

### **Pulpit Commentary (Acts 15:20)**

Later St. Paul somewhat enlarged the liberty of Gentile converts in respect to meats offered to idols (see 1 Corinthians 8:4-13; 1 Corinthians 10:25-28). What is strangled, etc. The things forbidden are all practices not looked upon as sins by Gentiles, but now enjoined upon them as portions of the Law of Moses which were to be binding upon them, at least for a time, with a view to their living in communion and fellowship with their Jewish brethren. The necessity for some of the prohibitions would cease when the condition of the Church as regards Jews and Gentiles was altered; others were of eternal obligation.

### **John Calvin (Acts 15:29)**

For laws made concerning things which are of themselves necessary must be continual. But we know that this law was foredone [150] by Paul so soon as the tumult and contention was once ended, when he teacheth that nothing is unclean, (Romans 14:14;) and when he granteth liberty to eat all manner [of] meats, yea, even such as were sacrificed to idols, (1 Corinthians 10:25). Wherefore, in vain do they gather any cloak or color out of this word to bind men's consciences, seeing that the necessity spoken of in this place did only respect men in the external use lest there should any offense arise thereupon, and that their liberty before God might stand whole and sound.

### **Jamieson, Fausset & Brown (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.

*20. But ... that they abstain from pollutions of idols—that is, things polluted by having been offered in sacrifice to idols.* The heathen were accustomed to give away or sell portions of such animals. From such food James would enjoin the Gentile converts to abstain, lest it should seem to the Jews that they were not entirely weaned from idolatry.

*and from fornication* — The characteristic sin of heathendom, unblushingly practiced by all ranks and classes, and the indulgence of which on the part of the Gentile converts would to Jews, whose Scriptures branded it as an abomination of the heathen, proclaim them to be yet joined to their old idols.

*and from things strangled*— which had the blood in them.

*and from blood*— in every form, as peremptorily forbidden to the Jews, and the eating of which, therefore, on the part of the Gentile converts, would shock their prejudices. See on [2023]Ac 15:28.

[on Acts 15:29]

*to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things ... from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well*— The whole language of these prohibitions, and of Ac 15:20, 21, implies that they were designed as concessions to Jewish feelings on the part of the Gentile converts, and not as things which were all of unchanging obligation. The only cause for hesitation arises from "fornication" being mixed up with the other three things; which has led many to regard the whole as permanently prohibited. But the remarks on Ac 15:20 may clear this (see on [2026]Ac 15:20). The then state of heathen society in respect of all the four things seems the reason for so mixing them up.

### **Alexander Maclaren (on Acts 15)**

The observances suggested are a portion of the precepts enjoined by Judaism on proselytes. The two

former were necessary to the Christian life; the two latter were not, but were concessions to the Jewish feelings of the stricter party. The conclusion may be called a compromise, but it was one dictated by the desire for unity, and had nothing unworthy in it. There should be giving and taking on both sides. If the Jewish Christians made the, to them, immense concession of waiving the necessity of circumcision, the Gentile section might surely make the small one of abstinence from things strangled and from blood. Similarities in diet would daily assimilate the lives of the two parties, and would be a more visible and continuous token of their oneness than the single act of circumcision. ...

The closing words of the letter are beautifully brotherly, sinking authority, and putting in the foreground the advantage to the Gentile converts of compliance with the injunctions. 'Ye shall do well,' rightly and conformably with the requirements of brotherly love to weaker brethren. And thus doing well, they will 'fare well,' and be strong. That is not the way in which 'lords over God's heritage' are accustomed to end their decrees. Brotherly affection, rather than authority imposing its will, breathes here. Would that all succeeding 'Councils' had imitated this as well as 'it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us'!

#### **Meyer NT (Acts 15:20ff)**

... the absence of any mention of the council and decree in the Pauline Epistles, particularly in the Epistle to the Galatians (and even in the discussion on meats offered in sacrifice, 1 Corinthians 8:10; 1 Corinthians 8:13 ff.), is completely intelligible from the merely interim nature and purpose of the statute; as well as, on the other hand, from the independence of his apostleship and the freedom of believers from the law, which Paul had to assert more and more after the time of the council in his special apostolic labours, and always to lay greater stress on, in opposition to the Judaism which ever raised itself anew.

#### **FF Bruce (Acts 15:20)**

20 There remained, however, a practical problem. In most of the churches Gentile believers had to live alongside Jewish believers, who had been brought up to observe various food-laws and to avoid intercourse with Gentiles as far as possible. While there was no more question of requiring the Gentiles to submit to the ceremonial law, they would do well to behave considerately to their "weaker brethren" of Jewish birth, not all of whom could be expected immediately to acquire such an emancipated outlook on food-laws and the like as Peter and Paul. Therefore, without compromising the Gentiles' Christian liberty, James gave it as his considered opinion that they should be asked to respect their Jewish brethren's scruples by avoiding meat which had idolatrous associations or from which the blood had not been properly drained, and by conforming to the high Jewish code of relations between the sexes instead of remaining content with the lower pagan standards to which they had been accustomed. This would smooth the path of social and table fellowship between Christians of Jewish and Gentile birth. ... it is surely quite natural that, when once the matter of principle had been settled, an effort should have been made to provide a practical *modus vivendi* for two groups of people drawn from such different ways of life. The *modus vivendi* was probably similar to the terms on which Jews of the dispersion found it possible to have some degree of intercourse with God-fearers. The prohibition against eating flesh with the blood still in it was based on Gen. 9:4. At a later time, when the issue was no longer a live one, the provisions proposed by James and adopted by the

council were modified so as to become purely ethical injunctions: thus the Western text makes James suggest “that they abstain from idolatry, from fornication and from bloodshed, and from doing to others what they would not like done to themselves”.

[on v 29]

The end of v. 28 and beginning of v. 29 should probably run: “... to lay no burden on you except these things: it is necessary for you to abstain...” Then the four things from which they are to abstain are repeated from v. 20: here again the Western text recasts them in the form of a threefold ethical prohibition and adds the negative Golden Rule. The prohibition of fornication, understood generally, is of course an ethical prohibition in both forms of the text, but the word may be used here in a more specialized sense, of marriage within degrees of blood-relationship or affinity forbidden by the legislation of Lev. 18:52. As for the food-laws, they appear to have been observed as late as A.D. 177 by the churches of the Rhone valley in Gaul, which were in close relation with the churches of the province of Asia. In the province of Asia we find the general terms of the apostolic decision upheld at the end of the 1st century in Rev. 2:14, 20. And towards the end of the 9th century they were included by King Alfred of England in the preamble to his law-code.