

**Acts of the Holy Spirit #17, The Scandal of Grace**  
**Acts 15, Week of Nov 05, 2017**  
**Bay Park Life Groups – Participant Guide**

The first Christians were predominantly Jewish believers. As such they didn't give up their Jewish culture, traditions or worship. If anything, they saw Jesus as the fulfillment of their Jewish faith. That's why they continued to meet in the Temple and local synagogues. So when did Christianity officially break away from Judaism? Several factors contributed to the transition, which was a process not an event. The notion that God was doing something new was clearly signalled by Jesus' death and resurrection; gained momentum with the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's family; and was galvanized by the Jerusalem Council (circa AD 50) as recorded in Acts 15. The destruction of the Second Temple (AD 70) further cemented the divide, as did the growing number of Gentile conversions and churches worldwide. Eventually, even those Jewish believers who continued to attend synagogues were ousted. They didn't fit the religious mould of salvation in keeping the law; of God indwells this space, on this day, via this holy man, and through these holy relics.

The uniqueness of Christianity is found in the gospel of by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Grace shines light on our utter helplessness and need of a Saviour. For this reason, grace is both glorious and scandalous. Our sin nature fights to put works ahead of grace, as a means of deserving God's grace. The message of God's grace doesn't just prick the pride of atheists, pagans and those of other religions. It's a hard pill for Christians to swallow on a daily basis. Acts 15 reminds us of the need to keep coming back to grace plus nothing!

1. From your personal experience, give an example of:
  - Church at it's worst . . .
  - Church at it's best . . .

Read Acts 15:1-21

2. Over the years, Christians have debated, argued and fought over who is church for? Is it for believers or seekers? How does Acts 15 help answer this question?
3. The controversy then was grace plus circumcision. That would definitely have made it hard for Gentile men interested in Christianity! What are some contemporary equivalents of grace plus? In what ways might we be making it harder than necessary for people to come to faith?
4. Reread 15:7-11. What practical insights can we glean from Peter's reply that might help us in the struggle to keep grace ahead of works, rules, traditions, and preferences?

Read 15:22-35

5. What does this entire debate and event teach us about how to settle disputes when Christians differ?
  
6. What can we do to ensure that we're not testing God by laying burdens on future generations of believers at Bay Park? How is God challenging you personally?
  
7. Which of Sunday's "food for thought" speaks to you most? How can we encourage each other in staying grace based and focused?
  - A life of faith keeps coming back to grace (15:11). How do we know that we're living out the grace of God in the power of the HS? Am I a blessing or a burden?
  - Is our passion for outsiders or pacifying insiders? (15:19) Are we advancing mission or preserving traditions?
  - Err on the side of grace (15:7, 13) There will always be nameless people more interested in building their kingdom than God's Kingdom. It's more comfortable. God uses those who humbly & sacrificially seek his grace. Both Peter and James went through a second conversion. They made a radical turn from being burden imposers to burden lifters (cf Gal 2:11ff).

We know that as you've prayed, gathered, and shared, God has spoken. Be sure to tell us some of your brilliant discoveries and creative ideas!