

Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the Spread of God's Word

Clarifying the Message of the Gospel

Acts 15:1-11, 22-29

Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Brad Bigney, Oct. 27, 2019

Getting the Gospel right and keeping it right is the key to getting life right—not only this one, but the one to come!

If we get the Gospel wrong, Christianity collapses in on itself and becomes no different than any other religion.

I. You Should Expect People to Resist the Message of Salvation by Grace Alone

Acts 15:1 “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.’”

They still can't fathom that Christianity and the Gospel stands alone and on its own – with no need to hold onto the religious trappings and traditions of the Old Testament.

Acts 15:24 “Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’ – to whom we gave no such commandment –”

Anything that moves you away from salvation in Jesus alone should be very unsettling to your soul, because now your security is dependent upon Jesus plus something else.

The human heart still has a tendency today to want to add to the Gospel and to put ourselves somehow into the equation.

II. You Should Be Ready to Defend the Message of Salvation by Grace Alone

Acts 15:2 “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.”

Paul and Barnabas were willing to take a stand and to cause an uproar if necessary because what was at stake was the very heart of Christianity – this Gospel message we proclaim!

The 4 commands in verse 20 have nothing to do with Gentile believers needing to keep the law of Moses, but everything to do with them promoting unity and practicing love—by laying down some of their freedoms—in an effort to be sensitive to their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Do you know how to defend this message of salvation by grace alone?

[See Galatians 1:6-7; 2:16,19-3:1; 3:13-14, 21-26; 5:1-4,13-18, 24-25]

III. You Should Know What the Distinctions of Salvation by Grace Alone Are (v. 8-11)

A. Salvation is a Change of Heart that Changes Who You Are – You’re a Child of God

Acts 15:8 “So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us.”

Salvation by grace alone is not about what happens to you on the outside, but who He gives to you on the inside...His Spirit!

Romans 8:15-17 “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”

B. Salvation is an Act of Faith that Purifies What You’ve Done – You’re Forgiven and Made Clean

Acts 15:9 “... purifying their hearts by faith.”

No ceremonial laws could change the deep-rooted filth and sinfulness of our dark hearts. Only by faith when we come to Christ can we be purified and forgiven of all our sins.

Colossians 2:11-13 “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses”

C. Salvation is a Gift of Grace that You Can Only Get Through God’s Son

Acts 15:11 “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

This is the radical message of the Gospel - come as you are. He will meet you where you are and will change you by His grace and for His glory.

D. Salvation is a Relationship with Jesus that Changes Your Relationship to the Law

Acts 15:10 “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?”

Salvation by grace alone removes not only the burden of your sin, but the burden of the law.

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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.”

Colossians 2:13-17 “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

So much of the Old Testament Law was a shadow of something better to come...and He's come! His name is Jesus.