



The Struggle to Understand Grace

Acts 11:1-18

Sunday, May 14, 2017

2. God's Salvation by Grace cannot be EARNED, but is a free GIFT.

The Gospel **is not:**

GRACE + WORKS = SALVATION

The Gospel **is:**

GRACE + FAITH = SALVATION that produces WORKS

- Obedience to Old Testament civil and ceremonial law IS NOT REQUIRED for salvation.
- Obedience to New Testament commands IS NOT REQUIRED for salvation.
- Obedience to New Testament commands is a RESULT and FRUIT of salvation.
- Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, but not by a faith that IS alone.

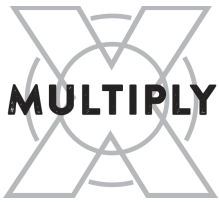
Even when my HEAD gets the Gospel,
my HEART has a hard time HOLDING ON to it.

The struggle to understand God's salvation by grace is acute and persistent for the followers of Jesus in Acts . . . and for the followers of Jesus today! Acts 11:1-18 is one, but not the only instance, where the Early Church grapples with the wonder and scandal of God's grace.

Peter's critics misunderstand the Gospel in two distinct, but intertwined ways . . .

1. God's Salvation by Grace is not a JEWISH thing, but a TRANSCULTURAL thing.

- These early Jewish Christians are RACIST.
- These early Jewish Christians are SHOCKED by the salvation of the Gentiles.
- Though coming THROUGH the Jewish nation, God's salvation is not LIMITED to the Jewish nation.
- Through the Gospel, God is RECONCILING and INTEGRATING the races.
- As Christians, we must care about RACIAL issues.
- As Christians, we must STRIVE for racial reconciliation/integration because that's what the Gospel does.
- As Christians, we must think thoughtfully, carefully and Biblically about IMMIGRATION issues in light of the Gospel.
- As Christians, we must personally welcome and care for IMMIGRANTS as we have opportunity, whatever our view of our government's policy on immigration.



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Connecting & Caring Together (about 20 min.)

In this 6th week of Spring Growth Groups, share a personal joy and trial from the week.

Grappling with God's Word Together (about 20 - 30 min.)

1. How did you come under God's Word in the message this week? What did you feel and think in response to God's Word?
2. Read Acts 11:1-18 together as a group. Luke, the author of Acts, has spent a significant amount of words and space on this encounter between Peter and Cornelius. Here their encounter is recounted again. Why do you think that Luke is spending so much space on this incident?
3. Who and what does Peter face when he finally returns to Jerusalem in Acts 11? Who are these people? What do we know about them? Are they Christians? Why do they respond to Peter the way they do?

4. As Peter recounts his encounter with Cornelius, what is he showing? What point is he making?

5. In light of this text, why must the Gospel inform and shape how we think about and act toward those of other races and issues related to immigration? How does a failure to care about racial reconciliation/integration reflect a faulty understanding of the Gospel?

6. *Even when my HEAD gets the Gospel, my HEART has a hard time HOLDING ON to it.* Explain how that's true for you. Why is grace such a hard concept to understand?

7. What is the place of obedience in the life of a Christian and what are we called to obey? How do we keep this all straight?

Praying Together (about 20 min.)

Share needs. Pray out of your discussion together for a deepening understanding of the Gospel. Pray for those in your lives and circles that still don't know the Gospel.