

Wednesday, August 23, 2023  
SHAKEN  
PART 15: LAW VERSUS GRACE

Tonight, we continue our study of Acts by looking at chapter 15.

Acts 15:1-5 (NKJV)

The place of the Law in salvation rears its head again. Believing members of the sect of the Pharisees seek to require the Gentiles to follow the Law of Moses to be saved. This question has been brewing in the Jewish part of the church since the salvation of the Gentiles. The elders and apostles will decide the issue.

Acts 15:6-12 (NKJV)

Much dispute occurs. Peter reminds the gathering that God saved the Gentiles/filled them with the Spirit by faith. To require them to keep the law would take salvation backwards into law and failure. Evidence is given by Paul and Barnabas regarding how much God has done among the Gentiles by faith.

Acts 15:13-22 (NKJV)

James speaks up in the gathering. This James is the half-brother of Jesus. He is a leader in the church of Jerusalem. Notice how the will of God is discerned:

1. Gentiles believed.
2. The Word of God agrees with what has happened.

Measuring what has happened to the truth of the Word settles the issue for the leaders. Some caveats were added to the decision.

1. Abstain from things polluted by idols.
2. Abstain from sexual immorality.
3. Abstain from meat that has been strangled.
4. Abstain from eating/drinking blood.

Why? Let's look at some commentary points from *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*.

- Pollution by idols: The Greek of the first noun is found only in the LXX. and the New Testament; and perhaps its primary idea is that of “wallowing” in blood and mire, and so incurring pollution. As distinguished from the acts that follow, it indicates any participation, publicly or privately, in idolatrous rites. One who acted on the rule would have to refrain from entering a temple, and to dislodge busts or statues of the gods from his house and gardens.
- Sexual immorality: The laxity of morals throughout the Roman empire had led men to think of it as natural and permissible, bringing with it no sense of wrong or shame and it might well be that the ethical standard of the Gentile converts was not all at once raised to a true ideal of purity. The old license may have seemed venial, and the disciples may have thought, as Christians have too often thought since, that it did not call for any deep repentance, or exclude them from fellowship with Christ. And yet it was clear that to the Jewish Christian, trained from his childhood; to condemn the sin severely, this, too, would legitimately be a very grave stumbling-block in the admission of Gentile converts.
- Meat strangled: The prohibition rested on Genesis 9:4, and was connected with the symbolic meaning of the blood as representing life, and therefore consecrated to Jehovah. It was repeated in the Law (Leviticus 3:17; Leviticus 7:26; Deuteronomy 12:16; 1Samuel 14:33), and has been maintained with a wonderful tenacity. For this reason, long after sacrifices have ceased, the Jew will still, if possible, only eat what has been killed by a butcher of his own persuasion. Meat so killed, which may be eaten without defilement, is known technically as *Kosher*. Here the moral element falls entirely into the background, and the prohibition has simply the character of a *concordat* to avoid offence.
- Abstain from eating/drinking blood: The prohibition against eating or drinking blood goes back to Genesis 9:4-5. This command was given to all humanity.
  - Genesis 9:3-4 (NKJV)

Dishes prepared with blood were common in the cuisine of Greeks and Romans.

The essence of these caveats was to promote love, respect, and fellowship among the believers. A letter was written by the apostles and elders to the Gentile believers informing them of their decision. The letter was carried to Antioch by Paul and Barnabas but the leaders in Jerusalem sent along representatives of their own church as witnesses: Judas and Silas.

[Acts 15:30-35 \(NKJV\)](#)

The Gentile believers rejoiced over the decision. Silas decided to remain in Antioch with Paul, Barnabas, and the church.

[Acts 15:36-41 \(NKJV\)](#)

Deciding to go back to where they had been before among the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas disagreed over taking John Mark with them. Paul was so adamantly against it that the two decided to separate – Barnabas taking Mark to Cyprus and Paul taking Silas to Syria and Cilicia.

Today's Scriptures:

- Acts 15:1-22
- Genesis 9:3-4 (NKJV)
- Acts 15:30-41