

# (Through the Bible) Acts 14-15

by Chuck Smith

---

*Chuck Smith's sermon on Acts 14-15 emphasizes the challenges and triumphs of Paul and Barnabas in spreading the Gospel amidst opposition and the fickleness of public opinion.*

**Duration:** 1:18:43

**Topics:** "Idolatry", "True Worship"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker warns against seeking the worship, glory, and praise of man, as it is fickle and temporary. He uses the example of athletes who experience cheers and adoration from the crowd, but can quickly fall out of favor if they go through a slump. The speaker then discusses how the people in the city of Lystra, where Paul and Barnabas were preaching, had little knowledge of the true and living God. Paul starts by pointing out the revelation of God in nature, but faces a great danger in their worship of him and Barnabas as gods. The sermon emphasizes the importance of turning away from empty beliefs and legends and turning towards the true God.

---

## Transcript

Shall we turn in our Bibles to Acts chapter 14. Paul and Barnabas, in carrying the Gospel, have come into the uncharted territories, as far as the Gospel is concerned, into Asia Minor. They came from Cyprus to the area that is now known as Turkey.

They did not remain in the coastal plains of Pamphylia. It is thought that Paul probably got malaria fever. It was a very prevalent thing around the coastal plains of Pamphylia at that time.

And later on when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he spoke to them about how sick he was when he was there with them. So the fact that Paul did not stay in Pamphylia, but immediately moved into the upper plateau country of Pisidia, to the city of Antioch, that he was going up there for actually health reasons as much as anything else, coming into the area of Galatia. There in Antioch, they went into the synagogue.

They preached Jesus Christ and there was a tremendous response the following week. Practically the whole town came out to listen to them, which created a jealousy in the hearts of the Jews in the synagogue. And they turned the people against Paul and Barnabas.

So Paul and Barnabas left Antioch and as we come into chapter 14, they went from Antioch about 50 miles away to Iconium. And so when they came to Iconium, as was their procedure, they went into the

synagogue again on the Sabbath day and they again spoke and a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil-affected against Paul and Barnabas and those who had believed.

And so they remained there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace. And the Lord granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. So they were facing opposition in Iconium.

And rather than fleeing from the opposition, they stayed there a long time in order that they might really root and ground those who believed in the faith. I think that one of the weaknesses of modern-day evangelism is the lack of follow-up. It is rather tragic to bring people to a birth in Jesus Christ, but don't carry them on into a mature state.

And that has been one of the great weaknesses of the church today. So many times the church makes its emphasis upon evangelism rather than the developing of a strong body. And so when they saw the opposition, they remained there in Iconium for a long time in order that they might really establish the believers in the faith, knowing that they were going to have difficulty in their Christian walk.

Now they spoke boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony unto the word of His grace. In other words, in the Gospel of Acts, the last verses is that they went everywhere preaching the gospel. The Lord working with them with signs following.

Here again, the Lord gave witness to the truth that they declared by signs, miracles, wonders that were done there in Iconium to confirm the truth of what was being declared. Signs following. Today many have reversed that and they have signs preceding.

And they hope by the signs to attract people. But here and in the New Testament, the signs were for confirming of the truth of the word that had been declared. And so they had declared boldly the Lord to them, who gave them confirming evidence to the people of the truth.

But the multitude of the city was divided. Part held with the Jews, part with the Apostles. So when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews with their rulers to use them despitefully and to stone them, and they became aware of it, they fled unto Lystra, about 40 miles away, and Derbe, the cities of Lyconia.

And unto the region that was round about that area. And there they preached the gospel. And there sat a certain man at Lystra who was lame in his feet, being a cripple, and from his mother's womb he had never been able to walk.

And the same heard Paul speak. And as Paul was steadfastly beholding him, he perceived that he had the faith to be healed. And so he said to him with a loud voice, stand up on your feet.

And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice saying in the speech of the Lyconia, the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas Jupiter or Zeus.

And they called Paul Mercurius or Hermes. Now they were Greeks. Jupiter and Mercurius were the Roman names of the Greek gods of Zeus and Hermes.

Zeus was supposedly born to Croesus and Rhea, who were of the mythological race of the Titans. When Zeus grew up, he and his brothers rebelled against the Titans and overthrew them. And Zeus became the chief god, the god of the skies.

Hermes was born of an illicit relationship, one of the many that Zeus had with the goddesses and the mortal women. And was known as the god of speech. And because Paul was the chief spokesman, they figured he must be Hermes.

And because Barnabas was probably a very stately looking person, taller, they said that he was Zeus. Now there at Lystra, there was a great temple to Jupiter. And according to the legends, years earlier, Jupiter and Hermes came to the city of Lystra incognito.

But nobody recognized them. And the people treated them rather shabbily. But there was one couple who took them in and treated them nice.

And so for a reward, Zeus made them the perpetual keepers of the temple of Zeus there in Lystra. For he turned them into two trees that stood at the front of the temple. And thus they were the perpetual guards of the temple of Zeus.

And so when they saw this miracle that Paul had wrought, speaking the word of faith to this lame man, for somehow again by the Spirit of God, Paul knew that this man had faith to be healed. And it had to be just the discerning of the Spirit of God on Paul's part. So Paul said with a loud voice, the word of faith, stand up on your feet.

Now at this point, the man had one of two choices. Either to stand up on his feet, believing the word of faith, or to laugh and scoff at the command of Paul and beg his inability. Notice how many times Jesus gave impossible commands.

To the man with the withered hand, He said, stretch forth your hand. Lord, I can't. My Those who have been challenged with the word of faith have the choice to obey and to receive that work of God or to argue with it.

Unfortunately, I'm afraid that too many times we're arguing with the Lord. The Lord speaks His word of faith to our hearts. Be strong.

Go in and conquer. Oh, Lord, I would love to conquer. Oh, Lord, I'm so weak.

I would just love. Oh, you don't know, Lord, how I'd love to do that, you know. And we're telling Him all the reasons why we can't, rather than just obeying and going ahead and doing it.

Now, if you will just will to obey those commands of Christ to your heart, you will find, as did this man, that God will give to you all that you need to obey His command of faith. So when God says to you, all right, now be strong and be victorious, say, all right, Lord, and just accept and be strong and victorious. That's all there is to it.

If you will will to obey, He will give you the capacity to do it. So Paul spoke a word of faith. The man stood on his feet.

He began to leap and walk. And the people said, the gods have come down. He's come back again.

You know, the legend was that he had been there before. He's come back again. So they ran down to the temple of Jupiter.

For the temple was there at the gates of the city. And they brought oxen and garlands under the gates. And the priest of Zeus would have done sacrifice with the people to Paul.

Which when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their clothes and ran in among the people crying out and saying, sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you. And we preach unto you that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God which made the heaven and earth and the sea and all of the things that are therein. Who in times past allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.

Nevertheless, he did not leave himself without witness in that he did good. He gave us rain, fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. Now notice, here are people.

And notice there was no synagogue in Lystra. Paul's usual method in coming into a city would be to go into the synagogue. Because there at least the people had a basic foundation in their knowledge of God having studied the Old Testament.

They knew the true and the living God. Now Paul is getting further and further into the wild, you might say. He comes now to the city of Lystra where no synagogue existed.

Now in any city, if there were ten adult Jewish males, they would form a synagogue. So that means there wasn't ten adult Jewish males in Lystra. No synagogue.

So Paul just goes on the street and starts to preach to the people. But in talking to them about God, he must start with nature. God has not left himself without witness in that God has been good.

He's given you the rainy seasons. He's given you the fruitful ground. Lystra was the center of the corn raising of the ancient world.

It was the Iowa of that time where most of the corn was raised. Very good, abundant crops. God has given to you the fruitful seasons.

God has given you the rain. God has made himself known through nature. So God has not been without witness.

And so he starts where they are. They have very little concept of the true and the living God. All they know about God is the legends of Zeus, who through his many affairs gave birth to Apollo, to Athena, to Muses, to Phetis, to Artemis, and to all of the other gods that they worshipped.

But they didn't know about the true and the living God. And so Paul starts at an area that they can understand the revelation of God in nature. And so as they are ready to make a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, Paul says, no, we've come to preach to you.

We're men. We're just like you are. And we've come to preach to you that you should turn from these vanities, these legends, these beliefs that you have, are empty.

They're not true. You should turn from these to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth, the seas, everything that is in them, and has left his witness by being good to you and giving you rain and

fruitful seasons. So he starts where they are.

God has revealed himself in nature. Now David tells us in the 19th Psalm that the heavens declare the glory of God. The earth shows his handiwork.

Day and to day, they utter their speech. Night and to night, their voice goeth forth. And there is not a speech nor a language where their voice is not heard.

God speaks to man universally in nature. Every night the heavens talk to you. When you look up into that star filled sky, God is talking to you.

The heavens are declaring to you the glory, the vastness, the awesomeness of God. And every day as you look around at the flowers, the fields, the various life forms, God is speaking to you. The problem is, so often we are misinterpreting and we stop short.

And man begins to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. Paul speaks of that danger in Romans. So a man becomes a pantheist.

Yes, he's aware of God, but everything becomes God. That beautiful green bean field becomes God, though it's going to turn brown and die, get plowed under. But he begins to worship nature, animism.

I remember when I was a little tiny kid, our family was up at Yosemite National Park. And you know how little kids are. There were other kids.

We were in Camp 14 by the Merced River. And we were looking up at Glacier Point. And this little kid said to me, do you know who made that? And I says, yeah, I know who made that.

God made that. Oh no, Mother Nature made that. Well, it's not right to fool around with Mother Nature.

But man stops short of God. So Paul pointed out to them, God has given a witness of himself to you in nature. I believe that at this point, Paul was facing one of the gravest dangers in his whole career.

At this point, his career could have come to an end. His ministry and work for God could have halted right here, had he taken the praise and the glory that these people were wanting to put upon him. I think the gravest danger of the ministry is not when you're under severe persecution, but when God has used your life, you're highly effective and everybody begins to speak well of you, begins to praise you, begins to declare what a marvelous person and all you are.

You are facing there the gravest danger of your ministry because if you accept that praise, you will soon find yourself sitting on the shelf. It is interesting how that again, man wants to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. Paul was the instrument that God used and so they were ready to worship Paul.

Now, Paul could have rationalized in his mind, well, this is good, I've got them right in my hand. I'll let them go ahead and worship me and then I'll point them to the Lord. And unfortunately, there are many people who follow this policy.

They try to draw persons to themselves and once they're really attached to me, then I can turn them over to the Lord. I can, you know, they so admire me and they so love me, now I'll bring them to Jesus. It's a very dangerous rationale.

Paul, rather than receiving the praise, said, no, this is emptiness. I'm only a man. Don't worship the creature, worship the Creator.

We've come to preach to you that you should turn from this emptiness, from these vanities, to the living God. Don't stop short by worshiping the creature, worship the Creator who is blessed forevermore. And even so, they were almost insisting on going ahead to worship Paul and Barnabas.

They were scarcely able to stop the people who were intent upon worshiping them. Now, if you think that the worship of man, glory and praise of man, is a very desirable and wonderful thing to have, let me just give you a word of warning. The glory and the praise of man is very fickle, as will testify any ballplayer who has gone into a slump for a period of time.

You can be a great hero, but just go into a slump for a while. And every time you come up and up to bat, you will hear the boos of the people. And how many athletes, every time they step up to the plate, they've heard the crowd shouting their name, chanting their name, stomping their feet, standing up and cheering and cheering.

Our hero has come to bat. But let's just let him go into a deep slump over a period of time. And how the adulation of the world does change.

And every time you come up to bat, you hear the boos and the hisses. How fickle is the worship of man. Evident, they're at Lystra.

Here they're ready to worship him as a God. Verse 19, And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people. And having stoned Paul, they drug him out of the city, supposing that he had been dead.

These same people that were ready to worship him have now lynched him, because stoning was the form of lynching in those days. It was no justice, just that crowd mob psychology. And these people ready to worship them now stoned him and drug him out of the city when they thought that they had killed him.

Now, I personally feel they did kill him. Now that's sort of brash perhaps to say, because Paul himself said he didn't know whether or not they killed him. But since he didn't know, I have a right to my feelings.

Years later, when Paul was writing his second letter to the Corinthian church, no doubt referring to this experience here in Lystra, he said there was a man in Christ over 14 years ago. And whether in the body or out of the body, I really don't know. But such a one was caught up into the third heaven.

And there heard things so marvelous that it would be a crime to try to describe it with human language. Of such a one I will boast. And so Paul wrote about this Lystra experience and he declared, whether I was in the body or out of the body, I don't know.

Whether or not I was still alive and had a vision or I was actually dead and had an out-of-body experience, I can't tell you for sure. But what I can tell you for sure is that I was caught up into the third heaven and there it was so glorious. The things I heard were so fantastic that there is no language that can describe them.

And if I tried to describe them, it would be a crime because there are no words that are adequate to describe what I heard. And because of the abundance of the revelations that were given to me, there was

also given to me this thorn in the flesh, a minister of Satan to buffet me. It could be that Paul received injuries at that stoning from which he never recovered.

Paul said of such a one I will boast. So the fickleness of the glory of the crowd ready to worship him, ready to kill him. So they drug him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

However, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came back into the city. Yeah, you'd think he had run, wouldn't you? Not Paul. Came right back into the city and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derby.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, right back to where he was stoned. Then back to Iconium, where they were planning to stone him. And then on to Antioch, where he got kicked out of town, shaking the dust off of his feet.

As they confirmed the souls of the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God. They didn't say, well, fellas, it's a rosy path. Now that you've accepted Jesus, all of your problems are over.

Isn't that nice? Jesus is so good, you're not going to have another problem. No, they said, hey, hang in there, man, it's going to be tough. With much tribulation, we're going to enter into the kingdom.

But they encouraged them to the faithfulness in Christ. Later, Paul wrote to Timothy, who came from this area. Timothy grew up in this area, and no doubt met Paul on this first journey, joined Paul later as a companion and as a servant.

But Timothy, Paul called him my son in the faith. So it was no doubt in this journey that Paul met Timothy and he was converted. Paul later wrote Timothy and reminded him of the tribulation that he faced while in that territory.

And he said how that God delivered me when I was in Iconium and in Lystra and in Derbe. How God delivered me. Now, herein is interesting to me the different ways by which God delivered Paul from these enemies.

In Iconium, God delivered Paul by having him kicked out of town. He said, well, God freed me from those people. In Antioch, he got kicked out of town.

In Iconium, they were plotting to stone him, but Paul learned of the plot and left town before they had a chance. So God delivered him by making him aware of the plot against his life. But in Lystra, God delivered him by having them think that he was dead and dragging him out of the city.

Now, God doesn't follow a particular pattern. He's very versatile. He refuses to be confined to a pattern.

It is interesting how that man is constantly seeking to put God into a form. I want to somehow put God into a rut because I'm always in a rut. And I want to pattern God so I can say, this is how God works.

This is how God will deliver you. There are those people who are offering simplistic answers for complex problems. But let me tell you something.

There are no simple answers. There are no pattern ways by which God works. God may deliver you by letting you know that trouble is afoot.

God may be delivering you by the foot, kicking you out of town. Or God may deliver you through the stoning from the angry mob. God works in different ways.

His works in our lives. And he does not confine himself to one single way or pattern of working. But he works through diversities.

So, they encouraged him, hang in there. It's going to be tough. But through much tribulation, we will enter into the kingdom of God.

And so, in these churches, they ordained elders. And they prayed with fasting. And they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed.

Brothers, we just place you in the hands of the Lord. And after the prayer and fasting, anointed and prayed for the elders, appointed these elders over the church. Now, after they had passed throughout Pisidia, the upper area where Antioch was, they came back again to the coastal plains of Pamphylia.

And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Atalia where they caught a ship. And they sailed back to Antioch from where they had begun their journey back in the beginning of chapter 13, where they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. So, they fulfilled their first missionary journey.

And they came back again to the brethren there in Antioch on the northern coast of the Mediterranean, north from the areas of Phoenicia. And when they were come and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode for a long time with the disciples.

So, they came back to their home church, sharing with them the glorious work of God among the Gentiles, the miracles of grace, and the number of believers, the body of Christ being expanded into the Gentile world. Now, certain men which came down from Judea to the church in Antioch taught the brethren and said, except you are circumcised after the manner of Moses, you can't be saved. Unfortunately, there are always those troublers who are going around trying to disrupt God's work among the body of Christ.

When we were over a block away in the other church, sort of the beginnings, in the early beginnings of the Jesus movement, when so many hundreds of young people were coming to the Lord and we were having, even as we do now, the baptisms. I was having them then every Monday night. After the Monday night class, we'd go down to Newport Beach, 19th Street, and we'd have a baptism every Monday night.

And there would be 50, 60, 70 kids being baptized every Monday night at that time. And one night after church, I saw this little fellow talking to some of the young people. And he had gathered a group around him, and he was very, you know, into what he was saying.

So I went up to hear what he was saying. And he was telling them, if you haven't been baptized in the name of Jesus only, it doesn't count, you know. And boy, I'll tell you, fire.

That's about as close as I've come to hitting somebody in a long time. I went up and grabbed the little guy by the collar and just lifted him up. And I said, fellow, you better get out of here in a hurry, because I'll not guarantee what I'll do.

And I took him right up to his car, pushed him in his car, and said, now get out of here. It's unfortunate that there are those people that are going around trying to disrupt the work of God. They can't stand you having so much joy in the Lord.

Those that are wanting to put you into bondage, you know, you should never be a happy Christian. You should never be a joyful Christian. And they're always trying to lay their trip on you.

It's existed from the beginning. The fellows from Judea, who believed in Jesus, but who at one time were Pharisees, came down, they saw the Gentiles worshiping God, and all they said, look, you're not really saved unless you've been circumcised. Now they believed that salvation was only for the Jew, and the only way to become a Christian was to become a Jew.

That you could not be saved if you were not a Jew. And so, there in the church of Antioch, they brought this disturbing doctrine. So when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension, I mean, they really faced these guys, and there was a big uproar over it.

They had no small dissension and disputation with them. They determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. Notice, the men came down from Judea and they go up to Jerusalem.

Just a little aside, you never go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. Even though you're on the top of the mountain.

You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem.

You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem.

You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem.

You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem. You never say, let's go down to Jerusalem.

You never say, let's go top of Mount Hermon, 10,000 feet. You don't say, well, let's go down to Jerusalem. You always say, let's go up to Jerusalem.

And from Jerusalem, you always go down. Let's go down from Jerusalem, but you never go down to Jerusalem. Jerusalem sits there, of course, in the Jerusalem mountains.

And from whatever direction you come to Jerusalem, you've got to come up to Jerusalem. And so it's always going up to Jerusalem. So in even to the present day, it's always up to Jerusalem, never down to Jerusalem.

So they determined that they should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and the elders about this question. Let's get this thing settled. And so being brought on their way by the church, they pass through Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, and they cause great joy unto all the brethren.

Now churches had already been established in the areas of Phoenicia, Lebanon, and in Samaria. And so they were sharing with them everywhere they went of God's work among the Gentiles. And great joy came to the brethren because of the work of God.

But when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all of the things that God had done with them. And so they gave a missionary report to the church in Jerusalem. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who had become believers.

And they said that it was necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and the elders came together to consider this problem, this matter. Now when there had been a lot of disputing, a reedy hassle over this thing, Peter finally stood up.

And he said unto them, Men and brethren, you 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. And God which knows the hearts bear them witness giving them the Holy Ghost even as he did unto us. And he put no difference between us and them purifying their hearts by faith.

Peter, first of all, is the one who gives the first witness to the council how that God had called him to go to the house of Cornelius to bring them the gospel. And that God obviously worked among them by his grace through faith because they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. God did not make a difference between them, but their salvation was through faith.

Paul tells us in Romans 3.22 that there is no difference. God has taken away the differences. All have sinned, all have come short of the glory of God, but all of us are redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ.

Whether we be Jew or Greek, there's no difference. There's only one way to salvation and that's through faith in Jesus Christ. So Peter said, 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? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they.

In other words, our salvation is just like theirs is through grace, through faith. So why should we put upon them the yoke? That is the law which we nor our fathers were really able to bear. Why hang something on them that we weren't able to handle? Then all of the multitude kept silence and they gave audience to Barnabas and Paul who declared the miracles and the wonders that God had done among the Gentiles through their ministry.

And after they had held their peace, that is the opposition, James, who was the pillar of the early church, the leader of the early church, not Peter, but James was the leader in the early church in Jerusalem, not the brother of John, but the half-brother of Jesus, whom Jesus appeared to in a special appearance after his resurrection. James answered, saying, Men and brethren, listen to me. Simon or Peter has declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.

And to this agree the words of the prophets as it is written. 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 that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all of the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Now, he brings forth a prophecy from the Old Testament where God declared that after his work, after what work? After his work among the Gentiles, he will return again and build again the tabernacle of

David, which is fallen down. The temple will be rebuilt. There are those today who try to identify the church as Israel and make all of the prophecies concerning Israel apply to the church.

And needless to say, they have so messed up eschatology that they have the church going through the Great Tribulation. They declare that God's work with Israel is finished, that Israel had their opportunity, and that from now on the church is Israel. But it just totally messes up the whole prophetic picture and actually the bulk of prophecies where God declares that he will once again return and put his spirit upon the nation of Israel and work with them as a people.

Now, James in the early church recognized that this work of God among the Gentiles was to draw out a people for his name. We are still living in that age when the dominant work of the Spirit is among the Gentiles still drawing out a people unto the Lord. He has drawn out you and he's drawn out me.

We're a part of this work that God intended to do among the Gentiles as he is developing the body of Christ out of basically the Gentile nations. But through his grace there is no difference. The Jew is saved just as the Gentile.

Right now as far as God is concerned there's no racial differences. Salvation is open to every man, Jew and Gentile alike. But the day is coming when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, then God will again restore his work on the nation of Israel.

But here he says he's visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name. God knows exactly who those people are. God has a number.

And Paul tells us that when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, then God will deal with Israel once more. But God knows exactly what the fullness of the Gentiles is. For known unto him are all of his works from the beginning.

God knows exactly who is going to be saved. God has always known who was going to be saved. Known unto him are all of his works from the beginning.

I utterly reject the doctrine of the moral government of God that tells us of a God who is limited in his knowledge. A God who was disappointed and shocked by Adam's sin. A God who was caught by surprise when man fell and had to hastily devise a plan of redemption through the sending of his son.

How is it then that Christ was crucified from the foundations of the world? I utterly reject that concept of the limited knowledge of God that he doesn't know what you are going to do until you do it. And then is so disappointed when you make the wrong choice. Known unto him from the beginning are all of his works.

He's known it from the beginning of the world. He's known exactly who he is going to save, when he is going to save them, the circumstances under which they will be saved. He knows.

He has known from the beginning. There are no surprises with God. He's omniscient.

He can't learn anything new. When you enter into heaven, God is not going to say, well, what a surprise to see you here. I really never thought you were going to make it.

You may be surprised, but he won't. For known unto him are all of his works from the beginning of the world. And so God knew his plan to reach out unto the Gentiles, to draw out a people for his name.

God knew that Israel was to be set aside as the favored nation status, that God might work among the Gentiles. But yet one day as Hosea returned to his unfaithful wife, so God will come to unfaithful Israel and restore his work among them, pouring out his spirit once more upon them and drawing them unto himself. Wherefore, James said, my sentence is that we not trouble them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.

But let's write unto them that they abstain from pollutions of idols and fornication and things strangled and blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him being read in the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Then it pleased the apostles and the elders in the whole church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas, who was surnamed Barcibus, and Silas, who was the chief men among the brethren.

And they wrote the letters by them after this manner, the apostles and the elders and the brothers send greeting to the brothers, which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. For as much as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your soul, saying you must be circumcised and keep the law to whom we gave no such commandment. It seemed good unto us being assembled with one accord to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, the men who have hazard their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same thing by mouth. Now, if Paul and Barnabas had just come back, they said, oh, you know, you're not telling us the truth, you know, and you've, you know, fabricated the letters and all. So the church had wisdom in sending Judas and Silas with them to confirm, yes, this is indeed what the council decided in Jerusalem, that you as Gentiles are not under the law of Moses.

You as Gentiles do not have to proselytize and become Jews in order to be saved. We recognize the work of God's grace in your midst, and we recognize that you are saved through faith and the grace of God, just as we are. And you don't have to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved.

Recognizing that salvation is not a thing of works, but a thing of faith. And here it was established in the church. Yet unfortunately, there are so many churches that still insist on a righteousness through works and have established their standards of holiness and their do's and their don'ts in order that you might have a righteous standing before God.

The Galatian church had the same problem after Paul left this area. There were certain men that came in and said, now look, Paul doesn't have any authority. He has only taken on the role of an apostle himself, but nobody laid hands on him.

And Paul is wrong in teaching you that you have been justified by faith. You've got to keep the law of Moses. You've got to bring forth works that prove your righteousness.

So as Paul writes to the Galatians, he said, oh foolish Galatians who have bewitched you that you so soon turned away from the truth. Having begun in the spirit, are you now going to be made perfect in the flesh? This I would learn of you. Did you receive Christ by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Did you receive the spirit by the works of the law or the hearing of faith? And Paul writes to the Galatians who have been subverted by this undercurrent of Judaizing Christianity, which was prevalent in those early days.

But the issue was established for the church. Now there are still those today, Seventh-day Adventists, who proclaim, as did these men from Judea, that you've got to keep the law commingled with faith in Christ in order to be saved. Herbert Armstrong, in his Good News of the World Tomorrow, also advocates the keeping of the law, as do the Jehovah Witnesses, as the works righteousness emphasis that they have, rather than righteousness through faith, which is the emphasis of the New Testament, and was determined by the church at the council here in the 15th chapter of Acts.

So Paul and Barnabas came back to Antioch with the letter along with Judas and Silas, and so they gave the letter which said, it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. And so they recognized that the counsel that came forth was from the Holy Spirit. Now here, I believe, we have an example of the word of wisdom, the gift of the word of wisdom in operation through James.

We have disputing parties. We have a strong dispute going on in the church. There is a danger of splitting the church.

There are those that are saying they've got to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. How can they be saved without doing that? Paul says, look, it's obvious God is working among them. There are signs and gifts and they haven't been circumcised.

And there is this dispute going on. And James says, brethren, this is what I feel we ought to do. Let's write him a letter and just recognize that God has saved them through faith.

And just tell them that they ought to keep themselves from pollution and from fornication and things that are strangled and from blood. And if they do this, they do well. And everybody was satisfied.

The word of wisdom through the Holy Spirit. And so they write, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, recognizing that the counsel came from the Lord to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. One, that you abstain from meats that are offered to idols and from blood and from things strangled.

So the first thing is this thing of meat, which also was a problem in the early church. The Jew would not eat any meat of an animal that was strangled. They had their special way of killing the animal, making sure that all of the blood went out of the animal because of their respect for the blood and the life that was in the blood.

And of course, it was a part of the Mosaic law. And so they reiterated this part of the law to the Gentiles. However, Paul modified this later as he was writing to the Corinthian church.

In those days, quite often, when you would take your sacrifice to the priest to offer it to a pagan god, they would take a portion of the meat and offer it to the god as a sacrifice. But then they would give you what was left and you could have a feast for yourself and your friends. And then often the priest would take that portion that belonged to the priest and they would sell it in the meat markets.

So when you went to the butcher shop to buy a steak, it was quite possible that that particular steak came from an ox that was offered to one of the pagan idols. So Paul said, when you go to the butcher shop to buy your meat, don't ask the butcher, was this steak offered to an idol? He said, just buy it and go home and enjoy it without asking questions for your conscience sake, because the meat can't hurt you. You know, eating meat can't defile you, it can't make you a sinner.

As Jesus said, it isn't what goes into a man's mouth that defiles a man, it's what comes out of the man's mouth. That which goes into a man passes through his system and on out. It doesn't, it isn't a thing that defiles, what comes out of the man is the defiling things.

For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks and out of the heart issue the fornications and all of these other things. And then Paul said, when you're invited to eat, eat what is set before you asking no questions. So a friend invites you over to his house to eat and he lays out this beautiful roast, you don't say, was this roast offered as a sacrifice to an idol? He said, just eat what's set before you asking no questions.

Again, for conscience sake. So Paul sort of modified these rules in his letter to the Corinthians and then to the Romans, he said, he who is weak in the faith eats vegetables, as do the Seventh-day Adventists. And he who is strong in the faith eats meat.

Now, don't let him who eats meat condemn him who doesn't eat meat. So if they don't want to eat meat, that's all right. If they want veggie wieners and veggie burgers and all, that's fine.

I don't condemn them. But yet on the other side of the coin, they who don't eat meat should not judge them that do. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

So the first rule was concerning their dietary eating habits. They should not eat meat, they said, that was offered to idols. Paul later on said that's only for conscience sake.

From blood, from things strangled, then from fornication. And if you keep yourselves from these, you do well. Farewell, brothers.

You know, I mean, it was not laying out the whole Mosaic law. Nothing here about the Sabbath day and the ordinances of the law. It's just, hey, basic simple things.

And if you do this, fine. God bless you, boys. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch.

And when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered this letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced for the comfort, the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words and confirmed them.

Now, the prophets and he who prophesieth speaks unto church to exhortation, to comfort, to edification. So they were exercising their gift as prophets within the church, exhorting the brethren and confirming them in their faith. And after they had tarried there for a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Notwithstanding, Silas decided to stay there for a while longer. Now, Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also. That Antioch church must have been quite a church, with Paul and Barnabas teaching and preaching and Silas and that work that God had wrought in Antioch.

Now, some days after, Paul said to Barnabas, Paul had sort of a restless spirit. I guess he just couldn't stay in any one place too long. Always moving around, always anxious to get out.

Let's, you know, let's go. Let's go for it. Let's, you know, head out and, you know, preach again.

And he could only stay in one place so long before he got antsy and had to go and get into uncharted territories again. He was always a man who was ready for a challenge. So, after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, let's go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they're doing.

Let's go back and visit them, see how they're doing. Now, Barnabas determined to take with him John, who was surname Mark. That is his nephew who had jumped ship in Pamphylia and did not go into the Asia Minor with Paul and Barnabas.

He left them in the first journey. And Barnabas wanted, he was determined to take Mark with him again. But Paul thought it was not good to take him with them, who had departed from them in Pamphylia and did not go on with them in the work.

And the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from the other. And Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus. Interesting little insight that the Bible gives us concerning these beautiful brothers, Paul and Barnabas.

The contention became so great that they split company. Can Christians have disagreements? Obviously. Now, I see this in a very positive light.

I believe that the contention was really from God. I believe that God desired to broaden the missionary endeavor of the church. Rather than having one team go out, I think God wanted two teams to go out.

You can cover twice the territory in the same amount of time. Both Paul and Barnabas were skilled missionaries. And so for them to go together again was not a good utilization of manpower.

Let's get the gospel out further. So God created this dissension and this dispute with Paul and Barnabas. The net result was a doubling of the efforts.

I think that there is room for disagreement. I think that we must guard, though, in disagreements that we disagree agreeably, realizing that we are all a part of the body of Christ. And maybe God wants to expand His work.

So, whatever the motive may be for someone starting up another work, God can use it to expand the overall work of His kingdom. It seems that whenever God is doing a powerful work in an area, there are always those that want to come in and build on another man's foundation. I cannot really understand a man declaring that he has received a call of God to come to Orange County to establish a new church, when there are counties all over the United States that are crying out for someone to come and share the truth.

Every week I receive multitudes of letters from people just crying out for us to send someone to minister in their area, because there is no church where they can really be taught the Word of God. So, I have difficulty with that person that says, well, God has called me to Orange County because of all of the successful, powerful works of God in this county. But, nonetheless, though there are many powerful works of God in this county, we surely are not reaching all the people that need to be reached.

So, that other churches are raised up is good, because God is just expanding His work, and in that we glory. And as Paul writing concerning those in Rome, some preaching Christ out of contention, some have impure motives, bitterness or whatever, I rejoice that Christ is being preached, that the work of the

kingdom of God is expanding. And I have no ego problem to believe that I have the message for everybody.

I know that there are people that I can reach. I know there are people I cannot reach. And I praise God that there are other ministers who have a different emphasis of ministry, who are able to reach those people I cannot reach.

There are people who need an emotional experience when they go to church. They need emotional releases. So, I praise God that He has developed emotional churches.

I'd hate to have those emotional people frustrated here. So, God knows the needs of people and raises up various ministries, and I rejoice that the work of God is expanding. So, Paul and Barnabas, I believe God was in the dispute.

It is obvious that the dispute did not last forever. And Paul later writes concerning what a blessing Mark was to him. And he said, please send Mark as quickly as possible.

He's been such a blessing to me. But at this time, God desired to expand the missionary outreach of the church. And so, this dispute over Mark between Paul and Barnabas, so great that Barnabas took Mark and headed off and went again to Cyprus where Paul and Barnabas had first gone.

And Paul took Silas, this brother who came down. He was a brother of great note in the church in Jerusalem. And Paul took Silas, and they journeyed being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

And they went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches. And then back up into the area of Derbe and all where Paul meets Timothy. And we'll get into that next week as we move into chapters 16 and 17.

And we get Paul's second missionary journey now with Timothy as they are moving into areas which will ultimately take them the next leap over into Europe as Paul in Troas is troubled because he can't seem to get any direction. And then the Spirit calls him to come to Europe to carry the gospel even further. So, the glorious expansion of the church as we have it recorded here in the book of Acts as God is working even in the disputes to expand His work.

Father, we thank You for Your Word and we pray now that Your Spirit will just lock it up in our hearts. Thank You, Father, for that grace that we have received in which we stand, in which we walk. Thank You, Lord, for Your work among the Gentiles as You are gathering out of people for Thy name.

And Lord, we're so thankful that You gathered us according to Your plan which You have known from the beginning. Now, Lord, bless Thy people as we go out as lights shining in a dark place. And may our lives this week just bear witness of God's love to that needy world that we will be facing.

God help us to be all that You want us to be, Thy witness, carrying Thy message of grace to those hearts in need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/6/SID6556.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/chuck-smith/through-the-bible-acts-14-15/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**