

Acts 15 Part 2

Introduction

The Original Question: Do the Gentile Christians have to keep the Jewish law?

The Answer is recorded in **Acts 15:22-31**

To Summarize:

- I. Strict adherence to Jewish Law was not necessary. Works-based systems of Christianity are known as legalism. We looked at that in our previous message.
- II. A few prohibitions were considered important enough to emphasize. A loving parent sometimes says no and so does God. These can be summarized under two headings:
 - A. **Idolatry** This is what we will look at today. (The blood and strangling issues fall into this category. See Lev. 17:10-13. Blood was even forbidden to Noah and his sons long before the law. See Gen. 9:1-4.)
 - B. **Sexual Immorality** This is what we will look at next week.

Idolatry: Divided into *Soft, Medium* and *Hard* Varieties

- I. Soft Idolatry: Anything that stands in the way of whole-hearted worship of God

Colossians 3:5 (NKJV) Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

- A. You may know the story of the rich young ruler.

Matthew 19:16-22 (NKJV) ¹⁶Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" ¹⁷So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."¹⁸He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' ¹⁹'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁰The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" ²¹Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

This man didn't know it before he talked to Jesus, but he was guilty of what we're calling "soft" idolatry. Had God truly been first in his life, he would have immediately seen the wisdom in Christ's advice. By this *soft* definition, most of us have struggled, or are currently struggling with, idolatry. God is not always first. We allow things, desires, relationships, to get in God's way. As a result, we are not loving God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. This equals idolatry, in one of its many forms.

II. Medium Idolatry: False Concepts of God

A. **Making God in our own image:** For example, when people sin, God normally provides space for repentance; He will not judge them immediately. Sometimes, however, this space is interpreted as God's approval. In this case you might say that people re-make God in their own image. This is a false concept of God tailor made to fit the person who holds the false concept.

- i. There were those in ancient Israel who were guilty of this. They sinned in various ways and God responds by listing the sins and going on to say:

Psalms 50:21 (NKJV) These things you have done, and I kept silent;

You thought that I was altogether like you; [False concept: They remade God in their own image] But I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes.

B. False images of Jesus and false understandings of the Gospel:

*2 Corinthians 11:3-4 (NKJV) ³But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. ⁴For if he who comes preaches **another Jesus** whom we have not preached, or if you receive **a different spirit** which you have not received, or **a different gospel** which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!*

C. False concepts of God are natural in a newer believer who lacks understanding. God's people need to grow in their knowledge of Him. Therefore it is the job of the pastor-teachers in the church to accurately teach the Bible so that people with open hearts will understand God as He reveals Himself.

D. As Paul implies, however, there are teachers who are not interested in teaching the true Jesus, but a false Jesus, not the true Gospel, but a false Gospel. This is a serious evil.

Galatians 1:8-9 (NKJV) ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

E. Peter and Jude also warn us about these evil workers.

2 Peter 2:1-2 (NKJV) ¹But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

F. How is the way of truth blasphemed? False teachers make the truth look bad or seem somehow unacceptable. People then lose their desire for it.

Jude 1:4 (NKJV) For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Hard Idolatry: Actual Use of Images in Worship

1 Corinthians 10:19-21 (NKJV) ¹⁹What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? ²⁰Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

A. The main issue here, according to Scripture, is that idolatry opens the door to the demonic.

B. Now to further clarify, two types of "hard" idolatry are condemned in Scripture. Both involve devotion to images or idols. Israel was guilty of both at one time or another:

i. Hard Idolatry type 1: Devotion to other gods:

*Exodus 23:24 (NKJV) **You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.***

*Deuteronomy 12:3-4 (NKJV) And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. **You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things.** [This leads to:]*

ii. Hard Idolatry type 2: Showing devotion to the true God by means of images. This is what it seems was happening with the golden calf.

Exodus 32:2-6 (NKJV) ²And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

*Then they said, "**This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!**"*

*⁵So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "**Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.**" ⁶Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

a) God clarifies later that this entire concept is wrong: It wasn't as if the golden calf was an inadequate idol that called for a better one, but the issue of an idol – period.

*Deuteronomy 4:15-18 (NKJV) ¹⁵"Take careful heed to yourselves, **for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb** out of the midst of the fire, ¹⁶lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image **in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female,** ¹⁷the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. ...*

iii. Hard Idolatry Summary: No use of images or idols, statues, etc. will ever help or enhance our worship. It will only hinder whole-hearted devotion to the Living God.

*Leviticus 26:1 (NKJV) **You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.***

The Solution for Idolatry:

*Hebrews 1:1-3 (NKJV) ¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of His glory and **the express image of His person**, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

First God made us in His own image. Since that is true God was able come to us as a man and have this Man be “the express image of His person”. His ultimate revelation to us is in the person of Jesus Christ. How should we respond?

Whole-Hearted Devotion to God through Jesus Christ

*Hebrews 2:1-4 (NKJV) ¹Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ²For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³**how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation**, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?*

Finally

Idolatry of any type is an expression of the distance between God and the idolater. My wife's picture is meaningful to me when we are apart. It's meaningless when we are together in the same room. If you know what it is to have “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) then you have no need for substitutes.

1 John 5:20-21 (NKJV) ²⁰And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

²¹Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.