

OVERVIEW:

When it came to people turning to God...Jesus made it easy and the Religious Establishment made it unnecessarily difficult.

You read through the gospels and it couldn't be any clearer—Jesus built bridges to those who had been overlooked and left behind. He touched the leper, hung out with the tax collectors and sinners, he talked to Samaritan women, and he made hated minorities the heroes of stories he told. He did favors for Roman Centurions, which were the instruments of Roman oppression. He didn't play politics, He wouldn't answer every question asked of him, and he didn't take a public position on everything. He fed people. He healed people. He taught them in such a way that they understood what He was saying. He built bridges. He said things like, "follow me," instead of listing prerequisites or telling them to stop what they were doing.

The Religious Establishment had 613 rules that people had to keep. It was nearly impossible to follow all of those rules, especially if you had a job. They had created different categories of people to determine who was in and who was out. If you were Gentile? Out. Tax collector? Out. Samaritan? Out. Leper? Out. Shepherd? Out. They built barriers. They looked at Jesus and thought he made it too easy, too simple. Jesus looked at the Religious Establishment and concluded they were making it unnecessarily difficult for people to turn to God.

DISCUSSION:

1. Jesus said of the Religious Establishment, "They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." Speaking of himself, Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Has your faith ever felt more like a cumbersome load than something light and easy that leads to rest? If so share about why that was or why that is.
2. Do you think that most people outside of the local church would characterize the message they have heard through the church as one of rest, with a light burden and easy yoke? Why or why not?
3. What unnecessary barriers have you seen the church build that make it difficult for people to follow Jesus?
4. How do we, both as a church and as individuals, balance the tension of making it easy for unbelievers to come to God but also hard to remain where you are after coming to faith? How do we become more okay with slow progress and embrace a lengthy process as a church?
5. The message of grace is simply that we have freely received what we did not deserve. Think about that for a minute. Do we really think that churches in our culture embrace the true message of grace, or do we in our own ways mingle grace with works?
6. Speaking of the Gentiles in Acts 15, Peter indicated that God had purified their hearts because of their faith. What implications does it have for the modern church that God can purify a heart before we see any change to someone's behavior?
7. What takeaways, if any, should we walk away with after learning that Jesus refused to get overly political, opted not to take a public stand on everything, refused to answer every question, identified with the marginalized, and ferociously pursued them in order to build bridges to them? What practical situations can you think of where this applies to Christians and the local church?

8. Why is it easy to get focused on pleasing insiders rather than reaching outsiders?
9. Why was the decision in Acts 15 a big deal for us, and why does it serve as a blueprint for what the local church should always strive to do as it relates to those who are or need to turn to God?
10. "People don't have to act like us to be a part of us." Agree or disagree with that statement as it relates to the local church.
11. The Church's letter simply told the Gentiles not to offend the Jews with dietary practice and abstain from sexual immorality. What can we glean from the leadership's response to the Gentiles?

BIG IDEAS:

1. If Jesus invited everyone, what right does the church have to make hard for anyone to follow Jesus?
2. Let's not allow anything to get in the way of people finding The Way.

APPLICATION:

Evaluate your social media, your conversations, and the way you represent the message and life of Jesus and His church. Have you unknowingly made it appear or seem difficult to turn to God for people that your life and influence intersect with?

MEMORIZATION:

Acts 15:10-11 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors 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."

1. [Group]

5 REASONS YOU SHOULD LEAVE YOUR CHURCH

2.

When it came to people turning to God...Jesus made it easy, and The Religious Establishment made it unnecessarily difficult.

3. [Group]

They tie up **heavy, cumbersome loads** and put them on other people's shoulders...

Matthew 11:4 NIV

4.

"Come to me, all you who are **weary and burdened**, and I will give you **rest**. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am **gentle and humble** in heart, and you will find **rest** for your souls.

Matthew 11:28-29 NIV

5.

For my yoke is **easy** and my burden is **light**."

Matthew 11:30 NIV

6.

When it comes to people turning to God...Jesus builds bridges and The Religious Establishment builds barriers.

7.

A church is never more unlike Jesus than when it keeps out those Jesus invited in.

8.

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Acts 15:1 NIV

9.

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 15:2 NIV

10.

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 believers very glad.

Acts 15:3 NIV

11.

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.

Acts 15:4 NIV

12.

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 keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:5 NIV

13.

The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

Acts 15:6 NIV

14.

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**.

Acts 15:7 NIV

15.

God, who knows the **heart**, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

Acts 15:8 NIV

16.

He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts **by works**.

Acts 15:9 NIV

17.

He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts **by good behavior**.

Acts 15:9 NIV

18.

He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts **by faith**.

Acts 15:9 NIV

19.

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?

Acts 15:10 NIV

20.

No! We believe it is through the **grace** of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

Acts 15:11 NIV

21.

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

Acts 15:19 NIV

22.

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

Acts 15:28 NIV

23.

You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.

Acts 15:29 NIV

24.

You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

Acts 15:29 NIV

25.

The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

Acts 15:31 NIV

26.

Whenever we drift from being like Jesus to being like the religious establishment...we make it unnecessarily more difficult to follow Jesus.

27.

When it comes to people far from God...if your church builds barriers rather than bridges...leave.

28.

Jesus invited everyone... and the church has no right to make following Jesus hard for anyone

29.

30.