



Sermon Series: Acts

Sermon Title: Yes, Make The Sacrifice

Date: 7/26/2026

The cross of Christ sets you free; faith in Christ compels you to self-sacrifice.

Acts 15:13-29

Freedom is one of the most treasured words in our culture. Political freedom, personal freedom, freedom to define your own truth - our world is constantly calling us toward more autonomy and less restraint. But those cultural freedoms tend to lead somewhere painful, because they're built around self rather than love. Scripture tells a different story. True freedom isn't found in doing whatever you want; it's found in Christ, and it leads us into a paradox: the cross sets you free, and faith in Christ compels you to self-sacrifice. Acts 15 shows us exactly what that looks like, as the early church wrestles with a real and urgent question: now that Gentiles are coming to faith in Jesus, what should be required of them?

1. James' Discernment of the Moment

Acts 15:16-18

After hearing from Paul, Barnabas, and Peter, James stands up and speaks with unusual clarity. He points back to the prophet Amos, showing that God had always planned to rebuild what was broken and to bring in a remnant from every nation, not just Israel. This remnant includes all of mankind, not only the Jews. What was happening right in front of the early church - Gentiles coming to faith apart from the law of Moses - wasn't a disruption of God's plan. It was the fulfillment of it. God had promised this all along.

This matters because it reframes the whole debate. The question in front of the Jerusalem council wasn't really about religious rules. It was about how a free people, adopted by grace, should now live. Circumcision and the law of Moses were never meant to define who belongs to God's people; that identity now comes through the new covenant in Jesus' blood (**Jeremiah 31:31**).

Gentile believers don't need to become culturally Jewish to be fully included. They are already free.

2. The Church's Decision and Action Plan Acts 15:20-22

So James gives his judgment: the Gentiles shouldn't be troubled with extra requirements, but they should abstain from four things - food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, meat from strangled animals, and blood. At first glance, this sounds like a contradiction. If Gentiles are truly free, why add restrictions at all?

Because Christian freedom was never meant to be self-centered. It's others-centered. These four areas weren't conditions for salvation - they were expressions of love for the Jewish believers who had worshiped and studied Moses for generations. Each carried real weight: idolatry was tied to false worship (1 Corinthians 8:4), sexual immorality violated God's design from creation (Romans 6:6-7), and eating blood or meat from strangled animals struck directly at the picture of atonement, since God had always said that life is in the blood (Genesis 9:3-4; Leviticus 17:11-12), and blood was set apart for making things right with Him. Asking Gentile believers to avoid these practices wasn't about earning favor with God - it was about protecting the conscience of their new brothers and sisters.

This is the same principle Paul later teaches (1 Corinthians 8; Romans 14:13): don't let your freedom become a stumbling block for someone else. True freedom limits itself for the sake of love.

The cross of Christ sets you free; faith in Christ compels you to self-sacrifice. As Paul puts it, freedom was never meant to be an opportunity for self-indulgence, but a chance to serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13). That's the paradox at the heart of the gospel, and it's still true for us today. Freedom in Christ was never meant to be about getting everything you're entitled to. It's meant to be lived out in love, even when that means giving something up.

So take a moment this week and look for one place where you can lay down your freedom for someone else's good - not because you have to, but because you're free enough to. When you do, faith becomes visible, the gospel becomes tangible, and the church grows stronger together.

Discussion Questions

1. James pointed to Old Testament prophecy to show that Gentile inclusion was part of God's plan all along. Why does it matter that God's plan unfolds over time rather than changing along the way?
2. The Jerusalem council decided that circumcision and the law of Moses were not requirements for Gentile believers. What does this tell us about how we relate to God today?
3. James asked Gentile believers to limit their freedom in four specific areas out of love for Jewish believers. Can you think of an area where you've had to limit your freedom for someone else's benefit?
4. Read Galatians 5:13. How does this verse help explain the paradox that our freedom in Christ leads us toward self-sacrifice rather than self-indulgence?
5. Is there an area of freedom in your own life right now where God might be calling you to self-sacrifice for the good of someone else? What would it look like to take that step this week?