

053b - Do You Have to Follow the Old Testament Laws? Part 3 - Acts 15:19-21, 28-29 -
2017-08-13

Call to Worship: Psalm 96:1-5

Scripture Reading: Genesis 9:1-7

Sermon: "Do You Have to Follow the Old Testament Laws? Part 3" Acts 15:19-21, 28-29

Benediction: 1 John 5:20-21

INTRODUCTION

On the question of Judaism, the church conference in Jerusalem had reached a verdict, that circumcision and the other Old Covenant ceremonies of the law of Moses should not be imposed on the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit had made it evident that the Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles, without becoming Jewish proselytes. Gentiles are saved as Gentiles by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, just as Jews are saved in the same way.

But that is not the end of the matter for the conference. The Old Testament scriptures, including the law of Moses, contain much more than Old Covenant ceremonies. In the Old Testament scriptures, the One True and Living God reveals His glorious majesty in many ways, declares His perfect law of love, and teaches many other wonderful lessons. In the strongest terms, Jehovah demonstrates His hatred for all the abominable acts of the pagans in their worship of false gods. And so, in the verdict of the council, the Gentiles must not be left with the impression that the Law of Moses is something strictly for the Jews, something to be ignored by the Gentile Christians.

The Gentiles must not be taught to obey all the Law of Moses, but must be taught to abstain from all the practices of idol worship.

or **On the one hand, the Gentiles need not follow Old Covenant ceremonies such as circumcision; on the other hand they must remove themselves completely from pagan, idolatrous ceremonies.**

or There are commands in the Law of Moses that seem to the Jews like essential religious practices, but really are just Old Covenant ceremonies that must not be required of the Gentiles. On the other hand, there are commands in the Law of Moses that may seem to the Gentiles like mere matters of Jewish ceremony, but really are moral laws of God commanding them to have no part in the pagan idolatry all around them.

TEXT

Acts 15:19-21, 28-29

BODY

I. The Gentiles Who Were Turning to God Were Turning from Idolatry

- A. It is not that they were irreligious, atheistic, or agnostic
- B. They were very religious; but their religion was the worship of idols
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols
 - 2. Galatians 4:8 when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods
 - 3. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God
 - 4. Acts 14:11-13 [in Lystra] Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" (12) And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. (13) Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.
 - 5. Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.
 - 6. Acts 19:25b-27 . . . you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. (27) So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

The Gentiles Who Were Turning to God Were Turning from Idolatry

II. James and the Conference in Jerusalem Judged that While They Should Not Trouble the Gentiles By Imposing the Law of Moses, They Should Affirm Its Teaching Against Idolatry

- A. Acts 15:19 we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God; (that is, we should not try to impose on them obedience to the law of Moses)
- B. Acts 15:20 but we should write to them to abstain from four certain things
 - 1. first item, stated two ways
 - a) James' words
 - (1) KJV pollutions of idols
 - (2) Greek (Robertson) G234 *alisgeaton ton eidolon*
 - (a) from *alisgeo* only in lxx
 - (b) refers to idolatrous practices and things sacrificed to idols, not to sacrificial meat sold in the market, a matter not referred to here

- (3) this word is not used anywhere else in the NT; it is used two places in the OT; one of these is surely the source of James's choice of words; Daniel 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.
- b) the letter (Acts 15:29)
- (1) NKJV things offered to idols
 - (2) Greek *eidolothon* lit. idol sacrifice
- c) note: there is a very fine argument contained in 1 Corinthians, running chapters 8-10, delving into this issue in detail
- (1) the rule, as laid down here, is to abstain from idol sacrifices
 - (2) there are fine points to how that is applied
2. second and third items (letter Acts 15:29): blood, things strangled
- a) Genesis 9:4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.
 - b) Leviticus 17:10-14 'And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. (11) For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.' (12) Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.' (13) "Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; (14) for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.'
 - c) note this pattern
 - (1) given as law in the OT scriptures, but before Israel and Moses
 - (2) reiterated in the Law of Moses
 - (3) continuing in the New Covenant church
 - (4) e.g.
 - (a) eating meat
 - (b) death penalty
 - (c) marriage one man to one woman for life
3. fourth item (Acts 15:29): *porneia*
- a) G4202 *porneia*

- b) NT use often fornication, sexual immorality
- c) Strong: harlotry (including adultery and incest); figuratively idolatry; fornication
- d) LXX meaning
 - (1) 43 times, almost always used to mean prostitution, figuratively of Israel being unfaithful to God and worshiping idols
 - (2) harlotry, prostitution, whorings, unfaithfulness, infidelity
 - (3) Ezekiel 16 and 23 extended metaphors of Israel being the wife of Jehovah, then going off into *porneia*, prostitution
 - (4) Hosea 1:2 When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of **harlotry** And children of **harlotry**, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD."

The Gentiles Who Were Turning to God Were Turning from Idolatry

James and the Conference in Jerusalem Judged that While They Should Not Trouble the Gentiles By Imposing the Law of Moses, They Should Affirm Its Teaching Against Idolatry

III. The Lord Jesus Personally Confirmed this Judgment

- A. Revelation 2:18-24 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: (19) "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. (20) Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman **Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, to **teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality [porneuo]** and eat things sacrificed to idols. (21) And I gave her time to repent of her **sexual immorality [porneia]**, and she did not repent. (22) Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. (23) I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. (24) "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, **I will put on you no other burden.**

B. What is this about Jezebel?

1. 1 Kings 21:25-26 But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, **because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. (26) And he behaved very abominably in following idols**, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

2. 2 Kings 9:22 Now it happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" So he answered, "What peace, as long as the **harlotries porneia** of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?"

CONCLUSION

The Gentiles Who Were Turning to God Were Turning from Idolatry

James and the Conference in Jerusalem Judged that While They Should Not Trouble the Gentiles By Imposing the Law of Moses, They Should Affirm Its Teaching Against Idolatry

The Lord Jesus Personally Confirmed this Judgment

What, then?

Accept no imposition of the law of Moses on you. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, it was torn down.

Grasp that there is law in the Law of Moses that transcends Israel, and applies to all mankind.

Do not despise the law of Moses, as, along with the New Testament scriptures, it forms the bible, which is the most valuable means you have of being warned against sin and pointed to the Savior.

Revelation 2:25-29 But hold fast what you have till I come. (26) And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations-- (27) 'HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; THEY SHALL BE DASHED TO PIECES LIKE THE POTTER'S VESSELS'-- as I also have received from My Father; (28) and I will give him the morning star. (29) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

JRY:

Here is Jezebel and *porneia* in the same verse.

2 Kings 9:22 Now it happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" So he answered, "What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?"

JRY:

My main influences on this are

- Steve Garrick
- Eckhard J. Schnabel *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Acts)
- A.T. Robertson
- B.H. Carroll
- Adam Clarke (quoting Delaney)
- Patrick Delaney (1685/86-1768) *Revelation Examined with Candour* vol ii

Carroll:

Could you do any one of those things without committing a wrong. In other words, would it be wrong for you to eat an animal that had been killed by being choked to death? Or would it be wrong for you to eat blood pudding? My answer to the question is this: That the most of these things are a part of the covenant with Noah before there were any Jews – a covenant that touched the whole human race. There is where we find it, and therefore in imposing that upon Gentiles, they did impose no more than God imposed in the Noah-covenant for the whole race. The reason that they assigned for not : eating things strangled or for not eating the blood after it was taken out in any way, is that the life is in the blood. It is all right to eat a beef, but not the blood.

When you put the knife in the throat to let the blood out, don't catch that blood and make a blood pudding out of it.

It is a beastly thing, and I say it is wrong now.

In the very next chapter, Paul and Silas carried this very decree, or decision, and gave it to the churches in Antioch, Pisidia, Lystra, and Derbe, to be kept by the churches. Dr. Farrar tries to make it appear that a good many of those things were just local, and soon passed away. The decree of the conference at Jerusalem was delivered to all the churches. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, very many years after this, in making his revelation to John on the Isle of Patmos, brings up this charge against two of those churches. "You eat things sacrificed to idols. . . ." Repent, therefore; or else I come, . . ." So that what they imposed at the end of that letter (and this is about what James meant: "We don't propose to make Jews out of you, but we do insist on your being decent men") was that these Christians were to observe things that touch all mankind.

Robertson:

The restrictions named by James affect the moral code that applies to all (idolatry, fornication, murder). Idolatry, fornication and murder were the outstanding sins of paganism then and now (Rev_22:15).

Garrick:

I have a hard trouble seeing this as a compromise. It is not one of compromise, but of moral absolutes. Stay away from idolatry!

1. mention of sexual immorality
2. Paul's epistles, he does not support these ideas in this way

Four things:

1. to abstain from the pollutions of idols; KJV, ASV; that is the way literally it reads; not that they have to stay away from things polluted *by* idols; "pollutions of idols" that is, the idol worship itself verse 29 "from idol sacrifices" Greek one word "idol sacrifices" 1 Cor 8 and 10 Paul makes this very careful distinction
2. sexual immorality
3. thing strangled
4. blood

JRY:

One reason this cannot be something temporary, a compromise of sorts for the weak conscience of the Jews, is that nothing is said about unclean food, such as pork.

1 Corinthians 12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

Galatians 4:8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

Acts 14:11-13 [in Lystra] Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" (12) And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. (13) Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

Acts 19:18-19 [at Ephesus] And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. (19) Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Acts 19:23-27 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. (24) For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. (25) He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. (26) Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. (27) So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

One of the most important aspects of gospel preaching was declaring that to come to Christ is to leave idolatry.

Leviticus 17:10-14 'And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. (11) For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.' (12) Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.' (13) "Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; (14) for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.'

Leviticus 19

1-2 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (2) "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'

4 'Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am the LORD your God.

19 'You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.

26-28 'You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying. (27) You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. (28) You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD.

31 'Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

Ezekiel 33:25-26 Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: You eat flesh with the blood and lift up your eyes to your idols and shed blood; shall you then possess the land? (26) You rely on the sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife; shall you then possess the land?

Acts 15:20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.

Bengel:

Fornication in Act_15:29, and ch. Act_21:25, is put in the last place, so as not to make a break in the words which refer to the subject of food: but here it is joined with things sacrificed to idols, because it was frequently an accompaniment of the worship of idols.

Stock, Eugene *Lessons on the Acts*

But, were the four prohibitions made on local and temporary grounds?

- (a) Blood was forbidden to the Jews by the Levitical law (Lev. ii.17, xvii. 10-14), but among the Gentiles it was, in various forms, a delicacy; therefore, in Churches composed of both Jews and Gentiles, social and brotherly intercourse would be impossible, unless the latter abstained from it also.
- (b) Things strangled were not used as food by the Jews, because the blood was still in them. Abstinence from them was therefore enjoined, for the same reason.
- (c) By ‘meats offered to idols’ is meant the flesh of animals offered in sacrifice, a portion of which was eaten at sacrificial feasts, and other parts were sometimes sold in open market. Abstinence from such food was enjoined, partly because it also was abhorrent to the Jews, and partly because the partaking of it was regarded as, in a sense, *uniting* the eater and the Deity to whom it was offered (see the reference to this in connection with the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. x. 16-21). It is true that ‘an idol was nothing’ (! Cor. viii. 4), and there could be no union with a god that had no existence; true, also that all kinds of meat were God’s gift (1 Cor. x. 25, 26; 1 Tim iv. 4), and therefore not objectionable on religious grounds; but it was necessary in this case, considering what was the popular belief, to abstain from the appearance of evil (1 Cor. viii. 9-11, x. 28; Rom. xiv. 14). The fact, however, that St. Paul’s directions to the Church of Corinth are given without any reference to the Council’s decree, shows that the latter was not meant to be universally or permanently binding.
- (d) But why is one gross sin---fornication---put with these things indifferent? The answer is, that there is probably a special reference to the wicked customs connected with idolatrous feasts; and, therefore, the prohibition is coupled with that of ‘meats offered to idols.’ The connection may not be so clear to us now as it was to the Gentile converts then; but that there was a connection, and a dangerous one, is seen from Rev. ii. 14, 20.

Prelude: Grace 2 "A Debtor to Mercy Alone"

Camille: Flute

Noah: Trumpet

Anna: Piano

Grace 70 "How Great Thou Art"

Camille: Piano

Noah: Trumpet

Anna: Sing

Trinity 122 "Of the Father's Love Begotten"

Camille: Piano

Noah: Trumpet

Anna: Sing

Grace 187 "Were You There?"

Camille: Piano

Noah: Trumpet

Anna: Sing

Trinity 644 "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us"

Anna: Piano

Noah: Sing

Camille: Sing