

## Acts 15:1-35. Power that Replaces the Law

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Chapter 14 saw the return of Saul and Barnabas from their first missionary journey. They were sent out by the Christian church in Antioch of Syria a couple of years after they established the church. They went first to the island of Cyprus where they preached in two cities, Salamis and Paphos. In the latter city, the Roman senatorial governor of the island and his household was saved, encouraging the spread of Christianity throughout the island and encouraging the spread of Christianity in Rome. From there they crossed over the Mediterranean Sea to the North, landing at Perga of Pamphylia where John Mark, who had traveled with them from Antioch left them and returned home. From there, Paul (who had changed his name from the Hebrew name, to this current Greek name), continued North to the mainland into what is now Eastern Turkey to the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Churches were started in these cities among considerable controversy when the non-believing Jews tried to stop Paul's preaching. Paul was stoned and left for dead in Lystra by Jews and recruited Gentiles from Antioch and Iconium who followed him there, but he quickly recovered. After tracing their steps back to the Mediterranean, revisiting the new Christian congregations, Paul and Barnabas sailed for Antioch, ending the first missionary Journey.<sup>1</sup> They are now back in the church of Antioch of Syria.

**Acts 15:1. *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.***

One consistent characteristic of the church is that it is made up of a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds, each bringing in their unique personality, gifts, and talents. Unfortunately, church members also bring in the influences of their culture and all of the unwashed laundry of unrepented sin. For example, one of the most destructive forces in the church is unrepented pride. Pride, expressed in any area of the church always serves to divide and stratify its members, quite the opposite of the unity that is prompted by the Holy Spirit. Pride is one of the "seven deadly" sins that the biblical text describes as "anathema" or an "abomination" to God.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, its destructive power in the lives of Christians is one reason. Though the example of church conflict that we are going to find in the first part of Acts, chapter 15 is not specifically one of pride, the expression of pride on the part of those creating the conflict is certainly

<sup>1</sup> Acts 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 6:16-17, 16:5; Ezekiel 16:50.

a foundational component of the false doctrine that they are attempting to impress upon this young congregation.

As the church in Antioch grew, its need for more teachers and leaders is evident. As people start to fulfill these responsibilities, they must always be careful and vigilant to adhere to the truth of the gospel. All church leaders should be very cognizant of the imperative that is recorded by the writer of the Gospel of James:

**James 3:1. *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.***

Those who take on the responsibility of teaching and leading other Christians also take on the responsibility of doing so in a spirit of *agape* love, and in truth. They have the ability, because of their position, to influence other Christians. This influence can be to bring them closer to a knowledge and love of the Lord, or it can take them away from the truth of the Gospel. More often than not, when a leader is motivated by pride, they will lead people in their own direction, and for that offense they will be more strictly judged for their act. Why would a leader be more strictly judged? When the church selects a leader, it should be doing so because it is submitting itself in trust to that leader. Therefore the leader just honor that trust, know the truth, and because of that knowledge, is expected to adhere to it.

Some of the leaders in the church in Antioch were from Judea, the region surrounding Jerusalem. Firmly entrenched in their Jewish traditions, they taught the fellowship that salvation by grace alone was not sufficient for salvation. In order to be right with God, they held that adherents must also adhere to the Mosaic Law, a burden experienced by the Jews since Moses took them out of Egypt. In addition to the Law, the Jews had created a system of additional traditional laws, rules, and regulations that guided every part of the Jewish life. These teachers were expecting that Christians should also adhere to these rules and regulations in order that they would be saved.

Why would the Jewish leaders in the Antioch church hold so adamantly to such a position? First, we should not be too hard on them since these rules and regulations were all that they ever knew. Like all of us, we bring into our faith experience the sum of all of our previous experiences that serve to define our world-view. Second, Christianity was viewed by the Christian Jews as an extension, or completion, of Judaism. Many Jews did not think of Christians as being separate from Judaism, and therefore maintained their status as Jews, and maintained their subjugation to its tenets. There is nothing wrong with Jewish Christians maintaining their Jewish traditions where they do not contradict the

gospel. However, the problem in Antioch, and other first-century churches was the idea that Gentiles must become Jewish before they can become Christian.

Though we do not expect Christians to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law, the modern Christian church sometimes does add works of the flesh to the one work of the Holy Spirit in its “requirements” for salvation. Salvation is given as a gift, by the LORD, by faith alone, and not of any works of man.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, it would not be a gift of God’s grace. Also a works-based doctrine gives us the power to become “righteous” through our own actions, a power not given by God.

The Ephesian imperative against works states that salvation denies works so that no person can boast about what they have done. Any demand for works denies the voracity of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary. However, we sometimes forget that salvation is by faith alone through God’s grace, and we add on some other requirements. What are some of these? Some Christian denominations require sacraments: works that are required for salvation, such as baptism, attendance in ceremonies, secret confession, and participation in the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> Still other churches establish additional rules and regulations, often identifiable as a list of “Do nots” such as “Do not drink,” “Do not dance,” etc. Some denominations borrow and reapply biblical historical models to deny people access to the fellowship if they wear their hair the wrong way, wear the incorrect clothing, worship with the wrong musical instruments, etc. The list goes on and on.

What is it called when Christians add works to the simplicity of salvation by faith in God? It is called *Legalism*. Legalism is simply the establishment of a set of rules that are added to God’s grace as a requirement for acceptance into the fellowship. Ancient Judaic culture became the very zenith of legalism. There were rules and regulations for virtually every facet of life. It was these rules that the Judaizers attempted to require of the new Christian converts, rules that no Jew was ever able to entirely keep, and the breaking of a single rule makes one a lawbreaker. This leaves the adherents of legalism with no hope of salvation at all. What was the response of Paul and Barnabas to their legalistic teaching?

**Acts 15:2a. *When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them***

The scripture gives no details of the specific discussions that took place between Paul, Barnabas and the Judaizers, but it is clear that the dispute was acute. We see an example of considerable conflict in the body of believers. Certainly, the

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:9

<sup>4</sup> The LORD’s Supper

Holy Spirit leads us to maintain unity in the body of believers, and that unity should be firmly defended, protected, and promoted. There are very few occasions when we should take a stand on an issue that could potentially divide the church, and this is an example when action was necessary. Truth should never be compromised in order to maintain unity. The Truth of God's word is paramount to the health of the church body, and when that truth is being compromised, Christians must step forward and deal with the conflict, as Paul and Barnabas did here. However, we should be very careful to limit such deliberate actions to errors in truth, and not include in the list of offenses anything that is simply our own preference, opinion, or desire. That is when pride enters the situation and creates greater dissention and destruction. Before starting any action that could disrupt the unity of the body, Christians should be very sure that the action is intended to correct basic doctrinal error, and such actions must always be exercised with uncompromised *agape* love. Usually church discord does not involve doctrinal error: it usually involves disagreements over the dogma and tradition of the church or the personal opinions and desires of those involved in the conflict.

The example in the Antioch church is one of basic doctrinal error that would serve to lead people away from saving faith: salvation is by grace alone, and does not require any additional works.

**Acts 15:2b. *they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.***

How did the church go about resolving this conflict? In this case, they had what they perceived to be a higher authority to whom they could go for a resolution. Note that Paul and Barnabas did not simply over-shout their opponents into submission. They willingly submitted themselves to the decisions of the body to send them and others to the Jerusalem church for guidance. Actually, this would be quite advantageous to the gospel, since the influence of Judaisers was not limited to the church in Antioch. The church in Jerusalem tended to be very legalistic since many, if not most, of its members were also practicing Jews, and this issue was more acute in Jerusalem than anywhere else. Those Jews who maintained their legalistic practices were also expecting the same from other members of the church. Actually, this desire by Jewish Christians to subjugate Gentile Christians to the authority of Mosaic Law and Jewish tradition was one that would continue to create conflict throughout the entire century. Since many of Jesus' Apostles were in Jerusalem at this time, the church sent Paul and Barnabas to them to seek a resolution to this doctrinal impasse.

**Acts 15:3-4. *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. <sup>4</sup>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.***

The trip to Jerusalem took several days, and took the evangelists through Phoenicia and Samaria. As they went, they continued to share the gospel with those whom they met along the way. This passage also implies that there were “brothers” to whom the news of what God was doing was being shared, implying the presence of Christian families and the presence of churches throughout the region. They then arrived in Jerusalem where they were warmly received, and to whom they gave an account of what had taken place since their last visit. This would have included the experiences of the first missionary journey as well as the account of the rising doctrinal conflict in the Antioch church.

**Acts 15:5-6. *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. <sup>6</sup>And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.***

What did they find when they started discussing the conflict in Antioch? The same conflict was present in the Jerusalem church. The Jerusalem Judaisers are referred to in verse 5 as “the party of the Pharisees.” These are literally Jewish Pharisees who came to the LORD in faith, bringing with them all of their training and experience as Pharisees. Though the biblical narrative does not refer to them frequently, it is quite evident that the gospel was making a positive impact on many Jewish leaders in the city of Jerusalem, and there was a significant “party” or “sect” of the Jewish Christian community who came from this order. These were, like Paul, schooled and practiced at Jewish law and tradition more than any others, and yet they came to the LORD in faith. The early Jewish Christians did not give up their “Jewishness” and retained much of their traditional belief and practice. However, it was difficult for them to fully embrace the idea of Gentiles in their fellowship since the idea was culturally so foreign to them. This was an issue that was quite reasonable, and needed to be dealt with in a positive manner.

Knowing no different way to respond, some of the Jerusalem Pharisees, like the Judaisers in Antioch, sincerely believed that it was necessary that Gentiles be circumcised and follow Jewish law, which for them included both the law of Moses and the rules and regulations of the Pharisees that are recorded in the

thousands of pages of the Talmud and Mizpah. As a “sect” of Judaism, they perceived Christianity as fully Jewish.

It is apparent that the heated discussion that arose in Antioch had not been openly dealt with by the Jerusalem church. This implies that its leaders were united in their agreement on basic faith doctrine, and the Judaisers, though adamant in their beliefs, did not have the power to divide the church. Their need to continue in their Jewish traditions was fully embraced as long as they did not actually demand the requirements of Jewish legalism to be imposed on other believers. Consequently, when this very important question arose, they were able to come together and discuss the matter quite rationally.

**Acts 15:7-11. *And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto 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. <sup>8</sup>And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; <sup>9</sup>And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup>Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? <sup>11</sup>But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.***

After much discussion, Peter rose up. It is not surprising that Peter would be recorded as the one to take the lead in the discussion, and now that His own spirit is informed by the Holy Spirit, the gift of confidence that he always demonstrated has resulted in powerful and wise leadership. What was Peter’s position in this congregation? He was certainly the most influential and respected member of the church. Furthermore, as the one closest to Jesus during His ministry, Peter was able to speak with authority and truth. Peter’s response to this issue would be considered authoritative and persuasive. Only those closest to Peter would, by this time, challenge him on his doctrine.

Some argue that Peter was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, and others argue that James held this position. Peter was the pastor according to the dogma of a few Christian church denominations. The biblical description of the church from the time that Peter was imprisoned by Herod seems to lean towards James as the pastor. This segment of scripture would do the same.

Peter certainly remembered his introduction to and conversion of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion. Peter had frequently experienced Gentiles coming to the Lord, receiving the Holy Spirit, and being saved without any benefit of the Mosaic Law. In fact, the Law and Jewish traditions never played any part at all in the

salvation experience of any believer, be he Jew or Gentile. The Law only served to prove to us that salvation by works is not possible.

Peter described the Jewish Law and traditions as a “yoke of bondage” that even the Jews could not bear. Likewise, any form of legalism, when expressed in the Christian church, is a similar “yoke of bondage” that is not relevant to either the reception or experience of salvation. Paul would later write in his letter to the Galatians a complete argument against the expression of legalism in the church. Legalism, served only as a tool of Satan that Paul would find everywhere he looked as he visited and heard from the churches. Paul was adamant that the purpose of the Law was to expose the sin that Jesus Christ died on the cross to account for. The Law performs this purpose on all those who have not accepted Christ, but for the believer, the Law is no longer a burden. When the Holy Spirit enters the heart of a believer, God’s Word, His Law, enters their heart also. Christians know, by listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, what they should and should not do. It is no longer necessary to memorize and adhere to traditional law or try, though impossibly, to do so.

Salvation is by faith, through God’s grace alone, given by Him through the power of the Holy Spirit, expressing His unconditional *agape* love for all mankind. All people can come to Christ without regard to their creed, culture, sinful acts, or any other act of man. God will take you where you are, give you the gift of His Holy Spirit, who will then live in you and lead you to obedience to the LORD without any requirement of written or cultural law. It is this presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer that is deemed as “righteousness” to the LORD.

**Acts 15:12-14. *Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. <sup>13</sup>And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: <sup>14</sup>Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.***

After Peter speaks, Barnabas and Paul both shared their testimonies of the mighty works that God had done among the Gentiles. The congregation showed respect for them by their silence. Most likely, they were quite astonished by their descriptions of what was taking place among the Gentiles. The church in Jerusalem did not share the missionary/evangelistic fervor that was characterized in the Antioch church. This church was made up primarily of Jews who brought into the church their prejudices against Gentiles. Though they were understanding that the gospel was also for the Gentiles, it was very difficult for them to overcome their prejudices, so the Jerusalem church, and the disciples and apostles who served in it were not as effective in taking the gospel outside

Judaism as were Paul, Barnabas, and the other missionaries who would later be sent out of the Antioch church.

When they had shared their stories of how God was working in the Gentile community, James spoke. James was the half-brother of Christ who was saved after the resurrection. Peter tended to be the “preacher,” and James tended to be the pastor with his practical approach to the ministry. What was James’ position? As Peter spoke for the apostles, James spoke for the disciples and agreed with Peter’s statement, a position that supported the doctrine of Paul and Barnabas. James pointed to the then well-known argument that when the LORD made His covenant with Abraham, the patriarch who they all considered to be the most prominent, was made with a Gentile. Abraham was not a Jew. The LORD’s covenant with Israel, its identity as “God’s chosen people,” and the giving of the Mosaic Law that separated them from the pagan nations did not take place until Israel was brought out of Egypt, approximately 14 generations after Jacob’s sons moved there.

**Acts 15:15-18. *And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, <sup>16</sup>After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: <sup>17</sup>That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. <sup>18</sup>Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.***

James quoted the words of the prophet, Amos<sup>5</sup> who wrote of David’s fallen tent. When Jesus spoke of this event, He referred to it as the destruction of the Temple. However, Jesus said that He would restore the Temple in three days. After Jesus was resurrected and the Holy Spirit came to live in the hearts of the believer, the Christian became the “Temple of the Holy Spirit” and the Temple was fully, irrevocably, and eternally rebuilt.<sup>6</sup> Amos spoke of the destruction of the ways of Judaism when he spoke of the remnant of the Jews and the Gentiles who would bear the Name of the Lord. This is a very profound prophesy that bears understanding. The prophet clearly stated that Judaism would come to an end, and the church of God would be rebuilt with a remnant of Jews and with the Gentiles, exactly what had happened within the experience of this church in Jerusalem. They had seen the prophesy fulfilled in their own lifetimes. Furthermore, Amos states that this event was part of God’s plan from the very beginning. The purpose for Israel was the establishment of a community of faith, which prior to Abraham’s passing of his faith to his son Isaac, his grandson

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<sup>5</sup> Amos 9:11-12.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19.



Jacob, and his twelve grandsons, was limited to a very small community of believers.

As a Christian attempts to communicate the gospel to the Jewish community, this prophesy of Amos can be very helpful in pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, and inviting those in the Jewish Community to be part of the remnant that Amos speaks of. Put this verse in your tool box.

**Acts 15:19-21. *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: <sup>20</sup>But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. <sup>21</sup>For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.***

James then gave some very specific instruction, and by doing so, reveals to us a hint of the authority that he holds in the Jerusalem church. James first stated that the burden of the Mosaic Law and Jewish traditions should not be placed upon the Gentiles. Then he gave them a list of things that they should abstain from, a small list of items, rather than a huge tome that is the Mizpah and the Talmud. James lists four things that demonstrate the character of a person of faith:

- Abstain from food that comes from animals that have been sacrificed to idols.
- Abstain from sexual immorality,
- Abstain from eating the meat of animals who have been strangled,
- Abstain from eating blood.

Are these four things that James stated to be laws that the Gentile Christians must adhere to? We will find from the subsequent text that there is no intent of legalism stated in these words. It is a suggestion of behavior that would be expedient as they portend to be Godly people, behaviors that would be considered an insult to Jews. Christians, when submitted to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abstain from these and many similar behaviors specifically because they would damage their testimony among those outside the body of Christ who would not understand. Paul addresses these same “poor testimony” issues in his letter to the Romans<sup>7</sup> among other places. The key here is the word, “abstain.” Rather than being a written law, it is a call for abstinence, a deliberate choice to refrain from the things he listed.

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<sup>7</sup> Romans, Chapter 12.

**Acts 15:22. *Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:***

With this, the event referred to by most Bible students as the “Jerusalem Conference” ended. The leadership of the Jerusalem church gave their ascent to Paul and Barnabas to return to Antioch with the news of the “official position” they had established. Furthermore, they sent with Paul and Barnabas two emissaries, who by their presence, would validate the news. They called two of their leaders, Judas Barsabas<sup>8</sup> and Silas, who were leaders in the Jerusalem fellowship. This visit to Antioch was intended to be a simple “chaperone” assignment for Judas and Silas. However, once they arrived in Antioch, they found themselves amazed by the power of the Spirit of God in that church, and their lives would never be the same again. We would hear much about the life of Silas in the remainder of the book of Acts.

**Acts 15:23-29. *And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:***

***<sup>24</sup>Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: <sup>25</sup>It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup>Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup>We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. <sup>28</sup>For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; <sup>29</sup>That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.***

The church in Jerusalem did something the modern church seems rarely willing to do. They placed their decision in writing and sent it out among the other churches that had been formed. In it they simply validated the presence of Judas and Silas, commended Paul and Barnabas, and repeated the requests of James for abstinence in the four areas. Again, in the letter it is clearly stated that “you will do well to avoid these things.” They are something to be avoided, not something that will cause them to lose their salvation. If this “loss of salvation” were the case, the argument would have been clearly stated as such. With the

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<sup>8</sup> Barsabbas is Hebrew for “Son of Sabbas.”

testimony of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James clearly teaching salvation by faith alone, such a requirement would never have been considered.

What are some of the things that Christians should abstain from, even though we are “no longer under the Law?” Many feel that abstinence from alcohol is expedient, as being under the influence of alcohol reduces our dependency on or testimony to the Holy Spirit. Abstinence is also an indication of self-control in one’s life, a fruit of the Holy Spirit. However, as with all behavior, even abstinence or any other work can go beyond expediency and place one under the bondage of legalism, so as with all we do, we should always be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as we make decisions as to what we do, what we abstain from, and how those decisions and actions affect other people, both within the church and without.

**Acts 15:30-35. *So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: <sup>31</sup>Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. <sup>32</sup>And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. <sup>33</sup>And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. <sup>34</sup>Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. <sup>35</sup>Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.***

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from their mission of peace, bringing with them Judas and Silas. The latter two met the Antioch congregation and shared greetings from the Jerusalem church and shared the contents of the letter. The people were glad for the encouraging news that would, at least for now, resolve the conflicting teaching. This may very well have been gladly received by the Antioch Judaizers, since they would no longer feel like spiritual policemen going around accusing the Gentile Christians of an incomplete faith. Furthermore, their own bondage to the Law might have been released. The biblical narrative states that the contingent from Jerusalem returned, but Silas stayed behind.

Acts, Chapter 15 is the complete account of the Jerusalem Conference. That conference was necessary in order to dispel a significant and pervasive false teaching that added works to the requirement for salvation by faith in God. The position of the leadership in the church, led of the Holy Spirit, was clear. Salvation is by faith, and by faith alone. Any other requirements that are placed on people by the church are works, a burden, and a sin. We can take this as an opportunity to examine our expectations of one another as we seek to be obedient to Christ. Salvation is clearly given to the believer by God as a gift of His grace, given to those who have sincerely expressed their faith and trust in

Him. Then, following that profession, the LORD grants full and complete forgiveness of sin, another gift, and one that was paid for when Jesus took those sins to the Cross of Calvary. All people will find themselves standing before the LORD in judgment at the end of their lives,<sup>9</sup> but only those who have placed their faith in God, (and *all* of those who have placed their faith in God), will stand before Him with forgiveness that is declared by the LORD Himself. All others who have separated themselves from the LORD throughout their life will find that separation will continue through eternity.

Salvation does not come without some responsibilities given by the Holy Spirit to the believer. There is a level of spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical integrity that is expected by God that is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is realized through the expression of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. The exercise of this fruit will cause us to love one another to the point that we will refrain from doing things that might insult or confuse other Christians or, most importantly, unbelievers. Our temperance, or self-control, can control our temper and control our natural impulses so that we can be a positive testimony to the Spirit of Christ in our lives.

As we seek to become more and more like Jesus, we will see a change in our lives that will be evident to others, and we will be shaped and controlled by the Power of the Holy Spirit, rather than shaped by a set of rules and regulations that we cannot possibly keep. Legalism is destructive to the freedom we have in Christ. We can replace legalism with obedience to the Holy Spirit and we will be able to live a life that is free from the burden of guilt, a life that honors God, and is filled with both peace and joy.

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<sup>9</sup> Revelation, Chapter 20.