

# The 4 - do well to avoid or abstain from - actions in Acts 15

As I was reading **Acts 15**, where Paul and Barnabas go to the **Jerusalem Council** to address whether Gentile believers must be circumcised, I was struck by the judgment and the letter that followed:

## **Acts 15:28–29**

*“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 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.”*

These four requirements are not random—they directly reflect commands found in **Leviticus 17 and 18**:

- **Leviticus 17:7** – *“They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols...”*
- **Leviticus 17:12–13** – *“The life of every creature is its blood... you must not eat the blood... Cover it with earth.”*

Reading through **Leviticus 18**, I noticed the strong moral language used around **unlawful sexual relations**, which compelled me to explore a few key words:

- **Dishonor**
- **Wickedness**
- **Detestable**
- **Perversion**

These terms reflect God's serious view of moral boundaries—not just for Israel, but for all people. They also echo the moral foundation behind the prohibitions given to Gentile believers in Acts 15.

Let's examine each word:

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## 1. Dishonor

- **Meaning:** A loss of respect or dignity; to shame or degrade someone.
  - **In Leviticus 18:** Refers to bringing **shame upon a relative** by violating sexual boundaries (e.g., uncovering a relative's nakedness).
  - **Hebrew Root:** Often from "**ḥāsāh**" or related terms meaning **to shame or expose**.
  - **Implication:** Focuses on **relational and familial shame**, damaging the integrity of the family unit.
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## 2. Wickedness

- **Meaning:** Moral evil or depravity; deliberate wrongdoing.
  - **In Leviticus 18:** Used to condemn actions **contrary to God's moral law**, such as adultery or child sacrifice.
  - **Hebrew: "Rish'āh"** (רִשָּׁעָה) — guilt, injustice, moral corruption.
  - **Implication:** A broad term for **ethically evil** acts that defy God's holiness.
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## 3. Detestable

- **Meaning:** Abhorrent, offensive, revolting—especially to God.
  - **In Leviticus 18:** Describes acts that are **ceremonially or morally repugnant** (e.g., same-sex relations, bestiality).
  - **Hebrew: "To'evah"** (תּוֹעֵבָה) — commonly translated as **abomination**.
  - **Implication:** Highlights actions deeply offensive to God's nature—frequently associated with **idolatry and sexual sin**.
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# 4. Perversion

- **Meaning:** A distortion or corruption of what is right or natural.
- **In Leviticus 18:** Describes acts that **violate moral and natural order**—used in the context of bestiality, for example.
- **Hebrew: "Tevel"** (תֵּבֵל) — meaning **confusion or disorder**.
- **Implication:** Suggests a **twisting of God’s design**, especially regarding sexuality.

## Summary Table

Term	Focus/Meaning	Hebrew Term	Contextual Use
Dishonor	Shame, violation of dignity	Varies	Familial boundaries, shame
Wickedness	Moral corruption, evil	רִשְׁעָה (rish‘āh)	General immorality
Detestable	Abhorrent to God, ceremonially vile	תּוֹעֵבָה (to‘evah)	Offenses deeply repugnant to God

Term	Focus/Meaning	Hebrew Term	Contextual Use
Perversion	Twisting of moral/natural order	תִּבְלָה (tevel)	Moral confusion or disordered acts

# Connection to Acts 15

In Acts 15, early church leaders (James, Peter, Paul) met to decide if **Gentile believers** must follow the Law of Moses, especially circumcision. The resulting letter emphasized four commands:

*"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality."*  
**(Acts 15:28–29)**

These instructions correlate closely with **Leviticus 17–18**:

Acts 15 Instruction	Leviticus Context	Shared Themes
Sexual immorality	Leviticus 18	Dishonor, Wickedness, Detestable, Perversion

Acts 15 Instruction	Leviticus Context	Shared Themes
Food sacrificed to idols	Leviticus 17:7	<b>Detestable, Idolatry</b>
Blood / strangled animals	Leviticus 17	<b>Sanctity of life, Purity</b>

The Greek word for “sexual immorality” in Acts 15:20 is **πορνεία (porneia)**, which in Jewish usage refers specifically to the kinds of forbidden sexual acts listed in **Leviticus 18**, not just generic fornication.

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## ◆ Why This Matters

The Jerusalem Council **did not impose the full Mosaic Law** but upheld essential **moral teachings rooted in creation**, not just in Israel’s covenant. These included:

- Respect for God’s design for sex and family (Leviticus 18)
- Rejection of idolatry and its practices
- Reverence for life, symbolized in blood

These were **universal moral expectations** for all people—not merely ceremonial laws for Israel.

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# Universal Moral Foundations in Acts 15:29

*“You are to abstain from:*

*① Food sacrificed to idols,*

*② Blood,*

*③ Meat of strangled animals,*

*④ Sexual immorality.”*


**(Acts 15:29)**

Let's examine why each command is **morally universal**, not just culturally Jewish:

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## ◆ ① **Idolatry — Violates the Creator-creature relationship**


- **Genesis 1:26–27** – Humans are made in God's image to reflect and worship Him.
- **Romans 1:18–25** – Idolatry is condemned universally as a rejection of truth for a lie.
- **Exodus 20:3–5** – The first commandments are moral, not merely ceremonial.
- **1 Corinthians 10:19–22** – Idol sacrifices are demonic; believers must not participate.

 **Why it's universal:** Worship is a core aspect of being human. Replacing the Creator with idols defies our created purpose.

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## ◆ ② **Blood** — *Represents the sanctity of life*

- **Genesis 9:4–6** – God forbids eating blood; this command is given to **Noah**, the ancestor of all nations.
- **Leviticus 17:10–14** – Blood is sacred; it represents life and is reserved for atonement.
- **1 Samuel 14:31–34** – Saul's troops sin by eating blood; Saul intervenes immediately.
- **Ezekiel 33:25–26** – Eating blood is condemned alongside murder and idolatry.

 **Why it's universal:** Rooted in the **Noahic covenant**; not just for Israel. Blood signifies life, and disrespecting it is a moral offense.


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## ◆ ③ **Strangled Animals** — *Preserves life's sanctity and avoids*




# ***pagan association***

- **Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:13** – The life is in the blood; animals must be properly bled.
- **Deuteronomy 12:23–25** – Emphasizes that eating blood is forbidden because life belongs to God.

 **Why it's universal:** Respect for life and separation from paganism. Eating strangled animals (with blood still in them) was associated with **pagan and occult rituals**.

Pagan rites often involved consuming blood for **spiritual power, longevity, or ecstasy**, linking it with:

- **Witchcraft and demon worship** (Psalm 106:37–38)
- **Detestable practices** (Deuteronomy 18:9–12)
- **Sacrificing life for power**

 **Spiritual warning:** Seeking power through blood or suffering aligns with demonic perversion—not God's design.

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 **④ Sexual Immorality (Porneia)**  
**— Corrupts God's design for relationships**

- **Genesis 2:24** – Marriage is designed by God: one man, one woman.
- **Leviticus 18** – Prohibits incest, adultery, same-sex relations, bestiality—acts called **perverse, detestable, and wicked**.
- **Romans 1:24–27** – Even Gentiles, without the Law, are accountable for abandoning natural relations.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3–6** – Calls believers to avoid sexual immorality as part of sanctification.



**Why it's universal:** These boundaries predate the Law of Moses and are embedded in **creation and conscience** (Romans 2:14–15).

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## **Summary Table: Why These Four Are Universal**

<b>Command</b>	<b>Moral Principle</b>	<b>Rooted In</b>
Abstain from idols	Worship the one true God	Genesis 1, Exodus 20, Romans 1
Abstain from blood	Respect the sanctity of life	Genesis 9, Leviticus 17
Abstain from strangled meat	Avoid cruelty, uphold life	Leviticus 17, Genesis 9

Command	Moral Principle	Rooted In
Abstain from sexual immorality	Preserve moral purity and family	Genesis 2, Leviticus 18, 1 Thess. 4

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## Conclusion: *A Moral Minimum*

The Acts 15 letter was not about **lowering** God's standards—it clarified which parts of the Law were **universal moral truths** and which were **ceremonial or covenantal**.

These four commands represent a **moral minimum**—a **starting point** for Gentile discipleship, rooted in creation, conscience, and the Noahic covenant.

*“You will do well to avoid these things.”* (Acts 15:29)

This isn't legalism. It's **wisdom, obedience**, and a call to **unity and holiness** in Christ's church.