

Chapter Twenty-four
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
The Condemnation of the Religionist for Misplaced Faith
Satan's Attack on the Gospel

“²⁵ For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. ²⁶ Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? ²⁷ And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: ²⁹ But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:25-29).

Satan's attack against Christianity has historically been on two main fronts. He attacks with persecution and he attacks with the perversion of the gospel message. Persecuting Christians has been like throwing gasoline on a fire. It only proves a person faith to be real. When Satan cannot destroy the Church from without by persecution, he usually joins the Church. From there, he can attack the Church from within by perverting the gospel and with internal dissension.

The first recorded attempt at this perversion of the gospel and dissension is recorded in Acts 15:1-31. It is an important text in that it reveals the subject matter of what Paul is dealing with in Romans 2:25-29. Acts 15 takes place in about 46 A. D. and is about 12 years after Paul's conversion in Acts 9. Paul had returned to Antioch from his first missionary journey (44 A. D. to 46 A. D., Acts 13 through 14). It was in the church at Antioch that Satan began to infiltrate, pervert the gospel and bring division. The epistle to the Romans was written 14 years later (60 A. D.). Obviously, the problem has continued down through the centuries.

“¹ And certain men {**notice he does not call them brethren**} which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. ² When therefore Paul and Barnabas 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. ³ And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. ⁴ And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and *of* the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed {**They believed Jesus was the Messiah, but did not understand what He did to save them. Therefore they did not understand the gospel and were not saved**}, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. ⁶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. ⁷ And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. ⁸ And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; ⁹ And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ 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? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. ¹² Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. ¹³ And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: ¹⁴ Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, ¹⁶ 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: ¹⁷ That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. ¹⁸ Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. ¹⁹ Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: ²⁰ But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. ²¹ For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. ²² Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: ²³ And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: ²⁴ Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls {**Their false gospel was subversive. “Subverting” [an-ook-yoo-ad-zo] meaning to overthrow, plunder or turn away from a right state**}, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment: ²⁵ It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; ²⁹ That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. ³⁰ So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: ³¹ *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation” (Acts 15:1-31).

The perversion of the gospel was a very successful tool of Satan and has been throughout the Church Age. The central reason for so many different Christian *faiths* is due to this perversion of the gospel.

“¹⁵ For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ¹⁶ But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous *men* have desired to see *those things* which ye see, and have not seen *them*; and to hear *those things* which ye hear, and have not heard *them*. ¹⁸ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. ²⁰ But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; ²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. ²² He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. ²³ But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:15-23).

“⁹ That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:9-10).

It is amazing how easily people are willing to accept a false gospel. The simple truth is this, if the gospel is perverted in any way from what the Bible says, the people who trust in that false way of salvation will end up in an eternal hell regardless of how moral they are or how orthodox their beliefs are.

“¹³ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴ Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. ¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. ¹⁶ Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? ¹⁷ Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ²⁰ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. ²¹ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:13-23).

When it comes to believing the gospel, God doesn’t accept *close enough*. If we want to see people get saved, we must preached the same gospel message that God offers salvation through.

“¹ Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also. ⁴ And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. ⁵ Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? ⁶ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:1-6).

“⁵ And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, ⁶ And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, ⁹ If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; ¹⁰ Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole. ¹¹ This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. ¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:5-12).

The true gospel calls people “into the grace of Christ” (Galatians 1:6). “Grace” is the heart of the gospel. It is from the Greek word *charis* (khar'-ece).

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

“Grace” refers to the merciful kindness of God by which He exerts His holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, regenerates them as a gift through faith, preserves them, spiritually empowers them and increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, and love. When the Bible says something is of grace, it means it is something wholly done by God without any human merit. That means man cannot save himself. All any person can do is receive the gift of salvation “by grace . . . through faith” offered to us by God through the finished and substitutionary sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

The gospel is of grace because it is a message detailing what God has done in Jesus Christ to open the door of opportunity for anyone to be saved. Salvation is completely and totally a work of grace apart from any human work or sacrifice and apart from any religious ritual or ceremony. When the Bible talks about “works” it is referring to human efforts, sacrifice, religious rituals and/or ceremonies. Anything that is of works is not of grace.

“And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Romans 11:6).

There are millions of professing Christians who believe Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. They believe He is the eternal Son of God. They call Him Lord, but they are lost and on their way to hell because they have not understood and believed the gospel of grace detailing what Jesus has accomplished for all of mankind in His death, burial and resurrection. How do you help these people? The only way to help them is to gently and patiently tell them the truth over and over again until the Spirit of God gives them understanding.

“²⁴ And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, ²⁵ In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; ²⁶ And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (II Timothy 2:24-26).

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1. Discuss Satan’s two main fronts of attack against the Church of Jesus Christ. _____

2. Discuss why understanding Acts 15:1-31 is so important to understanding what Paul is talking about in Romans 2:25-29. Be detailed. _____

3. Read Matthew 13:15-23. From the context of this parable discuss why there are so many different *Christian faiths*. _____

4. Read Matthew 7:13-23. From the context of this Scripture discuss the result of believing in a gospel contaminated by the addition of religious rituals or trust in anything other than what Christ has done. _____

5. Read John 14:1-6 and Acts 4:5-12. Discuss why the gospel message is *inclusive* to “whosoever will” trust in what Christ has finished and *exclusive* to anyone who denies the finished work of Christ by adding religious rituals to faith. _____

6. Read Galatians 1:6. Discuss what is meant by the statement the true gospel calls people “into the grace of Christ.” _____

7. What is the God referring to when He uses the word “works” in various portions of Scripture such as Romans 11:6? _____

8. Read II Timothy 2:24-26. Discuss what you need to do in order to help people who are professing *Christians*, but who do not understand the gospel and continue to believe in the necessity of religious rituals to be saved. _____
