

Acts 15 Part 3

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 the Law was not necessary, in fact, it interferes with a real understanding of the Gospel. We call this legalism and we looked at this in message Acts 15a.
- II. A few prohibitions were considered important, which can be summarized under two headings:
 - A. **Idolatry** Anything that stands in the way of whole-hearted worship of God, including false gods, false concepts of the true God, and any use of physical idols or images in worshiping God. We looked at this in message Acts 15b.
 - B. **Sexual Immorality** This is what we will examine today.
 - C. Both of these issues already became a problem in the church of the First Century. Of the seven churches Jesus speaks to in Revelation 2 & 3, there are two about which He has nothing good to say. There are two more about which He has nothing bad to say. There are three churches in the middle; Jesus has both good and bad to say about them. Two of those three “average” churches struggled with both idolatry and sexual sin. This was in about the year 95 A.D., while the apostle John was still alive, so these problems are not new. It also seems that the two issues were related:

*Revelation 2:14 (NKJV) But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, **to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.***

*Revelation 2:20-22 (NKJV) ²⁰Nevertheless 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 and eat things sacrificed to idols.** ²¹And I gave her time **to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.** ²²Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.*

Sexual Immorality

- I. **The Biblical Standard: One Man, One Woman, One Lifetime.** This is the title of a book by Rabbi Reuven P. Bulka. I'm not recommending the book as much as admiring the clarity of the title, which precisely summarizes the traditional view. Reuven Bulka is an orthodox rabbi.
 - A. This biblical point of reference does not in the slightest bit imply that sexual intimacy is a bad thing – just that it is wonderful in the right context only.

*Hebrews 13:4 (NKJV) Marriage is honorable among all, **and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.***

1 Corinthians 7:2-5 (NKJV) ² ... because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ³Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵**Do not deprive one another** except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; **and come together again** so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

- i. **Illustration:** Both olive oil and motor oil are good. Olive oil is great on my salad but not in my car. Motor oil is great in my car but not on my salad. Each is wonderful in its own place and time. If I use them incorrectly I will regret it.
- ii. **Application:** Sex is meant to be enjoyed freely and frequently by one man and one woman, after a covenant of marriage. This is how God designed us to work and He intended it to be a joy. Obedience brings joy and protects us from harm. In fact, a marriage without much sex is a bad thing according to Scripture.

II. Motivation for Obedience:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NKJV) ¹⁴For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; ¹⁵and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

- A. Obedience is prompted by the love of Christ. Contrast this with legalism:
 - i. **Legalism** guides those who try to be moral upright people in order to gain God's favor.
 - ii. **Obedience** guides those who know they already have God's favor.
 - iii. **This point is huge.** If you don't grasp this you'll think Christian moral standards are simply about being a "good" person – and miss out on a loving relationship with God.
- B. **Illustration:** I know my family loves me. Therefore, it's a joy for me to do things that I know will please them. On the other hand, I really don't want to do things that I know will hurt them. I can err by A) selfishly live for myself, or B) doing right *self-righteously*.
- C. **Application:** Christ loved me so much He died to save me from the hell that I deserved. How should I respond? Once again read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. Both the rebel and the Pharisee are wrong. They either don't yet grasp the truth of Christ's love or the extent of it.

III. Understanding Sin:

- A. This is important because sexual sin is sin much like any other. If we can get passed all the headache and heartache connected with sexual things, we find that all sin can be dealt with.
- B. God knows we may want to engage in prohibited behaviors, but His standard is intended to express His desires for us. Understanding His will may involve some *unlearning* as well as *learning*. This is especially true in a culture that disagrees so sharply with the Bible. People in a Muslim culture, on the other hand, might think the Bible is a bit too lenient!

- C. God's Word explains *why* we want things which are not in God's will: We are fallen creatures. Our desires are tainted by this problem called “sin”, which affects this thing called our “flesh”. Therefore, God's desire of lifelong, heterosexual monogamy may not come naturally for us. God's will often doesn't come *naturally*! Fallenness affects us all, but it doesn't change God's will.
- D. Repeated sin leads us into bondage. This is perhaps especially true of sexual sin, because sexual behavior can be very addictive, much like drugs or alcohol.

John 8:34 (NKJV) Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. [The Greek tense indicates a repeated or habitual act.]

John 8:36 (NKJV) Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

IV. Sub Christian Concepts: Some things appear in the Bible, but are downplayed:

- A. Polygamy Some say the Bible *endorses* polygamy, but that's not really accurate. It *records examples* of polygamy – but no *really good examples* of polygamy – only bad ones. Multiple wives inevitably lead to problems. All the most positive examples of marriage in Scripture involve one man and one woman. Also, from the earliest days of the church no polygamist could be an elder (pastor or overseer). So this rules out the Mormon founders!
- B. Divorce Always painful, never desirable, sometimes allowable, but God hates it.

V. Non Christian Concepts: This would be anything else that doesn't fit into God's created intent for the human race: *One Man, One Woman, One Lifetime* or *Lifelong Heterosexual Monogamy*.

We will touch on three (of many) areas because I have personally found these to be common and commonly misunderstood in many churches in the USA at this time, including this one.

- A. Homosexuality
- B. Premarital Sex
- C. Cohabitation

- There are plenty of other ways to sin sexually, but most Christians and most churches seem to agree that they are wrong. For example, I've never really heard anyone try to defend adultery, pornography or prostitution. On the other hand, I've heard either Christians or churches try to defend the above three.

A. **Regarding homosexuality:** “God made me this way, so God must want me to fulfill my desires. Why shouldn't I be able to have a loving, committed relationship with someone? What's more, many churches now defend this point of view biblically.”

■ **Response:**

- First of all: It's homosexual behavior that is wrong, not homosexual desires or orientation. All of us are tempted by something. This is simply a temptation that you need to resist. Once you grasp that you can begin to grow in loving obedience.

- Secondly: From a biblical perspective, this may mean you won't get married, although there are those who experience a gradual change in desire or orientation as they succeed in remaining pure.
 - Please also understand, however, that a lot of heterosexual people remain single. This is very hard for many of them. Your struggle with singleness is shared by many others. It is not peculiar to those who are tempted homosexually.
- Thirdly: Don't fall for the pro-gay biblical arguments. They represent a growing category of false teaching that is designed to keep people in bondage to their sin – rather than allowing them to experience victory over it. I would be more than happy to confront these arguments one by one to help you see through them. For example:
 - The following prohibition seems relatively clear:

Leviticus 18:22 (NKJV) You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.

- Therefore, the church has traditionally taught that homosexual sex is wrong.
- The pro-gay view argues this away as follows: *In the context of Leviticus we are talking about practices of the Canaanites who were steeped in promiscuity and idolatry – even sex in religious rituals. Therefore it is this promiscuous, idolatrous, homosexual behavior that is condemned, not loving, committed gay relationships as we would expect to find in a married gay couple.*
- If that argument is right, then we must equally apply it to the next verse:

Leviticus 18:23 (NKJV) Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion.

- Is it really only promiscuous, idolatrous or ritual sex with animals that the Bible here condemns? Would sex with an animal in a loving, committed relationship with that animal then be just fine? I hope we can safely agree that all sex with animals is wrong – but if we do, then the same passage has to teach us that all homosexual activity is also wrong. What's love got to do with it?

B. Regarding premarital sex: “We love each other and we want to get married someday anyway, therefore we should be free to have sex.”

- Response: If you really love each other, then abstain for now and get married soon.
- The ancient Jewish customs regarding weddings are very instructive.
 - Engagement may have happened at any point in life – even in childhood, due to arranged marriages – but this was a non-binding agreement.
 - Betrothal, which was legally binding, took place up to a year before the actual marriage. A husband and wife were legally bound long before sexual intimacy.
 - The wedding then happened later. The legal contract was by far the first priority.

C. **Regarding cohabitation:** “We really are committed to one another, so what's the big deal about the legal paper. We feel married before God.”

- **Response:** Jesus made a distinction between people who were married and those who were not. Remember the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well?

John 4:16-18 (NKJV) ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”

¹⁷The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

- Notice that the woman was not without a man, she was just without a husband. Jesus doesn't elaborate. He just points out the fact that they are not married. If He makes that distinction then we should too. Get married; don't simply live together. Make your commitment public and legally binding.

VI. Passages intended to encourage loving obedience:

- To the woman caught in adultery:

And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

*1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 (NKJV) ³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should **abstain from sexual immorality**; ⁴that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. ⁷For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.*

- The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us to do God's will.

*Galatians 5:16-18 (NKJV) ¹⁶I say then: **Walk in the Spirit**, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸**But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.***

- The Holy Spirit does not bring us into bondage to rules, but rather lovingly prompts us to obey Jesus, who loved us enough to die to save our souls.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NKJV) ¹⁸Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.