

What is the Meaning of ACTS 15:20 and How Does it Relate to Believers Today?

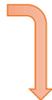
PASTOR ANNETT ASKED 2-EXTREMELY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

QUESTION #1---"Why did the council at Jerusalem church prohibit the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; to avoid eating food offered to idols, yet they are saved by grace?"

- In order to answer this, we need to look at verse 20 contextually..... **Here is the Scriptural context:**

Acts 15:4-21 NLT.

⁴ When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. ⁵ But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses." ⁶ So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. ⁷ At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: "Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. ⁸ God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. ¹⁰ So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? ¹¹ We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus." ¹² Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ When they had finished, James stood and said, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. ¹⁵ And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: ¹⁶ 'Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, ¹⁷ so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine. The Lord has spoken— ¹⁸ he who made these things known so long ago.' ¹⁹ "And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. ²¹ For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations."

ANSWER 

David Kuzik writes in his "***Enduring Word***"¹ commentary series on this topic..... (*This very good Online Commentary on the Old and New Testament*).

i. **All the Gentiles who are called by My name:** When God said there were Gentiles who are called by His name, He said they stay Gentiles. They were not Gentiles who had been made Jews. Therefore, Gentiles do not need to become Jews and come under the law to become right with God.

f. **Therefore I judge:** This phrasing implies that James had a position of high authority in the church. He was probably respected as the leader or senior pastor of the church at Jerusalem.

ii. The ancient Greek phrases it even more strongly as "I determine" or "I resolve" (Expositor's). In addition, when the decision of James was published, it was presented as the mutual decision of all present (Acts 15:25: *It seemed good to us*). Clearly, James' leadership was supported by everyone present.

iii. "The rest either *argued* on the subject, or gave their *opinion*; James alone pronounced the *definitive sentence*." (Clarke)

g. **We should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God:** James essentially said, "Let them alone. They **are turning to God**, and **we should not trouble** them." At the bottom line, James decided that Peter, Barnabas, and Paul were correct, and that those *of the sect of the Pharisees who believed* were wrong.

h. **But that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood:** James' decision that Gentile believers should not be under the Mosaic Law was also given with practical instruction. The idea was that it was important that Gentile believers did not act in a way that would offend the Jewish community **in every city** and destroy the church's witness among Jews.

i. If the decision was that one did not have to be Jewish to be a Christian, it must also be said clearly that one did not need to *forsake* the Law of Moses to be a Christian.

i. **To abstain from things polluted by idols... from things strangled, and from blood:** These three commands had to do with the eating habits of Gentile Christians. Though they were not bound under the Law of Moses, they were bound under the Law of Love. The Law of Love told them, "Don't unnecessarily antagonize your Jewish neighbors, both in and out of the church."

j. **To abstain from... sexual immorality:** When James declared that they warned the Gentile Christians to **abstain from... sexual immorality**, we shouldn't think that it simply meant sex outside of marriage, which all Christians (Jew or Gentile) recognized as wrong. Instead, James told these Gentiles living in such close fellowship with the Jewish believers to observe the specific marriage regulations required by Leviticus 18, which prohibited marriages between most family relations. This was something that would offend Jews, but most Gentiles would think little of.

k. **To abstain from:** Gentile Christians had the "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols, to continue their marriage practices, and to eat food without a kosher blessing, because these were aspects of the Mosaic Law they definitely were not under. However, they were encouraged (required?) to lay down their rights in these matters as a display of love to their Jewish brethren.

¹ EnduringWord.com

i. “All four of the requested abstentions related to ceremonial laws laid down in Leviticus 17 and 18, and three of them concerned dietary matters which could inhibit Jewish-Gentile common meals.” (Stott)

- The above is the reason why these instructions were given to these Gentile Believers. It was not a matter of “necessity” for salvation or righteous living, but rather of the Christian Practice of giving-up ones own personal “freedoms” and “rights” to maintain peace and unity among brothers and sisters who have different convictions.
- At this time, the Gentile Converts and Jewish Converts (including Pharisees) were being grafted together into one Body of Christ!
 - Therefore, at this CRUCIAL juncture, this advice, for the sake of unity and cohesion, was given.

QUESTION #2--- “Does this also apply to us (believers) today?”

ANSWER: *No, we do not have to practice this today!*

- We are **NOT** under the Law, for the Law was a “*School Teacher*” to show us all that we could **NOT** live up to the Righteous Standards of God!
- Listen to the Word of God here.....

Romans 7:6 NLT.

⁶ But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.

Romans 10:3-4 NLT.

³ For they don’t understand God’s way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God’s way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. ⁴ For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. ^[a] As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God.

Galatians 2:16 NLT.

¹⁶ Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.”

Galatians 3:10-14 NLT.

¹⁰ But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law.” ¹¹ So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” ¹² This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, “It is through obeying the law that a person has life.” ¹³ But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” ¹⁴ Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:24-25 NLT.

²⁴ Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. ²⁵ And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

- From “**GotQuestions.com**” here are some excerpts in regard to Believers and obeying the Law:
 - “Christ became the end of the Law by virtue of what He did on earth through His sinless life and His sacrifice on the cross. So, the Law no longer has any bearing over us because its demands have been fully met in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ who satisfied the righteous demands of the Law restores us into a pleasing relationship with God and keeps us there. No longer under the penalty of the Law, we now live under the law of grace in the love of God.”
 - “The key to understanding the relationship between the Christian and the Law is knowing that the Old Testament law was given to the nation of Israel, not to Christians. Some of the laws were to reveal to the Israelites how to obey and please God (the Ten Commandments, for example). Some of the laws were to show the Israelites how to worship God and atone for sin (the sacrificial system). Some of the laws were intended to make the Israelites distinct from other nations (the food and clothing rules). None of the Old Testament law is binding on Christians today. When Jesus died on the cross, He put an end to the Old Testament law (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23–25; Ephesians 2:15).”
 - “In place of the Old Testament law, Christians are under the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), which is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and to love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). If we obey those two commands, we will be fulfilling all that Christ requires of us: “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:40). Now, this does not mean the Old Testament law is irrelevant today. Many of the commands in the Old Testament law fall into the categories of “loving God” and “loving your neighbor.” The Old Testament law can be a good guidepost for knowing how to love God and knowing what goes into loving your neighbor. At the same time, to say that the Old Testament law applies to Christians today is incorrect. The Old Testament law is a unit (James 2:10). Either all of it applies, or none of it applies. If Christ fulfilled some of it, such as the sacrificial system, He fulfilled all of it.”
 - “The Ten Commandments were essentially a summary of the entire Old Testament law. Nine of the Ten Commandments are clearly repeated in the New Testament (all except the command to observe

the Sabbath day). Obviously, if we are loving God, we will not be worshiping false gods or bowing down before idols. If we are loving our neighbors, we will not be murdering them, lying to them, committing adultery against them, or coveting what belongs to them. The purpose of the Old Testament law is to convict people of our inability to keep the law and point us to our need for Jesus Christ as Savior (Romans 7:7-9; Galatians 3:24). The Old Testament law was never intended by God to be the universal law for all people for all of time. We are to love God and love our neighbors. If we obey those two commands faithfully, we will be upholding all that God requires of us.”²

→In place of the Commandment to “**Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep it Holy**” we have been instructed in the New Covenant.....

Romans 14:5-6 NLT.

⁵In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. ⁶Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God.

→And, historically, the New Testament Church chose to worship the Lord’s day. There are 3-reasons for this:

1. Because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday

The early church met on the Lord’s Day to commemorate Jesus’ resurrection. All four gospels emphasize Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the week. Early church history attests to this as well.

2. Because Sunday was set aside by early Christians as the Lord’s Day

By the end of the first century, the “Lord’s Day” had already become a technical term that referenced to the first day of the week, Sunday, as the Christian gathering day. John used the term in Revelation 1:10.

3. Because Sunday was the day the early church gathered for distinctly Christian worship

By the middle of the second century, Lord’s Day worship gatherings had become the universal practice of the church. This is the day Christians gathered to remember Jesus’ death and to take part in the Lord’s Supper.

Both the historical and biblical record reveal the Lord’s Day was the chosen gathering day for distinctly Christian worship because it was the day Jesus rose from the dead.

Every Sunday the church gathers, then, it remembers and celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. When Christians understand who Jesus is and what the resurrection means—**Every Sunday is Easter Sunday.**

² GotQuestions.org

