

ROMANS 14:4-8 *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. ⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

2. What are some things that Paul taught that might have been perceived as a threat to those who were zealous for the law?
3. What are some ways that Paul honored the Law in a way that his Jewish brothers and sisters did not?
4. Why do you think Paul chose to affirm his Jewish brothers and sisters rather than telling them to loosen up and enjoy the freedom he enjoyed?
5. How would you counsel someone who seems to take the law far too seriously (the rule keepers or legalists in your life)?
6. How would you counsel someone who fails to incorporate godly instruction from the law into their walk with Christ (the rule breakers or libertines in your life)?
7. What are some practical steps you can take to honor the the spirit of the law without becoming entangled in the letter of the law?

A DISASTROUS RESULT (vv. 27-30)

²⁷ When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place."

²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut.



THE STORY CONTINUES

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE | ACTS 21:17-30

In his book *Prodigal God*, Tim Keller reminds us:

"The gospel is neither religion nor irreligion - it is something else altogether. Religion makes law and moral obedience a means of salvation, while irreligion makes the individual a law to him - or herself. The gospel, however, is that Jesus takes the law of God so seriously that He paid the penalty of disobedience, so we can be saved by sheer grace."

The gospel is the space between "religion" and "irreligion." A space the early church had a hard time occupying. If you grew up Jewish you grew up with very clear boundaries on where you would worship, how you would worship, what you would eat, how much you would drink, who you would eat and drink with and how you would express your sexuality. If you grew up Gentile, you were not strictly speaking irreligious, you simply worshipped in any number of temples that blurred all of the boundaries—there were no limits on food and drink, where you would worship, how you would worship or how you could express your sexuality.

Jesus captures the contrast in his compelling portrait of a father and his two sons. The youngest son leaves his father for the far country where he squanders his wealth on wild living. The older son stays at home and follows all of the rules. The point of Jesus' story is not so much that God welcomes wayward sons and daughters with open arms (which he absolutely and unequivocally does!), the point of the story is that you can spend all of your life in the father's house, meticulously following the father's rules, and completely miss the heart of the father. There is singing, dancing and fattened calves involved, but you are still on the outside looking in.

When Paul arrives in Jerusalem the church is still wrestling with how to occupy the space between religion and irreligion. When the two worlds collide the result is predictable, but disastrous.

A WARM RECEPTION (vv. 17-20)

¹⁷ When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God.

1. According to Paul, who was responsible for the remarkable inroads the gospel was making among the Gentiles? Why is this important to keep in mind?
2. How did James and the elders respond to Paul's report? Why is this important to keep in mind?

A GROWING CONCERN (vv. 20-22)

Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.

1. What do you think it means to be zealous for the law?
2. Paul had once described himself as "extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers (Galatians 1:14)." How do you think he felt about the believers in Jerusalem who "were zealous for the law?"
3. If the people who knew you best were to describe what you were zealous for, what are some of the things they might mention?
4. Once we have come to know Christ, what is the one thing we should be more zealous for than anything else?
5. Why is the Law (or anything else) a poor substitute?

AN ILL-CONCEIVED PLAN (vv. 22-26)

They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

²⁵ As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

²⁶ The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

1. Paul had a complex relationship to the Mosaic Law. By the time he arrived in Jerusalem for Passover in 57 A.D. he had already written Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Read the following passages and describe how Paul thought about and related to the Law.

GALATIANS 3:23–25 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

GALATIANS 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:18–20 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. ²⁰ Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:20-23 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law... I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

ROMANS 3:31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

ROMANS 6:14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

ROMANS 8:1–4 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.