



**Sermon Text:** Acts 15:1-11

*Sermon Date:* May 13, 2018

One of the most difficult doctrines for people to grasp is salvation by grace alone—we are always trying to add something to it. We are saved by grace and baptism or church membership or good works. Yet, as Paul, Barnabas, and Peter argue in our passage, a “Jesus plus anything” gospel is no gospel at all.

#### **GRACE DISPUTED**

We began by seeing grace disputed. A group of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem arrived in Antioch and began to teach that Gentile Christians must adopt circumcision and follow the Mosaic law if they were to be truly saved. In essence, a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian. Their gospel was Jesus plus the law of Moses. Their teaching was so dangerous because it sounded biblical and reasonable. Philip Ryken wisely warns, “The church’s greatest danger is not the anti-gospel outside the church; it is the counterfeit gospel inside the church. . . . The most dangerous teachers are the ones who preach a different Christ but still call him ‘Jesus.’”

#### **GRACE DEFENDED**

An intense debate erupted in response to the Judaizers teaching, with Paul and Barnabas vigorously defending the gospel of God’s free grace. Eventually a meeting is organized at Jerusalem to settle this heated argument. After a lengthy discussion, Peter stands to make his final recorded speech in the book of Acts. In his speech, he defends the gospel of God’s grace by making two related points.

1. **Jesus + Nothing = Everything.** Peter reminds the audience of his ministry with the Gentile Cornelius, who was the first Gentile convert. God plainly revealed that He accepted Gentiles as Gentiles. He gave them the Holy Spirit, cleansed their hearts by faith, and made no distinction between Jew and Gentile even though Cornelius was not circumcised. God saved both Jews and Gentiles in the exact same way—by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
2. **Jesus + Anything = Nothing.** Peter also gives a stern warning to the Judaizers. Since God accepts Gentiles as they are, then it is dangerous to go beyond His ways and add anything to the equation of His grace. The Judaizers were not defending God, they were distorting Him. We can never improve the gospel by adding anything to it. The gospel cannot be improved; it can only be destroyed.

#### **GRACE ENJOYED**

No matter how long we’ve been Christians, we are still recovering Pharisees. The old legalist lingers within us that pulls us toward a performance-based Christianity. We want to base our justification on our sanctification, to base what God does for us on what we do for God. Therefore, we must regularly preach to ourselves (and to one another) the glorious gospel of God’s free grace in Christ. Hear these words of Philip Ryken and rejoice:

Consider what the gospel says. It does not tell us what we have to do to please God. Instead, it announces that God is already pleased with us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is as pleased with us as he is with his own Son. This liberates us from seeking the approval of others. At the same time, it frees us from striving for God’s favor. We already have the tender affection of his eternal love. What more do we need? Nothing more, which is why the one true gospel is such amazingly good news.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Why is it essential for the church to vigorously defend the doctrines of the gospel? In light of this, why must we realize that the greatest dangers are biblically-sounding counterfeit gospels?
3. How do you slip into a performance-based Christianity that makes Christianity about what you do for God instead of what God has done for you in Christ?