

**"The Battle for Liberty"****Part 3****Acts 15**

**Introduction:** In the last two studies we have been in Acts 15 where we have been looking at the discussions between the elders and the Apostles at the Jerusalem church as they seek God's will concerning what to do with the Gentile believers. There were two groups of Jews that rise up in this chapter and both groups want the Gentiles to become as Jews, meaning they want them to be circumcised and to be commanded to keep the Law of Moses. In Acts 15:13-17 James speaks and he uses the prophecy of Amos to show the Jews that in the Kingdom, there will be saved Gentiles that will remain Gentiles and will not need to become like Jews in order to be saved. So, James' point was, there is no need for Gentiles to become like Jews in the present age since they will not need to become like Jews in the Kingdom Age.

**Notice Acts 15:18**

This is the verse that we ended with last week and in this James was simply stating that God knows what He is doing by saving the Gentiles so it is the Jew's responsibility to trust the Lord with what was taking place, and what was taking place was that God was taking a people from the Gentiles for His name as seen in Acts 15:14.

**Deuteronomy 29:29**

<sup>29</sup> *The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

One reason the Jews struggled with the Gentiles becoming Christians was because in the Old Testament the Gentiles were never seen as being on the same plane as the Israelites.

**Isaiah 61:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> *And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.*

<sup>6</sup> *But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.*

Here in what Isaiah wrote the Gentiles were seen as servants. Now the Jews come to the Church Age and both Jew and Gentile are the same and both make up the same body. There is now no difference.

**Ephesians 2:11-15**

<sup>11</sup> 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;

<sup>12</sup> 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:

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

<sup>15</sup> 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;

This Truth was hidden in the Old Testament.

**Colossians 1:25-28**

<sup>25</sup> Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

<sup>26</sup> Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

<sup>27</sup> To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

<sup>28</sup> Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

This then helps us to understand why the Jews were struggling. This was all new to them.

❖ **Instructions to the Gentile Believers**

**Notice Acts 15:19-20**

In verse 20 we gain much insight as to what was practiced among the Gentiles in these different cities. The Gentiles were to abstain from:

1. Pollutions of idols.
2. Fornication.
3. Things strangled.
4. Blood.

I want to look at each of these to see what James is referring to, but before we do let us see why James gives this list.

**Notice Acts 15:21**

The reason for abstaining was because there were Jews in every city and James did not want the Jews to be offended and turned away from the Gospel. The Gentiles would need to be very careful so as not to offend the Jews. Now let us look at the list.

❖ **Pollutions of idols.**

This was a reference to meat that had been offered to idols. In 1 Corinthians Paul made it very clear that a believer could eat meat offered to idols because idols were nothing. But if it was offensive to someone else then it was wrong to eat it. The Corinthians had asked the question concerning meat offered to idols and Paul answered that question in his letter.

**1 Corinthians 10:19-28, 31-32**

<sup>19</sup> *What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?*

<sup>20</sup> *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.*

<sup>22</sup> *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?*

<sup>23</sup> *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*

<sup>24</sup> *Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.*

<sup>25</sup> *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:*

<sup>26</sup> *For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.*

*<sup>27</sup> If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.*

*<sup>28</sup> But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:*

*<sup>31</sup> Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

*<sup>32</sup> Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:*

### **1 Corinthians 8:13**

*<sup>13</sup> Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*

#### **❖ Fornication**

Fornication was rampant in these Gentile cities. It was a part of the worship of the pagan gods and was practiced in all the temples of the false gods. Notice the words of Whitcomb.

*"Fornication was part of their religious observances and temple worship, and they would defile their bodies with both humans and beasts. Such temples were fornication centers where all manner of illicit sexual intercourse took place. Female and male prostitutes were provided, and there was little shame in such religious fornication. It was commonly practiced, and yet such conduct was especially odious and detestable to the Jews."*

#### **❖ Things strangled.**

This refers to animals that were choked to death, meaning they would harvest the flesh of animals killed by strangling without shedding their blood. The Law of Moses prohibited the Israelites from eating of meat that had not been drained of blood so the Gentiles were to refrain from this practice out of sensitivity and love for the Jews.

### **Leviticus 17:13-14**

*<sup>13</sup> And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust.*

*<sup>14</sup> For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.*

**Deuteronomy 16:16, 23**

<sup>16</sup> Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water.

<sup>23</sup> Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.

❖ **Blood**

Man was forbidden to consume the blood of animals when Noah stepped from the ark.

**Genesis 9:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

<sup>4</sup> But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

The life of the flesh is in the blood and man is not worthy of life. James gives the command because consuming blood was common among the Gentiles. They drank blood often at their sacrifices and when making covenants and compacts.

All of this would have been offensive to the Jews and to offend them would make it much more difficult to win them to Jesus Christ.

**Notice Acts 15:22-24**

Here in verse 24, we see where these false teachers came from. They were from among the believers! This is something that Paul will warn of in Acts 20.

**Acts 20:28-30**

<sup>28</sup> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

<sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

<sup>30</sup> Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

There are two points to see within this thought. First of all, we can understand that not everyone that identifies with the church is saved. Then here in verse 24 we see that these

Jews came from among the believers. Keep in mind the Jews in verse 1 were not saved and the Jews in verse 5 were saved. This goes back to Matthew 13 and the parable of the wheat and the tares. Jesus said that there would be tares mixed in with the wheat in this age we live in.

The second thought here is a reminder that Satan will use whoever will submit to his deception to lead people away from the Truth. It is so important that we stay grounded in the Word of God.

## **2 Peter 3:15-18**

*<sup>15</sup> And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

*<sup>16</sup> As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

*<sup>17</sup> Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

*<sup>18</sup> But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

### **Conclusion:**

Peter was writing to Jewish believers but he says something that is very applicable to our lives.

## **1 Peter 2:11-12**

*<sup>11</sup> Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;*

*<sup>12</sup> Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.*