

Sunday School Lesson: “God Makes No Distinction

Bible Basis: Acts 15:1–12

Bible Truth: Luke claimed that the Jerusalem council had power to change the Law of Moses in order to make it congruent to God’s action.

Memory Verses: “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9)

 Theme: Salvation is by grace through faith—not by works or rituals.


Lesson Aim:

By the end of this lesson, we will know that:

- Grace is unmerited favor
 - Salvation is by grace through faith
 - Grace transforms and empowers
 - Grace liberates from sin and law
 - Grace sustains in weakness
-

Background

- The early church was growing rapidly, and Gentiles were coming to faith.
- Some Jewish believers insisted Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved (v.1).
- This sparked a major theological debate, leading to the Jerusalem Council.
- Peter’s speech (v.7–11) is a turning point: he affirms that God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentiles without requiring circumcision.

 Note: Circumcision was a sign of the covenant in Judaism (Genesis 17). For Jewish believers, it symbolized obedience and identity. The question was: must Gentiles adopt Jewish customs to be fully included?

Words That Matter:

1. *Torah* – “Instruction” or “teaching” in Hebrew, and it refers most specifically to the Five Books of Moses. It can also encompass all Jewish sacred teachings, including the entire Hebrew Bible’ and oral traditions.
2. *Yarah*– “to throw” , “to point”, or “to teach,” and it forms the root of the word Torah. This connection reveals that the Mosaic Law is not merely a legal code but divine instruction-God’s way of pointing His people toward righteousness.

Why Does this Matter?

1. *Yarah* ties in with Jesus Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of divine instruction-He is both the Teacher and the embodiment of the Torah. Where *Yarah* means “to teach” or “to point the way,” Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6) perfectly revealing God’s direction for humanity.
2. In the Old Testament, *Yarah* describes how God “casts forth” His truth-through prophets, laws, and wisdom-to guide His people.
3. Jesus, as the incarnate Word, does not merely teach the Torah-He fulfills it (Matthew 5:17) He is the living embodiment of *Yarah*.

Lesson Outline

1. Reflection Question

- Have you ever felt like you had to “earn” God’s love or approval?
- What does grace mean to you?
- Are there ways we unintentionally add requirements to God’s grace?
- How can we welcome others into faith without burdening them?

The Lesson Text

I. God’s Will Debated (Acts 15:1-3)- Conflict Arises.

¹ While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers^[a]: “Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

² Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.

³ The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone’s joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted.

What’s Happening here (Acts 15:1–3)

- Controversy arises in Antioch
Some men from Judea (Judaizers) arrive and teach that circumcision, as required by the law of Moses, is necessary for salvation. This challenges the gospel of grace that Paul and Barnabas had been preaching.
- *Judaizers* refers to a group within the early Christian church—primarily Jewish Christians—who taught that Gentile converts must observe certain aspects of the Mosaic Law (such as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and Jewish festivals) to be fully accepted by God. The word comes from the Greek verb *ioudaizein* meaning “to live like Jews,” and appears in Galatians 2:14 when Paul rebuked Peter for compelling Gentiles to “Judaize.”

- Paul and Barnabas push back
They vehemently disagree (**violently**), defending the truth that salvation comes by faith in Jesus alone, not by adherence to the Mosaic Law. This isn't just a doctrinal dispute—it's a battle over the very nature of the gospel.
- The church sends a delegation to Jerusalem
Recognizing the gravity of the issue, the church in Antioch sends Paul, Barnabas, and others to consult with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. This sets the stage for the Jerusalem Council, where the church will officially decide how to handle Gentile inclusion.
- Encouragement along the way
As they travel through Phoenicia and Samaria, Paul and Barnabas share the joyful news that Gentiles are being converted. This affirms that God is at work beyond Jewish boundaries, and it brings great joy to the believers they meet.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why were some believers insisting on circumcision?
2. What does Peter say about how God accepts people?
3. What role does the Holy Spirit play in confirming salvation?

II. God's Will Considered (Acts 15:4-6)

⁴When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them.

⁵But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."

⁶So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue.

What's Happening here? Acts 15:4-6

- Paul and Barnabas arrive in Jerusalem
They're welcomed warmly by the church leadership—apostles and elders—who are eager to hear what God has been doing through their ministry among the Gentiles.
- They report God's work
Paul and Barnabas share testimonies of Gentile conversions, miracles, and Spirit-

led breakthroughs. This is a moment of celebration and affirmation of God's inclusive grace.

- **Opposition arises**
Some believers from the group of the Pharisees—likely Jewish Christians who still held tightly to Mosaic traditions—insist that Gentile converts must be circumcised and follow the law of Moses. This echoes the earlier tension from Acts 15:1.
- **The apostles and elders convene**
Recognizing the gravity of the issue, the church leaders gather to deliberate and discern. This meeting becomes the Jerusalem Council, a defining moment where the church officially affirms that salvation is by grace through faith—not by law or ritual.

III. God's Will Revealed (Acts 15:7-12)

⁷ At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows:
“Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe.

⁸ God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith.

¹⁰ So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers^[b] with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear?

¹¹ We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”

¹² Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

What's Happening here? Acts 15:7-12

- **Peter speaks after long debate**
After much discussion among the apostles and elders, Peter—who had earlier witnessed the Holy Spirit fall on Cornelius and his household (Acts 10)—reminds them that God chose him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.
- **God's impartiality affirmed**
Peter declares that God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. He gave the Holy Spirit to both, cleansing their hearts through faith, not through law-keeping.

- A powerful rebuke
Peter challenges the idea of imposing the law on Gentile believers, calling it a “yoke” that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear. This is a striking admission: even devout Jews couldn’t fully keep the law.
- The heart of the gospel
Peter concludes with a clear, unifying statement:
- “We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”
This is the theological climax—grace, not law, is the basis of salvation for all.
- Paul and Barnabas testify
After Peter, Paul and Barnabas share stories of miraculous signs and wonders among the Gentiles, reinforcing that God is clearly at work outside the bounds of the Mosaic Law.

Reflection Questions

1. What does Peter’s speech reveal about God’s view of Gentiles?
2. Why is it significant that Peter calls the law a “yoke”?
3. How does this moment affirm Paul’s message of grace?

Why This Moment Matters

- It affirms faith and grace as the foundation of salvation.
- It validates Gentile inclusion without legal conversion to Judaism.
- It sets the tone for Paul’s later teachings in Galatians and Romans.
- It models Spirit-led discernment in the face of doctrinal conflict
- Paul saw grace as the great equalizer—Jew and Gentile alike are saved by trusting in Christ, not by ritual or heritage.

Paul’s message on grace centers on God’s unearned favor, freely given through Christ, which saves, transforms, and empowers believers—not by works, but by faith.

Key Take Aways

- **Grace is unmerited favor**
Paul defines grace as *God's kindness and mercy freely given*, not something we earn. In Romans 3:24, he writes, "All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus".
 - **Salvation is by grace through faith**
In Ephesians 2:8–9, Paul emphasizes that salvation is a gift: "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith... not by works, so that no one can boast".
 - **Grace transforms and empowers**
Paul's own life is a testimony to grace. Once a persecutor of Christians, he was radically changed by his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). He later wrote, "By the grace of God I am what I am... and His grace to me was not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:10).
 - **Grace liberates from sin and law**
In Romans 6:14, Paul declares, "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." Grace frees believers from the bondage of sin and the demands of the law.
 - **Grace sustains in weakness**
Paul shares in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Grace is not just for salvation—it's strength for daily life and ministry.
-