

# Acts 15:1-33 "Turning Pagans into Christians"

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, pour out the Holy Spirit upon us at this time. Pour out the Holy Spirit upon us deep within, not just us, but those online and those live right now and those watching downstream. Pour out the Holy Spirit upon us. Father, tune our hearts to receive all the grace and all the truth and all the wisdom and all the beauty that you desire to give us this morning through your Word and later through the Lord's Supper. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

You know, sometimes, because we preach through books of the Bible at this church, sometimes I look at the text for the week and I think, oh my, like, oh boy. But you know, that's the momentary thing. At the end of the day, I'm really glad that I preach through books of the Bible. It makes me talk about things that in my flesh I probably wouldn't talk about most times. So what we're looking at today is actually touching on or opening a door or a window, depending on the image you want to use, and opening a window into something which is increasingly important in large sections of our culture. There's an increasing interest in traditions, in rhythms of life, in habits, in rules of life, in rituals, to help to sort of stave off the chaos of life. And there's this ongoing desire to get into these types of things with the hope as well that they'll be meaningful and just help to ground them and connect them to something bigger than themselves. It's a very big growth industry. People go back to ancient China, writings of ancient China, writings of the Stoics, listening to Navy SEALs, retired generals, and psychologists by the name of somebody like Jordan Peterson, who has, I think, a YouTube channel of six or seven hundred million. I'm just a few people. So it's touching on something like that, although at the surface level of reading it, it actually would reinforce to many people the problem with Christianity and the problem with religion in general. So let's look to go beneath the appearances to see how it's opening the door into something which is very important in our culture. And here it's Acts chapter 15.

That's what we're looking at today. It's going to be verses 1 to 33, or at least verses 1 to 20. Let's see if we get to the last few verses. And the context is the book of Acts is written. It's about the first 30 or so years of the Jesus movement. It's a history of that movement. It's written by a man who was an eyewitness for big pieces of it. And the parts he wasn't an eyewitness for, he consulted eyewitnesses. And it was all written while many eyewitnesses were still alive. And what's just happened before this in the story, and I've talked about this, I think, two weeks ago. I know it's a dirty word in Canada right now, but there'd been the very first ever Christian missionary journey.

[ 4 : 1 6 ] And that's what sort of happened in the previous two chapters. It's come to an end. The two men who did that missionary journey, men by the name of Paul and Barnabas, they've returned to their sending church to great joy at the way that God had moved. And now the story continues, and it goes like this. But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers and sisters, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about the question.

Now just sort of pause here for a second. You know, some of us use talk and using, can be a bit facetious. Some of us can be very ironic in our conversation. And we don't always realize that sometimes the Bible speaks in the same type of way. So if you go back and look at that part in verse two, where it says, and after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate, he's being ironic. This was a full bore argument that went on for a long time. They went at it, hammer and tongs over this particular issue. And some of you might be thinking, and this is where, you know, on one level, people will tune out at this point in time. You can just imagine sharing this story at your local boutique coffee place or your Tim Hortons as you're going there to get your double-double or something like that. And people would just, you know, if they were honest with you inwardly, they're rolling their eyes. This is exactly why I don't want to have anything to do with the Christian faith. Good grief, getting into a big argument over circumcision. Like, how crazy is that? Who cares about all those dietary laws and all that thing? That's exactly what the problem was with Christianity and other types of religions. That's why I don't have anything to do with them. And it sounds at face value as if that's what it's all about. Now, as I said, it actually is going to open a door into something that we are, in fact, many people in our culture.

But I said, not all. Some people want to have more and more chaos in their lives. And this text isn't really for them, unless it's to give them a bit of a check. But there are many people who want traditions and rituals and other things. And this is actually going to open a door on that question in a way that I think people would actually need to hear. But it looks as if it's just an argument about words. And they make a decision to go down to Jerusalem. Why to Jerusalem?

Well, that's, of course, this is probably happening about 48, the year 48, maybe early 49.

Depending on when you date the death and resurrection of Jesus, either the spring of 30 or the spring of 33, this is 15 to 18 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. There's lots and lots and lots of people in Jerusalem who would have heard Jesus preach many, many, many times. So they're going to the source. That's what they're doing. And they're going to the apostles, the men, all of the apostles except one, James, has died. The others are alive. And they're going to the people who spent three years with Jesus to bring this question to them. And so the story continues. Verse 3.

[ 7 : 51 ] And it goes like this. So being sent on their way by the church, that's the church in Antioch, now known as Syria, it's sort of Antioch in Syria, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the pagans and brought great joy to all the brothers and sisters. So they're telling what's happened in their missionary journeys and in their work in Syria. It's just bringing joy to everybody who hears it. By the way, it's like a 550 kilometer trip from Antioch to Jerusalem, Antioch and Syria to Jerusalem. So they would have, this would have taken quite a while to make the walk.

They would have reported to lots of churches. Everywhere they went, there was great joy. Verse 4. For when they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.

But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees wrote up and said, it is necessary to circumcise them and order them to keep the law of Moses. Now just sort of pause. So just imagine it's something like this, this big room or bigger room, something like Woodvale Pentecostal. I think that's the biggest in terms of seating church in the city, and the place is completely packed. Everybody's just really, really having, they're just really overjoyed when they hear the things that have been going on. And then in the midst of that, a group of people stand up and say, but we worry that things are going off the rails.

Don't we all believe that they would have called it the Tanakh? Actually, just as a bit of an aside, the Gospel of Mark might have been written by now, Galatians had probably been written by now, and the Book of James had probably been written by now. And as we're going to see in the story right now, in a sense, what they are going to teach in Acts is also, in a sense, already very commonly known.

Luke is just going to record what they all obviously know. But they get up and say, listen, don't we believe in the Tanakh? Don't we believe that that's the infallible authoritative word of God?

[ 9 : 58 ] I think these, I'm really happy these people are all becoming Christians, but they're really lacking something of the utmost importance. They got to obey the Tanakh. They just got to. The men have to be circumcised, and they have to start keeping kosher, and there's a whole range of things that they got to do. I mean, that's what the Bible says, is what they say. So what happens? Well, look at verse 6.

What they do is they don't have the whole congregation decided. And by the way, at this point in time, we need to take off our sort of a certain type of lens. When they say the church in Jerusalem, I don't know who, there might have been 10,000 Christians there. They didn't all, there was no huge 10,000 seat place that they'd all, this was, when they say the church, they're meaning the church in the city and all the local churches. That's what they mean. And the apostles and the elders who are overall. In some ways, it's more like a diocese, actually. And so what they do is they break off from that meeting, verse 6, and the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. So, I don't know how many that would have been. They leave and they go to a different place. At verse 7, and after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, brothers, you know that in the early days, God made a choice among you that by my mouth, the pagan should hear the word of the gospel and believe. Now, just sort of pause here for a second. It doesn't say how long the debate went on, but there was a serious debate. And maybe it was an hour, maybe it was six hours, maybe it was a couple of days. They had a lot more time to talk about things back in those days. So, there's real back and forward debate amongst the whole room. They're a bit confused. Some people would remember what Jesus said, what the Tanakh says. There's a debate. And so what Luke is doing now is he's not recording the minutes of the debate. He's set up the primary issue. And now he's going to give you the sort of three pieces of evidence that bring the whole thing to a conclusion and what the conclusion is. And it's really interesting. I paused on that in verse 7. It is by my mouth that the pagan should hear the word of the gospel and believe. That's a very encouraging word for us. God uses... God can use your mouth. God can use your mouth. He doesn't need you to be super wise. He doesn't say, I only use people who have five PhDs and have passed every public speaking course and have a huge YouTube presence. He just, he uses your mouth. And it's just, but we bear witness to Jesus in very simple ways and he does the work. You know, just a very simple thing. Like often after this service, I stop at a coffee place on the way home because I really, really like dark, dark roast coffee. And I stop there on the way home and it's a place that I'm familiar with, but often there'll be somebody who doesn't know me.

[ 12 : 59 ] And they'll ask the normal barista type of question. What did you do this day? What do you do it? What did you do today? And I say, well, I just came from church. They often go, oh.

You know, sometimes they have a big frowny face when I say that. Others are just sort of like puzzled, you know, like Monday they asked me what I do yesterday, you know, I'll say, oh, I went to church and I did this. And they go, oh, like if they don't know me. That's a simple way of bearing witness to Jesus. You never know what doors will open as a result of that. Like I encourage you to do it. Anyway, it's just his mouth. But what does Peter keep on saying? So Peter's, I'll talk more about in a moment. Peter's just reminding them about something which I'll talk more about in a moment, fill you in the details, but let's listen to the rest of what he says. Verse 8.

So the people have heard, the pagans have heard the word of the gospel and believe. Verse 8. And God, who knows the heart, the inner person, not the emotions, that's like the very center of who you are, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test? That's a bad image. A better way to put it is, in English, it sort of sounds neutral, but it's a negative thing. It's the, oh yeah? Oh yeah? That's it. It's an oh yeah thing to God. Oh yeah? God? Oh yeah? You can do that? Like, you think that's it? It's an oh yeah statement. You know? Or it's a good luck with that statement about God. You think God's going to do that? Good luck with that. That's what's trying to be captured there with the test. And then it says, first hand again, now therefore, why are you putting God to the test? By placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear. The image there, to give it a sort of an image which we can get a better sense of, it's like the image you might see in movies or in books where the enemy, you've got your enemy down and somebody puts their foot on the person's neck who's down. That's the image. Right? It's not a good image. So that's what he's saying. You know, these people who are arguing that you need to be circumcised, keep the law, what they're in effect

doing is testing what God has done. And they're actually, it's like putting a boot to the neck of these pagans. Verse 11. And here's the key theological truth. But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. And so that's the culmination of the long debate. There's going to be two more important things that happen here. But here's a couple of things about it. So a little while ago, I was talking to a young guy, very, very smart young guy, really interested in ideas and talking. I have a feeling he's probably been really influenced by Jordan Peterson. And he knows I'm a pastor. And he often asked me different Bible questions and stuff like that. And we were talking the other day, and about, I said, about maybe a month ago. And all of a sudden, he realized that he and I were missing each other in the conversation a bit. He said, one moment, you're just talking about like, psychological structures and like metaphors and meanings and lenses to see the world and give meaning. That's a Jordan Peterson's perspective, right? It's all just psychology. It's all archetypes and different ways to frame the world and get in touch with things deep about being human beings. That's fundamentally what Jordan Peterson has done, bringing out great truths about the Bible. But he sees it from that perspective. And I think that guy might have been affected by it. And he said that to me. I said, no, no, no, no. No, I believe these things actually happened. Like, I believe they're real. Like, I think Jesus really did die on a cross.

[17:05] I think he really died. I think he really was buried. I think the grave clothes were there, and he rose from the dead. And I think he appeared alive. And I think when I pray, I'm talking to an actual God who really is there, who speaks. And he went like this, like, oh. We've been having a conversation for maybe a month. But he just thought I'm talking, like, in Jordan Peterson, you know, but no, no, I'm talking about something real. And it's a very common, you know, problem.

And it's even at the—and so here's how we can see with this why it's—how Peter is talking about something that's real. In Acts chapter 2, you have the story about how the Holy Spirit falls on the first Christians, and they get filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, what didn't happen there is this. Okay, what didn't happen? Sometimes, you know, there can be a congregation like, you know, like this, or you have a vestry or something. And after the whole service is over, maybe you and your buddy or, you know, you and your wife or your whatever, you walk out, you think—you say to yourself, I have a sense that something changed today in the church. I just had this real feeling that something changed, that a corner was turned. You know, and maybe the person with it said, yeah, you know, I sort of felt that too, as if something changed. But that's just very subjective.

And what happened, what's described in Acts chapter 2 isn't as if Peter and John and James, after they leave Acts 2, they say to each other, you know, I really think something changed today.

Like, I don't know what—you think something changed? No, no. That's not what happened at all.

Like, God made it abundantly, spectacularly clear that something different had happened.

First of all, they saw what looked like fire landing on people's heads. Secondly, there was such a loud noise of roaring wind that it drew a big crowd from the entire surrounding neighborhood wondering what had caused this noise. And then the clincher was that people started speaking in languages that they didn't know. It would be as if all of a sudden today that happens, and Jono starts speaking Mongolian.

[19:26] You don't know Mongolian, do you, brother? Okay. Jono starts speaking Mongolian.

Harold starts speaking Mandarin. Andrew starts speaking Swahili. And all of a sudden, they're speaking all these other languages, and you really know that something's happened. And it's not just something on the outside, it's something on the very inside. And then Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, realizes that what Jesus had talked about and what the Bible talked about, it all actually happened. Now, what's Peter talking about? If you go back to Acts chapter 10, they don't tell you all of the details. But pagans, they just, all the Christians sort of thought you'd have to be sort of Jewish, or at least know some Jewish stuff before you could really become a Christian. And all these visions happen. Peter goes into the house of a pagan, and he starts telling them about Jesus, and Peter's there with other Jewish people who'd become Christians. And all of a sudden, all heaven breaks loose. And we don't tell the details. They just turned to each other and said, good grief. Just like Pentecost, it's happened to the pagans. I don't go into the details, but they say, just like us. So maybe all of a sudden, they see the tongues of fire, they hear the rushing noise, and they start speaking in languages that they shouldn't know. And Peter realizes that they've heard the gospel, received the gospel, and it's objective. It's real. That's what's happened.

You see, it isn't that they're having an argument about whether the best-tasting ice cream has to have chocolate in it or not. I mean, that's just ridiculous, right? That's what people think religion is. It's just a matter of taste. Ice cream makes most people feel happy. Some people like vanilla. Some people like, I mean, my grandkids like those ones that, you know, the really gross colors that look like they're radioactive and will kill you. You know, that if they go for ice cream and there's that choice, they'll take the ones with the grossest, brightest, most terrible colors, and they eat that, you know? But, you know, we don't get into argument over stuff like that. That doesn't matter. But this is talking about real things. And so why is it then that this whole thing actually even matters? Well, I'm going to tell you why it matters in a moment. Let's look at how it continues to go on. So the main thing is, and by the way, that means if this is talking about something which is real, that really happened, if Jesus really did die, if he really did get buried, if he really spent three days in the tomb, if the grave clothes were still there and the door was opened and the body was gone and they never found the body and Jesus appeared alive, if that really happened, it changes everything. Changes everything. The universe is different than they talk about in global and CBC and the court and in academia. The world is different. Reality is different. It means there is a God that does exist. It means there is a, he does want you to pray. It means he can hear your prayer. It means Jesus is alive. It means there really is a Holy Spirit. I mean, it's, everything changes if that's, if that's true. And if Pentecost is true, it's, we're talking about objective things, but they're objective things that matter. They're not just sort of random facts that weird people know so they can win trivia contests. It actually matters. But we'll get to that in a moment. Let's just a little bit further.

Verse 12. But the key point has been made. You are made right with God completely and utterly by the grace of God that you receive by, you receive by faith. That's, that's how you're made right with God. And verse 12. And all of the assembly fell silent. And then they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they, Paul, Barnabas and Paul, Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the pagans. Once again, saying, listen, we went and a man who'd never walked, he was healed. And this happened. The person who was blind received sight. People who, you know, had leprosy were healed. Real objective changes as a result of prayer. Verse 13. After they finished speaking, James, this is Jesus's half-brother, not the original, not the brother of John, but Jesus's half-brother, James. And by the way, did you know, this is a bit of an aside, did you know that this isn't, James isn't just somebody known in the Bible, but Josephus, a Jewish historian, writes about

James. Like, Acts is history. It's not fantasy. It's not mythology. It's not metaphor. It's not myth.

[ 24 : 22 ] It's not allegory. It's history. James is known to ancient historians. I'll continue. Brothers, listen to me. Verse 13. Simeon, that's another name for Peter, has related how God first visited the pagans. Listen to this wonderful phrase, to take from them a people for his name.

When you and I become a Christian, it's Jesus taking you and me to be part of his people for his glory. That's what that means. I, in a sense, am taken out of my life before Christ and my allegiances and my citizenship, and I'm transferred to a new kingdom, and God does the taking, and now I am his by his action. And it's not just a solo George with Jesus. I've now, it's me, so it's deeply personal, but I'm now part of Jesus's people. Verse 15. And with this, what I just described, the words of the prophets agree. Now, I'm just going to read it for a moment. It's an actually, if you are really interested, you can go online or go other places. It's a fascinating mashup of five prophets all put together in a very interesting way. It's Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea, and Zechariah all mashed up together. So, for those people listening who really know their Old Testament, their Tanakh, they would pick up that he's made five interwoven references in this quote, very cleverly put together.

But here's how it goes in English. After this, I will return, that's God speaking, and I, God, will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen. And God says, I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it. Why? That the remnant of the human race may seek the Lord, and all the pagans who are called by my name. He's going to restore it. He's going to bring, he's going to rebuild, a sense of a perfect kingdom and people, and all the pagans that he's called are going to be there, says the Lord who made these things known from of old. So, well, here, no, now we get to the really weird bit, and that's where I'm going to explain why the gospel matters and what the weird bit means in my last 10 minutes. So, they've made a big decision. It doesn't matter if you have grown up as a Hindu. It doesn't matter if you've grown up as a Buddhist. It doesn't matter if you've grown up as a Confucius. It doesn't matter if you've grown up a Taoist. It doesn't matter if you've grown up as an atheist. It doesn't matter if

you've grown up Jewish. It doesn't matter if you've grown up Christian.

We are made right with God. He makes us right with himself when we put our faith and trust in the person and work of Jesus. And we're trusting that everything that had to be done to make us right with God is done in the person of Jesus, and we receive it by believing into him.

And believing is not an intellectual word. It's a personal word. It's believing into a person. It's like you're entering, in a sense, into trusting them and giving yourself to them and committing to them.

[ 27 : 47 ] It's a relationship word, which obviously has intellectual components, and that's how you're made right with God. And that's now been established. It's been, in a sense, they'd say it's what the Bible teaches.

It's what God has obviously shown in an objective way, and that's the truth. Now they're going to give this weird bit. Verse 19. Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the pagans who turn to God, but should write to them two, four things.

Abstain from things polluted by idols, abstain from sexual immorality, abstain from what has been strangled, and abstain from blood.

Verse 21. For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues.

That's the conclusion, and that's pretty weird. Am I the only one who thinks it's weird? It's pretty weird. Like, why those four things? Why sexual immorality?

[ 28 : 53 ] Does that sort of mean, well, all of us, I think, here in the room are former, from pagan stock. It's all right to lie. It's all right to kill. It's all right to steal. That's the only one, like, what's going on here with this weird thing?

Like, you know? So here's the two things. First is this. Why did this whole issue matter?

And what is the second weird bit? As I've talked to you about before, but it's, I need to be, I need to remind myself of this, brothers and sisters, and I hope, and I think you probably need to have it reminded to you time and time and time again, the natural way that our mind works about connecting to God or that connecting to anything is real, our natural inclination is that first you try to get your life in order, then you start to get connected with other people whose lives are in order, and then maybe God accepts you.

That's the natural way things work. So, you know, maybe you've stopped coming to church, and maybe you're watching online, you know, because you're really caught up, you're getting drunk all of the time, maybe you're watching lots and lots of pornography, you're doing a couple of other naughty things, and so you think, I can't come to church.

So what do you decide to do? You decide, well, you know, finally you come to, you hit some type of bottom, and you say to yourself, I'm going to stop drinking, I'm going to disconnect from the internet, and I start to go for a bit of walk and get some exercise.

[ 30 : 31 ] And after you've done that, you think, okay, now I can come and be with other people who are doing the same thing. And then after you do that, you think, okay, well, now maybe God will accept me.

And you can fill in the blanks in different ways. It could be, you know, whatever it would be for Hinduism or Buddhism or different forms of Christianity, but that's the way just our natural mind works.

That's just the way the world works. And the gospel is completely and utterly upside down, back to front, and inside out. The message of the Bible is that will never work in 100, 100, 100 billion years. You're completely fooling yourself if you ever think that that's actually going to work with anything like a God who's real, who really is goodness himself, beauty himself, justice himself, truth himself. To think that you're going to be able to do that is you're just fooling and deluding yourselves. And so the Bible says something that goes completely and utterly against the grain of how we naturally think about these things.

[ 31 : 35 ] It proclaims, Peter proclaims, none of that's ever going to work. I'm going to tell you something completely and utterly shattering. God did everything to make you right with himself, and you just come with empty hands, and you lay your down and surrender yourself to him, and accept what he has done for you, and he makes you completely and utterly, perfectly right with himself.

And you receive it just by trusting in him in repentance. And out of that, you connect with other people. And out of that, you get better.

It's a complete opposite direction. That's what grace is. So you see, what these people wanted to do, the Judaizers it's called, they wanted to actually make Christianity, unwillingly, they wanted to make Christianity the way that the normal, natural mind works.

And they wanted to say, listen, if you're going to route to reach pagans, they've got to take on some of these practices around food. And then after they've taken on some practices around food, they've got to get circumcised.

And then they can fit in with the congregation, and then God will accept them. And Peter says, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That is not what the Bible teaches. It's not what Jesus teaches. It's not what we've seen the Holy Spirit do.

[ 32 : 52 ] That's completely wrong. You're leading them. You, in fact, the well-intentioned, are leading them down a way that leads to nothing. We need to understand. And we need to be reminded all of the time, no, everything that had to be done to make me right with God has been done by God himself on my behalf.

Because he, it's his unmerited kindness, unmerited because I do not deserve it. It's my, God, I don't deserve God's kindness. I'm shocked by his kindness.

I'm actually probably in most of my moments would say, God, I would never do this for me. How can you do it for me?

And that's why this issue matters. But what about these other four weird things? Okay, here, I'm going to give you a disclaimer. If you go and look at most major conservative, orthodox commentaries on this issue, they will tell you it means these are rules set up for table fellowship between pagans and Jews.

And I think with all due respect, I'm just going to let you know that if you go and tell your pastor about it, he'll say, well, George is wrong. Go read, go read Stott on this. Go read this guy.

[ 34 : 10 ] Go read this guy. Go read this guy. Go read this guy. They all say, George, that it's all about table fellowship. And when George says it's not, George is just wrong. I need to know that I'm taking an extreme minority view.

I think it has nothing to do with table fellowship. I think it has to do with how do you de-paganize pagans? Why do I not think it has anything to do with table fellowship?

I'm going to maybe write a little thing for the webpage about this if you're really interested. A couple of reasons. One is I don't think it fits with the context, which is the main reason. Other thing is I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood.

I really did. From 5.5 to 14.5, I grew up in a neighborhood which was 96% Jewish. And most of them were relatively secular Jews. And they don't give a hoot about any of these four requirements. And I've also been to Israel three times.

And I've seen lots and lots of ultra-Orthodox people. And none of the ultra-Orthodox would accept these. So it has nothing to do with Jewish people. But what it has to do with is that this letter is in between the first missionary journey and the second missionary journey.

[ 35 : 13 ] And at the end of the first missionary journey, we had this story that we talked about. I think it was last week. Of Peter and Paul, of Barnabas and Paul, and they're preaching, and a pagan becomes a Christian in a completely, utterly pagan background.

And yet, at the same time, the whole crowd, probably others had become Christians, but then they want to sacrifice animals to them. And they realize that paganism is very, very deep, very extensive. It's woven into the fabric of how they think. And people can come to a faith in Jesus, but now you need to de-paganize them. And Paul gave a bit of an argument for about how you would do that at the end of chapter 14, but this is now another part of it.

Now, I'm watching my time. If you're watching this online or if you're here as a guest, everybody outside the Christian faith knows that Christians have different views on sexual knowing in the world than the average Canadian does.

And I have no particular bee in my bonnet about it, but the text here is talking, when it says sexual immorality, it's that sin. What Christians believe is that God designed human beings to have sexual knowing, but sexual knowing is to be limited to a biological male married to a biological female.

[ 36 : 28 ] And outside of that marriage, people are to practice abstinence. And anything that departs from that then, therefore, is wrong. So that's just, but that's not, I mean, average Canadian thinks we're horrible people, but it doesn't surprise, shouldn't surprise an average Canadian to hear that that's the case.

And by the way, I think the Christian position is unbelievably wise and healthy and whole, and it's a perennial thing. But here's what's going on in these four things.

In the ancient world, the very typical way that men would worship would be to sleep with prostitutes, male or female.

And in the ancient world, often blood played a very significant role. You would be marked with blood or covered with blood as part of a blessing or a curse.

You would drink blood as a way to connect yourself with the powers of nature and with success.

The sacrificing to idols would also involve often meat that was connected to it.

[ 37 : 43 ] And you'd get the blood on you or often you would consume it by having the animal die without any blood being shed and then you'd cut the animal open and you'd eat the meat with the blood and it's all about getting the power of the blood.

And I think what they did is they said, we're going to give you these four simple things. We need to de-paganize you and it's going to involve taking on new habits and stopping old ones.

This is how it fits in with traditions. And they don't talk about it but if you go through and you read the rest of the book of Acts and you read the rest of the Bible, it's very obvious that what the habits are that you have to take on to grow as a Christian.

You need to hear the apostles' teaching in the scriptures. You need to be praying. You need to be having the communion together. You need to be financially generous. You need to be sharing the gospel.

You need to be doing these things. These are the positive things that you do to grow. But you also have things that you need to put away because habits and rituals like that form you. They form you into a particular type of person.

[ 38 : 42 ] They form your understanding of the world. They form your identity. You don't just learn these things by ideas but by practices. That's why somebody like Ross, probably if you asked him afterwards, what they do in the military is they don't just give you a whole pile of ideas.

They teach you how to make your bed. They teach you how to salute. They teach you how to march. They teach you a whole pile of other things because that's how human beings are formed. They'll give you a lecture and they form you at the same time. That's just what human beings are looking for.

And here's where this is really important because, you know, friends, if you're outside the church and you want to have a tradition and a habit and a rhythm that's real, that's beautiful and that's deep and that's ancient and that's connected to reality, well, good grief, Christianity is all about Jesus' real defeat of death and revealing what the real world is and so you should want to get the habits and the rituals and the rhythms which he has taught.

Communion, scripture, worship, community, all of those things and you can't just, you know, it's like breathing. You don't just breathe in, you have to breathe out and it's like in marriage, if you're going to have indissolubility, you embrace your wife and you reject all others and it's the same thing then, if you're going to deconstruct paganism, you not only have to teach people these new habits that are going to form them and give them an identity, but you have to break them from habits that connect them to their old worldview and form them in those old ways and so that's what they've said.

If you're doing anything at all that involves sacrifice to idols, you don't have anything to do with it. Anything to do with the blood, in either way, you don't have anything to do with it. Any type of worship that's going to involve sleeping with a prostitute, whether male or female, you have nothing to do with it.

[ 40 : 17 ] An analogy would be like this. So, one of the people that I share the gospel with at the coffee house in the gay village and is completely and utterly familiar with and just formed by the entire pride world and they become a Christian and we would all rejoice and we would start to tell them, well, here's how you read the Bible, here's how you sing, here's how you, you know, you come for communion, do all of those things, but you're going to have to maybe, that's not going to be sufficient.

There's some things they need to reject. Here's four things. You can't go to pride parades anymore. You shouldn't go to them. You shouldn't go to the pre- or post-parties and meals of pride events.

You can't, you have to stop wearing pride buttons and having pride flags in your house. And you have to say that your pronoun is your biological sex and you're going to stop wearing pronoun pins, period.

I probably shocked the whole room. But how else do you help to break them from a whole worldview, a whole organizing world?

Well, you want to do the positive things. You read your Bible, come to church, receive communion, give to the spread of the gospel and the support of the church and the relief of the poor.

[ 41 : 50 ] You give financially, generously to, you know, you do, there's these habits that you need that will form you into the Christian faith and you can't just say yes to them without saying no to other things and that's what is going on in this particular thing.

How do you turn a pagan into a Christian? Things you take on, things you stop.

But what makes you a Christian is hearing about Jesus. I knew very little theology when I became a Christian. I didn't know all, you know what, I, some people do.

I know a guy who's now a professor of philosophy and he had to go through a whole pile of apologetic stuff before he became a Christian. For me, it was just a sense of the incompleteness of my life and a fullness which I needed and I gave my life to Christ.

Christ. And then the formation comes afterwards. I invite you to stand. Bow our heads in prayer.

[ 43 : 01 ] Father, we thank you that everything that had to be done to make us right with you was done by you, that we receive that by faith and that out of that truth flows our worship together, our disciplines, the changes that you help us to make in our lives, you know, in terms of being more financially responsible and more disciplined in our time and having rhythms that come from you.

And Father, we ask that you help us to accept that, to grow into that, to understand that it's not just us, Father, learning things in our head, although that's really, really, really important, but developing habits and rhythms and disciplines and traditions and ways of being that also form us into that, Father.

And we ask that you help us to embrace these things and to turn away from those habits and traditions and rhythms which take us away from you, form us into something different.

Father, we're so glad that you have saved us by Jesus and we ask that you fan in the flame within us an ever deeper hunger and longing and yearning to truly be yours and to see ourselves and see others from the lens of your grace, what you have done for us so freely and completely and thoroughly in Jesus.

Help us, Father, to be so rooted in that and live out of that and be shaped by that that day by day we are being fit to spend eternity with you. And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

[ 44 : 35 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.