

## 36—Acts 15.22-35—A New Creation in Christ and the Old Man is Dead

- I. Introduction
  - a. We have just sung praises to God and about God. We worship the King but which King? The one that is all glorious above. He is our shield and defender and the ancient of days, pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise. We told of his might, we sung of his grace.
  - b. I ask do you know this God? The God of gods and Lord of lords. Do you know him personally? Do you walk with him daily? Do you have something to sing about?
  - c. Are you a new creation in Christ? Is the old man dead? Have you turned from your old ways to follow Jesus? Can you say “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me”? Is his grace amazing to you?
  - d. I want to probe the mind and heart this morning to see if you know which God or gods you are worship. That’s usually made noticeable by what we do. We become like what we worship. We are like a fish who doesn’t know the water in which it swims. Do you know whom you serve?
- II. Main Point
  - a. By God’s grace people turn from sin and turn to Christ in faith
- III. Outline
  - a. The Outcome of the Debate
  - b. The Response from the Outcome
  - c. Abstain from these Things
  - d. The Response of the Gentile Believers
  - e. Our Response
- IV. Exposition
  - a. Let’s now look at the outcome of the debate.
    - i. Last week we covered only the debate over how one enters the Kingdom of God. The conclusion was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Peter said in (Acts 15:11) we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. And in (Acts 15:7) the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.
    - ii. James, one of the elders at the church of Jerusalem, says the words of Peter AGREE with the prophets.
      1. I mentioned a passage in Ephesians 2 last week with a different emphasis. I want to point out something that I didn’t emphasize.
        - a. (Eph. 2:19-21) <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
        - b. Paul was speaking to the Gentile believers saying they were no longer strangers and aliens but fellow citizens in the Kingdom of God.
        - c. But notice what this truth was built upon—the foundation of the apostles and prophets and Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone.
          - i. Peter is an Apostle. James states that what Peter has said agrees with the prophets.
          - ii. In other words, the risen Lord Jesus is building his church on the authority given to the apostles and prophets.
      2. Now a judgment is made on what the Apostle Peter and the Prophets agree upon, namely, that these Gentiles who have turned to God should not be troubled with

circumcise and the law of Moses but they should abstain from things polluted by idols, and from sexually immorality, and from what has been strangled and from blood.

- a. We will talk more about what's going on here later but we needed to see the process too.
  - b. We needed to see the authority of the Twelve Apostles and the prophets of the OT scriptures.
    - i. Only the Apostles...these Apostles were granted this role.
    - ii. We cannot make these kinds of declarations. We must obey the written word.
  3. So, the outcome was decided concerning the debate. The next question is, what should they do next?
- b. Let's now take look at the response.
- i. James has said that they should write to them back in verse 20.
  - ii. In v. 22 it says, the apostles and the elders, with the whole church decided to choose men from among them and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabus to take this letter we have in verses 23-29.
  - iii. So, their response is to write a letter to inform the churches what was decided upon. And they wisely decided to send representatives from the church in Jerusalem to accompany Barnabus and Paul to deliver the letter.
    1. This is a wise move that should be considered when weighty decisions lay in the balance, even in elections.
- c. Now that we've heard the outcome of the debate and the decisions made, let's take a look at the letter to see what it means to abstain from these four things.
- i. We need to step into the world of the Gentiles because these decisions are aimed at them and their former life.
  - ii. When the Bible uses the word Gentile, it means non-Jews. It means all other nations that are not Israel. The reason the Bible speaks like this is because Israel was a people for whom God chose as a people for his own possession.
    1. Simply put, Gentiles are the nations who do not worship YHWH. They worship false gods of all kinds. Many of the Gentiles would not be concerned with worshiping many different gods at the same time.
      - a. For example, you know who the Philistines are, right? They the nations that Israel seemed to always be at war with. Goliath was a Philistine who was killed by David.
      - b. The Philistines worshiped a god named Dagon. You might recall in the story of Samson when they had cut off Samson's hair and he lost all his power. Here's what the Philistines did when that happened.
        - i. (Jdg. 16:23) <sup>23</sup> Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand."
        - ii. You might notice in that verse they think Dagon is more powerful than Samson's God. If you know the story, Dagon's temple and many of the worshipers are destroyed when God uses Samson to bring down the building.
        - iii. You might notice in this verse that the Philistines offer sacrifices to Dagon. Well, Israel offers sacrifices to YHWH their God.

- iv. I bring this up because all the Gentiles worshiped false gods. Each nation usually had their own gods and their own temples where they worshiped.
  - v. They had their own worship practices at the temple.
    - 1. The Canaanites worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth (which is plural). Egypt had their own gods.
    - 2. You get the idea. Hindus worship many gods. Muslims worship Allah. The list goes on and on.
2. The question that comes up in Acts 15 is what does it look like for Gentiles who are now a people for whom God—YHWH—has taken for his name.
- a. They have turned from their gods...their idols to the one, true and living God through Jesus Christ. They are in God's family. God has put his Name on them. They belong to him.
  - b. Now, the question isn't just how do Gentiles get into the Kingdom of God but what does it look like for those who turn from their false gods and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?
    - i. They are saved by the grace of Christ but how do they now live?
    - ii. Let me ask it this way. If a Muslim comes to faith in Christ does, he or she have to stop worshiping Allah? Yes. Emphatically, yes!
    - iii. God said (Exod. 20:2-5) <sup>2</sup> "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God.
  - c. There's an interesting mark of most false religions, many are born into them.
    - i. For example, if your parents are Muslim then you are born a Muslim. Certainly, there are converts to Islam but most are in by default.
    - ii. That's not so in Christianity. No one is born a Christian. In fact, the Bible is very clear to say that one must be born again. One must be converted.
      - 1. Conversion is a supernatural act of God. We call it regeneration.
        - a. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we were dead in our trespasses and sin but God made us alive.
        - b. Going from dead to alive is a supernatural act of God.
      - 2. None of this is possible apart from the saving act of God in Christ and the convincing work of the Holy Spirit. Without the revelation of God in his word concerning the good news according to the Scriptures, there is no salvation.
        - a. I don't believe any other religion claims this.
        - b. No one has ever arrived at the Emergency Room as a D.O.A. (dead on arrival) and grabbed the paddles and shocked their heart back to life.
      - 3. Conversion is not only supernatural, it is unique.
        - a. "Conversion, if judged by behavior, is not uniquely Christian; but Christian conversion, as we understand it, is uniquely true. From the outside, a Christian's

conversion may look like many other kinds of conversion. If, however, we understand that this conversion rests upon Christ, is grounded in him, looks to him, is supernaturally caused by, and has eternal results, then it is unique as Christ himself is unique.” (David Wells 21).

- b. In other words, do you have a story to tell? Have you experienced God’s forgiveness of YOUR sin? Do you know what it’s like to know that you deserve the eternal wrath of God and then find that you, an enemy of God, have found a home with the heavenly Father? Do you have a story of conversion? Do you have a story of being dead and now you are alive? Do you have a story that the old man is dead and you are a new creation?
  - c. Do you have a story to tell? And I mean a supernatural story. Not a story of how you overcame addiction. But a story that is bound up in what God did in Christ in reconciling you to himself?
  - d. And it’s not just a story in past tense. It’s an ongoing story. Conversion was only the beginning not the end. It was the beginning of a journey of growing in Christ and be conformed to his image. We must learn to obey all that Jesus has commanded and what he has commanded is not burdensome!
  - e. If you are to have Christ as your Savior then he is also Lord.
  - f. Let me ask this question. Do you live your life thinking “I do not want God telling me what to do”?
  - g. If that’s how you live your life, then God isn’t your God. You are. And I am certain that you cannot save yourself.
- iii. Let me circle back. No one is born a Christian. You must be born again. It is a supernatural act of God to be converted. It is a supernatural act to move from death to life. Have you been born again?
1. Like the Muslim or Hindu or Baal worshiper or whatever, you have turned from those things—even yourself, your job, your family, money, possessions, whatever—to gladly follow Christ.
  2. If you do not want God telling you what to do then you are not a Christian.
- iii. That’s gets us to the things these Gentile Christians must abstain from.
1. They are to abstain from these four things:
    - a. what is sacrificed to idols
    - b. From blood
    - c. From what has been strangled
    - d. And from sexual immorality
  2. These are the very things they would have been doing at the temple of their false gods.
    - a. There must be a complete break from the worship of their idols.
    - b. They can’t have both.
    - c. Their temple worship would have involved all these primary things.

- i. I suppose three of the four things they would have done “at church” seems strange to us. We do not live in a land where these kinds of temples are set up. But this was typical of Gentile worship.
        - ii. But sexual immorality we know about. Prostitution. Adultery. Fornication (having sex outside of marriage). Pornography. And many more.
      - d. You might not understand what it means not to participate in meat sacrificed to idols or blood or animals being strangled.
        - i. I’ve never had to ask at McDonalds whether those cows were strangled or not.
        - ii. But these Gentiles knew what all of this meant. They knew this is what they did at their “church.”
- iv. So, how did the Gentiles Christians respond?
  1. (Acts 15:30-31) <sup>30</sup> So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. <sup>31</sup> And when they had read it [aloud], they rejoiced because of its encouragement.
    - a. This was their response. Indeed, this was their desire.
    - b. I’m sure many of them had lost their family in the process.
    - c. Some will have lost their property.
    - d. This was their way of life. Their gods demanded worship like this.
    - e. It would have been understood as dangerous not only for a family member to break away from the gods of their people but would have endangered the entire city when you make the gods mad.
    - f. This was no easy decision. But these Gentile believers rejoiced!
  2. But does it really matter if these Gentile Christians did both? What harm was that?
    - a. Can’t they keep the peace and worship at the temple of their gods and go to church?
      - i. Well, Jesus has something to say about that.
        1. In (Rev. 2:12-14) Jesus said to the church in Pergamum write: <sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.
        2. (Rev. 2:16) <sup>16</sup> Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.
        3. (Rev. 2:18-21) to the church in Thyatira write: <sup>19</sup> “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.
        4. (Rev. 2:22-23) <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, <sup>23</sup> and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

d. Our Response

- i. We are called to follow Christ alone.
  1. (Eph. 1:3-4) <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
  2. (1 Pet. 1:14-15) <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct
  3. (1 Cor. 6:9-11) <sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
  4. Do you have a grace story like this? SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU?