

DISPUTES IN THE MIDST OF GROWTH

Acts 15.1-35

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Episode 1: Doctrinal Dispute (About circumcision and the Law)

1. Dispute & Dialogue (Acts 15.1-5)

2. Discussion and Discernment (Acts 15.6-18)

cf. Amos 9.11-12

3. Decision and Dissemination (Acts 15.19-35)

Four things the Gentiles were to abstain from in Acts 15.29:

1. Food polluted by idols—this is likely associated with idol worship and the rituals connected to it. In 1 Cor 10.14-22, Paul also wrote about how believers must no longer be participating in idol worship through the eating of such foods. One should also note the principle stated by Paul in 1 Cor 8.7-13 in the exercise of our freedom. So, in today's context, in a public setting when eating such foods is associated with idol worship, we must certainly abstain. In a private setting, while we have been given the freedom to eat as all foods are given by the Lord, we should not eat them if it stumbles those who are with us.

2. Sexual immorality, probably associated with temple prostitution—this is likely part of pagan and temple worship that tantamount to idolatry. It also violates God’s commands to us to be sexually pure, where sex is restricted to within a monogamous marriage. This certainly applies to us today.
3. Strangled animals—this is very likely linked to sacrifices or meals among Gentiles, which led to blood not being drained from the animal, forbidden under the Jewish cultic laws (Lev 17.10-14, 18.6-30), which no longer apply to us specifically.
4. Blood—this is forbidden in the Jewish laws due to the association between blood and life. This reflected the Jewish concern over the sacred nature of life as possessed in the blood. So, these last two requests likely stem out of a consideration for the Jewish cultic practices, since “Moses has been preached in every city...read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” This too no longer applies today.

According to Witherington, “It is more likely that each item in the decree should be taken separately and all be seen as referring to four different activities that were known or believed to transpire in pagan temples.”¹ Hence it is likely that these four requests were made in order “to be faithful to the one true God, to be moral in worship, and to have sensitivity to issues of unclean animals and eating of strangled animals without draining blood. The limitations are probably to keep relations from becoming strained in a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles as well as to warn against association with idolatry.”²

¹ Witherington, B., III. (1998). *The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary* (p. 464). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

² Bock, Darrell L. (2007). *Acts* (p.506). Baker.