

**Firm Conviction and Careful Compromise:
Two Essentials for Our Church's Success
A Study of Acts 15:1 to 16:5**

Make 2 commitments in light of this study:

For the sake of our mission, I will make *much* of

Verse 11: "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

For the sake of our fellowship, I will make *little* of

Verses 19-20, "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood."

Why Did the Early Church Single Out These Four Things?

By Steven Cole, Flagstaff Christian Fellowship

James mentions four things that the Gentile Christians should abstain from for the sake of not offending the Jews. Three of these were not essential doctrinal matters, but rather matters that took into consideration the social situation and sought to avoid needlessly giving offense.

The fact that three of the requirements seem to be related to the Jewish ceremonial law, whereas the other seems to be moral, has led to many textual variants and interpretations. Some take them all to be moral; others take them all to be ceremonial. I think that three of the items related to Jewish ceremonial laws, and the other (fornication) related to a moral issue toward which many Gentiles would be insensitive because of their culture.

The first item, "things contaminated by idols," or "sacrificed to idols," referred to meat that had been offered to pagan gods, but then was sold in the marketplace. It would be offensive to most Jews if Gentile Christians ate such meat. "Blood and things strangled" referred to eating meat that had not been killed by draining the blood from it, thus violating Jewish dietary laws (Gen. 9:4; Lev.3:17; 7:26; 17:10-14; 19:26; et. al). While the Gentiles were not subject to these laws, the Council requested that they abstain from these practices so as not to offend the Jews.

The last item, "sexual immorality," has been variously interpreted. Since the other three items are ceremonial, and since the prohibition against sexual immorality would apply to every believer as a moral absolute, some understand it to refer to the levitical prohibition of marriage to a near relative (Lev. 18:6-18), which the rabbis described as "porneia" (Metzger, p. 380). The problem with this view is that it is an unusual use of this Greek word, and most Gentiles would not have taken it in this sense.

I think that we must understand the word as the Gentile recipients would have, to refer to sexual relations outside of marriage. But, why did this even need to be mentioned, since it is a part of God's moral law? Sexual immorality was so commonly accepted among the Gentiles that there were probably some who professed faith in Christ, but did not yet understand God's moral standards. They came out of a background where temple prostitution and having a mistress for sexual gratification were shrugged off as standard practice. If they professed faith in Jesus Christ, and yet continued these practices, unbelieving Jews who held to the sanctity of marriage could never be reached with the gospel.