



Enormous Drift

Acts 15-9

About *Enormous Church: How Church is Supposed to Be*

Two thousand years ago, a gathering of people in a Middle Eastern city began a movement that would circle the globe and leave its mark on individuals and cultures on every continent. This movement eventually became known as The Church. The church isn't a place; it's a movement. And ... it's still moving. Whether you consider yourself a church person or not, *Enormous Church*, seeks to reveal the story and meaning of the earliest gatherings of Christians.

Bottom Line

We must be a church full of both grace and truth.

Introduction

The church launched 2,000 years ago as eyewitnesses to the resurrection poured into the streets of Jerusalem with the message that Jesus had risen from the dead.

After a month, over 8,000 people embraced this movement and the city was in an uproar. The delicate balance of power between the leaders of the Temple and Rome was disturbed and there was great resistance. The disciples were arrested, flogged, and warned not to speak about Jesus any longer.

Then Stephen was martyred and a full-scale persecution broke out. The followers of Jesus all scattered and took their message with them. This raged for three years.

Then the leader of the persecution, Saul/Paul, was converted and became a believer. Fourteen years later, he took off and began planting churches all over the Mediterranean rim.

Paul was arrested and executed in 67 A.D. by Nero. But now the gospel was out and spreading. Meanwhile...

Struggle

Back in Jerusalem, there was controversy.

In fact, the first enormous church controversy was a controversy that would surface over and over again in the history of the church.

The controversy was over **how good** does a person have to be in order to be a part of the church? **Who** is the church for?

Many Jews assumed since Jesus was Jewish and fulfilled Jewish prophecy, then to become a Christian, you must **first** become Jewish.

In the church, *grace and truth* often collide. But Jesus was **full of** grace and truth (John 1:14). Jesus was not the balance of grace and truth but full of both grace and truth at the same time. So must the church be!

The problem is we drift toward what is familiar and comfortable and manageable which is not grace but truth.

Truth

Read Acts 15.

The drift in the church is naturally toward insiders and away from outsiders.

It's natural to cater to the paying customer, but the church isn't just (primarily) for church people.

The drift is toward law and away from grace.

This happens practically, of course, not theologically. It happens in the way we treat people.

We put people in categories. In the first church, Jews were in and Gentiles were out. They had policies. Churches always gravitate toward policies and categories. Churches used to practice segregation in our country.

Fewer policies means more controversies. This is messy.

The drift is toward preserving rather than advancing.

The more successful we are the more we have to lose. Organizations become less vision-driven and more "preserve-what-we-have" driven.

What's the solution? ***Remain openhanded.***

God has not called us to preserve anything. He has called us to reach this generation.

Conclusion

We must swim against the current. We must not drift!

We must work hard not to be a church where grace and truth conflict but coexist.
We must be a church full of both grace and truth.

Three commitments:

1. Let's be more concerned with who we are reaching rather than who we are keeping.
2. Let's always err on the side of grace.
3. Let's remain openhanded.

James was right. We should not make it difficult for those who are turning to God.

By God's grace, when people are with us, perhaps they will experience both the grace and truth of our Savior.

Next Steps

- Memorize Acts 15:19
- Think about the tension between grace and truth.
- Meditate on how to be full of both grace and truth.
- Remain openhanded.