

HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN LEGALISM

We are currently studying Paul's closing remarks to the churches of South Galatia (Gal.6:11-18). In our lesson text, there are two groups in opposition to one another in the church. "Those who" (party of legalism theology) are contrasted to "You" (party of grace theology).

- Legalist - Self-glory:
 - **"Those who desire (thelo/ p.a.ind.3pl) to make a good showing in the flesh, (these/ houtos) try to compel (anagkazo/ p.a.ind.3pl) you to be circumcised,**
- Legalist – Motivation:
 - **Simply that (monos hina +subj) [purpose] they may not be persecuted (me dioko/ p.p.subj) for the cross of Christ [Jesus]."** (Gal.6:12)
- Legalist - Motivation:
 - **"For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but (alla/ adversative) they desire (thelo/ p.a.ind.3pl) to have you circumcised,**
- Legalist - Self-glory:
 - **That (hina +sub) [purpose] they may boast (kauchomai/ a.m.subj) in your flesh."** (Gal.6:13)

By the time of Paul delivered the contribution to the persecuted Jewish believers, the legalist party within the Jerusalem Church had grown into what we would call a Christian denomination today. (1 Cor.16:1).

Listen to the legalist party conversation with to Paul:

(Acts 21:20-21) "You see, brother, **how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.**"

This lesson will study <u>five aspects</u> of the History of Christian Legalism in the church.

1. **Since the Jewish Pentecost of Acts Ch. 2 (30 AD), there has been about 30 years for Pharisaical legalism to develop into a system of a denominational theology within the Jerusalem Church (Acts 21/ 60 AD).**

By the time of the first church conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15) (50 AD), there were a large number of legalists in the Jerusalem Church known as the Judaizers. The pastor was James (Acts 15:13; Gal.2:9). All the Disciples of Jesus were members of this church (Acts 1-9; Gal.2).

Today many legalistic churches claim they are the First Church, denominationally or geographically. Much like the Jerusalem Church of the first century (Acts 15:1, 5) we find them to be a vocal opposition theological group to grace within the church congregations.

2. Peter's experience with the heavenly vision of the sheet of unclean animals that resulted in the grace conversion of the first Gentiles became a problem for the legalistic believer (Acts 10-12).

Peter was criticized by the Judaizers for it (Acts 11:1-3). However, many from this group accepted Peter's gospel message of grace salvation (Acts 11:18).

However, the persecution of the Christian Church became a bigger problem (Acts 7-9). After the conversion and calling of Paul to the Gentiles, this controversy regarding the Grace Gospel and Spirituality would resume (Acts 13-15).

3. By the time of Paul's return from his 1st Missionary Evangelistic Tour (MET), to the church conference (Acts 13-15), the Judaizers had become organized into a system of Christian Theology based on the Mosaic Law.

They presented their legalistic doctrinal theology regarding salvation and spirituality at the Jerusalem conference.

- Salvation (Acts 5:1) Gospel plus circumcision in order to be truly saved (Gal.2:21; 3:21-25).
- Spirituality (Acts 15:5) Indwelling Holy Spirit plus keeping law in order to be truly spiritual (Gal.5:13-26).

They based their theology on the Pharisaical teachings of Mosaic Law (Acts 15:5; Matt.15:1-9; 23:1-26).

4. The apostles and elders that came together at the First Church Conference decided in favor of Grace theology of Salvation and Spirituality (Acts 15:6-11, 22-25, 33).

- **NC Church doctrine:** "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are also." (Acts 15:11)
- **NC inclusion:** "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles." (Acts 15:19; Gal.3:26-29)
- **OC burden:** "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials." (Acts 15:28; Matt.23:4)

5. Following the First Church Conference, three theological parties developed with their own theological system of doctrines.

- **Grace theology**
 - Salvation by Grace through Faith in Gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 15:11).
- **Legalism theology**
 - Salvation by accepting the Gospel 'plus' some specific work in order to be saved (Acts 15:1, 5) or to be Spiritual.
- **Compromised theology (Prevalent in the church today)**
 - Salvation by Grace through Faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ - but you must 'be doing' some specific works (production / fruit) to maintain your salvation - "or you never were saved to start with" dogma. (Acts 15:19-21; 21:21-26; Gal.2:11-21). [Was His 'Work' not enough?]

We must never compromise Grace Theology with Legalistic Theology "to live in harmony" (2 Cor.6:14-18). Doing so jeopardizes the "Spiritual Freedom" that Christ brought on the cross to all who believe the gospel of Grace Salvation. (Gal.5:1, 13; 1 Cor.15:3-4; Rom.1:16; Eph.2:8-9).