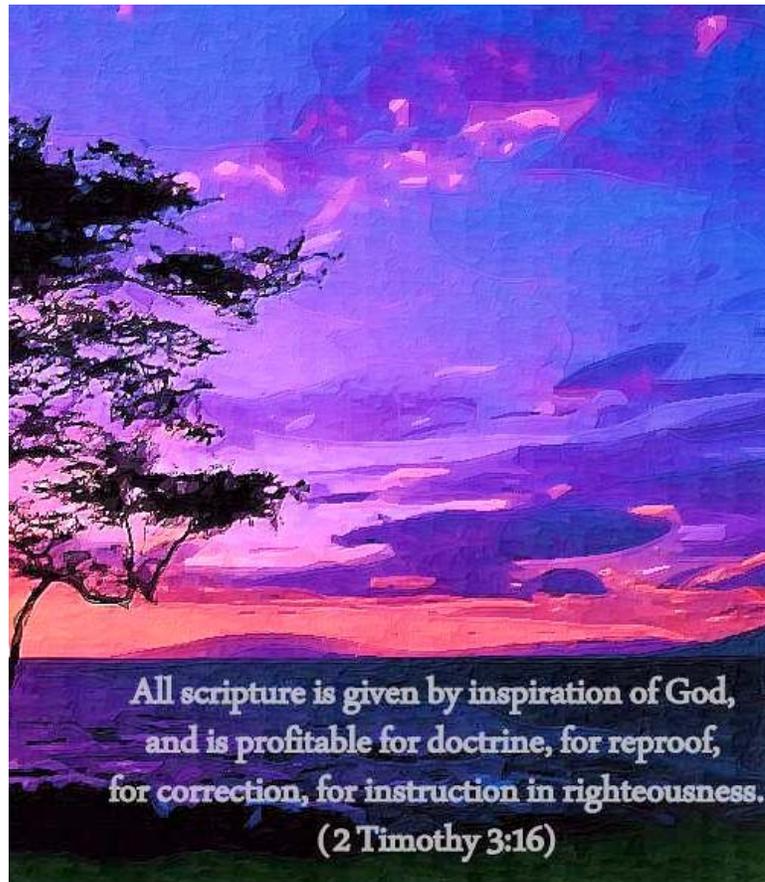


Acts Book Four

# **Guarding the Gospel**



**Booklet Four in the Series  
of Sermons on Acts Preached by  
Pastor Kevin Redig  
January-May 2016**

# Foreword

This fourth booklet completes the series of booklets that have come from our study of the Book of Acts. In the first three booklets, we have covered the relevance of the Gospel, who can respond to the Gospel and how do you do so, and the connection between grace and the Gospel. In this final booklet, *Guarding the Gospel*, taken from Acts 15, we discuss the ongoing need to maintain a pure Gospel message.



Although by no means even remotely comprehensive, it is my hope that this collection focusing upon the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be a blessing to all who will take the time to study through them. I also pray that these booklets help better equip readers to share the only *good news* that has the power to save for all eternity.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig', written in a cursive style.

Kevin Redig

During the first half of 2016, Pastor Kevin Redig preached a series of sermons entitled *The Church in Principle and Practice* inspired by the Book of Acts. Four of those sermons have been put into booklet form:

Booklet 1: *Is The Message Still Relevant?*

Booklet 2: *Who Can Come? How Do You Come?*

Booklet 3: *Can You See Grace?*

**Booklet 4: *Guarding the Gospel!***

# Introduction

As we draw to a close our study of the book of Acts, we need to spend some time with a very important principle that comes to the fore in Chapter 15. It is particularly important for any church fellowship which desires to have an impact upon its surroundings, as well as down through extended families. And, I trust that is our desire.

Before we turn to Chapter 15, let me give you a bit of background from what is commonly called “Paul’s First Missionary Journey” as described in Chapters 13 and 14. After being set apart by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas departed on a journey that took them to the island of Cyprus and then up into what is modern day Turkey, before eventually returning to their starting point in Antioch. Along the way they ministered in many cities such as Perga, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

In every city, the missionary team would go first to the synagogue. Then, after being rejected by the Jews, they would turn to teaching the Gentiles. Typically, a group of Jews hounded the team, stirring up the populace of each town against them even to the point that Paul was stoned and left for dead outside of Lystra. Hardship and persecution seemed to be the norm for Paul and Barnabas. Nevertheless, they retraced their steps and exhorted the disciples to “continue in the faith” before returning to Antioch. And so after a period of recovering from the rigors of their journey, we arrive at Acts 15.



We have learned quite a bit in the preceding chapters, in particular about God's plan for His Church and the spreading of the Gospel. We have seen that the message focuses upon turning to and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have answered the question, "Who can turn and believe, and thereby be saved?" We have seen it is Jews, Samaritans, Romans, Greeks, and Gentiles of all kinds. Some that were saved had overtly manifest sins, while others were religiously righteous. But all needed to turn and place their faith in a Savior who died for their sins.

We have discovered the object of their faith has always been the same: the Lord (He was fully God), Jesus (fully human), Christ (a reference to Jesus being the one anointed by God to save lost mankind from their sin through His substitutionary death on the cross). This means that the call to each member of the human race is to understand one's hopeless and helpless position before a holy God. Furthermore, the call is to change one's mind about who Jesus is—that He is God in the flesh, and the one Savior of the world. Then, having done so, to turn from all kinds of things—legalism, idolatry, religion—and in faith to Jesus Christ.

There are many things you can turn from, but there is only one object for our faith, only one thing to turn to, that allows us to receive God's gift of salvation—the Lord Jesus Christ. And whenever a person does turn, believe, and get saved, we have just seen the grace of God right before our very eyes. For it is

*...by grace we are saved,  
through faith.*  
Ephesians 2:8



God does the work of salvation, ours is to receive this priceless and unmerited gift through faith.

# False Teachings

So then what is the next developing storyline of the early church? In Acts Chapter 15, we are going to find such a disturbance in the Church at Antioch that it ripples all the way back to Jerusalem. For it happened that:

*... certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "...unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* Acts 15:1

Verse 2 tells us that Paul and Barnabas vigorously disagreed and disputed openly with these men. Paul and Barnabas knew that this teaching was adding an additional requirement to the Gospel, and, knowing legalism as they did, they knew it wasn't going to stop there.

Can you imagine the turmoil that this must have caused? Picture the early church in this predominantly Gentile city responding to the Gospel message of faith alone in Christ alone. And then one day, as a new believer, you have to go home and tell your family that there is another condition in order to be saved. Now you have to be circumcised also! In the world of sales this is called *bait and switch*, and you can be certain it is not God's way.

But what about it? Do Christians have to carry over circumcision, or other aspects of Judaism as well, to be saved? Well if they do, we haven't seen it in the first 14 chapters of church history as recorded in the Book of Acts. Let's see how it plays out.

Before we continue, let me remind you of the attacks the Church has weathered thus far. There have been attacks from within: lying and hypocrisy were rooted out by the hand of God Himself, an effort to profit from spirituality was forcibly addressed, and an effort to restrict the spread of the Gospel to Jews only was also overcome. There have also been attacks from without: persecution caused many to flee, plus arrests and execution, riots and stonings.

So what we have in Acts 15 is an effort from within the church to change the message of the Gospel by adding to it. We have already seen that Paul and Barnabas react vigorously against this false message, and they eventually become part of a delegation sent off to Jerusalem to see what the Jerusalem Church has to say.

Let me be quick to add, based upon Galatians 1:8, that Paul wasn't going to Jerusalem to determine the content of the Gospel. Rather, he was going to see if order and unity could be brought within the context of Church authority. You see, the only way you can really have unity within the Church is around the truth of God's revelation to us, and the Gospel message must be one of the essential elements of that revelation. There is no fulfilling of the Great Commission given to the Church apart from a pure Gospel message.

How, then, did the Church respond? The response of the Church in Phoenicia to Gentile faith was very positive, as it was in Samaria. However, the response in Jerusalem was much more tepid. Here's why:



*Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses." Acts 15:5*

Notice how already we have gone from adding just circumcision to adding both circumcision and the Law.

The Church in Jerusalem convenes a council to consider the matter, and there is quite a bit of discussion. There are two speakers during the council whose words are worthy of special note.

First, Peter spoke on the issue:

*Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on 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 in the same manner as they." Acts 15:7-11*

What is the yoke he is talking about? That yoke was trying to be justified before God by keeping the Law. Consider once more how Scripture reinforces the idea of belief apart from works:

*. . .but to him who does not work but believes. . . his faith is accounted for righteousness. . . Romans 4:5*

In fact, the contrast between Gentiles who were justified before God and Jews who were not, hinges upon exactly this issue:

*Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith, but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. Romans 9:30-32*

Faith not works! Over and over this is what God is trying to teach us through those He commissioned to spread the Gospel!

And then James, who was head of the Church in Jerusalem, offers the decision:

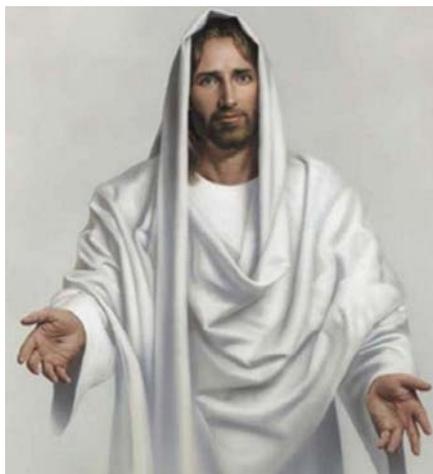
*James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. . . Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood." Acts 15:13-20*

When James says, we should not “trouble” the Gentiles who are turning to God, he is referring to the idea of not putting unnecessary obstacles, like circumcision, between a Gentile and what is necessary to be saved. His closing comments might seem a bit strange, and we will address them before we are finished. For now, not only do we have the consistent teaching of Paul, but we have one of the inner circle of Apostles in Peter and the head of the Jerusalem Church in James all uniting around the same Gospel message that salvation comes from **hearing the Gospel and believing**.

The Spirit comes as the result of receiving salvation. As we have learned in past lessons, turning to Christ in faith leads to remission of sins, justification, and eternal life. Truly, we have learned:

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

Acts 4:12



This monumental decision made in Jerusalem, was put in written form (Verse 23) and sent via delegates back to Antioch. The Church in Antioch rejoiced over both the answer and the fact that this matter was settled.

In just a short while, Paul will head off on his Second Missionary Journey, and I suppose you could say, "All's well that ends well!" However, I am not yet sure we have fully realized just how dramatic was this incident in the life of the early Church. For it addresses the absolutely fundamental question: "What is the Gospel?" Stated another way, it settles the question of what response is necessary for a person to be saved.

We started Chapter 15 with the purity of the Gospel under attack, in that there was a concerted effort to add circumcision to faith as the means of salvation. We came out of Chapter 15 with faith alone as the criterion.

Then, as early as the very next chapter, this decision is put into practice when the Philippian jailor falls on his knees before Paul and Silas and asks,

*"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Acts 16:30

Paul and Silas do not have to confer with one another, declare a time-out, or anything else, they answer immediately and forthrightly,

*"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household."* Acts 16:31

The Church had reached a fork in the road regarding the Gospel, and the only reason it spread further into Africa, Asia, Europe, and India was that it maintained, at least for a time, the singular message of faith alone in Christ alone. Whenever the message has been lost, the Church has become corrupt and there have been dark times for mankind. Whenever the Gospel's integrity is maintained, though it comes under fire, the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Today I want to make sure we understand a principle that is every bit as much at work in our day as it was in the days of the early Church.

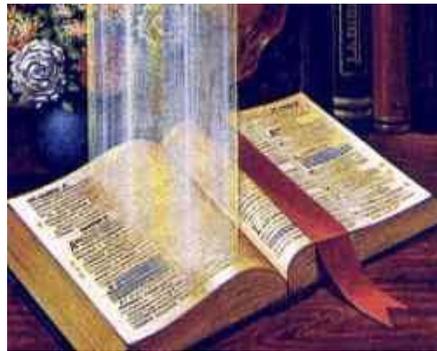
*It is as natural for man to add to the Gospel  
(or to take away from it) as it is for him to breathe!*

In Acts 15, it was circumcision and keeping the Law. And, although you might be thinking we would never do such a thing today, actually, there is a much greater proliferation of things in our day. For it seems that every denominational or geographic group of Christians has its own additions or things they find distasteful and have decided to eliminate. Additions seem to be more common, as there is a natural tendency to add works, our experience, or to correct something seen as a deficiency.

## **Application: Guarding the Gospel**

So you have the basic principle: the Gospel is always susceptible to corruption. Now we will spend the rest of our time on application. Here are some general principles:

- It is the Gospel that has the power to save, and only the Gospel.



*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe—for the Jew first and then for the Gentile. Romans 1:16*

What is essential to realize is that if we either add to or subtract from the Gospel message, we compromise its power to save. And that should be a very sobering fact!

- That is why the message is to have a laser-like focus:

*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you  
except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

1 Corinthians 2:2

Do you see how careful Paul is to make sure that nothing takes away from the *main thing*? For the Gospel message has one object—Jesus Christ—who He is and what He accomplished at the cross.

- If we are going to have any chance of impacting our extended families, our community, and those *divine appointments* the Lord brings our way, we must make sure we are communicating the Gospel—all of it and as little else as possible. In short, **WE MUST GUARD THE GOSPEL!** For why even bother to communicate the message, if it does not have the power to save?

Being engaged in rescuing those spiritually perishing is our divinely ordained mission! So here is what we are up against. We know from experience we often tend to muddle the message when we present it, then, it is imperfectly received by those to whom we witness, who in turn imperfectly pass it on. In short order, this type of communication—much like the kids' game of *telephone*—has corrupted the message. When it has become too garbled, what's left eventually loses the power to save. We must be keenly aware of this tendency and be vigorous to guard the purity of the Gospel.

Again, you might be wondering why this is such an issue. Let me remind you, we add and subtract from the Gospel as naturally as we breathe.

## Gospel Additions

For those who are skeptical, here are some of the things that have been added to the Gospel in our day:

- Stop sinning
- Come forward and pray
- Dedicate your life
- Pray a certain way
- Ask Jesus into your heart
- Be baptized

...*AND BELIEVE*

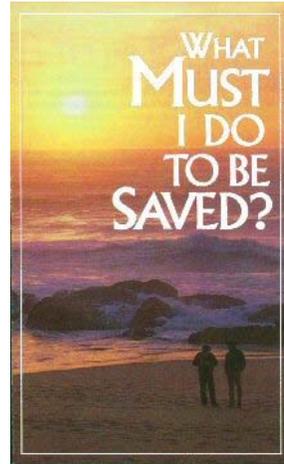
Now at this point I need you to very carefully hear me out, so that you do not become unnecessarily offended and thereby fail to think this through. For I know that many of you did some of these things when you were saved and you are wondering why I am stepping on your toes. Here is what I am communicating:

- **I am not saying** that if you did some of these things you did something wrong or that you are not saved. As a matter of fact, at least one of the items on the list is a point of obedience for the believer (baptism). But that is after getting saved and *not* as an essential part of being *born again*. Furthermore, some of the above items, depending upon circumstances, are quite natural accompaniments to putting one's faith in Christ, and/or may also be a very positive part of coming to faith in Christ.
- **I am saying** that if you take the Gospel message plus whatever accompanied your faith in Christ, and then turn it around and make it a condition that others have to meet in order to be saved, then you have added to the Gospel!

I think it is very healthy to publicly give testimony to having believed in Christ, which could be done by coming forward at the end of a service and most certainly should be done at baptism. But, did we see coming forward to testify to one's faith as descriptive of salvation in Acts 2-15?

No, but what we did see over and over again is a whole range of lost people turning to Christ in faith! You see, if something is an essential part of the Gospel that saves, then you need to be able to find it as a repeated requirement within Scripture!

Although these things might not have hindered your coming to faith, they can quite easily hinder those behind you. They could hinder the next generation of potential believers by falsely shifting the emphasis from Christ and Him crucified to something that could become a work.



Perhaps this is starting to make sense to you, but you think that perhaps I am making too much of it. Here is the problem. When we start out with faith in Christ and then add to it something that is generally healthy to do, before you know it we have made a work out of that item. One common example in our day is often presented like this:

*In order to be saved you need to believe in Christ,  
His work on the cross, and totally surrender  
your life to Him.*

Now let me ask you, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ have you totally surrendered your life to Him? If I were to follow you around for the day, would I observe a totally committed and surrendered life? The testimony of truly objective believers is that even as new creatures in Christ, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, we have to constantly work at living a life of commitment. And we also have to acknowledge that we don't always succeed. If we can't do it, how could we possibly feel it is acceptable to put such an obstacle in front of a lost person as a hurdle they must pass in order to be saved?

Any additions to the Gospel message certainly change the nature of salvation from a grace-gift from God which we can receive by faith, to a work to be accomplished by man. And at that point, you don't have the Gospel any more!

*. . . not because of righteous things we had done,  
but because of His mercy, He saved us. . . Titus 3:5*

You see that anything we add to faith in Christ detracts from the sufficiency of the cross. When God does everything, and we do nothing but trust in His completed work, He gets the glory for our salvation. When we add anything to the Gospel, we take from that glory. And, God is very adamant, He will not share His glory with another!

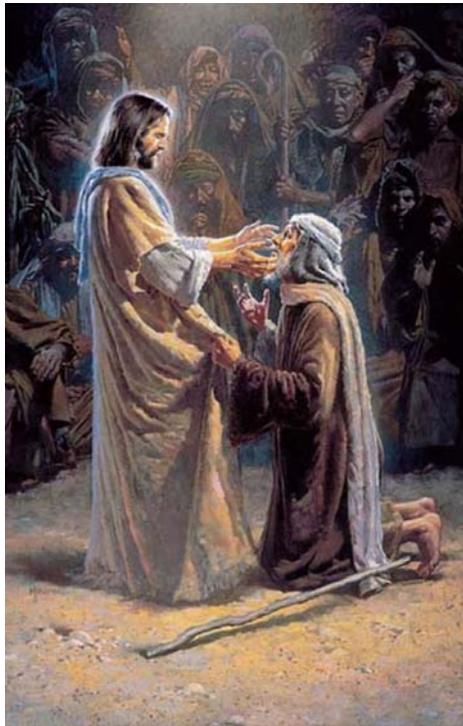
### **The Basic Question**

Let me ask this basic question: "When the Gospel is pared down to its bare essentials, is anything else required other than to recognize our need before a holy God, come to an understanding of who Jesus really is and what He accomplished on the cross, and then turn to Him, in faith, for our eternal salvation?" If you have been following along, then you know that I think the Bible teaches nothing more than this.

It is certainly true that when we turn to Him in faith, none of us understands the Gospel perfectly or in all its fullness. We simply respond with a weak bleep of faith to the person and work of Christ. When we do so, God regenerates us (spiritual birth), provides forgiveness of sin, clothes us with the very righteousness of Christ, grants us eternal life, and a host of other things. We are then called to follow after Him, which includes among other things: to grow up into who we are in Christ, to walk uprightly in newness of life, and, now that we are saved, to continue the cycle by testifying to others what God has done for us

It is as we engage in doing this that we are very prone to add our own circumstances to the message. It comes out as, "You need to believe and. . ." What we really need to do after salvation is to make sure our message is grounded solely in the truth of God's Word, and then guard the purity of that message as we bear witness to it.

Let me illustrate. Jesus healed blind men a number of times in Scripture. In Mark 8 He healed by placing saliva on the eyes of a blind man. In Mark 10, He simply spoke and the man could see.



In John 9, Jesus spit, mixed it with dirt, and placed the mud on the eyes of the blind man in order to restore his sight.

I want you to imagine this question directed to a representative from each of the three groups who had been healed, "How is it that you, a blind man, can now see?" I can imagine answers like the following coming back: "Jesus put spit on my eyes." "No, no, you need spit and mud."

"No, Jesus just needs to speak!" What is the correct answer to the question?

***"The Lord Jesus Christ healed me and restored my sight!"***

Do you see the point I am trying to make? If we asked a catalog of people from Acts 2 to Acts 15 how they were saved, we could conceivably get an array of answers that include:

- You have to believe in the streets of the holy city (Acts 2)
- You have to believe and come out of sorcery (Acts 8:13)
- You have to believe and be riding in a chariot (Acts 8:28)
- You have to believe after being thrown in the dirt (Acts 9:4)
- You have to be infirm and/or raised from the dead and believe (Acts 9:32-40)

What is the real answer for all of them. You have to:

*...believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and  
you will be saved. Acts 16:31*

We all have circumstances associated with our coming to faith. But we have to be careful, when we turn around and tell others about the Good News that saved us, that we give them a pure Gospel. We have to be sure that the Gospel we share is one that we are certain has the power to save and that it is not an adulterated version. The word adulterated means to render something inferior by adding something of lesser quality to it. And I don't mean to offend, but adding your circumstances to the finished work of Christ on the cross is to add something inferior to His perfect work.

My brothers and sisters, we must at all costs never add something inferior to the work of Christ! Our heavenly Father has a very high view of the sufficiency of Christ's saving work, and He is not the least impressed with what we might try to add to it.

## The Challenge

Here is what I am challenging you to do. Understand from the Scriptures the content of the Gospel, and then guard the purity of this Gospel message while you do your best to hold it out to the lost and dying world around you. We want the message going out to be pure, because we know the one that comes back will in all likelihood come back with some baggage attached that will need to be pruned away.

What happens if we don't work to keep the Gospel message pure? Over time it will accumulate so much *dead wood* that it will lose its power to save. However, if we are ever vigilant to "guard the Gospel," the cycle of salvation, growth, evangelism, salvation will continue until the Lord returns. It is a Church functioning in this way against which the gates of Hell will not prevail!

Although our focus has been the saving power of the Gospel, let's make one more thing perfectly clear. When a person responds to the Gospel, it is not the end of the story but only the beginning. For God calls each child of God to follow after Him, and to

*Live for Him who died for you...* II Corinthians 5:15

Some want to add this as a condition to the Gospel message, I suggest we stick with God's way and focus on first obtaining new life. Then we can work on growing into who and what we are in Christ through the enablement of the Holy Spirit.



# One Puzzle Remains

We have one more thing to consider as we close out our study of Chapter 15. Does Acts 15:29 seem a little bit contradictory to you? The whole point of the Jerusalem Council was to determine whether or not anything in addition to faith alone in Christ alone was necessary for salvation. After deciding faith in Christ was the essential element, James writes to the believers in Antioch

*...that you abstain from things offered to idols,  
from blood, from things strangled, and  
from sexual immorality.*

Haven't they added things right back on as a condition for salvation? If you read ahead in Acts 16:1-4, it gets even more confusing. For after deciding that circumcision was not a requirement for salvation, Paul has Timothy circumcised before he accompanies Paul on his second missionary journey. What is this all about? Let's walk through it.

## A Point of Balance

On the surface, Acts 15:29 and Acts 16:1-4 do seem to be, at a minimum, contradictory and at their worst taking a giant step backwards. But, the first thing to note is that the requirements of Acts 15:29, to an orthodox Jew do not even remotely constitute keeping the Law, and notice that the original issue of circumcision is nowhere mentioned.

Instead, both James and Paul are focused upon not alienating a particular group, most specifically the Jews who might hear the Gospel message during the course of missionary travels.

You can see this in Acts 15:21 and Acts 16:3 where James and Paul both show a clear understanding that a large number of Jews are very likely to make up part of the audience, in whatever locale the Gospel might be preached throughout the Roman Empire. What they are trying to avoid, at all costs, is giving that Jewish audience a reason for rejecting the message. This is very much the approach of I Corinthians 9:22 where Paul says:

*"I have become all things to all people that I might win some to Christ."*



Make no mistake about it, Paul knows Timothy was already saved because he wrote this about Timothy in II Timothy 3:15:

*...that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ.*

As we by now have come to expect, Timothy was saved through faith in Jesus Christ as was revealed in the Scriptures. What Paul is after now is to ensure that those Jews who hear the Gospel during their upcoming missionary journey will not dismiss it simply because Timothy is uncircumcised.

In more modern times we have the example of famed missionary Hudson Taylor who writes of how important it was for him to change his hair style and manner of dress in order to gain a hearing from the Chinese people. Although his outward appearance had changed, the message remained the timeless and unadulterated Gospel.

As a point of application: Don't give your lost grandchild the Gospel mixed with things you wish they would change, their hair style, work ethic, friends. Keep a pure Gospel. Then, as possible, help them to mature in the faith. If they do, that will take care of almost every thing else. I am not saying that you shouldn't speak the truth to your extended family on all manner of topics. I am just telling you that shouldn't mix what is good for someone with what is best. Don't pretend that desirable life changes are on the same level of importance as the Gospel and the issue of salvation. First Gospel truth, then the pure milk of the Word by which we grow, and then lifestyle corrections!

## **In Closing**

May I give you a test to see if I have been clear and if you really understand the importance of guarding the Gospel? To do so, let me give you a portion of three different testimonies. First, a portion of my own testimony.

I was saved, one night many years ago when I knelt down on the drill field at the U. S. Coast Guard Academy, and placed my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The drill field is a 4-5 acre grassy stretch in front of the Academy on which we practiced close order drill several mornings a week in the fall and spring and held a formal ceremony every Friday afternoon.

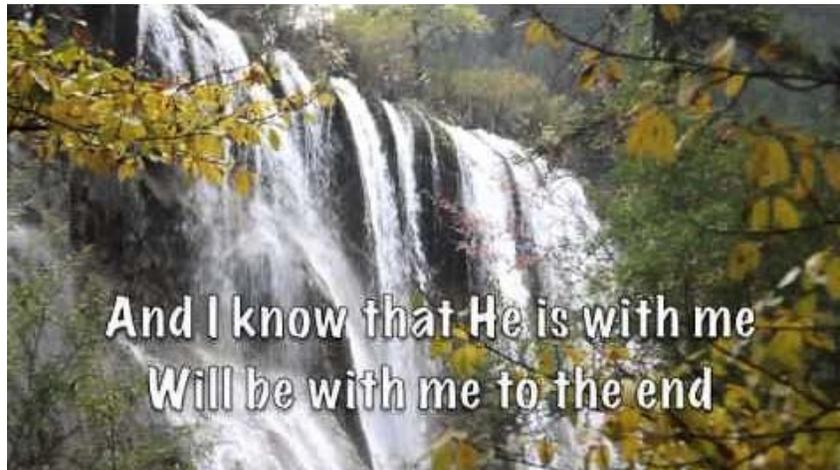
Now how about you? Perhaps, you came under conviction during a church service and came forward to the front of the church. On the way forward or at the altar, you

made the decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for your sin that you might have eternal life. That walk to the altar and your decision are part of your testimony.

Let me add a third testimony example, my favorite salvation story from WW II. An Air Force crewman was blown out of his plane at 20,000 feet without a parachute. As he fell from the heights, he remembered those verses his Mom had spoken to Him so many years before, and that song she used to sing to him:

*Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him  
at His Word, just to rest upon His promise,  
and to know "Thus sayeth the Lord."*

As he fell, he placed His faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who went to the cross to die in his place and for his sins. Now, little did he know that there had been a heavy snow fall across the German countryside below. And little did he know that he was going to land in the middle of a pine forest, all of which had a thick coating of snow. The heavily-coated tree limbs slowed his fall enough, along with the six-foot drift in which he landed, that he survived and was rescued by a German patrol that saw the whole thing.



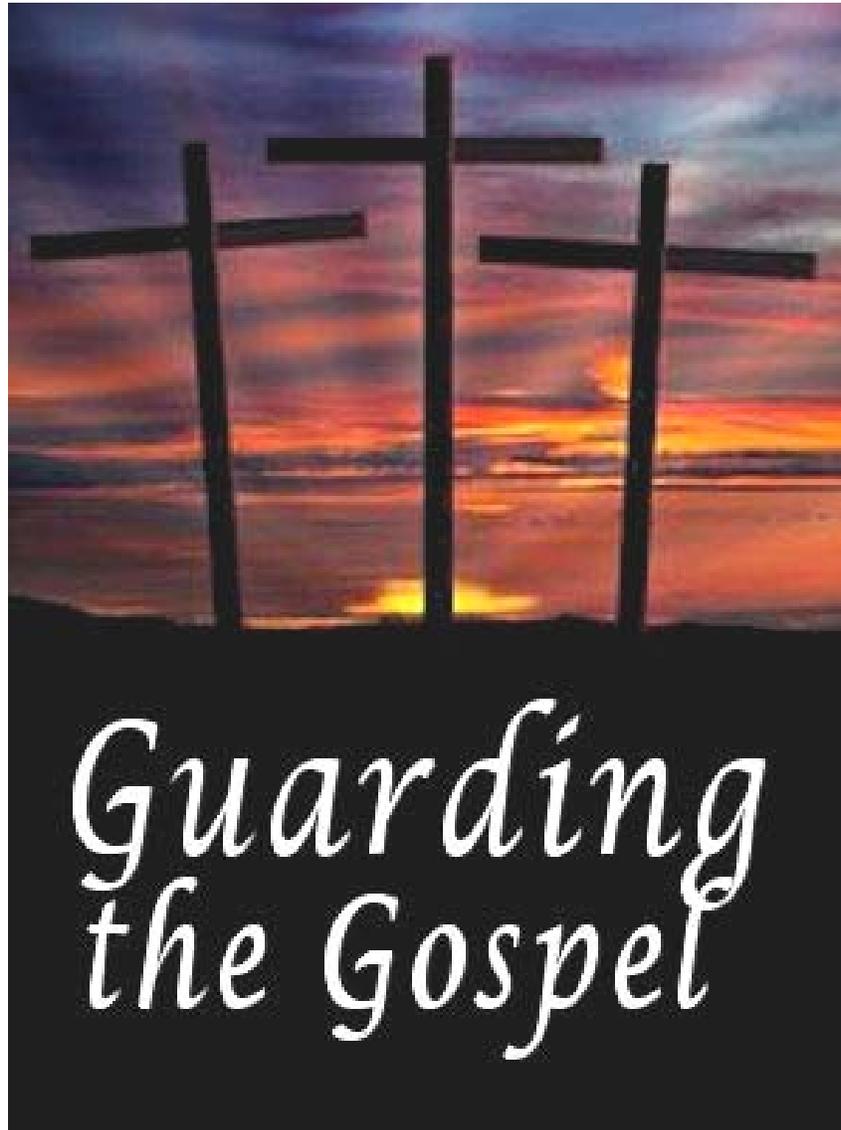
Here is your test! Do you need to kneel down on a drill field and believe? Do you need to walk to the altar of a church and kneel down and believe? Do you have to bail out of a plane at 20,000 feet without a parachute and believe in order to be saved? What is the common thread in all three testimonies?

*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?  
Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,  
you and your household. Acts 16:30-31*

I trust this message of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone will be the light that shines forth from our fellowship and down through our extended families.

If by some chance you are reading this and do not know for certain that you are going to be with the Lord for all eternity when you die, then I encourage you, in the quietness of your own soul, to put the content of this booklet into practice. In this discussion of *Guarding the Gospel*, you have also been exposed to a pure Gospel message. Now God is calling you to turn and place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He loves you! He is calling you to relationship with Himself! He has done everything necessary that you might become one of His children! Is there anything keeping you from turning to Him and putting your faith in the finished work of the cross right now?



# VISTOSO Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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Bible references in this booklet are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV)  
or the 1984 New International Version (NIV)