

DESIDERATA¹
WHY CHRISTIANS AREN'T UNDER OLD TESTAMENT LAW
Romans 7:1-6
FEBRUARY 2, 2009

BIG IDEA: THE GENIUS OF CHRISTIAN MOTIVATION IS A COMPELLING RELATIONSHIP.

I. IT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR (**Acts 15:2**, *This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.*)

A. Why?

1. Anywhere God's grace is sprouting and flowering, expect the legalists to show up with their toxic spiritual herbicides. **Acts 15:1**, *Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."* Their fuller message is revealed in verse 5, *"The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."*
2. What legalists do.
 - First, they mess up salvation. They make salvation something that you have to earn by the good things you do.
 - Second, they mess up Christian living. They make living for Jesus something you have to do rather than something you want to do. They reduce a vital, loving relationship with Jesus to a lifeless list of do's and don'ts.

B. How?

1. Meet legalism head-on
 - **Galatians 1:6**, *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*
 - **Galatians 2:11**, *When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.*
2. Have your arguments ready
 - Legalism can't save. **Acts 15:10**, *Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."*
 - Legalism can't make you a good Christian. **Colossians 2:23**, *Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their **harsh treatment** of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

II. IT'S WORTH SELF-CONTROL (**Acts 15:28**, *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following...*)

A. To Benefit Others

1. The instructions: **Acts 15:29**, *You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.*
2. The value of peace. **Acts 15:21**, *For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."* The Antiochian church was a strong mix of Jewish and Gentile believers. There were some Gentile behaviors that were so offensive to Jews, even Christian Jews, that it would be like

¹ *Desideratum: Something considered necessary or highly desirable.*

fingernails on a chalkboard relationally in the church. Every Jew had been trained to stay away from idol meat, bloody meat and strangled meat.

- **Romans 12:18**, *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at **peace** with everyone.*
 - **Romans 14:19**, *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to **peace** and to mutual edification.*
3. The value of edification (building others up)
- **Romans 14:20**, *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*

B. To Protect Myself

1. Sometimes we confuse grace-living with sinful-living. I believe that's why sex is listed in this passage. It stands in an entirely different category than the Jewish food prohibitions. Why is it here? It seems like a no-brainer. Why did the Jerusalem Council have to point out to the Gentile Christians that they needed to abstain from sexual immorality? I believe it is because the Gentile society was so pagan that they no longer thought of sexual immorality as immorality. They had lost all moral conscience about sex. It was just another physical appetite to satisfy, like taking a drink when you're thirsty.
2. Sometimes we translate grace into addiction or distraction. **I Corinthians 6:12**, *"Everything is permissible for me"-- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-- but I will not be mastered by anything.*
3. Chuck Swindoll asks and answers a probing question: *Why is grace risky? Because it has fewer boundaries than a legalistic system. And to live grace to the extreme means that some will take advantage of it. Some refer to grace as though it is the God-given pervasive covering for their outright disobedience which they call amazing grace. I call it abusing grace.*

III. IT'S WORTH CELEBRATING (**Acts 15:31**, *The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.*)

A. It's About Freedom

1. Legalism doesn't work (Acts 15:10, an unbearable yoke)-- **A plumb line** *can only prove that a crooked wall is crooked. No matter how you use it, a plumb line can't make a crooked wall straight. The law was God's plumb line, designed to show all people that they are crooked, or sinful. It was never intended to make us straight or righteous – and indeed it never could.*
2. Grace encourages--I Peter 5:12, *With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true **grace** of God. Stand fast in it.*

B. It's About Strength

1. Law weakens--It can't justify, sanctify, or forgive!
2. Grace enables
 - **2 Timothy 2:1**, *You then, my son, be **strong in** the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*
 - **Hebrews 13:9**, *Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by **grace**, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.*
 - **II Thessalonians 2:16**, *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his **grace** gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*
 - **Colossians 1:5**, *the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's **grace** in all its truth.*

--TIMOTHY G. WALTON

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