Let's have a word of prayer: "Father in Heaven, we thank You for the absolutely wonderful experience we've been having in music and children's story and offering thus far. We just praise You for that. It's been so meaningful and helpful in our experience with You. But Lord, we are now ready to open Your word. And we need You to speak to us. Lord, we want to not just have facts and information; we want to feel Your heart in our heart and in our mind. And we are asking for a miracle to take place here that You would be the One who teaches us. We are anxious to hear from You Lord. We have expectations, and we pray that You will now come into our midst and teach us and lead us in thought. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen."

In General Norman Swartzkopf's book, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, he has a story in there about the Granada invasion. Some of you remember that, some of you may not have been born when that took place. But there is an island down there in Caribbean named, Granada. It was attacked by communists. And there were a lot of American students there, several hundred. And the United States Government wanted to deliver them. They were captive. And General Swartzkopf happened to be in Georgia at the time. He was at one of the Army bases there. And he was called by Washington and ultimately flown down to the Caribbean. And he was on a ship there with an Admiral Metcalf. The Admiral Metcalf was in charge of the overall program, and General Swartzkopf was kind of his right hand man. And they were having a problem. The only landing places for the marines and for the army were quite a distance away from where the school was. And so they had to figure out a way to get the soldiers up to where the school was to deliver the students. And just every way they looked, there were obstacles. There were entrenched soldiers that they would have to fight through, and it was a very difficult thing. And they kept getting messages from Washington, "Get those kids out of there, get those kids out of there!"

And so the control room, if you will, on the ship where the varying leaders were gathered, was a place of tremendous tension. Trying to figure out what to do; they felt pressure from every side. And just to get a fresh thought, some fresh air, General Swartzkopf stepped outside. And he was standing, and he was looking down at the deck on the ship. And there were a number of marine helicopters, transport helicopters. And it dawned on him. You see, they were right directly across from the school. They were out in the water, and there was a beach there. And he thought, "If we can get the soldiers into those helicopters, we can transport them to that beach, and they can be in that school in a matter of minutes." So he ordered the Colonel, or he called for the Colonel who was in charge of the Marines to come into that office where they were. Well, first of all, excuse me, he checked with the Admiral, and the Admiral thought it was a brilliant idea and said "Yes, by all means do it."

So they brought the Colonel in, and General Swartzkopf said, "Colonel, I want you to take those marine helicopters, I want you to fly to..." and he told the spot where the army was. "Pick up the army and bring them to that beach. And we are going to storm the school, and deliver the students." And the Marine Colonel, very soberly, but matter-of-factly said, "I am not going to do that." And General Swartzkopf said, "What?" The Marine replied again, "I am not going to do that." So General Swartzkopf said, "Why not?" And the reply was, "Those are marine helicopters, and we do not transport the army in marine helicopters."

Now General Swartzkopf was angry. He said, "Well how long will it take you to get marines in those helicopters?" And the Colonel said, "It would take 24 hours." General Swartzkopf walked in front of him and gave him one of those, we called it when I was in the military, "Face to facy talks" you know, it was kind of nose to nose. He looked this Colonel right in the eye, and he said: "Colonel, Admiral Metcalf and I are giving you a direct order. You get those helicopters to the army, and you get the army on that beach, am I making myself clear? If you refuse to do that, I will personally see that you are court marshaled." At that time, two of the aids of the Colonel were at the elbow of the Colonel and one of them tapped the Colonel gently and said, "Sir, may I have a word with you please, in private?" So they stepped out of the room and when they came back, the Colonel said, he would oblige.

Now, you have to admire the Colonel for his convictions. You know, he was standing up for something that meant so much to him. There are traditions to preserve in the military. And he was doing that. You have the marines on one side, and simper-fy (sp?) and all that they represent. You have the army over here and they are enemies. You put those two groups of young people together and sometimes they'll break out in fights because the marines are this, and the army is that. And they have their nick-names for each other and on and on. And so you have to admire the Colonel for his convictions. But yet, you become overwhelmed with realization that his convictions are so important to him that he is not seeing the larger picture. And because of his convictions and traditions he is unable or unwilling to rescue the captives. And that's what I would like to study with you today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 15. There is a crisis in the church. Paul and Barnabas have completed their first missionary tour. They've settled back into the Antioch were they begun, and they are spending some time there. And we start chapter 15 with verse 1. It's a story it pretty much self explains itself. But there are some serious questions we have to deal with. Verse 1: "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

So here are Paul and Barnabas in Antioch and Antioch is filled with these Gentiles who've accepted Christ as their Savior. They are in the church, they've been baptized, and now all of a sudden some folks come along and say, "Oh no, you can't be saved unless you are circumcised." They'll add to it actually you will see that in verse 5. Well let's see verse 2: "Therefore when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them..." that means it was knock-down drag-out fight, "... they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them."

"But 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." Wow! Now not only are they to be circumcised, but they are to keep the Law of Moses. Now they have good reason to think this. After all Abraham was circumcised, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve fathers of the tribes of Israel were circumcised, Jesus was circumcised, all the apostles were circumcised. And Mosaic Law, we are talking about fourteen hundred years of Biblical precedence. It is the Word of God we are talking about here. And this is a major issue, a major conflict because, is Christianity going to be a reformed movement of Judaism or is Christianity its

own ism? Is it a new thing? And if it's a new thing, what can you learn from the old? How does that transition take place, and is it a transition? Or is the responsibility of the leaders in Jerusalem to call these Gentiles into being Jewish? Major, major conflict! And people are convicted and have their traditions.

So, we read in verse 6: "The apostles and elders came together to consider this matter." The future of the church depends on it. In verse 7 it says: "And when there had been much dispute..." again, lots of arguing, "...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..." He is retelling the story of the experience that he had with Cornelius. Where Cornelius and his household accepted Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit and then they were baptized.

Verse 9: "...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?" A yoke on their neck, that's the Mosaic Law. They were unable to keep it. None of them were able to keep it. In fact, the very teachings of the Mosaic Law are that they can't keep it. That's why you have The Day of Atonement. That's why you have the sacrifices. The very nature of the teachings of the Law of Moses is that you can't keep it. And it's here to demonstrate that you are sinners. "It's a yoke we couldn't bear."

Verse 11: "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." So once a person has accepted Christ they have salvation, that's what Peter is saying. But how are these Gentiles and these Jews supposed to worship together? In verse 12 it says, "Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles." You know, I will tell you right now, there is no miracle or wonder recorded in the scriptures that was done by the Pharisees who believed, or the circumcision party as they will be called. Because what it is, it's a reform movement that kind of turns everybody inward. God saves His miracles for people who are trying to deliver people who are captive.

And our church, our denomination is overwhelmed right now with reform movements. "We are the right people, we are the right people, we have the right way, and you get their literature, and you get their appeals for your money, and you get their appeals for your time and interest and to be on their side." And I am telling you right now brothers and sisters, it is eating the heart out of us. And here in North America, if it weren't for the Hispanic growth, we would be dying. Why? Could it be that our convictions and our traditions are causing us to deny direct orders from Heaven?

Well we are going to see that. Let's look at this further. This is a fascinating story. Verse 13: "And after they had become silent, 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." In verses 15, 16 and 17 he is going to quote Amos as evidence that the Gentiles should be called in. Verse 18 it says, "Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge..." "I judge!" Who is this guy? "I judge, James. Here is my declaration. I am speaking on behalf of all the church here." By the way, you may not like this sermon today? Some of you may become extremely nervous about it. You may be upset. But I've already told the deacons, "Anybody caught outside gathering stones are not allowed back inside." But I want to share with you, what maybe your salvation. Listen to me carefully. The church is going to make a ruling on this day. The Apostle Paul, the rest of his ministry will deal with the issue of circumcision, the Mosaic

Law. He will deal with meat offered to idols. He will deal with that. Not once, in all of his writings, will he ever refer back to the decision made on this day. Do you know why? He did not consider it authoritative, and neither should you. Any decision the church makes can be changed later by another group who vote the same issue. Don't base your faith on what the church teaches. Base your faith upon what the Word of God teaches.

It gets interesting. "I judge..." verse 19, "...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 form blood." Four things! "Abstain from things polluted by idols." That means meat or drink offered to idols, meat that is strangled, and any meat that has a blood in it, and sexual immorality. Have them avoid those things, and we can all get along. Why? He goes on to say, "...because Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

"This is part of our culture," he is saying. "The Mosaic Law and all that is associated with it, it's a part of us as Jews. It is read and preached about every Sabbath throughout all this area, throughout all the Mediterranean." And this decree that will be voted here, the question comes to our mind, "Is this a doctrine? Is it for all times? Is it for places? After all it is the Word of God." And the fascinating thing is that James is saying "You don't have to be circumcised and you don't have to keep the Mosaic Law. But please, in order to get along, let's do this much. Will you meet us part way? Don't eat things offered to idols, don't eat meat that's been strangled, and don't eat meat that still has the blood in it."

Now, the morality, we will study next week. Flee sexual immorality! But these things dealing with food, I have a question for you. Before you answer, think. Is counsel from God ever out of date? Is counsel from God ever time and circumstance sensitive? I am going to demonstrate today that counsel from God can be out of date, and that counsel from God is always time and circumstance sensitive, and I am going to prove it you by your own beliefs, from the Word of God. In the first place, James, in one declaration, just undid most of the Old Testament, all that's associated with the Law of Moses.

And if you don't think that's time and place sensitive or circumstance sensitive than I want to challenge you. Begin about Exodus chapter 25 or so, or 20, 21, and start reading. They've got the Ten Commandments, they are there at Mount Sinai, and then Moses is going to start telling them how they are supposed to live. And you begin to underline all the things that he says you are supposed to do and not do, and I am going to tell you right now you will come away saying: "That doesn't apply, that doesn't apply." How many of you have studied carefully how you are supposed to treat your slaves? Ha? I hope you realize that's time sensitive, circumstance sensitive. And that's not God saying anyone of us should become a slave or own slaves. Are you with me?

Now, the natural reaction is, "Is the counsel of God ever out of date?" The answer is, "Well no!" Well, let's see. Turn to First Timothy chapter 3.Our own church practices and teachings we are going to compare with the Bible today. First Timothy 3:1, "This is a faithful saying; if a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work." Now what's another word for bishop? What's another word that we would use today? Elder! Notice what it says, "If a man desires the position of an elder, he desires a good work." Do you know what the official position of our denomination is as regards women being elders? Do you know what it is? It is this. If a local congregation wants a female to be an elder, and they vote them to be an elder, that is completely and totally accepted by the denomination.

Was this counsel time sensitive, or circumstance sensitive? Was it? If not, then there are a lot of problems. Well, let's look at another one. Let's go back to Acts 15 verse 20. James says this: "We write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood." Now I am curious, and this is not to make you feel embarrassed, but just to make a point. How many of you eat meat? O, half the people here eat meat. Of those of you who eat meat, how many are Seventh-day Adventist, let me see your hands; just about the same ones. Yes, interesting! The Bible says not to eat the blood in the meat, do you? Do you only eat kosher meat? Have you ever been taught that as a Seventh-day Adventist, as a prerequisite to joining the church and embracing the teachings of the Word of God? Not only have you not been taught that, but I spent a lot of time to make sure I wouldn't get in trouble. I went through all of those writings, and she doesn't have an issue with it either. Why? Time sensitive, circumstance!

Now by the way, I don't think it's wrong to eat meat. I don't eat it because I want to be healthy. If you want to gnaw on the carcass of a dead animal, you feel free, you know. We had the Young Adults over last year, and I said, "I don't want to eat anything that had a mother," and somebody said, "That's nothing. I don't want to eat anything that had a bowel movement." But if you want it, go for it. But note, we've read two passages and we don't follow those practices nor do we feel guilty about it. Let's look at another one. Let's go to First Corinthians 11verses 14 and 15. In First Corinthians 11:14 it says, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?" It makes you wonder what bold people are then.

"But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering." And if were to add another text or two, there are a lot of women in this church in trouble because you do not have long hair. Why is that not an issue? It's in the Bible. And I've seen some people who considered an issue, and they've got a beehive three feet high. Why is it not an issue? Because we recognize it is time and circumstance sensitive. Let's look at another one. Let's go to First Timothy 2 verse 12. Paul, he is pretty bold here. Actually we'll read verse 11 too, so we'll get a running start at it. "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission." That's really the only text you need fellows if you want a good marriage. Trust me; you don't want to use that one.

Verse 12: "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." Do we honor that? Do we practice that, do we believe it? I'll tell right now, there are women teaching Sabbath School in the Adults, and there are men present. And also, what are you going to do with Ellen White? So I ask the question again, "Is counsel from God ever out of date? Is counsel from God ever time and circumstance sensitive?" By our own practices we say, "Yes." Well let's look at another one, we are here in Timothy. Let's go back to verse 9, same chapter. This one I find just fascinating. First Timothy 2 verse 9: "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing."

Now the Bible is called, the canon. The "canaa" (sp?) in the Greek, it means a measuring rod or measuring reed. That's what you measure things by. Its truth and you measure thing by it. But denominations, sub-groups of denominations and all that develop their own measuring rod. And it's called, "A canon within a canon." And it's unscriptural, and it's not healthy. But, because everybody accepts it, it becomes part of the denomination. Here it simply says, "…do not wear gold." Do we practice that? No, we have another system. Our system is this: if it's a wedding ring it's okay, if it's watch it's

okay, if it's buttons it's okay, if it's cufflinks it's okay, if it's your glasses it's okay, if it's a brooch it's okay, if it's a belt-buckle it's okay, if it's a tie pin it's okay, but if it touches an earlobe it's sin. Now does that make sense? And we wonder why people look at Christians and in particular today our brand of it, and say: "Brother!" And maybe it's an insight into why the generation growing up behind us is saying, "I am out of here." Because I will tell you brothers and sisters, there are people who have convictions on these things, and they have traditions on these things, and they are willing to let the captives remain captive and keep their convictions and it's eating the church up. It's tearing it up.

I have with great amusement watched the last seven weeks that we've been worshiping in this building. I thought we'll do something nice, something to create a little fellowship for you. We bought some doughnuts. We put them down there in the South Wing, and said, "Hey, have some fellowship." Oh, my lands, whoa, the great doughnut debate began. "We have a health message, what is going on?" "Hey, have you been to a potluck lately?" What is the nonsense of that? There are several hundred people every week going down there and having fellowship with each other that they never had a fellowship with before! And so the ladies got all in a tizzy about it and said, "Well all right, we'll serve fruit." And every week they are putting the fruit back in the refrigerator because people want the doughnuts. I told them, "The next person that complains about it you send them to me. But tell them if they come to me, we are going to their house and I am going through their cabinets."

Are you beginning to see how absolutely malignant conviction and tradition can be? Now I hope you are connecting the dots, but I am not going to trust you will, so I am going to. If this can happen with the Word of God, can it not happen to counsel that comes after the Word of God? Now are you getting a picture? And we have a whole denomination imploding on itself because of convictions and traditions. And I am telling you, many are time and circumstance sensitive. The church will always have people who are seeking to be the conscience for others. But what are you going to do with this message today? This is an unsettling message. What do you stand on? What do you stand for? What is the important thing? Is there a bottom line? I am a bottom line person. We had a closing on our house last spring, and it's \$2 for this, \$6 for this, a \$100 for that, I just went right to the bottom line. I didn't care about all that other stuff. Here is what is going to cost you. Okay! But they have to go through that, and you have to sign they went through it.

But what is the bottom line? Can we cut through the chase here Pastor? What am I going to walk away with here? Is there a standard that never goes out of date? Is there a command from a high enough authority that if we do not obey it, we risk eternal life? Is that there? I'll tell you there is! And unfortunately, because of all the stupidity, we've forgotten the big things. Look at John 14 please. By the way, are you aware of what the sum total of the teachings of our church was when it started, when it was officially organized as a church? Do you know what the sum total of our teaching was? It was one verse, that's it. It was Revelation 14 verse 12. Don't turn there; I want you to be in John. You can read Revelation 14 verse 12 on your own later, but that was a sum total of our teaching when we began.

Here we have John 14 verse 15 Jesus is speaking, He says: "If you love me, keep my commandments." Now, you will never love the Lord, I will never love the Lord until we accept Him as our Savior, and we'll love Him. So this is in the context of a faith-saving relationship already. That's how love for the Lord comes. You can't create it, you can't just desire it, you get it when you accept Jesus as your Savior. Now Jesus says, "Keep my commandments." And we could say, "Well, his commandments were

basically two fold. Love God with all your heart, you mind, your soul and all your strength, and all your might, and your neighbor as yourself." But Paul will come along later and say, "Yes, upon that all the law and the prophets hang." So how is it described? Are you aware that when Jesus says this He is actually quoting a passage of scripture found in Exodus chapter 20? And I'd like for you to turn there. Exodus chapter 20; you see, it's time to turn away from non-sensical things and stand on what is eternal. There is a moral law that is not circumstance or time based. This moral law is for all time. In Exodus 20 verse 6, this is what Jesus quoted referring to God "...who is showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." What commandments? The Ten Commandments! They are there, and they are in stone, and God wants to take them from stone and put them in your heart, and He says, "Do this, and you'll be okay." And we are fussing over doughnuts. And we are worried about whatever. And we are not even in love with Jesus. And we are not even trying to be moral.

Listen, this church is a church that teaches grace. But I want you to know something. If you are living a life of immorality, when you walk in that door, if you are repentant and wanting to change, that door is always welcome to you. But if you are living a life of immorality and have no intention of changing, and you think it's okay, and you are coming to this church, I am tired of you and I want you to go. I told my wife, I wish we had a metal detector like machine and everybody that walked in it, if they are not truly repentant, they can just go right on out, they are not allowed. This is the place to recover from sin, not to rejoice in it. And I am going to preach some hard sermons about morality because I've heard some things about you folks that distress me.

God says no other gods but Him. He says, "No idols!" He says don't take His name in vain and keep the Sabbath holy. He says, "Honor your mother and your father. Don't kill, be moral, don't commit adultery." He says, "Do not steal, do not bear false witness, and do not covet." Brothers and sisters those things stand forever. And it's high time we turn away from nonsense and go back to the commands of God. And if we do that, and get away from conviction and tradition that locks us up in fights with one another, we are going to see miracles and wonders and signs take place.

It's an amazing thing that happened. General Schwarzkopf said to that Colonel, "You do it, and you do it now." It took two hours to get everything ready. They've picked up the army. They had contact with the students in the building by phone. They said to the students, "Put mattresses up against the windows because we are going to bomb right near you and we don't want any debris to come in the room. Find something white and put it on your left arm, when you hear the helicopters land on the beach, run out of the rooms into the helicopters. As the army gets out of the helicopters, you get in the helicopters." Helicopters came, and in thirty four minutes every student was rescued alive.

Cut through... I have a bad word on my mind; I am not going to use that. Cut through it. Cut through all the traditions and all the convictions that are nonsensical and let's get the job done. There are people out there who are captive to sin, who are crying out for people to come and deliver them. And God is wanting so desperately to pour His Spirit out on the people who would be willing to go to battle for Him, and to rescue those who are captive. Instead, people are in fighting and carrying on, and concerned about their turf and their traditions, and their convictions. And I say, let's get rid of that, let's get serious, let's get Jesus as our Savior and start looking at big things. And if you, if you want to be that type of Christian, I am going to ask you to stand.

"Oh God, please deliver us from ourselves. Please help us to be intelligent when we read Your word and counsels You have given us. Oh please Lord help us to always have the big picture in mind, and that is salvation in Jesus, and keeping His commands. And Lord may you use us, even this week to rescue someone who is captive. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen."