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Unstoppable: The Book of Acts

The Jerusalem Council - Believing and Belonging

4 Corners Church

November 9, 2025

Acts 15:1 ¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. ³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

⁶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷ And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

¹² And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

¹⁶ "'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old.'

¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

Salvation is free.

Discipleship is expensive.

Jesus didn't die just to give you a belief system—He died to give you a new life.

Saved By Grace Alone; Saved to do Good Works

- Some Jewish believers: “Unless you are circumcised, you can't be saved.”
- Paul and Barnabas: “No! Salvation is by grace through faith.”
- James (brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church): “We should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood.” (vv. 19–20)
- Saved by grace — but still called to obedience.
- Grace doesn't erase holiness; grace empowers it.
- You can't separate faith from faithfulness.

The Four Prohibitions—Consideration that Builds Fellowship

Together, they protect the individual, the fellowship, and their shared mission.

“Abstain from things polluted by idols.”

- In the ancient world, almost every meal was connected to idol worship.
- Eating food sacrificed to idols meant participating in pagan religion.
- James is saying—Don't mix Jesus with idols.

“Abstain from sexual immorality.”

- The Greek word is *porneia*. It covers every kind of sexual sin—premarital, extramarital, homosexual, pornographic, all of it.
- The Gentile world said sex was just physical. God says it's sacred.
- Following Jesus means your body belongs to Him.
- This is countercultural obedience—still today.

“Abstain from what has been strangled.”

- That's about eating meat without the blood drained—because in Leviticus, blood symbolized life.
- God was teaching His people to respect life and the Giver of life.
- Even in your diet, remember—life is sacred.

“Abstain from blood.”

- Same idea—don’t treat life casually.
- For Gentiles, this was a huge lifestyle shift. They were being told, “Live differently now, because you belong to a holy God.”
- These weren’t hoops to jump through—they were boundaries for blessing.