

Acts

The Gospel on the Move

Study 12

The Gentile Mission and the Jerusalem Council

Acts 14-16

A. Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

Acts 14:1-7 (NIV)

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the gospel.

1. a) **Reflection question. According to the video lecture, there is a spiritual principle where success in gospel outreach is accompanied by persecution from non-believers. Were there any moments in your life where you felt hesitant to share the gospel in fear of rejection or persecution?**

b) **What is Paul and Barnabas' response and/or God's response to the persecution of the Jews?**

Paul and Barnabas:

- Spent considerable time/remained in Iconium
- Speaking boldly for the Lord
- Flee to the nearby cities/countries to continue to preach the gospel to escape persecution.

God:

- Confirmed the message of his grace
- Enabling Paul and Barnabas to perform signs and wonders.

B. Paul and Barnabas at Lystra

Acts 14:8-18 (NIV)

In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

2. a) Objective Question. How did Paul and Barnabas respond when they heard that the priest of Zeus and the crowds were addressing them as Gods?

- A. Accepted the praises and sacrifices
- B. Fled from the crowds and priests quietly to avoid drawing more attention
- C. Tore their garments and rushed to correct the priests and crowds that they were not gods, but mere men like them.

b) Fill in the Blanks. According to the video lecture, Paul and Barnabas shared the gospel with the pagans by distinguishing the differences between God and Idols. What are the key differences?

God	Idols
Living	Dead
Creator (made the heaven and the earth and the sea)	Created
Provider (rains from heaven and fruitful seasons)	Liars

c) According to Acts 14:21-23, what did Paul and Barnabas do upon their return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch?

Paul and Barnabas:

- Strengthening the souls of the disciple
- Encouraging the believers to continue in the faith
- Reminding the believers that they must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God
- Appointed elders for the believers in each church
- Prayer and fasting for the believers

C. Gospel to the Gentiles

Acts 15:1-11 (NIV)

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 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. 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 believers very glad. 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.

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 keep the law of Moses."

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 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. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

3. a) Discussion Question. Why did the Jews tell the believers that unless they are circumcised and obey the Law of Moses, they cannot be saved?

The Jews had been taught that salvation was achieved through circumcision and strict obedience to the Law of Moses. Historically, they believed that only Jews were "clean," while Gentiles were considered "unclean." Therefore, they argued that Gentiles needed to essentially "convert" to Judaism, including circumcision, to become clean and thus be saved.

b) Discussion Question. What does it mean when Peter says that the act of insisting the Gentiles to circumcise and follow the law of Moses is an act of putting God to the test?

As God has already accepted the Gentiles by giving the Holy Spirit to them, if we insist that circumcision and keeping the Law is needed, we are indirectly saying that we do not trust God / his word (i.e. accusing God that the work of the Lord on the cross is not sufficient for the Gentiles).

c) Objection Question. What did Jesus' death on the cross give us spiritual freedom from?

- A) Circumcision
- B) Sacrificial and food laws
- C) Jewish culture
- D) All of the above.

d) According to the video lecture, what are the 6 responses the apostles gave in response?

- 1) God made no distinction between Gentiles and Jews.

- 2) Salvation is by grace through faith alone for all.
- 3) The addition of circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic law as the pre-requisite for salvation is a provocation to God and an act of unbelief.
- 4) The addition of circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic law as the pre-requisite for salvation places the same unbearable burden on the Gentiles as it did on the Jews.
- 5) Paul and Barnabas' experience from Gentile ministry.
- 6) James concludes from Scripture that God intends to make the Gentiles His people just like the Jews

e) Discussion Question. What is the harm in accepting the belief of "Jesus + Something" (e.g., Jesus + Circumcision, Jesus + Mosaic Law, Jesus + Sanctification) as a backup to the Gospel?

In the book of Galatians, where the church in Galatia embraced the teaching that "Jesus + Circumcision = Salvation," Paul strongly rebukes them, accusing the church of turning to a different gospel, which is no gospel at all. He even goes so far as to say that if the apostles or even an angel from heaven preaches a different gospel from what Paul preached, they are under God's curse. Essentially, adding anything to the Gospel distorts its truth.

"Jesus + Something" actually leads to **nothing**, because salvation is through Christ alone. Adding requirements undermines the sufficiency of His grace and sacrifice.

Quick Verse Reference

Galatians 1:6-9 (NIV)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Takeaway

The church, comprised of diverse races, backgrounds, and talents, is called to proclaim the gospel and be witnesses of Christ. We are to trust in the Lord and remain steadfast in our mission, even amidst opposition and adversity.

Case Study

Case 1a – Superstar Pastor

Pastor Chris Mah is a well-known evangelist based in the United States, famous for his global tours where he shares sermons and hosts revivals, often speaking to audiences of over ten thousand people. Ken Goh, a member of your Life Group, has recently been sharing videos and clips of Pastor Chris' sermons with the group.

Recently, Ken approached you, excited to share that Pastor Chris will be visiting Singapore for a 4-day, 3-night Christian conference. Ken is eager for you to join him on the trip to attend the conference in person, expressing that this is a "once in a lifetime" opportunity. He feels that attending virtually wouldn't offer the same experience.

1. a) Discussion question. How would you respond if you were a fellow brother/sister of Ken?

b) Reflection Question. Were there moments in your life where you were pursuing the messenger (e.g. Pastors / Elders / Leaders) rather than the message (e.g. the Gospel)?

Case 1b – Imitation of leaders

As time passes, you begin to notice that Ken's speaking mannerisms and behavior have started to resemble those of Pastor Chris. When you ask him about this, Ken refers to **1 Corinthians 11:1**, which says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." He explains that he is intentionally imitating Pastor Chris, believing that Chris is a reflection of Christ.

c) Discussion Question. Is it appropriate for Ken to imitate Pastor Chris' mannerisms and behaviors? Why or why not?

Mannerisms and behaviors are morally neutral and it's up to a person's preference if they wish to imitate someone else. But to use 1 Corinthians 11:1 to justify is a misuse of the intention of the verse. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul is encouraging believers to follow his example in displaying Christ-like behaviors, such as loving others, serving others, and enduring hardship, just as Christ loved and served us and endured the suffering of the cross. Paul's message is not about idolizing human leaders but about imitating their Christ-like character. Our ultimate goal implied by the verse is that should always be to follow Christ, not referring to mimicking the outward behaviors of any individual.

Case 2 – Channels of Grace

In Catholicism, believers are expected to observe the seven sacraments, which are:

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Eucharist (or Communion)
4. Penance / Reconciliation (or confession of sins)
5. Anointing of the Sick
6. Holy Orders
7. Matrimony (or Marriage).

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** emphasizes that the sacraments are necessary for salvation as they are means of grace. Specifically, **CCC 1129** states, "The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. 'Sacramental grace' is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament."

Additionally, **CCC 1257** explains that "The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation," though it also acknowledges that while the sacraments are the ordinary means of salvation, God is not bound by them and can save individuals even without the sacraments.

2. a) Discussion question. Do you agree with the Catholic Church's position that salvation comes through Christ and Baptism?

No, according to Acts 15, the apostles clearly affirmed that we are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Galatians 1 warns that any teaching of "Jesus + Something" (such as Jesus + circumcision or Jesus + sacraments) leads to "nothing," as it represents a different gospel. Salvation is through Christ alone, without additional requirements or conditions.

Ephesians 2:8-9 reinforces the idea that salvation is not something we can earn through good deeds, religious rituals, or adherence to the law. Instead, it is a free gift from God, received through faith in Jesus Christ.

Quick Verse Reference

Galatians 1:6-9 (NIV)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Quick Verse Reference

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

b) Reflection Question. Were there moments in your life when you felt that you needed to add to your salvation through works such as reading the Bible, daily prayers, fasting, or other religious activities?

c) Reflection Question. Have you ever felt pressure to meet certain spiritual or religious standards, or to perform specific ministry services or acts in order to feel accepted by God?