

ONE message. people. mission.



The Guardian of the Gospel

Acts 15:1-35

Main Idea

The church is the guardian of the one true gospel that proclaims all people are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Overview

- **The Church is the Guardian of the Gospel**
 - The gospel is under attack as some men are trying to “add” to Jesus
 - Paul & Barnabas are sent by the local church in Antioch to go to the local church in Jerusalem to discuss the matter (v. 2-4)
 - The whole church hears and gathers for the discussion (v. 12)
 - The whole church agrees with the suggested outcome and delivers a letter to the church in Antioch (v. 22, 25, 30)
 - The letter offers suggestions not commands – “it seem good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (v. 28)
 - The local church is involved throughout the entire process – not just the spiritual elite or leaders meeting and telling the churches what to do
- **The Gospel is Not Jesus + Something**
 - Some men are teaching that salvation comes only from faith plus works
 - They misunderstood the purpose of the law
 - Trying to follow the law does not free you from it, but enslaves you to it! (cf. Acts 13:38-39)
 - The law does not save us, but points out our need to be saved.
 - The Pharisees get it right that we need to be saved
 - The Pharisees get it wrong that we can save ourselves
 - Jesus plus anything ruins everything
- **The Gospel is Jesus Plus Nothing Equals Everything**
 - Paul says there is only one true gospel (cf. Gal. 1:6-8)
 - Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James all agree that God saves all people by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
 - The heart is the issue, so we need a heart solution
 - Religion changes your behavior so you look good in front of man, but the gospel cleans your heart so you can stand in the presence of God
- **The Church Guards the Gospel by Pursuing Unity in the Gospel**

- We guard the gospel by (1) refuting false gospels; (2) holding fast to the one true gospel, and (3) by pursuing unity in the gospel
- James is suggesting the Gentiles should abstain from these four things because the law of Moses is proclaimed every week in the synagogues
 - James is not saying abstaining from these things is a matter of principle to be saved, but a matter of prudence to not offend or put up a stumbling block
- The church at Antioch receive the letter with joy – far from being seen as demanding and burdensome, the church at Antioch received it with joy! Why?
 - Because they understood the gospel – they did not have to become Jews to become Christians. And they could use their freedom in the gospel to lay aside personal preference for the unity of the church and the witness of the gospel.

Overview

Discussion starter: Why do you think it's significant that nearly all religions (if not all) affirm that we need to be 'saved'? What in the world tells us this?

1. How do we see the entire local church involved in this discussion?
2. Why it is significant that the entire church is involved and not just the leaders?
3. Read verses 15:1-5. How are the Pharisees distorting the gospel? What can we affirm in the 'theology'?
4. Even if we disagree with the Pharisees theologically, how do we live like them practically?
5. Read verses 6-18. How does the disciples' understanding of the means of salvation differ from that of the Pharisees?
6. Do you think it's true that at least part of us is like the Pharisees in that we "like" law more than grace? Why?
7. Why are we afraid of grace? How does the gospel address this fear?
8. Read verses 19-35. Why does James suggest that they should refrain from those four things he mentioned? He is like the Pharisees adding "law" on top of gospel?
9. Why should we be willing to lay our gospel freedom aside so as to not offend a Christian brother or sister? What are some practical examples of this?
10. The church in Antioch received the letter with joy – what does this tell us about how we should view giving up our freedoms for the sake of unity and evangelizing?

Accountability Question: Are there areas in your life that your trying to control God by living by the law?