

BGCC Community Group Guide



Living The Mission

April 26th 2026

Guarding The Gospel

Key Text: Acts 15:1-21

Introduction: When the Gospel Gets Threatened

Not every threat to the church comes from the outside. Some of the most dangerous distortions come from within—ideas that sound spiritual but quietly shift the foundation of the gospel. Acts 15 captures one of the most critical moments in early church history: a debate over what is required for salvation.

At the heart of the issue was a simple but massive question:

Is faith in Jesus enough, or must something be added to it?

This passage shows us that the gospel must not only be believed—it must be **guarded**.

Significance in the Biblical Story

Acts 15 marks the first major doctrinal crisis of the early church. The decision made here protects the gospel from becoming a system of works and preserves the truth that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

This moment shapes the mission of the church moving forward. Without this clarity, Christianity would have remained a sect within Judaism rather than the global, grace-centered movement God intended. As Paul later writes, even small distortions of the gospel are no gospel at all (Galatians 1:6–9).

Section 1 — The Danger of Adding to the Gospel

Text: Acts 15:1–5

Summary

The conflict begins when certain men teach that circumcision is necessary for salvation. On the surface, this may seem like a minor addition, but in reality, it strikes at the very heart of the gospel. If salvation requires anything beyond faith in Christ, then grace is no longer grace.

These teachers were not rejecting Jesus outright—they were adding to Him. That is often how false teaching works. It sounds close to truth but subtly shifts trust from Christ's finished work to human effort. As Martin Luther warned, the most dangerous errors are not those that deny Christ entirely, but those that diminish Him by adding requirements.

Paul and Barnabas respond strongly because the stakes are eternal. The gospel is not something to tweak or improve; it is something to share.

Group Question

Why is adding to the gospel just as dangerous as taking away from it? (Read Revelation 22:17-21)

Personal Relevance

Many believers would never say salvation requires works—but functionally live as if it does.

- **Flow Question:** What are some ways people today subtly add requirements to salvation and faith?
 - **Reflective Question:** Where might you be tempted to trust in something besides Christ for your standing before God?
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Section 2 — The Testimony of Grace

Text: Acts 15:6–11

Summary

Peter stands and reminds the council of what God has already done. He points back to the salvation of the Gentiles—how God gave them the Holy Spirit apart from the law, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Peter’s argument is not theoretical; it is experiential and theological. God Himself has already made His verdict clear. To require more would not only burden people—it would contradict God’s work. Peter even calls the law a “yoke” that neither they nor their ancestors could bear.

Salvation, Peter declares, comes through the grace of the Lord Jesus alone. As John Calvin noted, “grace leaves no room for boasting because it removes all dependence on human effort.”

Group Question

Why is it important that Peter points to what God has already done rather than just making an argument?

Personal Relevance

We often forget that our confidence in salvation rests in God’s action, not our performance.

- **Flow Question:** When are you most tempted to measure your standing with God by your performance?
 - **Reflective Question:** How does remembering God’s grace free you from both pride and insecurity?
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Section 3 — The Authority of Scripture and the Wisdom of Unity

Text: Acts 15:12–21

Summary

After hearing testimonies, James brings the discussion back to Scripture. He shows that the inclusion of the Gentiles was not a new idea, but part of God’s plan all along (Amos 9). This is a crucial pattern: experience must be interpreted through the authority of God’s Word.

The council ultimately affirms that salvation is by grace alone, but they also provide guidance for unity. The instructions given to Gentile believers are not about earning salvation but about preserving fellowship within a diverse church.

This shows that while the gospel is non-negotiable, love and unity require thoughtful application. As Augustine famously said, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

Group Question

How does the council balance holding firmly to truth while also promoting unity?

Personal Relevance

Holding truth without love leads to division; pursuing unity without truth leads to compromise.

- **Flow Question:** Where do you see tension today between truth and unity in the church?
 - **Reflective Question:** How can you personally pursue both faithfulness to truth and love for others?
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Section 4 — Living in the Freedom of the Gospel

Text: Acts 15:22–35

Summary

The council sends a letter to clarify the decision and encourage the churches. The result is not confusion or division, but joy and strengthening. When the gospel is rightly understood, it produces freedom, not burden.

The early church rejoices because the message is clear: salvation is by grace alone. This clarity fuels mission, strengthens believers, and unites the church.

As Charles Spurgeon noted, “the gospel is good news precisely because it depends on Christ’s work, not ours. Any version of the gospel that adds burden is no longer good news.”

Group Question

Why does clarity about the gospel lead to joy rather than complacency?

Personal Relevance

When we misunderstand the gospel, we either live in pressure or apathy. When we understand it rightly, we live in freedom and purpose. We are motivated to step out on mission! Look up, lean in, step out, and press on!

- **Flow Question:** How does the gospel bring freedom into your daily life?
 - **Reflective Question:** What would it look like to live more fully in the freedom Christ has already secured?
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Closing Summary / Application

Acts 15 reminds us that the gospel must be protected, proclaimed, and applied carefully. The early church refused to compromise on the truth that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Anything added to the gospel distorts it.

Anything taken from the gospel weakens it.

But when the gospel is held firmly, it produces unity, joy, and mission.

“We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.” — Acts 15:11

The question for us is not just whether we believe the gospel—
but whether we are trusting it alone.