

THIS IS US

THIS IS US, PART 6: NOT DIFFICULT

Most people don't have a problem with God. After all, plenty of people show up for church on Christmas and Easter. Unfortunately, people do have a problem with the church. For centuries Christians have made Christianity so complex that people simply write it off as irrelevant and confusing. In this session we'll see how this problem surfaced in the very early days of the church, how they dealt with it then, and how we should deal with it now.

BIG IDEA: We should not make it difficult for people turning to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Controversies arise in churches for many reasons. Some important. Some seemingly trivial. One tension that arose in the early days of the Church and that continues to surface over and over is the issue of grace and truth. Namely, how good does a person have to be in order to be part of the church?

1. How were you introduced to Christianity? Did it seem simple or complicated at the time?
2. From your perspective, who is the church for?
3. In your opinion, is it too easy or too hard to become a Christian?
4. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Acts 15:1-2.*

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

Acts 15:1-2 (NIV)

5. The Jewish Christians were adding circumcision to the list of things you needed to do in order to become a Christian. Over the years, and especially today, how have Christians complicated the message of Christianity?
6. The controversy for the Church at that time was over circumcision and dietary laws. What are contemporary sources of controversy for "entry" in the Church?
7. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Acts 15:3-11.*

The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Acts 15:3-11 (NIV)

8. Why do people display a tendency to make things complicated?
9. What is the simple message of Christianity?

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10. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read Acts 15:12-21.*

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: “ ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ that have been known for ages. “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

Acts 15:12-21 (NIV)

11. How can we continue to keep the message of Christianity easy and accessible to people?
12. What is the danger of becoming insider focused? What happens when we make church difficult and confusing?

THINK ABOUT IT

We have to work hard not to be a church where grace and truth conflict but coexist. Jesus was full of both grace and truth. So, in response, let’s make three commitments:

- Let’s be more concerned with who we are reaching rather than who we are keeping.
- Let’s always err on the side of grace.
- Let’s remain open-handed in attempts to advance the message of Jesus Christ.

MOVING FORWARD

People who were not like Jesus liked Jesus, and he liked them back. Since the church is the body of Christ, people should be drawn to Jesus followers. Even if they don’t agree with the message of the church, they should like the church. So, why isn’t that true?

Too many churches have been building walls instead of bridges. Too many churches have turned in their searchlights for security lights. How can we keep the focus on those outside the faith?

CHANGING YOUR MIND

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

Acts 15:19

