

MinistryPlace.net

The Jerusalem Council , Grace, Not Law

Scripture: Acts 15:1-35

Theme: We are saved by grace through faith, not by keeping rules

4th-6th Grade (Ages 9-11)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Overview: "The Jerusalem Council , Grace, Not Law" Introduction (Engage & Share): Begin by asking kids, "Have you ever felt like you couldn't measure up because you didn't follow all the rules perfectly?" Read Acts 15:1-2 briefly (e.g., "Some people came from Judea teaching that you must be circumcised and follow Jewish laws to be saved"). Key Lesson: A Turning Point in the Church In Jerusalem, believers debated whether Gentiles (non-Jewish followers of Jesus) needed to obey Jewish customs. Paul and Barnabas argued, "God doesn't make us right through rules, it's by trusting Christ!" (Acts 15:11). The council sent a letter to Gentile churches: "You don't have to keep the Law, just believe!" Why This Matters Today This lesson teaches us that salvation isn't earned by rules, it's a gift from God through faith in Jesus. Even if we feel guilty about mistakes, God forgives because of grace, not because we've earned it. Deeper Questions for Discussion: 1. "What's one rule you struggle to follow? How does this story show God loves you even if you mess up?" 2. "How can you share this truth with someone who feels judged by rules?" Personal Application & Challenge: Encourage kids to: - Pray today: "Thank You, God, for loving me when I'm not perfect!" - Share one kind word with someone who might feel left out. Closing: End with a song or prayer, then say, "God's grace is stronger than our rules, trust Him today!" --- Tip for Volunteers: Use simple props (e.g., a "rulebook" to tear up) or a visual of two paths (one labeled "Rules" vs. "Jesus"). Keep it interactive with short answers and praise! Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

Bible Story

Sunday School Lesson: The Jerusalem Council , Grace, Not Law (Based on Acts 15:1-35)

In the early church, some Jewish believers in Jerusalem started arguing over how new Gentile (non-Jewish) followers of Jesus should be welcomed into the faith. A group of Jewish leaders said, "To be saved, you must follow the Jewish laws, like circumcision, and obey Moses' teachings." But Peter and the apostles disagreed. They reminded everyone that Jesus had already fulfilled the law by dying on the cross. He didn't just add rules, he gave us a free gift: grace, God's unconditional love and forgiveness. The believers were confused. How could they welcome Gentiles without making them feel like they had to earn their place?

To settle the debate, the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas explained how God had used them to share the gospel with Gentiles, and they asked if they should ask for proof that the law was still required. The council didn't immediately decide, so they sent representatives to Antioch to check on the situation. Meanwhile, Peter and James (who had led the early church) shared their thoughts: "God chose Gentiles to bring Him glory, just as He had chosen Israel." They agreed that the Gentiles didn't need to follow Jewish customs, but they should keep two simple rules: abstain from food sacrificed to idols, avoid eating meat with blood in it, and stay away from sexual sin.

When the leaders in Antioch heard this, they were relieved. The Gentiles didn't have to be circumcised or follow Jewish laws, but they did need to live in a way that honored God. To keep things clear, the apostles wrote a letter explaining their decision. They said, "We don't put rules on you; we just want you to live in peace, trusting God's love for you." Some Jewish believers, however, still resisted, arguing that the law should be kept. The apostles gently but firmly stood firm: "God's grace is enough! We don't add rules to save you, He already saved you through Jesus."

The letter spread far and wide, and soon the early church knew: God's way was grace, not rules. Even today, that's the heart of the gospel! The Gentiles weren't perfect, they made mistakes, but God loved them anyway. That's what Peter and the apostles taught: God doesn't expect us to earn His approval. Instead, He wants us to live in love, trust Him, and share His good news with others.

Deeper Questions: 1. Why do you think some Jewish believers wanted Gentiles to follow Jewish laws? 2. What does it mean to live in "peace" with God, even when we don't feel like it? 3. How can we show grace to others today, just like the apostles did?

Personal Application: Have you ever felt like you had to earn God's love? What happened when you trusted Him instead of trying to "do it right"? God's grace is like a hug, He wraps you up in love, even when you're messy or make mistakes. Today, ask God to help you trust Him more and share His love with someone else.

Why This Matters: This story reminds us that God doesn't want us to live in fear of rules, He wants us to live in freedom through His love! When we believe in Jesus, we don't have to carry the weight of the law anymore. Instead, we can focus on growing in faith, serving others, and showing kindness, just as the early church did. Would you like to pray together about trusting God's grace?

Key Verse

Acts 15:11 , 'No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.'

God's Grace is Free for Everyone! Acts 15:11 tells us that when we trust in Jesus to save us, we don't earn our way into heaven, we just receive it as a gift. Just like how a birthday present doesn't make you a better person, Jesus' love doesn't make us perfect; it makes us accepted by God because He already loves us. This verse is like a hug from God, saying, "You don't need to earn it, just believe!" When people in the Bible first learned about Jesus, some said, "We need rules to stay holy" (like keeping certain foods off the menu). But Paul and the other apostles said, "No! God's love is like a big, kind gift, it's for all of us!" Their answer was simple: "We believe Jesus saves us by His love alone, just like you do!" This means even if you make mistakes, God still welcomes you because of Jesus. --- Why Does This Verse Matter? Imagine you're playing a game with your friends, and you win a big prize, like a new toy. The rule is that you can only keep it if you stay good all the time. But what if you break the rules every single day? Would you still get the toy? Probably not! That's like trying to earn your way into heaven by being perfect. But God's way is different: He says, "I love you so much, I'll give you my gift, my Son, Jesus, just because!" The apostles in Acts were sharing this with people who didn't know Jesus yet. They didn't

tell them to "try harder" or "follow rules." Instead, they said, "God's love is bigger than rules, it's like a free pass to be with Him forever!" This verse is like a reminder that no matter what, God forgives you because of Jesus. No amount of "goodness" can make up for mistakes, only His grace does! --- Personal Application: How Can We Share This? Here's a question to think about: If God's love is free, why do some people still feel guilty or worried about making mistakes? Maybe they're afraid of being left out or not "good enough." But this verse is a big NO to that! God doesn't keep score; He just loves you. So, how can you tell someone else today that their worth isn't based on their actions but on Jesus? You could say something like: - "God loves you more than you'll ever know, just like He loves me!" - "No matter what, you're accepted in Jesus' name." Or even just hug someone and whisper, "You're free because of Him!" --- Deeper Questions to Ponder: 1. If God's love is free, why do you think some people struggle to believe it's really true? 2. What's one thing you've done that made you feel "unworthy" of God's love? How does this verse help you see Him differently? 3. If you could tell God one thing you're grateful for right now (even if it's small), what would it be? God's grace is like a light that shines on everyone, even on the days when you feel messy or unsure. His love isn't a prize to be earned; it's a gift to be trusted. And that's something to celebrate every day!

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Divide into Teams: Split the group into two groups (6, 8 students each). Assign one group as the "Legalists" (who focus on rules) and the other as "Grace Advocates" (who focus on God's love).
2. Debate Scenes: Assign simple scenes from Acts 15 (e.g., Peter's speech, Paul's letter, James's leadership). Give each team 1, 2 minutes to "argue" their perspective on whether Gentiles should follow Jewish rules (e.g., circumcision).
3. Debate Questions: After the scene, ask:
4. "Which side do you agree with? Why?"
5. "How did Jesus' love change the Council's decision?"
6. "What does this teach us about grace vs. rules today?"
7. Reflect & Discuss: Ask students to share one takeaway: "How can we live like Jesus, trusting in grace instead of rules?"
2. "Grace in Action: Design a Graceful Life"
9. A creative drawing activity where students design a "rule-free zone" inspired by Acts 15's message of freedom in Christ.
10. Explain the Task: Say, "The Jerusalem Council said, 'God's grace makes us free from rules!' Today, imagine a time in your life where you felt restricted by rules, like food, traditions, or even how you act toward others. Draw how Jesus' grace would change that decision."
11. Create a Scene: Let students draw a simple illustration (e.g., a meal with friends, a church service, or a choice to share kindness). Encourage them to add symbols of grace (e.g., a heart, a cross, or a smile).
12. Share & Discuss: Ask volunteers to share their drawing. Then ask:
13. "What rule did your drawing show Jesus freed you from?"
14. "How can you live like that today, trusting God's grace?"
15. "What's one rule you've given up to follow Jesus?"
16. Prayer: Invite students to pray for others to experience God's freedom in Christ.
17. Both activities use simple supplies, encourage teamwork or creativity, and leave room for deeper reflection on grace. Would you like adjustments for time or group size?

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions for upper elementary students (ages 9-11) about The Jerusalem Council and Grace vs. Law (Acts 15), designed to spark deep reflection, biblical understanding, and personal application:
- 1. Why was the disagreement in Acts 15 so important, and how does it remind us of what God values in our lives?
- When the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem argued over whether new believers needed to follow Jewish laws (like circumcision), they weren't just talking about skin cuts, they were debating how God wanted people to trust Him. Think about this: If you and your friends disagreed over rules (like homework or fair play), how would you settle it? What would make you feel like God's way was the best one? The apostles decided that grace (God's unconditional love) was more important than rules, but why do you think some people today might struggle with this idea? How can we, like the early Christians, choose to trust God's love instead of our own rules?
- 2. How does the story of the Jerusalem Council show that God's grace isn't just for certain groups?
- The apostles told the Jewish leaders, "God doesn't make rules just for us Jews, He wants everyone to have the chance to know Him!" If you've ever felt left out because someone only talked about faith with certain people (like friends who don't believe in God), how does this story help you understand that grace is for everyone, no matter where they're from or what they've done? What's one way you've seen God include people who might feel like outsiders in your community?
- 3. What does it mean to "walk by faith" instead of following rules, and how does that apply to your everyday choices?
- Paul and Barnabas wrote to the believers: "We're not here to make rules, we're here to help you grow in faith!" Imagine if your teacher said, "I don't care about your homework grades, I just want you to trust me." How would that change how you do your work? Faith isn't just about rules; it's about trusting God's love and trusting Him to guide you. Have you ever made a choice that felt "wrong" by the world's standards, but God was leading you differently? How did that turn out?
- 4. If you were one of the early Christians in Acts 15, how would you explain grace to someone who says, "Rules are important, and breaking them is wrong." (Use the story to support your answer!)
- Picture yourself sitting with the Jewish leaders. You might say, "God's love is like a big, warm blanket, it covers everyone, no matter what. Rules are like guidelines, but love is what really matters. If I only told people about God because they followed all the rules, they'd never know the real joy He wants to give them!" Now, take that idea and explain it to a friend who might disagree. What would you say to show that grace isn't weak, it's stronger than rules?
- These questions encourage students to connect the biblical lesson to their own experiences, think critically about faith and rules, and apply the concept of grace in their daily lives. Would you like any of them adjusted for a specific group or theme?

Prayer Focus

Here's a prayer focus for upper elementary students (ages 9, 11) centered on Acts 15, with a gentle invitation to reflect on God's grace and how it can shape our lives: --- "Heavenly Father, We thank You for Your big love in Jesus, love so strong that it's bigger than rules, bigger than fear, and bigger than even disagreements. When people like Peter, Paul, and the early church leaders talked about how to follow Jesus, they didn't focus on what they could do perfectly. Instead, they remembered that Your grace is what really matters, like a gift from You that covers all our mistakes. Help us today to trust that Your love is enough, not just for us but for everyone around us. Sometimes, we might feel pressured to make rules our own or think we need to earn Your approval. But just like the Jerusalem Council, we can ask: What if God's love is so powerful it doesn't need our perfect behavior? Remind us that when we feel lost or scared, we can turn to Jesus like a child who needs a safe hug instead of a checklist. And when we see others struggling, help us share Your grace, just like they did, without judging, just by trusting

You. Lord, You gave us this Bible to read, so we can learn Your heart. Help us to ask: What is one way I can show grace today, even to someone who is different from me? Maybe it's a kind word, a helping hand, or just believing that someone else's life is important to You, just like ours. And when we mess up, remind us that You don't just see our mistakes, You forgive them, just like You forgave us. We pray especially for those who are new to faith or feel like they don't belong. Help us to be like Peter and Paul: brave enough to listen to God's call and kind enough to welcome others. And when we argue or feel tired, help us to remember: Your peace is stronger than ours. Amen.

--- This prayer includes: 1. Personal reflection questions (e.g., "What if God's love is bigger than rules?"). 2. Connection to the lesson (grace vs. law, the Jerusalem Council's decision). 3. Call to action (sharing grace, trusting God's love). 4. Empowerment for kids to imagine how to apply it in their own lives. You could lead this with a simple "Let's pray" and let students add their own heartfelt words!

>> Missions Spotlight

In many parts of Africa, traditional religions mix with Christianity, creating confusion about salvation. Missionaries emphasize the Jerusalem Council's decision: salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

-> To the Cross

Some people said you had to follow Jewish laws to be saved. Paul and Barnabas said no , salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus alone. The cross is enough. We don't add our good works to what Jesus did. His work on the cross is complete.