

## The Council's Verdict

The question of Gentiles needing circumcision before being admitted into the church contained implications regarding the entire ceremonial portions of the Law of Moses. In essence, all of the Law's ritual aspects and the traditions of the Pharisees would follow. When we consider the rules for eating, washing, and works, the list would be endless. Jews converting to Christianity might not perceive any difference between the Law's washings and baptism. How much more confusing would it be to the Gentile, listening to the Law read in Synagogues.

During the discussions at Antioch of Syria, Paul did not exert his apostolic authority. In Jerusalem, both he and Peter stated the facts before the elders and those assembled to hear the discussions. They presented as evidence the teaching given and the result. Both apostles spoke the Word, and the result was that people believed and were baptized for the remission of sins. A difference occurred at Cornelius's household, where the Holy Spirit gave evidence that Gentiles were acceptable in God's family of believers (Acts 10).

In the last words from Peter in the book of Acts, he clarifies the revelations to him, pointing out that Grace saves the Gentiles through Faith. Their faith led them to obey the baptism command. Peter, referring to the Holy Spirit, said, *"He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith ... But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are"* (Acts 15:9-11). Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 2:8-10. The conclusion is that atonement by the Law of Moses is no longer valid, and instead, the Jews are now saved in the same way as the Gentiles.

In these discussions, it is also made clear that added requirements to the revealed Word of God are not allowed. In John chapter 6, Jesus states that the words of eternal life came from the Father and that He, Jesus, spoke them without change. Moses said, *"You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you"* (Deuteronomy 4:2). Proverbs contain this statement. *"Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar"* (Proverbs 30:5-6). And The last book of the Bible has, *"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book"* (Revelation 22:18-19).

Concluding the Jerusalem Council, James (the half brother of Jesus) suggested four things that Gentiles needed to keep in mind. The Jews had been taught about these because the Law included them. James said, *"Write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood"* (Acts 15:20). These had existed since creation and continue with us now.

**Things polluted by idols**, is explained in verse 29 as *"things sacrificed to idols."* Paul enlarged on this subject in Romans 14:14-21, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, and 10:18-20. Paul's letters do not contradict the council's conclusions but explain why abstaining from meats sacrificed to idols was necessary.

**Fornication**, which is sexual immorality, was prevented in creation by joining one man and one woman in Marriage (Genesis 2:23-25). The Law contains many passages on the subject as in Leviticus 18 and 20:10-21. Jesus' statement also points to creation as He speaks of Marriage, *"from the beginning it has not been this way"* (Matthew 19:8).

**Things strangled and blood.** This prohibition goes back to the covenant which God made with Noah after the flood. *"Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood"* (Genesis 9:3-4). The method of killing for

food must allow the blood to drain from the body. Therefore, strangling, which does not break the blood vessels, cannot be used. Since this goes back to Noah, it precedes the Law of Moses. No passage in the Bible suspends or overrides this instruction; therefore, it also remains in force now.

*"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from 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 Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings'" (Acts 15:22-23).* Notice that the false brethren who caused these discussions had not, like these brethren, received authorization or approval from the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:24).

From whom do we receive authorization for what we do and teach today, man or Christ?