



Sermon Text: Acts 15:22-35

Sermon Date: May 20, 2018

On Sunday we picked up our passage right in the middle of the historic Jerusalem Council. As the Council unfolds, we saw three main points.

GRACE DEFENDED: AN ISSUE OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH

The church defended the truth that all people are saved by God's grace alone, apart from human works. Paul, Peter, and James—representing the various factions of the early church—are all united around this truth. Following Peter's speech, James testifies that God has taken a people (*laos*) for Himself from among the nations (*ethnē*) as the Prophets testified. As a result, the Gentiles should not be troubled with circumcision or becoming Jewish.

On the issue of Christian truth, the church must be unyielding. Like the early church, we too must defend the gospel of God's free grace. On matters of Christian truth, we must not compromise.

GRACE DEMONSTRATED: AN ISSUE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

Having established the truth of salvation by grace alone apart from works, James nevertheless thought it was important to appeal to the Gentile church to live in a gracious way toward the consciences of Jewish Christians. Having defended grace, he calls the Gentiles to demonstrate grace. Since Gentile believers had to live alongside Jewish believers, and those Jewish believers were brought up to observe certain food restrictions and ceremonial laws, the Gentiles should be sensitive and refuse to cause unnecessary offense. James is asking them to demonstrate grace to Jewish Christians by willingly laying aside their rights to eat certain types of meat so that intimate fellowship with Jewish Christians is possible. In addition, they should be diligently on guard against sexual immorality.

Martin Luther captured the combination of defending grace in truth and demonstrating grace in love. He said, "As concerning faith we ought to be invincible, and more hard, if it might be, than the adamant stone; but as touching charity, we ought to be soft, and more flexible than the reed or leaf that is shaken with the wind, and ready to yield to everything."

GRACE DISPLAYED: THE ISSUE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

In the early church you have two groups of Christians who naturally despised one another—Jews and Gentiles. There were centuries of relational and cultural baggage between them. Wouldn't it have been much easier to advise them to meet in different churches or conduct their own worship services? Yet, the Jerusalem Council doesn't even seem to entertain such an idea. Instead, they call these two groups to do the harder thing by staying together—setting aside their privileges and preferences if necessary and loving people who are different than them. In doing so, the local church is able to display the miracle of God's grace. This is why a local church must strive to do the hard work of reaching across social, racial, and cultural barriers to display God's grace through Christian unity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. What are the dangers of being flexible on Christian truth when we should be firm and being firm on Christian liberties when we should be flexible?
3. Why is it important for churches to strive to do the hard work of stretching across racial and cultural barriers? What makes this so difficult?