

Acts 15:29

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The 29th verse of this chapter deals with the new gentile converts that came into the Messianic faith. The portion that we wish to discuss is the agreement at the Council of Jerusalem, where the apostles decided that the new gentile believers must “abstain from what is offered to idols, and blood, and what is strangled, and whoring.”

offerings to idols

We will first have a look at what is offered to idols. It is obvious that YHWH would not want us to worship idols. But is it so obvious that He wouldn't want us to eat food offered to idols? Before we eat, we ask Him to bless the food we are about to receive. We also thank Him for our daily bread. Can we with an open heart thank YHWH for food which was ordained to another mighty one than Him? I will not feel free to do so, even though all other mighty ones are dead and without hearing! Even though other mighty ones or idols do not physically exist, they are made separate by the beholder, and exist in the mind of the worshipper.

The very thought that man is making an image or idol of that which does not live, is an abomination to YHWH. For this reason He said to Yisrael so often to destroy the idols of the land they took possession of. YHWH is the only living Elohim, and does not need any divided worship. He wants undivided worship. We must worship Him with our completeness - our heart soul and being, and that includes our eating and drinking. Another reason why we should not eat food offered to idols, is to prevent us from offending our brothers and sisters in the faith. To me, the thought of food offered to idols is already reason enough not to eat it. In the ancient system of sacrifice such as the custom was among the Greco-Romans, only a portion of the sacrifice was ordained to the idol in the temple. The remainder of the meat was either eaten in the precincts of the temple or at home. Sometimes the remainder was sent to the market to be sold.

Evidence of this practice is found in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus. It often happened that a public feast was announced where animals were sacrificed to idols. Some of the early believers were invited to these festivals, from where the question arose if they should eat any of the meat. If we eat meat sacrificed to idols, it also symbolizes that we pay respect to that idol. If I slaughter an animal, and ask YHWH's blessing on it, I dedicate my action to Him, and it is part of my worship.

When I eat the meat of that animal, I know that His blessing is upon it, because I dedicated it to Him. This is nothing different from asking His blessings upon the food before we eat. In saying this, I wish to emphasize that YHWH will not bless and cleanse unclean food through prayer, (I am referring to food forbidden to eat!) If a heathen slaughters an animal, and dedicate the procedure to an idol, will you feel comfortable to eat the meat of that animal? Will you sit at the table of a Hindu, allow him to dedicate the food to Buddha, and then eat that food? I will not! Yisrael was warned about this in Ex. 34:14-16, Num. 25:1,2.

blood

The word blood in Hebrew is MD, dam, which means, "that which when shed causes death" - so described in Strong's Concordance # 1818. This word, with the exception of one occurrence (Yesh. 63:3), is always used in the Tanak when referring to human or animal blood. Blood in other words mean none other than life! Without blood, a human or animal is dead. This is actually very obvious.

We will now explore the significance and importance of blood in Scripture. Through the ages blood was and today still is a delicacy among many nations of the world - but contrary to what Scripture teaches in this regard. Why is blood so important in Scripture, and why are we not allowed to eat or drink blood. Yes, to those who do not know, Scripture forbids us to eat or drink blood, and that for very good reasons. The decree of Acts 15:29 means that the teaching of the Torah about abstinence from blood did not change when the Faith was brought to the gentiles. In fact, these four requirements was nothing new at all, but simply a continuation of the requirements set in the Torah in Lev. 17 & 19.

If we closely examine these chapters, we will see where the apostles got the four aspects from. The first command in Scripture regarding abstinence from blood is found in Gen. 9:4, and also Lev. 3:17 which reads, "An everlasting law throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you do not eat fat or any blood." Clearer than this we will find nowhere else in Scripture. But why is it forbidden to eat blood? Once again the answer comes very clearly from the Torah. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the alter to make atonement for your lives (beings), for it is the blood that makes atonement for the life." Lev. 17:11

We may reason now that this is no longer so after Yahushua died for us. No, the Word that went out of the mouth of the Almighty is not reversible. If He commands, as in verse 12, "No being among you eats the blood, nor does any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.", then we obey - even today.

strangled animals for food?

The third part of the decree in Acts 15:29 is to abstain from what is strangled. This could mean one of two things, or both. That which is strangled by a human being, or which is strangled by an animal. An animal strangled is nothing different from an animal which is slaughtered in an unkosher manner, meaning that its blood does not drained properly. If I wish to learn more about fishing, I either read a book on the topic, or go to an experienced fisherman to teach me how to fish. Similarly, we can learn from the experts how to slaughter an animal so that its blood drains effectively. Jewish sh'chitah (slaughtering) requires that an animal be killed with a very very sharp knife, with a single stroke across the neck.

This is also the most humane way of killing an animal, because it dies instantly, and the blood drains quickly, pumped out by the heart that still beats for a few seconds after the brain already died. I cannot think of a more inhumane way of killing an animal than to strangle it. This is brutal and nothing different from murder.

whoring

Whoring, for very obvious reasons cannot be allowed among believers. Besides the obvious, YHWH forbid whoring since creation. The details to prevent whoring are dealt with in Lev. 18. The ten commands, in the 7th and 10th commands very clearly deals with this matter. In the preceding verses, it becomes very clear why the apostles only decreed the newcomer gentile believers to abstain from these four sins.

Verse 21, after they made the decision about these four items, Kepha continues, saying, "For from ancient generations Mosheh (Torah) has, in every city, those proclaiming him - being read in the congregations every Sabbath." The issue was primarily, at first, which commands the newcomer believers should adhere to. At that time, the Messianic believers, Jew and non-Jew, assembled in the same congregations, and the gentiles joined in with the "customs" and teaching of the Jewish believers. It was therefore obvious that Kepha meant with these words, that they (the gentile believers) will in time hear "Mosheh" - the Torah, and then start to observe the Torah.