John. So, John may be spending most of his time up there and his ministry is going to come later. Even after the resurrection, not long ago in one of our Easter week, our Resurrection Week studies, we looked at the interaction between Peter and John during and after the time of the Lord's trials and so on.

And after the feed my sheep, feed my lambs, and Jesus is talking to Peter and Peter looks back and he sees John and he says, What about this one? And the Lord looks at him and he says, What is it to you if this one should tarry till I come? You follow me. You feed my sheep. You feed my lambs.

And you get the idea that Peter has an immediate job and John is going to tarry. And of course, most of John's ministry seems to be in the later days of the church all the way up to 96 AD when we think Revelation was written. So, John is not a factor in the Jerusalem church.

Why is that? Well, part of it may have been that the majority rule said, Well, we want

James, the half-brother of the Lord. And John didn't argue. John just said, Well, maybe separation is the better part of valor here.

And so he's not a factor. He's not a force. Whatever it may be.

So then the natural question comes, Well, what about the canonical New Testament book of James? What are we to think about this book if James seems to be such a legalist here and to be causing these problems? Well, I think there's a great lesson here because when you read the book of James, you'll notice he does not claim to be an apostle in the beginning. He says he's a servant of the Lord. He doesn't say he's an apostle.

He never claims that title for himself. And no one else ever assigns it to him explicitly. You can make a case out of Galatians where Paul says, I didn't see any of the other apostles except James.

But you kind of get the idea that that was sort of a pseudo-apostleship. But what about the canonical book? What about the book of James? You can see the elements of this thinking in James, can't you? Faith without works is dead. If you see a brother, if you read that book, it's all about the outworking of your faith.

And what this tells me is that there is a balance between our faith and our works. And when you get out of balance, you can take something legitimate and make it illegitimate. Everything the book of James says is true.

Where James got in trouble was letting it go too far and letting others take it too far. And so, God does have a purpose for James and God uses him in spite of the fact that he seems to have gotten an office that he really should not have had. He seems to have caused problems that he should not have caused.

He seemed to go too far. There is a legitimate contribution to be made in reminding people that their practice ought to be the outworking of their faith. And this is a good thing.

And if you mess up in an area like this, it doesn't mean that you are useless and that God can't do anything with you. The book of James appears to have been written later in the career of James, after these events. And it may be that after seeing what took place, he may have been kind of a slow learner.

And maybe after the career of Paul and after Paul's arrest and after the riots in Jerusalem, this may have been what it took to wake James up to the fact that you can't hang on to the law. You've got to wake up and live in the light of the word of God. And yes, there is a legitimate role for the outworking of your faith in works.

But you'll notice the book of James even mentions the law. But he doesn't preach keeping the law. He says there is one law giver and that's God and that's the one that we

need to serve.

But he doesn't say there's one law that we must keep. And so, there's hope for us all. And James makes a lot of mistakes, but James winds up being the author of a canonical book.

And he is the same guy, it's the same James. He writes a good book that God chose to include in the canon and inspired with His Holy Spirit. But you look at him and he is the cause of just no end of grief and seems to accept an assignment and an office that was pushed on him by people or offered to him by people and not by the Lord.

He had no divine commission that's recorded anywhere in Scripture for it. So, this is the information that we have in the New Testament about James. But as we return now back to Acts chapter 15, there is no getting around the fact that these Scriptures, these requirements that are placed on the Gentiles, you never see these show up in the preaching and teaching of Paul.

Look through Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus. You are not going to see him tell anybody to abstain from things strangled or to abstain from blood. When he talks about idolatry, he says, let every man act according to his own conscience.

He says, if you sin against your conscience, whatever is not of faith is sin. If you have the understanding to recognize that a piece of meat that is laid in front of an idol doesn't make any difference, then eat it and God go with you. Don't cause your brother to stumble.

He is all about the law of love. He doesn't say anything about these. In fact, he says just the opposite.

Let no man judge you on foods or observances. And that flies right in the face of this guidance. So, Peter stands up and sits down and says we shouldn't put this yoke.

By the way, can you think of another place where a yoke is mentioned? Remember over in Matthew chapter 11 where Jesus said, my yoke is easy and my burden is light? Peter says this yoke of the law was too heavy for us to bear. So, the yoke that the Lord Jesus spoke of is not the law, is it? Because Jesus says, my yoke is easy, my burden is light. Come to me and learn from me.

From Matthew chapter 11. So, James quotes the scriptures, understands that the Gentiles are recipients of God's grace, but let's put this stricture on them because, verse 21, the Gentiles really are kind of familiar with this anyway because we've had these synagogues there for a long time. They sort of know this anyway, so it's not going to be a big shock to their system.

So, he's kind of, can't we all just get along? This will make the Pharisees happy. This won't be too big of a burden on the Gentiles. Can't we all just kind of come to a happy medium? And this compromise is going to sow the same kind of seeds in the Jerusalem church that has caused the same kind of problems that it does in Antioch when Peter is up there, that are going to crop up when Paul comes back to Jerusalem and tries to find some happy medium between grace and the law and take this vow, and it's going to eventually result in riots.

But, this seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. And they sent this letter by them. The apostles and the brethren, who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Silesia, who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, these are the Judaizers. It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials, to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, blood, things strangled, fornication, and keep yourselves free from such things you will do well. Farewell. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.

Where in here did the Holy Spirit speak? Where in here did they pray? Where in here did they fast? Where in here did they... And behold, one stood up from among them and spoke... I mean, it's all... You know the closest analog to this is the election of Matthias as the twelfth disciple back in the second chapter of Acts. Very same kind of a mechanism. What do we take away from this? We can be motivated and wish for peace and wish for everyone to kind of be happy and it can lead us in the direction of compromise.

There is flexibility. You know, there's a great old saying that says, be inflexible about the essentials and be flexible about non-essentials. Bear with the weaker brother and so on.

But you cannot compromise with righteousness by works. You can't say, well, some of that is okay. Paul is going to write a sixteen chapter book called Romans all about righteousness by faith and he's going to demonstrate all the way through that book that you cannot compromise.

There is only one righteousness that comes from God. There's only righteousness that is assigned by God and that is when we do what we do in faith, not out of following rules or

someone's concept of what spirituality is. And anytime we let ourselves be influenced and let ourselves be pushed in a direction by what people think, we have gotten out of the light, we've gotten off the straight road.

We have to measure and evaluate our path and our actions by the word of God and the word of God alone, not the ideas of people. Well, we're out of time for tonight. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for illustrating for us and recording for us the travails and the challenges of the early church. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister these truths to our souls. Help us to navigate the rocks and shoals of our life so that we can remain true to the righteousness that you give us through faith and through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray it in his name. Amen.