

# CALVARY CHAPEL COSTA MESA

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## – COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE –

### Studies in the Book of Acts

#### “The Battle for the Gospel” – Acts 15:1-35

##### MAIN IDEA

Any time you bring people together, you run the risk of their individuality leading to conflicting ideas, which potentially leads to confrontation. To integrate and collaborate takes initiative and commitment. Without some kind of higher authority, either a person or a covenant, to mediate the ideas and plans of a group, usually “might becomes right.” The Constitution functions in mediator role for the people of the United States. For Christians we have Scripture which represents God’s agreement and mandate for Israel and then the Church of Christ. This story in Acts records the first time the local churches in the first century had to work together to settle a major difference of opinion and doctrine. Legalists very early were pushing additional requirements for salvation and church membership. Luke describes the argument first in Antioch, “Then Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them.” (v.2) And then in Jerusalem, “And when there had been much dispute...” (v.7) How did they settle this? The leaders took to the task of examining the reports and experiences from the field in light of the affirmations of Scripture and the Holy Spirit. The solution and letter not only resolved the immediate crisis, but it set a precedent for the Church going forward. Now the simplicity of the salvation message was forever endorsed, but in addition, the Church was given a model on how to work together.

##### SCRIPTURAL INSIGHT

This chapter is more weighty in determining what the church is going to look like going forward than most might observe. Laced through the discussion of the apostles and elders is the word *Gentiles*. This comes from the Greek word ἔθνος, which our word “ethnicity” comes from. But for the Jews it connoted so much more than just the nations and tribes of the world. For them it was a prejudice that was formed from years of persecution and pagan practices at the hands of their neighbors and captors. The Jews were not opposed to converts, but since they viewed the Law of Moses as their Constitution, being proselytized was the only means for an outsider to find God. Grace and faith were now replacing this model, and tying one’s identity to Christ instead of a ethnic group.

##### READ & DISCUSS

Read out loud together Acts 15:1-35. Note the escalation of the debate and the means of their conclusion.

**Acts 15:8-9** *So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

- Observe the different times God is referenced in this story. *What kind of actions are taken by Him in the testimonies? What kind of attributes are ascribed to Him? What kind of reverence is expected for Him? How does Jesus and the Holy Spirit play a role in this chapter regarding access or connectedness to God? How can we become more God aware in our everyday routine?*
- It seems every generation of the Church must return to the fight against the creep of legalism and religiosity. During the 1500s the Reformers coined the phrases *sola fide*, “faith alone,” *sola gratia*, “grace alone,” *sola scriptura*, “Scripture alone.” **Read Romans 4:5, and Ephesians 2:8-9.** *Where does the Church today face this struggle against legalism? When do we sometimes personally burden ourselves beyond what God has required? How does religiosity harm our evangelism to our culture?*

##### RESOURCE

*Why Grace Changes Everything* by Chuck Smith. Costa Mesa: The Word for Today, 2007.

<https://www.amazon.com/Grace-Changes-Everything-Chuck-Smith/dp/0936728787>

##### PRAYER & TESTIMONY



**Community Group Discussion Guide**

Based on Pastor Brian Brodersen’s message from May 6, 2018.

Watch: <https://cccm.com/teaching/the-spirit-the-church-and-the-world/video/the-battle-for-the-gospel/>