

Acts 15:19-35

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[0 : 0 0] Of the new faces that are here, you're kind of coming in the middle of a story. You ever hated how you kind of showed up in the middle of a movie and you had no idea what! was going on and then all of a sudden you had to, you were lost and you're like, oh, that seemed like a great ending, but I don't really know what happened. And you had to go back and, you know, watch the movie somewhere else and from beginning to end. Some of you may feel that way this morning because here at Christ's family, we love the Bible. We love the Word of God. We believe it is enough. It always has been and always will be enough for what your soul needs. So turn in your Bibles to Acts 15. That's where we've been in the book of Acts. We believe here that it's good, right, and proper to walk through certain books of the Bible to teach the whole counsel of what God is saying. So last week, some of you might remember that we talked about how salvation cannot be achieved by just observing the law of Moses. It can't be achieved by just being good and doing good works. And so we kind of, in the context, I just kind of want to throw out just a couple of books because I don't have, you know, there's not enough time to do a complete whole sermon on the law today, but I want to touch on it. But for your further reading, here's a couple of books. One is if you're interested in saying, okay, how does the Old Testament law apply to the New Testament believer? This is a great book.

It's called Tablets of Stone. Not a great cover, but just for your information. Most of the great books don't have great covers. So it's called Tablets of Stone by John Reisinger. And it's just, it kind of walks through the covenant and the law and how it comes into the New Testament and how it doesn't as well. And then just in the Old Testament in general, there's a great book here I have called Loving the Old Testament by Alec Mortyer.

It really just kind of shows you how awesome, powerful, and relevant it is to New Testament life, as well as just how Christ is a fulfillment of a lot of those things.

And I've got the last book. If you're looking just for a good book, if you're curious just about who Jesus Christ is, what his message was, and you're wanting to investigate further, this is a great book called Who is Jesus? by Greg Gilbert, forward by Trip Lee. So it's a great book that just unpacks the person, the person of Christ, and who he is and what he did on the cross and his resurrection. So a great book just called Who is Jesus? And so now we find ourselves in Acts 15. And what's been going on thus far in the book of Acts is the gospel of Jesus Christ is going out to the Gentile world from Jerusalem. And so all the non-Jews are hearing the message of Christ.

[3 : 1 8] And we see in chapter 15 that the mission kind of hits a little snag. I'm trying to give you a brief summary. For those of you who weren't here, you can go back and listen to the message later. But as the Gentiles, the non-Jews, were hearing the gospel, there were some men who came down to Antioch and told them that the gospel is good and the gospel may be, you know, fine, but you also, to be made right with God and to be saved, you have to observe the law of Moses. You have to do all these strict things that the nation of Israel did. You have to be circumcised for the males. So many other things. It was like Jesus plus this equals salvation and not just Jesus equals salvation.

And so there was a big response to that. The apostles, particularly Paul and Peter and James, they all met in Jerusalem and they had to talk this stuff over. They had to decide how much of the law of Moses is a New Testament. They didn't call it that then, but there's a New Testament believer need to follow and what's not necessary. Does a Gentile who puts his faith in Christ, does he need to also observe all the dietary laws and does he need to be circumcised, observe all the rituals and festivals that those in the people of Israel followed? Their conclusion, you can go back and just read it from the beginning of 15, is a resounding no. Salvation only comes by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works and not by observance of the law of Moses, but only by faith in Christ. Christ was

enough. So today we're going to kind of pick up in verse 19 of the chapter, and this is when they kind of make the final judgment and kind of say the law was good for what it is, but a New Testament Gentile believer does not need to observe all these things that the law of Moses included. So starting in verse 19, and this is James, the apostle, the brother of Jesus. He's the one who's speaking here in verse 19. Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood. For from ancient generations,

Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues. Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men among them and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Bersabbas and Silas leading men among the brothers with the following letter. So here's what the letter said. The brothers, both the apostles and the elders to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, Sicilia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions. It seemed good to us having come to one accord to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality.

If you keep yourself from these, you will do well. Farewell. So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

And when they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also. Just pray with me.

[8 : 34] Father, we come to you this morning with many things on our minds, many things in our hearts. I ask that you would draw us into your word by the power of your Holy Spirit, that you would work in our hearts, that we would not leave here the same as we came, that you would convict us of sin, that you would point us to Christ, and that he would receive the glory. And so just help me now to love these people well and to teach your word rightly. And just ask that in Christ's name. Amen.

So I promised you last week, because so much of what we discussed last week was the law of Moses. And I tend to find by just experience and talking to a lot of college students, particularly that we have most believers in the church that have a very narrow, sometimes even pathetic knowledge of the Old Testament and what it includes. And you want to just say, usually out of just laziness, what are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to obey the law of Moses? Are we not supposed to obey the law of Moses?

Because it's not that simple. The law of Moses is a very intricate, detailed thing. And so I thought I would just give you a brief overview. And I know I'm getting in dangerous water there because you can either spend too little time on it or too much time on it. But I hope that it just leads you to more conversation, to study, to prayer. Come talk to me or Nathan or Wes or Doug later.

So what about the Christian and the law? Law is a capital L, like the law that we see in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. What do we do with that? So I'm going to first give you the content of the law, the content of the Mosaic law. And it's been broken up different ways. This suffices for sure.

Number one, there's a part of the law called the commandments. And they're expressed, they're the expressed righteousness of God. They're what God says. Some people call it the moral law, including the Ten Commandments. So that's the commandments. You can read about that in Exodus 20, 1 through 26, the moral law, the commandments. Secondly, the second part of the law is referred to as the judgments. And they were given to govern the social life of the nation of Israel. And they can be found in Exodus 21. Those things include things like dietary laws, dress, things like that.

[11 : 37] A lot of the piggy things that people look at in Leviticus and other places. Exodus 21, 1 through 24 kind of gives you a brief overview of the judgments. And then thirdly and lastly, the

ordinances.

And they govern the religious life of the nation of Israel. So that's things like sacrifices, how to prepare yourself for worship in a ritual cleansing way. So that may be oversimplifying, but like that's the main three parts of the law of Moses. So what are we supposed to do with all that?

Well, the only part really that the New Testament believer needs to understand and like really, excuse me, excuse me, I don't want to put it that way, needs to still follow and adhere to is the commandments, the moral law of God. Those have not been done away with by Jesus coming. If anything, he raised the bar on the moral law. You might remember, he said to, to a crowd of people, he said, you've heard it said, do not commit adultery. That's one of the commandments. And in their mind, they're thinking, okay, well, I haven't slept with another man's wife. Have you? I haven't, I haven't, I've kept that commandment. And he says, no, I tell you, if you look after a woman lustfully and look at her and think about her in that manner, he tells you, I've come, you have committed adultery in your hearts.

He got down to the heart of the law, not just the outward appearance of the law. He made it impossible for man to say that they kept the law. So, but the judgments that were given to govern the social life of Israel, the New Testament believer does not have to follow those. This is part of what this council was about. Those were laws that were given to the nation of Israel to make them stand out, to look distinct from all the other nations of the world, both in how they lived, how they looked, everything. So that was a, that was a law that applied to them during a season. And now that's not carried over. And then the ordinances that govern the religious life. So the sacrifices, the priesthood, all that stuff that has been completely fulfilled in the person of Christ. He was what all those sacrifices were pointing to and foreshadowing. So likewise, we don't have to go out and slay lambs to offer our forgiveness to God. We don't have to do all that. That has been fulfilled in Christ. So the New Testament gives us many purposes of the law. So what was the law about? So I'm going to give you just a few things to hold on to. I might not read all of this, but here's a few of the things, purposes of the law. All right. Here's a big one. The law educated us about sin and pointed to the need for a savior. All right. So this is what Paul says in Romans 3, 19. I'll just read it to you.

[15:13] He says, now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

All right. So he's saying, do you think that you have the ability to stand before a holy God on your own? Well, the law has come to silence you. It's come to show you that you can't live up to the holy, righteous standard of God. And now you are held accountable to God because of that.

Then he goes on. He says, for by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. So the commandments told us what God sees is holy and good. And he told, and it tells us what he sees is breaking those commandments as sin and evil.

So it's spelled out for us. We know like what honors God and what displeases God because of the moral law, because of the 10 commandments. And but they also make us aware that we can't keep them.

And they point to the need for someone to come and save us from our sin. All right. It's a huge one. All right. So secondly, the law in regard to worship and sacrifices, it was fulfilled in Christ.

[16:42] Okay. It was pointing, foreshadowing to Christ coming. All the lambs that were slain were pointing to the lamb, capital L of God, who is going to come on our behalf and be slain.

So I'll read you what Jesus says out of Matthew 5 or 17 said, do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you until heaven and earth pass away, not a iota, not a dot will pass from the law until it all is accomplished. So he was saying like, I'm not come here to kind of throw that away. All the stuff that came before me, I'm here to fulfill it and to show you that all was pointing to me.

And in Romans 10, Paul says, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Okay. So the law has come to show us that we can't please a holy God in and of ourselves by our conduct and by just being good, keeping the rules. We can't do it. So a word you're going to hear a lot this morning is the word justified, our justification. And without spending a ton of time on it, I'm just going to tell you just wherever you hear that word, just think being made right with God. How can I be made right? How can I stand before God in a right relationship to be justified before God? So here's a good quote for you. It's on your bulletin. If you want to look at it, John Stott, a great pastor, theologian. He says, we cannot come to Christ to be justified until we

have first been to Moses to be condemned. But once we have gone to Moses, acknowledged our sin, guilt and condemnation, we must not stay there. So don't stay there, you know, being beating yourself up because of how miserable you are. We must let Moses send us to Christ.

So that was the purpose of the law was to send us to the savior so that we know that we cannot save ourselves. Right? So there's two more purposes I have here for you, but sort of already touched on one, but the moral law, so the Ten Commandments, they still remain the standard of Christian living, as we'll see today, just even in our text, that we're to follow those, we're to observe those. But here's the cool thing. A believer, someone who has been born again, who has placed their trust in Christ in Christ, God changes them. The Holy Spirit comes to live in them. They're new creations.

They've been given new hearts. And they have a desire, a strong desire to keep the moral law of God. So it's not just like something that God has given to you in an arbitrary way as a believer. He wants you to keep the law. And so that's what we strive for. The law is good. It is holy. It's a good thing.

[20 : 12] So what about good works? And what about observing the law? I just kind of want to throw this out there to you. Because I don't want any of you to hear this. I'm not saying don't do good works. If Jesus died for you, then you can go out and live any way you want to. I'm not saying that you can say like, yes, I'm a Christian.

Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ. And I know I'm going to heaven. I got my ticket. I prayed the prayer. I walked the aisle. And now I can just live however I want to. No. Paul says in Romans, should we sin now that grace may abound? May it never be. And he even says to the point in Romans that if you really do think that way, that's what you really believe, then be sure of it. You don't belong to Christ. Because if you really understood who he was and what he's done, you will love him and you don't want to follow him. You will not be perfect. But your desire will be to become more and more holy. You cannot justify such defiance like that. When Christ comes into you, he changes you. He doesn't just leave you the way you were. So, so good works, good deeds, observing the moral law, and following it. Those are not the grounds for salvation or the means of salvation. They're the proof and the evidence of real salvation. They're the fruit of what Christ has done to you. Even that little silly song we sang earlier, you may be going ha ha ha, but it really is a deep theological concept saying that if Christ has changed you, you will bear good fruit, right? If you really has, if you've encountered God, you will change. You will not be the same. You'll want to live in a way that pleases God when you understood the agony that Christ went through for your sake. And then lastly, I want you to turn here, but hold your hand in Acts, but just turn to Galatians chapter 2. I think I would recommend Galatians, reading Galatians in regard to the topics we've been discussing the last two weeks. It's a lot about the law and about faith, but Galatians chapter 2 verse 15. 2 verse 15. It's Apostle Paul, and he says, We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified or made right by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by the works of the law, no one will be justified. You see that? Like, we cannot be made right. We cannot be justified before God simply on the basis of keeping the law. We can't do it. So he's saying that how that's done is by putting your full trust, your faith in Christ to save you.

So that's a very awesome text to show that salvation only comes by faith in Christ alone. So that is a probably terrible but brief overview of the law. So just come read more, talk more.

[23 : 53] But the law, we're not to follow all of it as Gentile, New Testament believers, but the moral law is still upheld by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. It's how we live in a manner that pleases God.

So that's kind of jumping back to last week, okay? So, but diving more into this week, the text that we just read in Acts 15, we're going to just sort of walk through that. So this is on the heels of them deciding, like, no, like, to have Christ and to be saved, one does not need to follow all the law of Moses. Very, very clear. You can go back and read what they say. And they use Scripture to prove what they're trying to say, even in this text. So three questions. Three questions that will help us walk through the text. Number one, what was the reason for the proposal? What was the reason for the proposal? So you see this in verses 19 through 21. So as some of the apostles went out from Jerusalem after this council was over, as they went out to the Gentiles, what was, how do they move forward? They're going to be around Jews at some point, so how should they interact with

one another?

How should the gospel move forward after this council? So James and others, Peter, they knew that these Gentiles were going to come in contact with Jews. And when they come in contact, how are both parties to interact with one another in a way that's good and loving and honorable? So how do they do that?

So the council concluded that, in our text, that Jews should not attack the consciences of Gentiles. But on the other hand, this letter is telling the Gentiles not to attack the consciences of Jews, who still feel like some of that stuff is important. And he kind of gives you the evidence of that in verse 21. He says, for, right, in verse 21, in every city, there are still Jews who hear the law of Moses read every week, right? So they need to be aware that as they go out, they're going to encounter Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ, they still feel like following parts of the law are important.

So how should they interact? Well, James, here in our text, humbly proposes that the Gentiles abstain from four pagan, idolatrous acts that can violate the law of Moses, which could offend the Jews, right?

[26 : 50] So these four things, I guess you could say stipulations, that James kind of sets out, they're not requirements or conditions for salvation, but rather they're guidelines for both Jews and Gentiles to interact with one another. So when you're around someone like this, how do you interact with them in a way that's loving, that's humble, that doesn't offend their conscience? So interesting enough, like in Leviticus 17 and 18, there's similar kind of stipulations. So James knew his Old Testament well, knew his covenant well. So how do they, how do they interact? But first, before we unpack that, you know, they decide to write a letter to the churches for the apostles to take with them to be read to the Gentiles. So just look at verse 22, 25, 28, and I want you to kind of see this phrase repeated in these verses to kind of understand the spirit of the letter, the character of the letter that they send. You see this kind of repeated, verse 22, then it seemed good. Verse 25, it has seemed good to us. Verse 28, it seemed good, it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. So they're saying, like in our opinion, we have agreed, this is good, this is appropriate. It pleases us to send you this letter. So the letter comes across very humble, very compassionate, pastoral even, and protective. But it's not like this edict, they just kind of shut everybody down and say, we're the council of Jerusalem, don't question us. It's a very humble, compassionate letter, giving them instruction. As if to say, like, hey, we're sorry that these men came out to you and they filled your mind and they troubled you with all these lies. We're very sorry about that. We're sorry that they confused you, that they hurt you. Just so you know, they didn't come out from us. They did not have our stamp of approval on this. We just want you to know that after much prayer and debate and looking at the scriptures, this is the outcome. You don't have to follow all the law of Moses to be made right with God. Christ is all you need. Christ is all you need. But you should know that as Gentiles, you're going to be around fellow believers who are Jewish and they're going to struggle with some of the things that you may do.

So just beware that we want you to be humble, to think about who you're interacting with. So that's kind of the spirit of the letter. Like, it seemed good to do this, right?

So that brings us to the second question. What were the requirements in the proposal? This is where we're going to spend the most time. What were the requirements in the proposal?

You see this in verse 20 and in verse 29. So they focus on the necessary things. They say, what would a Gentile in the Greco-Roman world do that could offend the conscience of a fellow believer who's a Jew?

And so these are the necessary things. So he focuses on these four things that could be completely taken wrong by the Jews. All right. I want you to know that the first three are contextual, meaning that you may or may not be able to do it based on where you are at the moment and who you're around.

[30 : 45] Think about it. Maybe a New Testament connection could be drinking. Some of you, like you know that in Christ you have the freedom to have a beer. You're not going to go to hell because you have a beer.

But if you're around people who really struggle with alcohol, and they struggle with their family because of alcohol, don't drink a beer around them. Like don't encourage them or hurt their conscience because of that.

It's a similar, I made up a big can of worms there. Just come talk to me later. Whatever. So I'm just seeing you Nathan's way. He'll appreciate that. So just think about who you're around is what

they're saying.

But the fourth requirement is universal. At all times, at all places, never do this. That's sexual immorality. So just briefly, let's look at these things.

So the first thing you see in these verses is food offered to idols. So what is that about? Well, in the Greco-Roman world, and still in many places in the world today, people would take food and meat, right?

[31 : 56] And they'll offer it as a sacrifice or an offering to a pagan idol. And then they would take that meat later, and they would sell it in the butcher market, usually around the temple at the time.

Not the temple in Jerusalem. I mean like the pagan temple. And so Jews had this understanding that anything remotely associated with idols, we don't even want to come near it.

Like, keep away. We don't even want to come near those things. So they instruct them, just when you're in that context, don't give your Jewish brother food that came from that kind of context.

Just don't. Because they consider it to be contaminated, polluted. But here it is. Here's where you actually have to think. Paul, in other circumstances where there may not be Jews around, fellow believers who are Jews, he permits believers to eat food, sacrifice to idols, or are given, are offered there.

1 Corinthians 8, 1 through 11. You can just look at that. But he's saying, like, food itself is not evil. Food is a gift of the Lord. It hasn't been corrupted.

[33 : 10] So if that's where your conscience is, then just eat. You know? So, but he's saying, don't do this around your fellow brothers who are Jewish, because it will offend them.

Lay that down. Right? And then the next one, it says, from blood. So this refers to animals that were killed without draining the blood.

So there is a diet, physical factor, like, you know, eating blood is not very healthy. It can be dangerous. But on the other hand, the Jews saw it as more what the Scripture says.

Blood is symbolic of life in the Scripture. And it has been given as a means for them to make atonement for their sin. You can read about that more in Leviticus 17, verse 10.

So then it gets into from things that have been strangled. That's just the thought of that. It's like, right, just strangling an animal. So he's not saying it because of animal rights.

[34 : 18] He's just saying play a close connection, because Jewish brothers will be offended if you strangle an animal, because there's still blood in them.

There's still that blood, right? It's still connected to the idea of blood. So those three things are contextual based on where you are and who you're with at the moment, right?

Just be sensitive to the consciences of your brothers who are Jewish. But then, fourthly, and this is the big one, and I really felt a burden to kind of spend a little more time on this, because up to this point you may be like, yeah, that's great.

But this is something that affects us all. And the fourth thing, sexual immorality. And just so you know, I feel weight talking about this.

So this is not contextual or opinion. It's a requirement of obedience at all times. It's a broad meaning. But, however, in a very specific context, you should know that in the Greco-Roman world, that if you wanted to go and you wanted to worship one of the pagan gods, like I know that in Corinth, there was the temple of Aphrodite, and you could go there and you could pay money to have sex with the prostitutes that were there, and it was an act of worship towards Aphrodite.

[35 : 49] And so, in a way, they could be saying, don't go and do that. That kind of stuff is wicked, is pagan, is idolatrous.

Flee from those kind of things. They may have been just aware that most Gentiles living in that world at the time, they didn't really have a high standard of moral purity, much like in our culture today, like more and more what it's becoming.

So, he's saying, like, don't do those things in that context. But I want you to know that there's a much broader sense here. It's not just historical context.

It's much more. It really applies to all of us, not just in this text. So, think about this. Does it blow your mind that the Jewish council, like the council in Jerusalem, the apostles, Peter, Paul, and James, and other church leaders, I mean, don't you think that if they sent a letter out, they'd have this long list of do's and don'ts?

That kind of, this is all they asked. This is all they asked them to do. Please refrain from these things. And they seem to be simple.

[37 : 03] But it just, if we have to boil it down to a few things to tell you, which we don't want to burden you. They even say that. We don't want to burden you. Just boil it down to these four things.

Why? Think about this. These things are laid out beside each other, right? Idolatry, blood, consuming blood. And in a way, it's as if he's saying these things are kind of on par with one another.

Can you think about that? Because this sin in Scripture and in history and in our modern times has destroyed many, many, many people, both within and without side of the church.

It is a dangerous, wicked sin. And if you don't believe me, I'll tell you to go listen to a sermon by Paul Washer that's called Sexual Immorality.

And to know that his heart is a very good, loving heart, but he just kind of shoots straight with you the way Jesus did a lot of the time. I'm always convicted, no matter how many times I hear it.

[38 : 14] He looks at 1 Thessalonians in regard to sexual immorality. But he said, if you don't believe this sin is a big deal, go talk to the policeman, to the judge, to the lawyer, and to the counselor, and they all will tell you how much disaster this particular sin has brought on humanity and how much stuff they deal with comes from those sorts of things.

It is very dangerous. Not just dishonoring to God is very dangerous to people. Very dangerous. So, I want to be clear. Like, in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul says, like, don't even, in the context of the church, like, don't even associate and welcome in, like, be a part of the church, someone who is enslaved and who lives in this type of sin.

It may sound harsh, but let's be clear. Remember, he's not referring to a genuine Christian who is struggling and fighting and hating that sin and repenting of it and growing every day further and further away from it.

He's not talking about that in the context. He's really saying the people who live in this type of sin, it doesn't bother them. They flaunt it around.

They even try to pick up people inside the church to have sex with, and they boast about it. That's the kind of person he's talking about. Don't even let them come in among you if that's their goal.

[39 : 44] That's why leaders, particularly pastors, elders, deacons, that's particularly why that sin can't be present in their life, or they disqualify themselves.

So, in our text, where it says sexual immorality, it's the Greek word pornea. It may ring a bell. Pornography, porn.

And it just refers to any illicit sexual intercourse. And in the original language, it extends to adultery, homosexuality, and really just any thought, belief, or action in a sexual sense that's in contradiction to what God says sex is for, which is only inside the bounds of covenant marriage between one man and one woman.

Anything outside of that, he's referring to as pornea. So, strong language. Pornea is meaning from the word prostitutes.

There's pornography, kind of adds the word graphos, and it means writings about prostitutes.

Today, it's been expanded, and it's even just referring to sexual exploits.

[41 : 05] For a man, it can mean, like, how many notches on his belt does he have from girls? How many girls has he slept with, and how does he boast about those things?

It's not just reading, or not just seeing. It's all that stuff. And our culture is attached so hard, and I promise, like, it may scare you, but in this room, there's a ton of you who still deal with this stuff.

There's some of you who are in a relationship with someone you're not married to, and you're sleeping together. You're hurting them, hurting yourself, and offending God altogether.

Not good. Dangerous. Go to Christ. Let him save you from this disaster. Don't listen to their lies telling you you'll never find anybody else, that you don't matter.

That's a total lie. Go to Christ. Let him be the one who takes care of you and cleanses you. And just to throw this out there, there's no such thing as soft porn.

[42 : 10] You can see porn on Facebook. You can see it on Instagram, YouTube. You don't have to go to an explicit porn site. It's anything that is revealing that leads to sexual thoughts.

And you could, a long time ago, people would just blame women, but guys, too, now, like anything that you're wearing or doing to kind of push yourself on display for other people, not okay.

You can lead people to think about you in a dishonorable way. So many of the movies, TV shows, video games, all of that, there's so much of that trash in there.

Guard your eyes. I wish, I wish I had taken better care of my mind and my heart when I was a younger guy, teenager, growing up.

I wish. Because those things don't leave. They don't leave. And I'll be personal with you. In my teenage years, I ran with a lot of athletes, and it was just a fun thing to do, to get together and watch a porn video and make comments about it.

[43 : 21] And I developed, probably from age 16 to my early 20s, a very strong addiction to Internet pornography.

And I praised God that He kept me sovereignly. I never actually slept with another woman. But it was all here, and in Jesus' words, I was committing adultery.

I was guilty. And it made me not care about women at all. It made me just see them as playthings and not people. And I remember the day.

It was sort of a turning point for me. I had seen pornography the night before. It was probably when I was 22, maybe 21. And I was feeling the weight of it.

And I opened the Word, and I read in Ephesians 5. You just turn there. Turn there with me, Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5, verse 3.

[44 : 32] Ephesians 5, verse 3. Paul says, But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as is proper among the saints.

As if he's saying this topic is so sickening, so vile, that it should be almost embarrassing to talk about it in the context of born-again believers.

Then he says, some of you guys particularly need to watch this, let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which is out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

So some of you like to joke about that kind of stuff and how you talk. He's saying, don't even talk about it. Don't even bring it up. It's dishonorable. It's polluting.

It dishonors God. Be thankful to God instead. Verse 5. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

[45 : 46] I was broken over that. And so it started with the Word of God, the Scripture, not just a man telling me that. But then I went to a house church, a worship gathering, and a man who mentored me and disciplined me in my early Christian life.

Some of you women, from the women's retreat last year, you might remember Alice, who came and spoke to you. It was her husband, who passed away many years ago. His name was Larry.

This man was saturated in the Word of God, who loved the Scripture, loved the Gospel. I don't know if I've met his equal yet. You couldn't put him in a box.

He wasn't this, this, or this. He was just a Gospel, Christ-loving man. But he was playing the piano and singing praises, and everybody was kind of joining in. And I just hid in the corner of the house by myself, just in shame, and just sort of, I can't do this because of what I did last night and what I've been doing for the last few years.

And I kind of heard the piano stop playing, and I didn't say anything. Like, I wasn't out talking about this. And I was just sort of in the corner, and Larry just leaned down to me, and he said, Hey, the Lord wants you to know that what you did last night was very dishonoring to Him, was very displeasing to Him.

[47 : 17] It hurt Him. It angered Him. But, He wants you to stand up right now and praise Him. Not because you feel like it, but because you're worthy. Because He is worthy.

Because Christ is worthy. He said, Get up and give Him praise, because He saved you, even from that sin. And I, just a prophetic word that He received. I didn't tell Him about that.

Then He went back and just started playing music as if nothing happened. But, just the Lord laid that on His heart. So, I have dealt with this in my past, and I still face the bullets out every day like it always will come.

And even, you should know that at the very end, like in the judgment, in Revelation 21, verse 8, it says, But the cowardly, the faithless, and the detestable, as for murderers, and the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, just throwing in that bunch of those same things, and liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, and that is the second death.

This is such a crazy, sickening, horrible, horrific sin that is listed among all these other things, like pagan idolatry and sorcery. It's scary.

[48 : 40] And in the church, we've either erred on one or two ends, we've either said, hey buddy, it's okay, Jesus died for you, he still loves you, just stop doing that.

And that only usually leads to people doing it more and more. And on the other hand, the other extreme is, how dare you do that? God hates you, he'll never forgive you for that. You'll never, so it's either all wrath and damnation where it's all cheap grace and a slap on the back. We can't treat it that way. It is very, very serious. But we have to come at it with grace, we have to come at it with love, and I know many people in this room have been personally affected by sexual morality.

Many people. And we have to come together as brothers and sisters, confess sin to one another, pray for one another, hold each other accountable, feed each other the word of God that can birth more faith than us to face these things.

There's no greater way to overcome sexual sin than to develop a hatred and a distaste for it by delighting yourself in the superior pleasures that God offers you in himself.

[49 : 58] No greater way. Fight pleasure with pleasure. You think sex is great? Jesus is better. Much better. Infinitely better. He created it in a good and holy context.

And you should know that in the scripture, sanctification is often measured this way. It's measured in your love for God, love for others, and sexual purity.

Those things are always beside each other. And it's very true. And as Paul Washer said in this video, I watched this sermon. He says, know that true, genuine love for God and others will lead to sexual purity.

Then he flips it and he says, but sexual impurity will only lead to lovelessness and hatred toward God and others.

Have you ever noticed that? Have you ever noticed that? The more you give yourself to someone else, the more porn you watch, the more loveless and selfish you become.

[51 : 04] when you look at those who were created in the image of God, beautiful and unique and you look at them as notches on your belt and as something to be consumed and harden your heart.

Guys, every time you look at porn on your computer, your phone, your iPad, it's just going to harden and harden your heart into sin. And the scripture says to flee these things.

Don't think about them. Don't talk about them. Don't give occasion for them. Flee to Christ instead. And if you look at our text in verse 29, he says, if you keep yourselves from these things, you do well.

So flip that. If you don't keep yourself from these things, you will not do well. And we know that's true. My personal experience. Right?

So can you imagine yourself worshiping a pagan idol and like drinking blood in front of that pagan idol? Well, they're basically saying that like, in a very similar sense, you're doing this when you commit sexual immorality.

[52 : 16] That's scary, is it not? It kind of made it its own thing, but it's not. I want you just to turn to 1 Corinthians with me. Chapter 6.

And we'll kind of probably end it right here. 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 15.

Actually, go to verse 18. For sake of time. Verse 18. Now, most of you may be familiar in the Old Testament context when a priest, a Levitical priest would, the high priest would once a year, right, make atonement and he would go into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was where the presence of God resided.

Right? And no one was allowed to go in there other than the high priest once a year. And if he did, he was struck down. He was killed. God would kill him if he came into the Holy of Holies in a very wrong attitude or wrong approach with sin in his heart.

So a very trembling, scary thing. But, I want you to imagine this idea of like the Levitical priest sleeping with a prostitute inside the Holy of Holies.

[53 : 43] How sickening is that? It wouldn't last. God would consume them in fire for sure. But just imagine that gross, sickening image. And now I want you to look at 1 Corinthians 6 verse 18.

He says, flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body. But the sexual immoral person sins against his own body.

Here's the connection. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you whom you have from God. You are not your own for you have been bought with a price to glorify God in your body.

He's saying God's Holy Spirit that same idea of the Holy of Holies now abides in you as a believer in Christ. And so when we commit gross sexual acts it's almost the same connection to what I just told you.

we are now the temple. We were the Spirit abides. It's supposed to shake us and scare us. Then if you can make this connection continue to sort of follow along I want to kind of leave that with hope. [55 : 03] Okay? If you've had a sexual impure past or life like Christ is for you. He's ready to take you save you cleanse you make you new you're not beyond hope.

This isn't the unpardonable sin. It's just a really hard one really rough one. And so I want you to just go down a few verses or go up excuse me go up and verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 6 verse 9 it says already you not know that the unrighteous will never inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

So there's the deal. People who love these things who live in these things and boast in these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. So he's talking to Christians okay?

He's writing to believers who are in Corinth but then he says in verse 11 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 he saved you from those things is what he's saying.

[56 : 32] You were some of those things and now you're not you've been sanctified you've been taken and set apart for God's holy purposes you were made right in the sight of God you were justified because of the name of Christ.

So rejoice in that right? Rejoice in that. There is hope in Christ. And the last question back in Acts I just kind of wanted I felt the burden to spend some time on that because I know that it's the most relevant to most people here and to our time but he's saying keep yourselves from these things and you'll do well.

If you don't you will not do well. Flee these things. All right? So the third question was what was the result of this proposal?

Like what happened after they sent this letter out? You see that in verse 30 through 35. The apostles they go out to plant the church. They carry the letter with them and the Gentile mission continues and people are encouraged.

They are blessed. They rejoice. You see that in 31. And when they had read it they rejoiced because of this encouragement. Then it says Paul and Barnabas stayed on teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also.

[57 : 55] So this was a good outcome. This was a good thing that the council had decided. It resulted in the gospel moving forward to all the nations, right? It just kept spreading out because of this.

and the council had come together and talked about how to work through these big issues and they didn't use their opinions or their feelings. They used the word of God.

What does God say? That's the most important thing, not what I think. They used prayer. They discussed it in humility and they concluded that nope, Gentiles don't have to do all these things. They made right with God. they only have to put their hope, their trust, and surrender their lives to Christ. And that's enough. That's the gospel. So, that's the end of our story here in Acts 15, at least at this point.

And Nathan, I think, is going to pick it up from this part of the story. So, just join me in a word of prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen.