

I don't have enough **FAITH**
to be an **ATHEIST**

with Dr. Frank Turek **PODCAST**

Why Grace is the True Meaning of Christmas

(December 16, 2021)

What is Christmas all about? I mean, why is there a Christmas at all? I mean, as Christians, we know it's not about trees, it's not about presents, we know it's not about reindeer. But what is it about? You know what it's about? It's actually about a very penetrating, and almost shocking statement in Scripture, from the Apostle Paul, from the first letter he ever wrote. He probably wrote it in about 48AD or so. It's the book of Galatians and here's what he says just six verses into his letter to the Galatian area churches. "6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse [condemned]."

That's from the book of Galatians. The area in Galatia, which Paul visited on his first missionary journey, probably between 46-48AD, covers what we now call southern Turkey. And he went to cities like Iconium, and Lystra and Derby, and Antioch, the Antioch of the area known as Galatia, and he established churches there. And you can read about all this in the book of Acts. Probably around Acts chapter 13 and 14 is where this first missionary journey of the apostle Paul takes place. He goes there and he established these churches, and two or three years later, he has to write them a letter, and it's called the Letter to the Galatians. And Paul, as you can tell, is very annoyed with these people, because they are turning to a different gospel, which he says is really no gospel at all.

Well, my question is: What is the gospel? Why is there a Christmas? There's a Christmas because there's a gospel. There's some good news that has taken place. And what is this good news all about? I think it's very instructive, ladies and gentlemen, that if we look at Paul's benedictions these are Paul's sort of closings to every one of the 13 letters he writes. Here they are. I'm just going to go through the last sentence or so of each of Paul's letters, the final things he says in these letters. So, we'll start with a book of Romans. And he says this at the end of the

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book of Romans. He says, "the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you". At the end of First Corinthians, he says, "the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you". At the end of Second Corinthians, he says, "may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." At the end of Galatians, the book we're going to look at more at just here in a few minutes, he says this, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit brothers, amen". End of Ephesians, "grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love". Philippians, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit". Colossians, he says, "grace be with you". First Thessalonians he says, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you". Second Thessalonians, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all". First Timothy, "grace be with you". Second Timothy, "grace be with you". Titus, "grace be with you all". Philemon, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit".

It's quite obvious here that Paul is trying to communicate that Christianity is another religion of works, isn't it? No, it's not another religion of works. That's the whole point. Christianity is about grace. That's why there's a Christmas. That's why Paul has to write his first letter to a group of new churches, who have already decided to abandon the most unique thing about Christianity, and that Christianity is about grace. It's not about works. So, if Christianity is all about grace, why is Paul so overheated in the first letter he ever writes? Because they're abandoning the uniqueness of Christianity. They're abandoning the good news. What do we mean by good news? You see, Christianity is news. Christianity is not advice, it's news. How could Christianity be good news?

And by the way, that's what the word gospel means. It means good news. How could Christianity be good news, if it were just another salvation by works religion? We have plenty of those already. We had plenty of those in the first century already. We have even more now. Another works-based religion. Christianity is news, not another works-based religion, it is news that makes works-based religions obsolete. It exposes religion and the self-righteous as inadequate. That's what Christianity does. Jesus is the only adequate one who lives the perfect life and then takes our punishment on himself. We're inadequate. Why? Because we haven't lived the perfect life. We need to be punished for our own sins, we need a sinless substitute to take our punishment on himself, and that's what Jesus, in fact, does. So, this is why Paul is so overheated in the book of Galatians. Unlike many of the other most of the other letters he

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writes, he's really upset about what's going on in the first series of churches he helped establish. They're abandoning what Christianity really is all about.

Now, whenever we look, and we're going to look in little bit more detail here at the book of Galatians. today. Whenever we look at a book, or any passage in the Bible, we have to stop and figure out the specifics of this particular book, otherwise we may not interpret it properly. And in fact, beginning on January 10, I'm going to lead an online course we've done before, but it's going to be a brand-new session of it, called "How to Interpret Your Bible". You know, there's one thing that I noticed that most churches don't teach; they don't teach you how to interpret your Bible. You would think that would be the one thing they would teach. Right? How do you interpret this thing? This is important. The Bible has a purpose to it. As Paul writes, in the very last letter he writes to anyone, Second Timothy 2, he says, "15 ...the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Christianity is how you get saved and sanctified and you do that through the Bible. That's how you know the truth of all this. And it would make sense that we ought to know how to interpret the Bible in order to be saved and sanctified, so what we're going to try and do is teach this. And if you go to CrossExamined.org and click on online courses you'll see all the details there. It begins January 10. If you take the premium version, you're going to be live with me on six occasions on Zoom for live Q&A and we'll interact and learn from one another. But sign up because we limit the premium section so everyone can interact. So, sign up soon. It makes a great Christmas gift, by the way. Go to CrossExamined.org, click on online courses, you'll see How to Interpret Your Bible. And right after the break, we're going to interpret the book of Galatians. What does it mean and how does it relate to Christmas, and grace, and all these things we've been discussing? I'm Frank Turek. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist on the American Family Radio Network. Back in two.

Blessings this Christmas season, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Frank Turek. Welcome to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. Today we're talking about: What is the true meaning of Christmas? It's not presents, it's not reindeer, it's not Santa, it's not trees. Obviously, if you're a Christian, yes it is about Jesus coming into the world in human form. But why did he do that?

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You know why he did it? Because we sinned and he wanted to save us from that because he's an infinitely just being. And he's also an infinitely loving being. And in order to reconcile his infinite justice and his infinite love, he has to punish sin. And the way he punishes sin, in order to reconcile it without punishing us is, he punishes himself in our place. He punishes an innocent substitute. The only innocent substitute is himself because the rest of us have sinned. So, he adds humanity to His deity. That's why he comes into the space time continuum. He comes into the space time continuum to save us. That's what Christmas is all about. And we are saved by grace. That's why the book of Galatians is such an important book, because it's defending grace. And this is why Paul is so adamant, and so annoyed, in the first section of the book of Galatians, because the first churches that he has established seem to be abandoning it.

Now, how do we know that? What do you mean, Frank, that they're abandoning true Christianity? Well, I have an acronym that I'll teach you more detail on in the How to Interpret Your Bible course. But the acronym is S.T.O.P. I think whenever you're looking at a biblical passage, or a biblical book, and you're trying to discover what it means, you ought to stop and ask yourself some questions. The S stands for the situation, the T stands for the type of literature, the O stands for the object of the passage, and the P stands for: Is this a prescription, the passage you're reading, or just a description?

Okay, let's start with the situation. When we're looking at the book of Galatians, what's the situation? First of all, Galatia, on the book of Galatians, actually means country of the Gauls. Now, what's Gaul? Gaul was the original name of the country we now know as France. And apparently, prior to Jesus, there were a number of French Gaul people that went and settled in the area we now call Turkey. And so, this Galatia became the country of the Gauls. And between 46AD and 48AD, Paul had established churches in southern Galatia, on his first missionary journey. And as I mentioned in the opening, he had done this in an area in southern Turkey, and you can read about what he did in Acts chapter 13 and Acts chapter 14. As you know, the book of Acts, the book of the activities of the early church apostles, the people that spread the gospel around, that book, the book of Acts, covers Peter for about the first half of the book, and then Paul, for most of the second half of the book. What they did, how they spread the gospel around. It covers a period from about 30AD, or so, dependent upon when Jesus was killed. He was either killed in 30 or 33AD. We're not exactly sure. Well, let's say 30AD, it covers that period to about 62AD, when Paul is under house arrest in Rome. And you can

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parallel what Paul is doing as he's writing these letters by reading the book of Acts. So, Acts chapter 13 and 14 cover his first missionary journey, where he establishes these churches.

Now, here's the problem. After he establishes these churches, between say 40AD and 46AD, there's a number of legalistic Jewish Christians called Judaizers. That's what Paul calls them. They come in after Paul has left the area and they were teaching the churches that grace is not enough, that believers also had to obey the Old Testament religious system of Israel. They had to get circumcised, they had to obey the Old Testament laws, particularly the laws related to bringing sacrifices to the temple and abstaining from certain foods, these kinds of things. And so, the book of Galatians is Paul's incensed response to counter what he calls these false brethren, to defend the gospel. Paul is trying to defend the Gospel against these false brethren, who now come in and say, oh yeah, okay, you do have to believe in Jesus, but you also have to do all these other things if you're going to be saved. And Paul comes in and says, no. So, that's the situation. That's what you need to know, before you start reading the book of Galatians, or reading any passage, you want to go through this S.T.O.P acronym.

The T stands for type. What type of literature is the book of Galatians? It is an epistle, it is a letter, it is Paul writing to this group of churches about some issues, theological issues, and how to resolve these issues. So, the letters that Paul writes, and the letters that Peter writes, and the letter that Jude wrote, and the letter the writer of Hebrews wrote, and first, second and third John, and James, these are all what we call epistles. They are letters written to believers after Jesus has already ascended into heaven. Now, word for word, this area of Scripture, known as the epistles, is probably the most application rich section of the Bible for Christians because they trade on everything that's happened in the Old Testament, and everything that's happened with Jesus and His teachings, and His death, burial and resurrection from the dead. So, they have a lot more history behind them than say, just the Old Testament, or just the Gospels. These are really very practical letters that apply to us in many ways. So, that's the type of literature it is. It's not law, it's not poetry, at least most of it isn't, it's an actual letter that normally is written in straightforward prose.

Who is the object of the letter? That's the O in S.T.O.P. The object of the letter are the churches in southern Galatia, and by extension, us as well, because now we're living in the New

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Testament, New Covenant age. And so, these letters largely apply to us as well, although there are some exceptions.

The P stands for prescription. Is this letter a prescription or a description? In other words, are the things written in this letter, are they prescribed for us, or are they just describing some historical things that occurred? And the answer to that question is both. This letter is describing things that occurred in history, but it's also prescribing how we ought to deal with legalism, which is what is going on here. Legalism, where you have these Judaizers coming in and saying, you got to obey all these laws, as well as believing in Christ or trusting in Christ. So, it's both prescription and description. That's the situation going on here. In fact, let's just go back now to the very first opening of the book of Galatians. How does the book open? How does Paul open the letter? I kind of jumped ahead and I read from chapter one, verse six. Here's how Paul starts the letter. He says, Paul, an apostle, which means sent one, sent not from men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God, the Father who raised him from the dead.

Alright, ladies and gentlemen, check this out. The very first verse of the book of Galatians. Paul was establishing his credentials as an apostle. He's not coming from men, he's not just making this up on his own, he gets this from Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. You get aspects of the Trinity here, you also get the resurrection in the first verse, and so, you're getting some of the essentials of the faith right away.

Then in Galatians 1:2-3, he says, "2 and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...". Again, he's pointing out the deity of Christ here. "3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." You've basically got the gospel in the first five verses of the book of Galatians. That Christ gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age. Paul does this in Romans two, if you read the first, say 16 verses of the book of Romans, I think it is, maybe it's 17. Anyway, the first it's about up to verse 17, or actually you don't need to go that far, if you read the first five or six verses of the book of Romans, you get the essentials of the faith. He's almost doing the same thing here in the book of Galatians. Now, Romans is written about eight or nine years later after

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Galatians, yet it has some of the same theology, obviously, in it as the great theological treatises we know as the book of Romans.

This is why Luther, by the way, called Galatians a mini-Romans. And Luther called Galatians his wife because this is the book that, right off the bat, defends what is most unique about Christianity, and that is grace. That God actually takes our punishment on himself and offers grace to us freely. And you might ask: Well, what is grace? Well, there's three things you can get. You can get justice, you can get mercy, or you can get grace. What's justice? Justice is getting what you deserve. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you think about this, you don't want justice, neither do I. Because if any of us really got justice in the afterlife for what we've done here, we wouldn't be happy, we would be punished. We don't want justice. Justice is getting what you deserve, mercy is not getting what you deserve, so it would mean say not getting punished. But grace is getting what you don't deserve. Grace is not only not getting punished; it's actually getting something that you didn't deserve. And in this case, it's eternal life and God's righteousness. So, we don't want justice, mercy would be nice, but what's way better than mercy is grace. Mercy is not getting what you deserve, grace is getting what you don't deserve. And that is not only forgiveness, you're not only forgiven for what you've done, but you're given Christ's righteousness.

And so, Paul sets it all up here in the first five verses of the book of Galatians saying that it's all about grace. And it's all about Jesus who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present age. And then he launches. Then he doesn't waste any time saying, say hi to so and so, like he does in so many other introductions to the passages, he gets right down to business. And he says, I'm astonished that you're so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. Ladies and gentlemen, have you turned to a different gospel? Do you even know what the true gospel is? It's liberating when you know what it really is. And we'll talk more about it right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. Our website is CrossExamined.org. We're back in two.

If you're looking low on the FM dial for National Public Radio, go no further, we're actually going to tell you the truth here. You're definitely not going to hear this. The best news ever on NPR? What's the best news ever? That God has entered the bloodstream of humanity and

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taken our punishment on himself and offers his righteousness to us free of charge. No rites, no rituals, everything is given to you free of charge. You don't have to work for it. You don't have to do anything for it. It's free. Well, Frank, isn't that going to mean that people are not going to actually obey and they're just going to do whatever they want? I mean, if you give them something for free, and they don't think they have to work for it, then they might abuse everything, and then they might just go live however they want. Well, Paul's going to deal with that here in the book of Galatians. We'll get to it. But the gospel is free.

So, Paul is astonished they're abandoning the Gospel for a different gospel. And he says, it's really no gospel at all. It's no gospel at all because some people are throwing you into confusion. They're trying to pervert the gospel of Christ, chapter one, verse seven. Now actually, this word pervert could actually be translated, you're reversing the gospel of Christ. What does he mean by reversing the gospel of Christ? The book of Galatians is pointing out that the order of your salvation is extremely important. The false gospel says that you have faith and then you will obey and after you obey, you're saved. The true gospel says no, you have faith - in other words you trust in Christ - you're automatically then saved and then you obey. Don't get that order mixed up. Don't reverse the gospel. The gospel is, you have faith, you're saved, then you obey. The false gospel is, oh, I got to obey in order to be saved. No. Instead of using the word saved - saved from what? You know saved from punishment. Instead of using the word saved, let's use the word grace. Would it make any sense to say, that you have faith - in other words, I'm using the word faith here meaning trust - that you trust in Christ, you obey, and then you get grace? Would that make any sense? No, of course, it wouldn't make any sense. You don't work for grace. That's the whole point. You don't work for it. You don't obey and then get it. It's the other way around. You have faith, or trust, you get grace, because you've trusted and then you obey. See? If it's worked for it's not grace. So, the true gospel is, you have faith. You get grace, because you have faith, and therefore then you obey.

Look, we are not saved by obedience, we are saved to obedience. Again, we are not saved by obeying the law, we are saved to obey the law, because our motivation is now out of gratitude for what Christ has done. We're not slavishly obeying a law in order to somehow make ourselves more acceptable to God, we are obeying laws because we love what Christ has done for us. We love Christ because of what he's done for us. So, we are not saved by obedience, we are saved to obedience. And we are not saved by works. No man should boast about being

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saved by works. And Paul in Ephesians chapter two says, we are saved by grace through faith. We are not saved by works but we are prepared to do good works once we're saved. That's the second half of Ephesians 2:8-10. We're saved to do good works. In other words, the good works are the fruit of our salvation, they are not the root of our salvation. Good works are not the root of our salvation. The root of our salvation is the work that Christ has done, the grace that He has provided through the work he has done. He has worked for us. We don't work for ourselves.

Martin Luther also put it this way. He said, "You are saved by faith alone, but your faith is not alone". What did he mean by that? In other words, your faith ought to produce fruit, your faith to produce good works. Now, some people don't have the occasion to produce good work. Some people have deathbed conversions. The thief on the cross didn't have any time to do any good works. But Jesus nevertheless said to him, today, you will be with me in paradise. But those of us that do live beyond our conversion date are prepared to do good works, but those works don't save us. Christ has already saved us. We are not saved by the law, but we are saved to obey the law. And this is what the book of Galatians is saying. And Paul is so adamant about this, he says this, "8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!". Do you see the seriousness of this? He says, even if an angel comes up and says, oh, you can be saved by works, don't worry about Jesus. Or even if you do believe in Jesus, you've got to do all these other things. Paul is saying no. Even if an angel comes and says that? Yeah. Paul was even saying, if I later come and say that don't believe in me. That's how serious he is about this. Because that's the whole focus. The truth about reality is that God saves us by His grace.

Don't go to another gospel, ladies and gentlemen. There are many different gospels out there. The gospel is good news that's been done for you. A different gospel, or another gospel, would be what you need to do. That's not really good news is it? It's not. And Paul, in Galatians chapter two, actually points out a couple of passages here where he just blatantly says it in black and white. He says, "we" (meaning the Jews, he and Peter and the other apostles), "16 ...we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified". Let me read that again. By observing the law, no one will be justified. That's Galatians 2:16. A little bit later in Galatians 2:21, Paul says, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be

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gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" . Yes, if righteousness could be gained by the law, Christ died for nothing. You don't need a Christmas, if righteousness could be gained by the law. You don't need a savior if you're perfect. You wouldn't need Christmas you wouldn't need Christ to come. Christ is irrelevant if you can be saved by obeying the law.

But Christ isn't irrelevant. That's the whole point. None of us can be saved by obeying the law because we all sin, and once we've sinned, we need to pay for our crimes. Why? We need to pay for our moral transgressions, because that's what justice demands, and God is infinitely just. He's caught in a bit of a dilemma here, so to speak. He's infinitely just so he can't allow injustice to go unpunished, but he's also infinitely loving so he doesn't want to punish those he loves. That's all of us. So, what does he do? He punishes himself in our place. And we can't abandon that. We can't go to another gospel, because it's no gospel at all. If there's one thing worth defending in this world, it's the gospel. And Paul could have easily turned the other way. By defending the Gospel, Paul actually set himself up for suffering, because he was beaten and stoned by these people, by these Judaizers. Or by the Jews who weren't even Judaizers. They rejected Christ. They were still trying to adhere to the Old Testament system, the old covenant, and they stoned him. You can read about it in Acts chapter 13 and 14.

It would have been easier for Paul to say, okay, let me just add another belief that you already believe, into Judaism. Let me just add that. In addition to obey in all these rites and rituals that the Old Testament establishes to separate us from the nations around us, let me also add that you got to believe in Jesus too. Okay. That would have been easy. But Paul says, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. You don't have to obey any of that anymore, because those rites and rituals, particularly the laws that were dietary laws, the laws that had to do with bringing a lamb to the temple, those kinds of laws have been superseded, because Christ has fulfilled all of those.

Now, Christians are still under the moral law. And in fact, out of the 10 commandments, as you may know, nine of them are repeated in the New Testament. The only one that isn't repeated in the New Testament is, keep holy the Sabbath. Why? Why is that one not repeated? Because the Sabbath has already come. You see, the Sabbath represented rest and Jesus is our rest. That's why Paul in Colossians chapter two says, don't let anyone tell you have to obey any Sabbath or festival day. You don't have to do that, because Jesus has already arrived. He is our rest. I was just out at Northwest church just south of Seattle in Federal Way - great church, by

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the way. Those of you in that area ought to check out Northwest Church. I did the full I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist presentation on Saturday. And then in the church services I spoke about, If God, Why Evil?. And one lady came up to me and was asking me about the Sabbath. And she said: You mean I don't have to feel guilty for working on Sunday? I said, no. First of all, Sunday isn't the Sabbath anyway. It's Saturday. Well, it's actually Friday at sunset to Saturday at sunset. But no, Christians are not under that dispensation anymore. We're not under the Old Covenant. We're now under the new covenant. And she said, wow, well, that's liberating. Now, I'm not saying it's not a good idea for your own mental and spiritual health to set a day aside to just focus on rest and Christ. But every day is a worship day for Christians. It's just not obligatory like it was in the Old Testament. That has passed away. So, this is actually liberating.

In fact, as you know, there was the first church council that took place, probably a year or so after Paul writes the book of Galatians. It was attended by the bigwigs in the church at that point. It was attended by James, Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and they were dealing with a question. And the question is stated right there in Acts 15. It says, "Then some of the believers who belongs to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said" ...notice there are Pharisees who are now believing in Jesus..."the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the Law of Moses. The apostles and the elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and address them. And here's what he said..."

Right after the break, we'll tell you what he said. It's actually liberating. Don't go anywhere. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with Frank Turek on the American Family Radio Network. We're defending the gospel here today, because it's the one thing certainly worth defending. Don't go anywhere. Back in two minutes.

Just before the first martyr of Christianity was killed, as recorded in the book of Acts by the doctor, Luke, who was a very accurate historian, we read this. So, the word of God spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Timeout. What? A large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Like Pharisee priests? Yeah. You always hear: Why didn't Jesus appear to the Pharisees? Well, he did appear to one of the greatest Pharisees of the time, the apostle Paul, who was Saul, who was a persecutor of the church until Jesus appeared to him. And apparently, many Pharisees

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were convinced Jesus truly rose from the dead, otherwise, Luke would have lost all credibility by saying that many priests had become obedient to the faith, if in fact they hadn't. Because it was well known. That was a well-known fact that could be checked out, yet Luke is saying, many, a large number of priests, became obedient to the faith. And some of those priests were trying to get the New Testament believers to obey the Old Testament law. They were the Judaizers. Those are the people that Paul is scolding in the book of Galatians, or saying, these are false brethren. Some of them were because they're trying to get you to obey the Old Testament law.

That's why Acts 15 starts out by saying that some believers who belong to the party of the Pharisee said, the New Testament believers, the Gentiles, must be circumcised and required to keep the Law of Moses. And so, the apostles and the elders met to consider this. And then Peter got up and addressed them. Peter got up and addressed them? Yeah he did. What did Peter say? Here's what Peter said. "7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them (the Gentiles) by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us (meaning the Jews). 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Oh, wow, you got to know the situation here. This is revolutionary for Peter to say this, because remember, the Jews thought they were God's chosen people.

There were the Jews and the non-Jews, or the Jews and the Gentiles, and they thought they were better than the Gentiles. And here Peter says, God did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. And then he goes on and says this. "10 Now then, why do you"...meaning you, talking to these Pharisees who want to get the Gentiles to obey the Old Testament laws? "10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." Wow. This is Peter? Yeah, this is Peter who's saying, it's grace. We couldn't even obey all those laws and now you're trying to get these Gentiles to obey them? No, we're saved by grace. That's the purpose of Christmas, ladies and gentlemen. Grace. We're saved by grace.

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And in fact, James, who was the half-brother of Jesus, who died as a martyr for saying his brother was God and had resurrected from the dead, got up at this same meeting, as recorded in Acts 15, the first church council in Jerusalem. He got up and he said, "19 It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood." And then they wrote a letter which basically said the same thing; just stay away from these things. Now, the things that they are to stay away from - in fact, here's what the letter says. It's short. I can read it. It says, " 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you" - meaning these people who were asking from a city known as Antioch, which is now in southern Turkey. These people in Antioch were asking, Hey, these Pharisees are saying we got obey the Old Testament laws. What should we do?

And so, James and Paul and Peter and Barnabas all got together, and they write a letter back to them. And here's what it says. "28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell." I like that letter. It's short and sweet. Now notice these rules were not to earn salvation, but to facilitate fellowship. Why? Because some Jews who had just become Christians still had scruples about eating blood from meat, of strangled animals, and food sacrifice to idols. And of course, sexual immorality was rampant at the time, and they had different beliefs about it. The Greeks had a different belief about sexual immorality than the Jews. And so, they all said, look just restrain from sexual immorality, and restrain from these other issues that just pertain largely to the Jews - that they don't feel like they ought to eat meat sacrificed to idols and these other things. If you do these things, you will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

So, these rules were in place not to earn salvation, but to facilitate the fellowship between Gentile and non-Gentile, or Gentile and Jewish believers. They're not being saved by obeying these laws, they're being saved already by grace, and as a result of the gratitude that they should feel toward God for saving them, and the love that they ought to have for God and for their fellow man, they ought to forego these things that may upset their fellow man. Paul unpacks this further in Romans chapter 14, where he basically says, don't major in the minors.

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If your brother is going to stumble because you're drinking wine, and he doesn't, you know, he feels that you shouldn't do that, then don't do it in his presence. That kind of thing. That's what's going on here. They might say, well, why didn't they say you are to abstain from murder and theft and rape and bigger issues? Because those things are already assumed. Of course, you're going to abstain from those things. But you're not abstaining from those things to gain salvation, you're abstaining from those things because you love God and love your fellow man. You're operating from grace, not to grace. You're not being saved by obedience you're being saved to obedience.

This is revolutionary. You're not going to find this in Islam, you're not going to find this in Mormonism, you're not going to find this in Buddhism, you're not going to find this in Hinduism, you're not going to find this in Jehovah's Witnesses (if that's a word), you're not going to find this in any other religious worldview, that you're saved by grace. You're saved by trusting in what Christ has done, not what you've done. It takes all the pressure off you, ladies and gentlemen. By the way, this is where you get your identity too. You don't get your identity from achieving something, you don't get your identity from what's on your heart, you don't get your identity from what you feel, you don't get your identity from your boyfriend or your girlfriend, or your spouse, or your sexual orientation, or your bank account, or your church or your... No, you get your identity from your Creator, who has given you salvation and given you his righteousness. That's why there's a Christmas. Let's not lose sight of that.

I mean, on this program, most of the time, we're talking about evidence for the faith. Why should we even give evidence for the faith? Why care? What does it matter? It matters because this is true. It matters because this is the best news ever. It matters because grace is what we all need, and grace is what God provides. Now, Paul deals with this. I mentioned it earlier. He deals with the question: Is this going to cause people to just live however they want without any moral restraint? No, it's not. Because if you truly love Christ, you will truly want to please Him and love others by obeying what he has done. He said, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. And he says, I give you one new commandment. Love one another as I've loved you. Well, how do you love one another as he's loved us? You sacrifice. It doesn't mean you approve of what everyone else does, it means that you will sacrifice your well-being for theirs. It means that you will tell people, in a gracious way, when they're about to go wrong,

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because you love them. You will stand in the way of evil for them. That you will put them first. That you will look not only after your own interests, says Paul, but the interests of others.

That's what love is. That's what Jesus did for us. He put our interest ahead of his own. He said, Lord, if you could take this cup from me, take it from me, but if not, not my will, but Your will. The cup of God's wrath, he took he took that cup for us. That's why there's a Christmas. That's why Paul is so upset in the beginning of the book of Galatians, because you're abandoning the true gospel, you're abandoning what makes Christmas so important, what makes Christ so important, what makes Christianity so important. And this is why, by the way, that CS Lewis famously said, "Christianity if false is of no importance, and if true of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." Yeah, if grace is really true, it's of infinite importance. It can't be moderately important. And it is really true, ladies and gentlemen, Christmas is true. God came into this universe, put humanity over his deity, lived the perfect life, allowed the creatures that sinned against him to torture and kill him so he can take our punishment on himself. And it's free. It's grace. Simply trust in Christ and you will be saved. Merry Christmas, ladies and gentlemen. See you next week. God bless.

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