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REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Council at Jerusalem, Part I

Judaizers Demand Gentile Circumcision

Acts 15:1-11

October 21, 2007

- I. **Judaizers Demand Gentile Christians be Circumcised**
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- Historically, conflict within the Church has forced the Church to define what it believes.

The Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D.

In 325 A.D., Roman Emperor Constantine convened the first ecumenical council in the Bithynian town of Nicaea [modern-day Turkey]. The purpose of the council was to officially declare whether Church doctrine would reflect the beliefs espoused by Arius of Alexandria [modern-day Egypt], or his opponents, who included Alexander of Alexandria and Athanasius. According to Arius, the Son was not eternal, but rather, was a creation of the Father [albeit, the first-born of all creation], and of a different substance of the Father, so that Arius and his followers declared 'there was a time when he [the Son of God] was not.' Athanasius, on the other hand, embraced what would become the official dogma of the Church, that the Son is eternal with the Father, 'begotten, not made, of one being with the Father,' that is, the Son and the Father are *homoousius* - 'of the same substance' [For they are both, with the Person of the Holy Spirit, fully God].

The First Council of Nicaea concluded by the vast majority of the bishops present overwhelmingly condemning the views of Arius. Of the estimated 250-318 bishops present, only 2 voted in support of Arius. The declaration of the First Council of Nicaea eventually

lead to one of the early creeds of the Church: the Nicene Creed. Although Arianism [the movement begun by Arius] was decisively defeated at Nicaea, the movement never fully died and eventually lead to the emergence of the modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses.

Yet, Nicaea was not the first time leaders in the church gathered to discuss and resolve theological conflicts. In fact, a conflict over circumcision in the Early Church threatened to tear the young Christian movement apart. It was soon resolved by the apostles and elders at the Council of Jerusalem and is recorded in Acts 15.

- ❑ It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of the Council at Jerusalem. According to Ernst Haenchen, “Chapter 15 is the turning point, “centerpiece” and “watershed” of the book, the episode which rounds off and justifies the past developments, and makes those to come intrinsically possible.”

I. Judaizers Demand Gentile Christians be Circumcised

- ❑ Luke begins Chapter 15 stating, **Verse 1**, “Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’”
- ❑ Reports of Paul and Barnabas’s journey to and contact with the Gentiles reached Judea and Jerusalem, possibly through John Mark following his return in Acts 13:13.
- ❑ No doubt the Jewish leadership feared that their heritage and culture was threatened by the influx of Gentiles into the new-covenant community. This certainly reveals the degree to which the Jews held their heritage. The preservation of the Jewish culture and customs was paramount to many within the Pharisaical Jewish establishment in Jerusalem.
 - It seems that many of the Jews in the first century greatly feared the impact the entrance of formerly-pagan Gentiles would have on the moral standards of the new covenant community. However, as ‘noble’ as such a concern may sound, it was truly diabolical.
 - These “men...[who] came down from Judea” were “conservative” Jewish Christians who believed that Gentiles should be received into the new covenant [Christian] community in exactly the same manner they had been received before – through circumcision [of the males] and total commitment to the Mosaic Law.
 - Prior to Christ, a Gentile proselyte to Judaism was required to become a Jew in all ways [physical circumcision and daily commitment to the Law of Moses] when he converted to Judaism.

- “The first Christians were all Jews. Jesus was a Jew and the Jewish Messiah. God had only one covenant people – the Jews. Christianity was a messianic movement with Judaism. Jews had always demanded of all Gentile converts the requirements of circumcision and rituals of the Torah. Why should that change?” John Polhill
- Yet, such a belief stood in contrast to the nature of salvation in the new covenant community, ushered in through the life and death of Jesus Christ [who Himself was the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament].
- Yet, despite this truth, in Syrian Antioch the peace within the church was suddenly interrupted by men the Apostle Paul will later warn the church of.

Galatians 1:6-7: “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are **some who are disturbing you** and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” (*bold print in Bible quotations is my emphasis*)

- Throughout the New Testament, the Apostles warn the people of God to be on guard against false teachers and those who seek to lead others astray.

2 Peter 2:1: “But **false prophets** also arose among the people, just as there will also be **false teachers** among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.”

Galatians 2:4: “But it was because of the **false brethren** secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.”

Acts 20:29-30: “I know that after my departure **savage wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

- The language that the Apostle Paul uses concerning individuals, such as the Judaizers, seems rather harsh. Yet, possibly the most dangerous heresies are those that teach that salvation is by the works of Christ and man.
- **Such teaching equates man with God and assumes that the work of Christ in His life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and intercession is not enough...not sufficient to save His people! Therefore, such a belief is of the greatest offense to God.**

“[The Judaizers from Judea] were telling Gentile converts that faith in Jesus was not enough, not sufficient for salvation: they must add to faith circumcision, and to circumcision observance of the law. In other words, they must let Moses complete what Jesus had begun, and let the law supplement the gospel. The issue was immense. The way of salvation was at stake. The gospel was in dispute. The very foundations of the Christian faith were being undermined.” John Stott

- **Once again, we are justified, declared righteous, on the basis of faith in Christ ALONE...not by any works that we can do.**

- As the Apostle Paul will later write to the people of Galatia: “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” Galatians 2:15-16

“To add anything to Christ as being necessary to salvation, say circumcision or any human work of any kind, is to deny that Christ is the complete Savior, is to put something human on a par with him, yea to make it the crowning point. That is fatal. A bridge to heaven that is built of 99/100 [99%] Christ and even only 1/100 [1%] of anything human breaks down at the joint and ceases to be a bridge. Even if Christ be thought of as carrying us 999 miles of the way, and something merely human be required for the last mile, this would leave us hanging in the air with heaven being still far away.”
R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*

- In other words, if God has done 99% of what is needed for our salvation, and we must do 1%, then, our 1% is still the determining factor in our salvation.
- However, despite the blasphemy of “salvation by Christ + works”, it is highly appealing to fallen man.
- In fact, in modern-day America, children are raised to believe that “you can do anything that you put your mind to.” Tragically, we are taught, at least subtly, that such a principle applies to our salvation as well. We are taught “**God has done everything He can...now, all you must do X...then you will be saved.**”
- Certainly, few things are more terrifying to men and women [especially in this country] than the thought that there is a part of your life where you are not in absolute and complete control.
- Furthermore, such people who hold to a works-based salvation are often revered as “pious”, “conservative” and, although “strict”, “highly religious” and “committed.”
- Yet, such a belief fails to see that the Work of Christ [in all that He did] secured everything necessary for our salvation...to include repentance and faith, which are, themselves, gifts of God:

Repentance:

- ◆ Acts 5:31: “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”
- ◆ Acts 11:18: “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’”
- ◆ 2 Timothy 2:25: “...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...”

Faith:

- ◆ Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
- ◆ Philippians 1:29: “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...”
- ◆ See also Ephesians 6:3 where Paul prays for “faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” therefore indicating that it is a gift – i.e. something *given* by God.
- ◆ Peter also writes concerning believers who have “*received* a faith as precious as ours” (2 Peter 1:1).

“The saving power of faith resides thus not in itself, but in the Almighty Savior on whom it rests. It is never on account of its formal nature as a psychic [spiritual] act that faith is conceived in Scripture to be saving, -- as if this frame of mind or attitude of heart were itself a virtue with claims on God for reward...It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ...It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith.”
B.B. Warfield

II. The Council of Jerusalem Convenes

- Then, Luke writes, **Verses 2 – 4**, “And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.”
 - After the men of dissension “came down from Judea”, they began to cause great dissension. However, rather than simply deal with the issue in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas had the wisdom to appeal to the church at Jerusalem.
 - Jerusalem was the “mother church” and it was also where the apostles were. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas appealed to Jerusalem in order to preserve the unity of the overall, universal Christian church, which had its origin in Jerusalem.
 - Jerusalem was over two hundred fifty [250] miles from Antioch. This journey would have taken about a month or so to make.

- Once the men from Antioch arrived in Jerusalem, Luke writes, **Verses 5 – 6**, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise

them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.’ The Apostles and elders came together to look into this matter.”

- It is no surprise that it was the Pharisees who stood up and insisted that the Law still be met for Gentile Christians to be saved. In fact, the Pharisees shared a great deal with Christians concerning views of the resurrection, life after death, and the Messiah.
 - As F.F. Bruce writes, “Pharisees [unlike Sadducees], as believers in the doctrine of the resurrection [as well as life after death, and the coming Messiah], could become Christians without relinquishing their distinctive beliefs: to what they already believed they could add the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead and was thus divinely proclaimed to be Lord and Messiah.”
 - However, these Pharisees did not believe the work of Jesus Christ sufficient...enough for salvation.
 - It is also worth noting that for the Pharisees there were two [2] observances that were of the utmost importance: (1) Sabbath-keeping, as it was the **sign of the Mosaic Covenant**; and (2) circumcision, as it was the **sign of the Abrahamic Covenant** (Genesis 17:10-14; Deuteronomy 5:28-33).
- Luke records that members of the “sect of the Pharisees...stood up” and said, “It is **necessary** to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”
- The Greek word *dei* [**dei**] indicates that the Pharisees were emphatically stating that circumcision and law-keeping were of divine necessity.
 - Again, this was an issue of cultural, family, religious, and ethnic pride. Such sentiments certainly run deep, and for the Pharisees there was **nothing** more important than preserving their Jewish traditions and heritage. Tragically, this is the case for many of us today.
 - Yet, the **fundamental** error of the Pharisees was that they truly believed that they could keep the Law! Their pride and sinful nature placed their salvation in their own hands.
 - In fact, many of the Jewish leaders of ancient Israel actually believed that one of the many ways that God blessed the Jews was by giving them so many commandments [613 of them in total!].
 - Even the first century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria even said that the commandments of God were “not too numerous or too heavy for the strength of those who are able to make use of them.”
 - However, the Law is not, and never was intended to be, the means of salvation. In fact, the law is perfect, righteous, and holy. As such, it is impossible for fallen man to meet its impossible demands. Yet, the Law of Moses is perfectly sufficient to

accomplish exactly what God has always intended for it to: to point to the **only** means of salvation – the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:4: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

- What the Pharisees did not realize was that the Law was not the “end”; rather, Christ was the “end”, the One, to whom the Law pointed. In fact, here in Romans 10:4, the Greek word translated “end” is *telos* [τέλος], which literally means “the end to which all things relate; the aim or purpose.” For, Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to be the “end” to which it pointed.
- ❖ It is absolutely essential, however, to realize that, as Christians today, it is not that the Law is useless or unimportant. Such a view leads to licentiousness and a perspective, known as Antinomianism, that is just as unbiblical as the Pharisees.
- ❖ The Law is absolutely essential, for it reveals God’s eternal nature, His holiness, and it convicts us of our sin.
- ❖ However, the issue at hand is that **we are not saved by keeping the Law.**
- ❖ To put it as the Reformers did: **We are not saved by good works [that is, keeping the Law]; we are saved *unto* good works.**
- ❖ In other words, when we are reborn and place our faith in Christ, in our new nature we should love the Law and seek to obey the Law, not because we feel we must [or that God will punish us if we don’t], but simply because we love the Lord, we love who He is, and we **want to** obey Him out of our love for Him.

III. Peter Presents his Position [*Sola Gratia*...by Grace Alone]

- Then Luke writes, **Verses 7 – 9**, “After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, ‘Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.’”
 - Peter begins his speech by referring to “the early days...” In the context here, this would have been “the early days of Church history”; that is, when the gospel was embraced by the Jews first, beginning at Pentecost, then, by the Gentiles, beginning in the home of Cornelius at Caesarea.
 - Yet, here, Peter is clearly referring to the scene in **Acts 10:44-48**, when the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius.

- Assuming that the Council at Jerusalem took place sometime between A.D. 48-49, then Peter is “going back” about ten (10) years to when he had been in the home of Cornelius.
- Note: this is the first time the word *euangelion* [εὐαγγέλιον] is used in Acts. It is the word translated “gospel” and transliterated “evangelize.” The only other time it will be used in this book is in Acts 20:24.
- Yet, Peter’s point is not just that the Gentiles heard the gospel and believed. He goes on to use his witness of God’s work as the basis for his refusal of the Pharisaical demands to declare that Gentile Christians must undergo physical circumcision.
- For, Peter says, **Verse 8**, “God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;”
 - In other words, “Man looks at the outer appearance [such as circumcision], but the LORD looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7
 - But Peter gives an objective, tangible example of God’s acceptance of the Gentiles **apart from circumcision**: He gave them the Holy Spirit [Acts 10:44], just as He had given the Jews the Holy Spirit [Acts 2].
 - In fact, as an authentication of the giving of the Holy Spirit, the Gentiles, **just as the Jews had done at Pentecost**, began speaking in tongues [that is, discernible foreign languages]. This proved that they had received the Holy Spirit, thus affirming that their salvation was not only sincere but genuine.
 - Therefore, Peter’s argument goes, if God demonstrated His complete and absolute acceptance of the Gentiles without physical circumcision, then why shouldn’t we?
 - Then, Peter states, **Verse 9**, that God “made no distinction between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles], cleansing their heart by faith.”
 - Peter once again asserts the equal standing that both Jew and Gentile have before God [“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” – Romans 3:22-23] [see also Acts 10:20, 34; 11:12; Ephesians 2:11-22].
 - Peter concludes this portion of his argument by stating that God had cleansed the hearts of the Gentiles “by faith.”

Ezekiel 36:24-26: “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

- This is also quite possibly a reference to the true circumcision: the circumcision of the heart.

Jeremiah 4:4: “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart...”

Jeremiah 9:26: “...all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.”

Romans 2:29: “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

- This is the last time Peter appears in the Book of Acts. As Martin Hengel once wrote, “the legitimation of the mission to the Gentiles is virtually Peter’s last work.”
- The Apostle Paul will later write against the Pharisaical view of circumcision in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 5:1-3: “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.”

- Peter concludes by stating, **Verses 10 – 11**, “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus, in the same was as they also are.”
 - Peter is here accusing the Pharisees of “putting God to the test.” The Old Testament strongly warns against testing God [Deuteronomy 6:16; Exodus 17:2; Psalm 78:18; Matthew 4:7].
 - In the Old Testament, the Israelites were rarely satisfied with God’s perfect provision. They were often stiff-necked, refusing to bow to Him as the Lord and King. As a result, they complained and grumbled and did not trust Him or follow His commands. In this, they “put God to the test,” demanding that He provide in a way that they wanted...thus, challenging His favor and mercy towards them.
 - As Peter continues, he equates the Pharisee’s placing the impossible yoke upon the neck of the disciples with “testing God.”
 - This impossible yoke was certainly the demand to fully keep the Law – a demand that Peter unequivocally declares that “neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.”

- Only Christ could bear that “yoke” – the “yoke” of the Law. Note: This is the only place where the term “yoke” is used in the Book of Acts. Literally, it was the wooden frame placed around an animal’s neck which greatly restricted its movement as it worked, typically in ploughing or pulling.
- According to Jewish teaching, a Gentile proselyte submitted himself to the Law of Moses and, in so doing was believed to “take up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.” This saying later came to refer to the reciting of the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel...” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). This is also referred to in the *Mishnah*, the written body of rabbinical tradition, where the reaction of the commandments, particularly the *Shema*, means “to take upon oneself the yoke of the commandments.”
- However, to claim to have the “ability” to bear the “yoke” of the Law would be to claim moral perfection in oneself. Again, only Christ, who was the fulfillment of the Law, accomplished this.
- One can imagine the beautiful imagery of Christ bearing the “yoke” of the Law as He bore the cross-beam of the Cross on the way to Calvary.
- In fact, the commandments of Jesus concerning “taking up the Cross” and “taking His yoke” are strikingly similar.

Matthew 11:29-30, Jesus writes, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (*capitals my emphasis*)

Matthew 10:38: “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.”

- The idea, here, is that we are able to “take His yoke upon us...” because He is the One actually bearing it. In so doing, we are the most privileged of people, as we are called to partake with Christ in His sufferings and crucifixion, and ultimately in His resurrection!
- Yet, all the while, we know that it is His Work, and none of our own, that saves us!

- And this is why Peter ends by saying, “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”
 - In other words, the “means” of salvation is the same for both Jews and Gentiles: ***Soli Gratia*** – the grace of God alone!
 - Today, many theologians refer to this as the “monergistic” work of God [as opposed to “synergistic”].

The *Century Dictionary* defines the term *monergism* as follows:

“In theology, the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the only efficient agent in regeneration - that the human will possesses no inclination to holiness until regenerated, and therefore cannot cooperate in regeneration.”

R.C. Sproul writes:

“A **monergistic** work is a work produced singly, by one person. The prefix *mono-* means one. The word *erg* refers to a unit of work. Words like *energy* are built upon this root. A synergistic work is one that involves cooperation between two or more persons or things. The prefix *syn-* means ‘together with.’ I labor this distinction for a reason. It is fair to say that the whole debate between Rome and Martin Luther hung on this single point. At issue was this: Is regeneration a monergistic work of God, or is it a synergistic work that requires cooperation between man and God?

“When my professor wrote, “Regeneration precedes faith” on the blackboard, he was clearly siding with the monergistic answer. To be sure, after a person is regenerated, that person cooperates by exercising faith and trust. But the first step, the step of regeneration by which a person is quickened to spiritual life, is the work of God and of God alone. The initiative is with God, not with us. The reason we do not cooperate with regenerating grace before it acts upon us and in us is because we cannot. We cannot because we are spiritually dead. We can no more assist the Holy Spirit in the quickening of our souls to spiritual life than Lazarus could help Jesus raise him from the dead.

“It is probably true that the majority of professing Christians in the world today believe that the order of our salvation is this: Faith precedes regeneration. We are exhorted to *choose* to be born again. But telling a man to choose rebirth is like exhorting a corpse to choose resurrection. The exhortation falls upon deaf ears. When I began to wrestle with the professor’s argument, I was surprised to learn that his strange-sounding teaching was not a novel innovation to theology. I found the same teaching in Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield. I was astonished to find it even in the teaching of the great medieval Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas.”

- ❑ When we view our salvation biblically as a monergistic work of God, *then* we can begin to understand the amazing grace of the LORD God which called us out of darkness and into light.
- ❑ Unfortunately, most professing Christians today reject this view. They believe that salvation is a cooperative effort. However, such a perspective diminishes the miracle of our salvation.
- ❑ Yet, it should be of no surprise that the synergistic view is the predominate one, as we, as human beings, desperately want to be a part of every aspect of our life.

- ❑ In the fourth century, one of the greatest theologians since Paul, Augustine of Hippo, was forced to deal with the crucial issue of salvation by grace alone.

- ❑ According to Augustine, God originally created Man [both Adam and Eve] with (1.) Perfect Liberty; and (2.) Free Will. For Augustine, Perfect Liberty was defined as the *ability* to either sin or *not* to sin. Free Will, on the other hand was the freedom to choose that which one *desires*. In other words, Perfect Liberty was a matter of **ability**; whereas Free Will was a matter of **desire**.
- ❑ However, when Adam and Eve fell, although they retained their Free Will [that is, their freedom to choose and do that which they desired], they lost their Perfect Liberty. Consequently, they no longer possessed the *ability not to sin*. They only had the ability to sin. Not only this, their Will was held in bondage to their sin, so that all they desired was to sin continuously, and therefore, this is what they did [Genesis 6:5: Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.] We, then, as Adam’s descendants, inherited this nature...an Adamic, sin nature that possesses the Free Will to do what we desire; however, that Will is still held in bondage to our inability not to sin [our *Fallen Liberty*]. Therefore, we, like Adam and Eve after the Fall, only have the ability and desire to sin.
- ❑ For Augustine such a biblical understanding of man’s sinful condition, demands a proper, biblical understanding of the desperate need each of us have for God’s sovereign grace. Apart from divine grace, we remain in our trespasses and sins with **no ability** to do anything that pleases God, for everything we do, whether in thought, word or deed is tainted with sin.
- ❑ Therefore, when we are reborn through the sovereign work of the Person of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the finished Work of Jesus Christ, on the basis of the will of the Father, we are “restored” to a place of Perfect Liberty; whereby, we are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life, given a **new nature**, our heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh, the Law of God is written on our hearts, our hearts are circumcised, and we then have the *ability* to do that which pleases God, for we can then see the kingdom of God.
- ❑ **This is the miracle of our salvation.** Apart from the sovereign grace of our Lord, this is impossible. Indeed, apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, salvation is the greatest miracle known to man. All other miracles point to this one; whether they be the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the healing of the blind beggar Bartimaeus [Mark 10:46-52], the healing of the lame, crippled, blind, and mute in Matthew 15. We need to look no further than our own salvation to see a “sign” of God’s power and majesty.
- ❑ Tragically, many of us do not fully understand the nature of the miracle of salvation, so it does not seem like “enough” for us. Yet, when we understand, or at least begin to understand the magnitude of this miracle, we are left in awe, and look to nothing else to satisfy us, other than the grace of God.

- ❑ The Apostle Paul later writes to the Ephesians concerning the centrality of the grace of God in our salvation. Read **Ephesians 2:8-16**.