

Series: Acts

Lesson #: 55

Title: Necessary Things

Scripture: Acts 15: 28

Date: February 08, 2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

Acts 15: 28: For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

Proposal: The all-important issue in the believer's daily life, and dealings with our brethren, is the worship of Christ Jesus the Lord in spirit and in truth.

The issue is that we each behold Christ Jesus our Lord, that we hear him in the heart through his word and his gospel, and that we grow in grace and knowledge of him by his grace working in us.

Whatever I do that may interfere with the all-important issue of *me* personally following Christ my Lord, and whatever I do that might cause *you*, my brethren, to be distracted from looking to Christ, that is the thing I must set aside.

The quickest way we prove insincerity is by making our "*way, our desire, our fleshly restraints*" to be more important than our brethren--whether it be in liberty or in our expectations of others. Salvation is of the Lord, it is not of our hand, we are being taught of the Lord to disregard the flesh, whether good or bad, in us and in our brethren.

Acts 15: 19: Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

(v19) WHEREFORE MY SENTENCE IS--The legalists had demanded that the believing Gentiles be brought under the requirements of the Mosaic law, beginning with the act of circumcision.

- First, Peter declared that it was God who choose him and sent him with the gospel to Gentiles (v7)
- Peter said that God himself purified their hearts by faith through the gospel of Christ (v9)
- Peter said it was God, which knoweth the HEARTS, who bare them witness by baptizing them in the Holy Ghost (v8)
- Likewise, Paul and Barnabas declared that it was God, not men, who had done the work in the hearts of the Gentiles to whom they preached. (v12)
- Then James declared that God had said all along in his word through his prophets that his Christ would do this great work for and in his church. (v14, 15)
- James showed how it was foretold that Christ would build the tabernacle of God, made up of living stones, fitly set together by Christ--James said, "That is what Christ is doing." (v16, 17.)

- James declared the work of salvation is God's work, known by God from the beginning of the world. (v18)
- Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James all believed that Christ is alive and rules in the hearts of his people...we are not under the law but under grace (Ro 3: 19; Ro 6: 14; Gal 5: 18.)

So James concludes...Wherefore...my sentence is...that we trouble them not. I like how James practiced what he preached. He did not force the brethren to adopt his view or else. (The legalists would have loved that. Diotrophes operated that way--**3 John 1: 9: I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 10: Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church.** Such a vain spirit seeks obedience by fear and reward, and accepts or rejects obedience merely by an outward measure, and as Paul told the Galatians, glories in your flesh while sinning hand-over-fist. Haven't you discovered that to be the case!)

Instead, James gave them wise instruction and left it for Christ to bring them into obedience to the truth. Which by the agreement of the church it was evident that Christ had done just that, **28: For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us...**

So what was James' recommendation?

Acts 15: 19: Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

TROUBLE NOT THEM (trouble--to harass or annoy)

In the letter the church wrote to the Gentiles, they described what this "trouble" was.

Acts 15: 24: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:*

These men used the law of Moses to make the Gentile brethren think they were not children of God by telling them something remained for them to do in order to *perfect* Christ's work.

- Christ was their Peace--but these fellows agitated and disrupted that peace
- Christ was their Complete Acceptance with God--but these fellows subverted--uprooted them like you would pack up and move your house.
- Christ was their Rejoicing--but these fellows would have them, at least to some degree, rejoice in their flesh--which is a total denial of Christ and the same as idolatry.

This word "subverted" means they were turned in a wrong direction--put into reverse--made to go backwards rather than forwards.

By grace, in truth and in power, they were turned *from* their idols *to* God. But the legalist would have them turn *from* God *back to* the law of Moses. It was the same as turning them back to their heathen idols because the will-worshipper is the same as an idolater.

Note: This was Paul's argument to the Gentiles in Galatia.

Gentiles were never under the old covenant; the Mosaic law did not apply to the Gentile. Watch how Paul compares their desire to go under the law of Moses *after* Christ had called them, as being the same with the idolatry they were in *before* they even knew God: **Galatians 4: 8: Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. 9: But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? 10: Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. 11: I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.**

How were the Gentiles purified and accepted of God? By God, through faith, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter said of the Jew's, we shall be saved even as they. How is that?

Ephesians 2: 11: Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12: That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14: For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; 15: Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; 16: And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17: And [Christ] came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18: For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19: Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20: And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21: In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

So you see to require the Gentile to be circumcised after they had been brought to Christ--would be putting them in reverse--sending them back--to worship idols. Will-worship places men at the feet of idols just as it did the Gentiles--whether it is through the use of man-invented precepts or through required obedience to the law of Moses It would be to return them right back to that from which Christ had saved them--the flesh, the will, man and man's strength.

Acts 15: 20: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. 21: For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

THESE THINGS WERE ABSTAINED FROM IN ORDER TO KEEP THE WEAK JEWISH BRETHREN FROM STUMBLING BACK INTO WILL-WORSHIP AND IDOLATRY.

The Jews had the law of Moses which forbid the things the Gentiles practiced. Yet, without God giving the Jews this spirit of grace, when they saw the Gentiles break the law of Moses it only gendered toward binding them more in the idolatry of will worship. **Galatians 4: 24: Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. 25: For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. 26: But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27: For it is written, Rejoice, *thou* barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. 28: Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.**

So the Gentiles are told to abstain from these things for three reasons:

1) Since these things were included in their former idolatry, they would only serve to be a hindrance between the Gentiles and the worship of Christ, and thus turn them back to their idols, and likewise their fellow Gentile brethren.

2) As the weak Jewish brethren beheld the Gentiles doing those things forbidden in the law, the weaker Jewish brethren would turn to the law, comparing their own obedience with the disobedience of the Gentiles and thus turn back to trusting themselves.

3) That none of the believers--Jew or Gentile--be a distraction to each other, but that they all follow Christ alone, LOOKING AWAY FROM THE FLESH, THE WILL, AND THEIR FELLOW BRETHREN.

READ I CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 8--The Lord Jesus Christ is teaching the saints in the early church (and us through them) that true worship is in spirit, not in the flesh;

Romans 14: 17: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. 18: For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. 19: Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. 20: For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence. 21: *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Application: If you truly believe that Christ is risen and reigning--in you and in your brethren, in the world and in the church--and you believe that Christ is All then that which matters most to you is not whether or not you get to walk in your liberty but your brethren for whom Christ died. If I offend my brother, I offend Christ. Christ is the one in whom we stand, who instructs us, who teaches us. The believer is content to wait on Christ to deal with

us and with our brethren whom he is bringing to a clearer understanding that the flesh is of no profit.

James is declaring the real issue. For the believer, the issue must never rest in the outward--godliness or ungodliness. Please do not misunderstand me. The believer's chief desire is to conduct ourselves in a manner which is becoming to the gospel of our Redeemer. The sin of our flesh distracts *us* from Christ, as well as our brethren. That is why we abhor it and desire to abstain from *all appearance of evil*. But the issue is a heart matter--a new spirit, a new creature--in me, and in you. In the new man we worship Christ in spirit. Our fellowship with our brethren is a spiritual fellowship. The flesh still profits nothing. We must remember *that* as we strive to abstain from the flesh and also as we see the sin in our brethren, let us not judge after the flesh--whether of ourselves or others. If I fail or I succeed, I must remember my completeness is in Christ, not my flesh; if I see you appear to succeed or fail in the flesh I must remember the same.

In all things, those born of the spirit use spiritual discernment and we must not regard a man's standing with God based on the flesh.

2 Corinthians 5: 14: For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. 16: Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more. 17: Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Galatians 5:6: For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 6:15: For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

The flesh, the law, the legal spirit of restraint, the lawless spirit of sin--in short the flesh which desires to serve itself--are the old things--Christ leading us, teaching us, directing us, guiding us, strengthening us, and those for whom he died, these are the necessary things.

If you are a new creature, if all things have truly become new, then you will strive to ignore, to cover up, to put away, to mortify, to point men away from, the old things--that they may worship Christ Jesus in spirit and in truth. Be no hindrance to those for whom Christ died that they be not hindered from following their Master--Christ is the necessary thing.

