

# **The Baptismal Regeneration / Believer's Baptism Debate**

A theological and historical overview of the most contested  
subject of the church age.

**Dr. J.O. Hosler**

© 1999 by J.O. Hosler. All rights reserved.

ISBN 0-7414-0590-3.

Published by Infinity Publishing.com

Permission granted to print for personal use or for use  
of excerpts for research and presentations, but full text  
reproduction requires written permission from the  
author.

## Chapter One

### The *Ritual-Equals-Reality* Controversy In The Apostolic Church

The connection between the idea that Old Testament ritual creates or imparts eternal salvation and the idea that New Testament ritual (sacramentalism) does the same is not immediately obvious. A background study of this misconception in the NT regarding OT ritual is essential in approaching the apostolic controversy with comprehension.

Those who were in error regarding circumcision and other Jewish customs would persecute from without while others would come into the New Testament church and insist that standard orthodoxy should require the equivocation of ritual and reality. Jesus told the disciples that they would come; the Apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders that they would come; they came claiming apostolic authority; the Ephesian church put them on trial and found them to be liars (cf. Rev. 2:2). Also:

(Matt. 10:16-18) Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

(Luke 10:3) Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.

(John 10:12) But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

(Matthew 7:15) Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

(Philippians 3:2) Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

(Acts 20:29) For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

The seventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel is Christ's conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. The section begins with an admonition to *Judge not that ye be not judged*" (Matt.. 7:1). The Pharisees were judging Christ Himself for not establishing the political kingdom they expected and for not promoting the kind of ceremonial righteousness that they were professing.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> One of the earliest objectives of the scribes was to catalog the contents of the written Torah (tora se-biktab). They itemized 613 commandments, 248 positive, 365 negative. Their next task was to supplement these with traditions that would prevent the violation of the commandments by accident or by ignorance. One example is the thirty-nine principal species of prohibited acts on the Sabbath. The commandments were further applied by analogy to situations not directly covered by the Torah. All these developments together with thirty-one customs of "immemorial usage" formed the "oral law"

Without listing all of the errors of the Pharisees, we should note two of the most devastating in terms of understanding entrance into everlasting life. The first error was in their interpretation of the Old Testament. They were not distinguishing between ritual and reality in Jewish ceremonialism, as Paul noted:

Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:24-29).

For the Apostle Paul, the only circumcision that could save us was the crucifixion of Christ as he noted:

For “the circumcision of Christ” see (Colossians 2:10, 11): And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (Gal. 6:13-15).

The signs, which were designed by God to point to the coming Messiah as the only true object of faith, were made the objects of faith themselves, thus pointing away from the Messiah, As Paul wrote:

(Galatians 5:1, 2) Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

The second deadly error was that of developing extra-biblical traditions; proclaiming them to be revelational mandates from God and calling them contingencies for obtaining eternal life. Jesus would tell them that this is the academic equivalent of disbelief in the Word of God altogether and that, even though they were reciting pious words of praise, their worship would be in vain:

Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?... Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none

---

(tora se-be-al peh). This was the *tradition of the elders* mentioned in Christ’s day. The Pharisees would argue that the ‘tradition of the elders’ (Mk. 7:3) came from Moses on Sinai.

effect by your tradition... But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:3b, 6b, 9).

They were leading naive victims to believe that they were drawing nigh to God by participating in great worship services when in reality their hearts were far from Him. True worship begins with possessing eternal life on Christ's terms of grace and mercy: as Scripture states:

(Phillipians 3:1-3) "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

(Hebrews 12:28) "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

The premise upon which the Pharisees judged others to be void of eternal life is the same that they will deceptively use to judge themselves as worthy when they someday stand before God. They will plead that they had spoken forth what they believed was the "word of God", and they will think that they had exorcised demons and had performed a life of good works. Not only will Jesus proclaim their worship to have been in vain and their belief in the "word of God" to have been of none effect, He will affirm that they will not enter into eternal life because He never knew them in the first place:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"(Matt. 7:21-23)<sup>3</sup>

Jesus wanted us to know that even acts of worship, enmity against demons and "good" works are works of iniquity if one is not in possession of eternal life on God's terms.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Note: "The will of My Father" does not refer to righteous deeds but to understanding and accepting God's terms of eternal life...(vss. 7, 8) "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." That which is to be received and opened in this discussion is eternal life. And again: (vss. 13, 14) "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

<sup>4</sup> Satan is always pleased to profess enmity against his own forces if by so doing he can point people away from the saving knowledge of Christ— (II Corinthians 11:13-15) "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." Satan is also willing to give Christ credit for satanic miracles if it will blind people to the knowledge of salvation— (II Thessalonians 2:9-12) "*Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying

Jesus is telling His listeners to judge not nor to consider themselves qualified to make distinctions using themselves as the measurement standard—

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you (Matthew 7:5, 6).

It is important to observe that after admonishing the Pharisees to refrain from judging, Jesus then exhorts the true believer to judge, or to distinguish, true messengers from those who attribute reality to mere ritual. Why is the *judge not* verse almost always used in commanding Christians to be undiscerning regarding false gospels? Discernment necessitates godly judgment because the false teachers are to be openly identified, as Christ said: *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves* (Matthew 7:15).

The unregenerate sinner cannot deduce a saving knowledge of Christ from a false gospel. Jesus taught that the disciple could identify a wolf in sheep's clothing by his bad fruit, which is a false gospel:

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matthew 7:16-20).

This is the precise kind of judgment that Christ commended the Ephesian church for exercising when He said:

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars (Revelation 2:2).

This is the same judgment that Paul was trying to teach the Corinthians when he wrote:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness... (II Corinthians 11:13-15).<sup>5</sup>

Having entered the visible church, these “Judaizers” immediately went to work becoming a powerful and intimidating force within. They even practiced bigotry against other Jews who held to different cultural preferences. In the early days of the Jerusalem church the membership was primarily Jewish and no doubt many Jewish proselytes. The

---

wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

<sup>5</sup> This is not an ungodly form of judgment but rather a true mark of spirituality— (I Corinthians 2:15) “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things.” (cf. Hebrews 5:14).

Grecian Jews were probably of the Diaspora who had moved to Israel from the provinces.<sup>6</sup> They had been Hellenized in many of their cultural preferences. Some of them might have been Gentile proselytes to Judaism who later became Christians as well. Most of the Grecians could not speak Aramaic, which was the native tongue of the Jews living in Israel. They were bilingual, speaking their native tongues as well as Greek (cf. Acts 2:5-11). The native Hebraic Jews could speak both Aramaic and Greek. The Jewish community outside the walls of the church considered the Grecian Jews to be a lower class of citizen.

There may also have been a "Bible version" debate in that the Grecians preferred the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament while the Palestinian Jews used the Hebrew translation. Christ and the apostles quoted both translations as the "Word of God."<sup>7</sup> This urban social and political problem spilled over into the church as the Hebraic Jewish converts gained executive control over the administration of the benevolent fund for widows. It was decided that funds would be withheld from the Christian widows of Hellenistic Jews and allocated only to the Christian widows of Palestinian Jews. This created tension in the church necessitating the election of the first board of deacons in Church history. Luke wrote:

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business (Acts 6:1-3).

Even though the Judaizers made circumcision and the Law of Moses essentials in the plan of salvation, they had to be doctrinally orthodox in several areas in order to become baptized members of the local church at Jerusalem. They had to have professed Christ to be the Messiah and to have expressed belief in the death, burial and resurrection. Again, Luke wrote:

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:41, 42).<sup>8</sup>

It was an eternal life and death question and one of great consequence. Is faith in the death of Christ on the cross for salvation, plus circumcision, plus works, a saving Gospel? Is faith in Christ only the beginning (or only a down payment) of our

---

<sup>6</sup> The term *diaspora* means *dispersion* and denotes either Jews scattered in the non-Jewish world (as in Jn. 7:35; 1 Pet. 1:1) or the places in which they reside (as in Jas. 1:1; Judith 5:19). This would also include proselyte Jews.

<sup>7</sup> Obviously the Apostles did not consider variation between text types to be a corruption as long as doctrine and historical record remained unaltered.

<sup>8</sup> Note the doctrinal content of Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost. To become numbered with the 3000 baptized that day one had to profess a change of mind about the things of which Peter spoke.

salvation? Or, are we to look to Jesus as the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2)?<sup>9</sup>

In many modern ecumenical mass crusades, all who can profess what “they of the circumcision” professed are considered Christian brothers even though they believe that eternal life is not a personal possession until baptism, communion, church membership, or endurance in personal holiness transpires. Understanding the “circumcision” doctrine will enable one to know whether Christ plus anything else can be a saving object of faith. The writer of Hebrews said:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Can we come to Christ and say: *Lord, I only need you to start it and I will finish it*, and then walk away truly born again? Make no mistake, Christians have races to run,

battles to fight, and courses to finish, but their personal eternal salvation is not one of them.<sup>10</sup> Paul had to challenge his own converts, who later became harnessed to a gospel that cannot save, when he asked the question:

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? (Galatians 3:2, 3).

Thus, we find in the earliest church a corrupting element insisting that obedience to law and ritual are essentials of salvation. The Apostle Peter had to deal with “they of the circumcision” after converting the Gentile house of Cornelius. God had to show Peter that they were saved independently of any ritual when He baptized them in the Holy Ghost before ritual water baptism was ever mentioned. This is how Peter could say:

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word (Acts 10:43, 44).

---

<sup>9</sup> Trypho asked Justin Martyr if keeping the Mosaic Law after conversion to Christianity will contribute to salvation: “ ‘But if some, even now, wish to live in the observance of the institutions given by Moses, and yet believe in this Jesus who was crucified, recognizing Him to be the Christ of God, and that it is given to him to be absolute Judge of all, and that His is the everlasting kingdom, can they also be saved?’ he inquired of me. And I replied, ‘Let us consider that also together, whether one may now observe all the Mosaic institutions.’ And He answered, ‘No. For we know that, as you said, it is not possible either anywhere to sacrifice the lamb of the Passover, or to offer the goats ordered for the fast; or, in short, [to present] all the other offerings.’” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Rev. Alexander Roberts, D. D. And James Donaldson, LL.D., Editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), Vol. 1, p 217.

<sup>10</sup> The Apostle Paul said: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith” (II Timothy 4:7) but his salvation was kept by the finished work of Christ— (I Peter 1:3-5) “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” And Again: (John 17:11) “...Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*.”

When he reported this incident to the Jerusalem church, the Apostle Peter described the conversion of Cornelius' household as the baptism of the Spirit prophesied by Christ Himself:

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost (Acts 11: 15, 16).

This was supposed to have convinced "they of the circumcision" that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved by belief in Christ alone, as Luke wrote:

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:45).

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).

Only after the clear baptism of the Holy Spirit did Peter even mention ritual as he asked the question: *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?* (Acts 10:46b-47). It became incumbent upon Peter to defend the fact that this was not a separate Gospel but that Jews and Gentiles were to be saved through faith alone apart from ritual:

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:17).

Just when it would seem that the point was made and accepted in the tenth and eleventh chapters of Acts we find that the Judaizers were only licking their wounds and innovating in order to contend another day. That day came when Paul and Barnabas returned to the church of Antioch from their first missionary journey and began to report the conversion of uncircumcised Gentiles—

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

Then suddenly there arose the self-appointed committee of Judaizers from the Jerusalem church to contend that none of the aforesaid converts were really saved unless they became circumcised. Luke records:

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved (Acts 15:1).

Paul and Barnabas immediately recoiled, springing forth into a great dispute with these men over the true nature of the Gospel. It was then decided that an open debate on the subject should transpire on the Judaizers' home turf at Jerusalem in a plenary session of the apostles and elders. Again Luke records:

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and

certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question (Acts 15:2).

Immediately upon arrival, the Jerusalem assembly did indeed call the first historic church council. Paul delivered the same report that he had given in Antioch: that the uncircumcised Gentiles had been converted to Christianity:

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them (Acts 15:4).

Again, the Judaizers, who were “believing Pharisees”, interrupted with the argument that circumcision was necessary. However, this time they innovated by adding the point that the Mosaic Law was part of the plan of salvation as well.

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5).

The first remonstrance speech of the council was given by Peter who was no doubt wondering why the issue had not been settled in the eleventh chapter of Acts when he reported the conversion of the household of Cornelius as follows:

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe (Acts 15:7).

Peter again rehearsed how that the Gentiles had received the Gospel from him and believed, no doubt remembering his own words at the house of Cornelius: *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins* (Acts 10:43). This was his second rehearsal of this event, the first taking place in the same church when Peter said:

And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them... (Acts 11:2-4).

God Himself had verified this by giving them the same baptism of the Holy Spirit that the disciples received on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>11</sup> Peter explained, therefore, that whether one is a circumcised Jew or an uncircumcised Gentile his heart can only be purified by faith in Christ apart from ritual— *And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith* (Acts 15:9).

Peter knew that no one had ever kept the Law of Moses, especially those who were making the argument that day. He therefore wanted to know why the Judaizers were asking the Gentile disciples to do something that neither themselves nor the Old Testament fathers were able to do.

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15:10).

---

<sup>11</sup> Compare 15:8 with 11:16.

Peter then concluded his argument by saying in effect: “not only do the Gentiles not have to get saved your way but you Jews have to get saved their way if you wish to live forever”—*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they* (Acts 15:11). The Apostle Paul confirmed this same affirmation when he wrote to the Romans:

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith (Romans 3:28-30).

Their Jewish hearts must be purified by faith apart from the Mosaic Law and circumcision or else remain unpurified altogether. Peter would later take the position that these Judaizers were false prophets. Although they professed Christ to be the Messiah who died on the cross, they were denying Him by their gospel of circumcision and law, as Peter stated:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (II Peter 2:1, 2).

Peter's words silenced the multitude at the Jerusalem Council so that Paul and Barnabas could be called upon to give their report. The two missionaries gave a resume of miracles and wonders that God had granted to confirm the conversion of the Gentiles apart from circumcision:

Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them (Acts 15:12).

Apostolic miracles were the final and ultimate confirmation in the First Century, even as the writer of Hebrews admitted when he said:

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Hebrews 2:3, 4).

Finally, the Apostle James stepped up to bat for the remonstrators. He reminded them for the third time how that Peter had preached the gospel to the Gentiles from the Old Testament prophets (Acts 10:43)<sup>12</sup> and then proceeded to defend Peter's testimony from an Old Testament passage.

The next few statements from James could cause the average Christian to toss his hands in confusion until he reminds himself to consider the audience being addressed. It

---

<sup>12</sup> Note the words of Jesus: “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

was a Jewish audience and James was able to assume a prior knowledge on the part of his listeners that the typical Christian of today would not normally have, as Luke stated:

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:13-18).

James' objective is to prove that God intended Gentiles to be saved without circumcision and this he does by quoting Amos 9:11, 12. He is not saying that the

New Testament church is the fulfillment of this prophecy.<sup>13</sup> But he is saying unequivocally

that God has made it clear in the Old Testament that He has a love for Gentiles and desires to save them apart from circumcision. The word "prophets" is plural telling us that James is using his interpretation of the passage in Amos as representative of all the prophets just as Peter stated in Acts 10:43.

James' quotation of the Amos passage does not match the Greek Septuagint nor the Hebrew text. He is therefore quoting from a different text type or else paraphrasing under Divine inspiration. He may have done this to avoid being sidetracked into a Bible version debate between the Hellenists and the Hebraic Jews.

Regardless of James' reason for his variable translation, there were now four building blocks upon which to demonstrate that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved and join the church: First, the testimonies of Paul and Barnabas; second, the testimony of Simon Peter; third, the testimony of signs and miracles; and fourth, the testimony of all

---

<sup>13</sup> The New Testament church was a mystery in that it was a New Testament truth not revealed in the Old Testament, as Paul noted: (Romans 16:25, 26) "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." Also (Ephesians 3:5, 6) "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." Also (Colossians 1:24-27) "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"

the Old Testament prophets. Next, the Apostle James offered his personal judgment (*krino*) on the whole matter: “let us not annoy (*parenochlein*) the Gentile converts”—*Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are*

*turned to God* (Acts 15:9).

Additionally, James recommended the drafting of a letter to Gentiles telling them to honor three commandments of Mosaic ceremonial law by abstaining from: food polluted by idols (cf. Acts 21:25 and I Corinthians 8-10), sexual immorality (Leviticus 18:6-20), and the meat of strangled animals and blood (Leviticus 17:10-14). Since we know that the New Testament Church is in no way under the Mosaic ceremonial law, we might conclude that these are moral instructions and not ceremonial commandments to the Gentiles.<sup>14</sup> The point is that God expects converted Gentiles to be gospel witnesses to unconverted Jews and observing these prohibitions will create such opportunities, as James stated: *For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day* (Acts 15:21). Obeying these three prohibitions would be an act of love and mercy upon the Gentile converts, even as Paul exhorted the Romans, saying:

For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy (Rom. 11:30, 31).

There is a great difference between a Judaizer attempting to compel a Gentile to be circumcised and a Gentile Christian being circumcised as an act of love in overcoming a barrier against witnessing to Jews. When Paul returned to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus the Judaizers attempted to compel Titus to be circumcised.<sup>15</sup> Paul stated that he would not compromise with them even for an hour for he knew that no less than the truth of the gospel was at stake: *To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you*” (Gal. 2:5). Paul explained this to the Galatians when he said:

As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (Galatians 6:12-16).

However, because Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father, Paul circumcised him in love to avoid an unnecessary offence while preaching to Jews (cf.

---

<sup>14</sup> If these were commandments rather than moral suggestions they would be a serious violation of the Mosaic Law itself— (Rom. 2:25) “For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.” (Galatians 5:3) “For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.” (James 2:10) “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.”

<sup>15</sup> Of the five reported visits of Paul to Jerusalem, this is probably the famine visit of Acts 21:15-23, 35.

Acts 16:3). In the case with Titus the issue was the gospel itself while Timothy's was a question of not giving offence. Paul distinguished between avoiding offence and submitting to compulsion when he said:

For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*. (I Corinthians 9:19-23).

The judgment of James was in agreement with the Apostles, elders, and the whole church and they sent letters to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia addressed to the Gentile brethren and carried by specially chosen men. The letters greeted the Gentiles as brethren and then made it perfectly clear that those who visited Antioch from the church at Jerusalem were not authorized in any way to impose circumcision and the Mosaic law upon them—

Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment (Acts 15:24).

The letters go on to give an endorsement of Paul and Barnabas by the Apostles, elders and the church and attest to the fact that the appointed carriers of the letters will say the same thing:

It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth (Acts 15:25-27).

In verse 29 the letters of communication spell out the three prohibitions but care is taken not to make these essential to salvation. They stated that if the Gentiles did these things they would “do well” with no indication that they would be saving themselves by doing so.

After what appeared to be a unanimous agreement in the Jerusalem church one would naturally surmise that this problem was resolved for all time. However, everyone seemed to underestimate how intent, perseverant, and intimidating these Judaizers were. They knew they had lost the day and were even willing to break one of the ten commandments by participating in the unanimous vote to send out these letters. But they would never go away, as the Apostle Paul would come to realize in his battle with them that continued to the end of his life—*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand, I have fought a good fight...* (II Tim. 4:6,7a).

The Apostle Paul knew them well. They had already corrupted many of the churches that he had founded. He knew that they claimed to be ministers of Christ—

*Are They ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more... (II Corinthians 11:23a). They claimed apostolic authority— For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ (II Corinthians 11:13). They were Pharisees who professed belief in Jesus Christ and had become baptized members of the visible church— And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:45). They believed that the salvation of Jesus Christ was bestowed or imparted through the ritual of circumcision— But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and command them to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5).*

Consider the occasion in which the Apostle Paul gave his last farewell to the Ephesian elders, just prior to making his final journey toward Jerusalem. As elders they were the first among equals in the church of Ephesus whose task it was to oversee and feed the flock and to stand as guardians of the Gospel truth. Paul had told the Corinthians that they were “stewards of the mysteries of God”—

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the council of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:25-28).

The Ephesians were to be sacred guardians of the purity of the Gospel, as indeed they became when John wrote: *...and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them to be liars (Rev. 2:2).* When Paul commissioned Titus to ordain elders in every city of Crete, one of the chief qualities he was to seek out in such men was the ability to stop the mouths of “they of the circumcision”—

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee...Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake (Titus 1:5,9-11).

Paul was more able to contend with these enemies of the Cross than probably any other defender of the gospel in his day. Yet, even the Apostle knew that they would never go away and, although he covered many subjects in his preaching and teaching, he never dared to drop this one challenge:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

When Judaizers came to Antioch they were so intimidating that they temporarily harnessed Peter to their apostate gospel necessitating an open rebuke from the Apostle Paul—

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision (Galatians 2:11, 12).

This maneuver on Peter's part caused other converted Jews, as well as Barnabas, to separate from the uncircumcised Gentile converts as if they were not really brethren. One cannot do this and still be a representative of the true gospel and Paul knew it full well when he said:

And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all... (Galatians 2:13, 14a).

Paul accused Peter of living like the Gentiles while teaching them by example that they could not be saved unless they lived like the Jews—

...if thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:14b-16).

*They of the Circumcision* were not factoring Christ and the cross out of the Gospel, they were just trying to factor circumcision and the law into the equation. The Apostle Paul affirmed that if the righteousness that saves is through obedience to the Law rather than the imputed righteousness of Christ then the crucifixion was merely an act of suicide— *I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain* (Galatians 2:21).<sup>16</sup> Why would Christ die to save people who could have saved themselves?

Salvation is not by faith plus works but by faith without works—*And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses* (Acts 13:39). Note Romans 3:28—*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.* Note also Paul's words when he exclaims:

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, *saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (Romans 4:5-8).

---

<sup>16</sup> Contrast personal righteousness with the imputed righteousness of Christ... Isa. 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Compare II Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

There is a strong argument that Paul is not speaking of faith without works but only faith without the works of the Law of Moses. In answer to this argument it should be noted that Paul is including Abraham (who was 430 years before the Mosaic Law ) into his equation of faith without works—

*Cometh* this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had* being *yet* uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:9-13).

The Judaizers came into the churches of Galatia and converted Paul's converts to an apostate gospel. It is imperative to point out that there are two categories of *they of the circumcision*: those who are saved and those who never were saved. Both categories profess the same apostate gospel. The difference is that the first group is made up of those who were truly saved by grace and then converted to another gospel. This is exactly what happened temporarily to Peter and Barnabas in (Gal. 2:13,14). In the first chapter of Galatians, Paul contrasts both categories of apostates when he said:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7).

The Apostle Paul had won them to Christ and now they were removed, not from salvation, but from Paul and unto an apostate Gospel. To demonstrate the seriousness of this removal the Apostle pronounces a curse upon himself, any angel, or any man who would preach this other gospel:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed, As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8, 9).

This curse (*anathema*), at least in the case of saved Judaizers, did not mean God's condemnation in Hell. It meant physical condemnation this side of the grave or perhaps even physical death.<sup>17</sup> Paul was speaking to fellow Christians when warning them of the danger of physical damnation if they misused the ordinance of the Lord's table:

---

<sup>17</sup> Note the difference between the salvation of a lost sinner from hell and the salvation of a brother in Christ from physical death—“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body, For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (I Cor. 11:29, 30).

The writer of Hebrews was not speaking of sinners escaping Hell but of Christians failing to escape God's judgment if they neglect the plan of salvation. Notice the word "we" as he writes:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation (Hebrews 2:1-3a).

In addition to possible physical judgment from God, the true believer who becomes harnessed to a false gospel will forfeit rewards upon entering eternal life, even as Paul warned the Colossians when he said:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind (Colossians 2: 16-18).

Paul expressed his frustration with those who muddled the gospel by saying sarcastically that he wished that they would be "cut off" (Gal. 6:12). He was wishing that they would go all the way and castrate themselves in imitation of the pagan priests of Cybele in Asia Minor. The resulting physical impotence would illustrate Paul's desire that they also be spiritually impotent as well and therefore unable to produce new converts to their apostate gospel.

Regarding the saved who converted to the circumcision gospel, Paul does not tell them that they have lost their salvation. However, they have lost the effectiveness of Christ in their lives and they have separated themselves from the Gospel of Grace—

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion

*cometh* not of him that calleth you. (Galatians 5:2-8).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors: *The Bible Knowledge commentary: New Testament Edition* (Victor Books, 1983)...Section on Galatians by Donald K. Camppbell, p. 605. "Turning to the

When the Apostle Paul made his final visit to Jerusalem with the money collected for their benefit, he and his party were received “gladly” by the brethren. The following day Paul and his companions met with James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. The first item on the agenda of this meeting was a rehearsal of God’s blessings on their ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 21:19). James and the elders responded by glorifying God and then immediately drawing the attention of the missionaries to the fact that many “thousands” of Jews believed in Christ but were still zealous for the Law of Moses. They were baptized members of the church and dedicated constituents of the Temple as well.

These “thousands” of converted Jews had received a negative report that Paul was teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons. Paul was careful to remind the Jews that the Law could not save, but he never said that its moral requirements were inconsequential to Christian living.<sup>19</sup> He did teach the Gentiles that Jewish customs and circumcision were inconsequential to them.<sup>20</sup> Yet Paul was so emphatic to point out how level the ground is at the foot of the cross that it would have been natural for anyone to conclude that he meant to say that Jewish custom and circumcision was just as inconsequential to the salvation of Jewish families as they were to the conversion of Gentiles, which is precisely what he was saying—

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye *be* Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:28. 29).

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference (Romans 3:20-22).

---

Law and accepting circumcision as a meritorious work has further dire implications which the Galatians were called on to consider. Anyone seeking justification by Law has been alienated (*katērgēthēte*) from Christ, that is, such a person would not be living in a sphere where Christ was operative. The KJV has a helpful rendering, ‘Christ is become of no effect unto you.’ In addition, said Paul, they would have fallen away from grace. The issue here is not the possible loss of salvation, for ‘grace’ is referred to not as salvation itself but as a method of salvation (cf. 2:21 where ‘a Law’ route is mentioned as an unworkable way to come to Christ). If the Galatians accepted circumcision as necessary for salvation, they would be leaving the grace system for the Mosaic Law system. The same error is repeated today when a believer leaves a church that emphasizes salvation by grace through faith and joins one which teaches that salvation depends on repentance, confession, faith, baptism, and church membership.”

<sup>19</sup> Remember that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were doubting their Christianity and were tempted to go back to their old Jewish faith. The author affirms the superiority and all-sufficiency of Christ over all (1:1-4; 9:11-14). His sacrifice is enough to take away our sin.

<sup>20</sup> “Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised” (I Corinthians 7:18). Paul was not only telling the Gentiles to remain uncircumcised, he was telling Jews to not become uncircumcised as was done in I Maccabees 1:13-15: “Then certain of the people were so forward herein, that they went to the king, who gave them licence to do after the ordinances of the heathen: Whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the customs of the heathen: And made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the heathen, and were sold to do mischief.”

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:12, 13).

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all. (Colossians 3:11).<sup>21</sup>

Just as Peter and Barnabas had once temporarily succumbed to the circumcisers in Galatians 2:11-16, James and the elders asked Paul to help prove to these “thousands” of Jewish believers that there was indeed a difference. By so doing, the rumor could be dispelled once-for-all. Paul responded to their request by agreeing to take four members of

the Jerusalem church, who had made Nazarite vows at the temple, and officiate over their ceremonial release from the vows. It would require the shaving of their heads and the blood sacrifice of a lamb without spot or blemish for their cleansing (Acts 21:21-23).<sup>22</sup> This would serve to prove to the “thousands” of Jewish believers that Paul still considered himself under the Law and customs of Moses, making them different from Gentile converts. Luke records their words as follows:

Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication (Acts 21:24,25).

Paul did as he promised and waited for a blood offering to be made for his own purification (Acts 21:26). We can only speculate as to why Paul agreed to this. He was no doubt fatigued from his missionary labor and from the anxiety over the threats against his life. He was there to deliver money and be of help to the church. But he, of all people, knew that blood sacrifices were totally irrelevant to a Christian’s faith in Christ. Paul would later speak of Christ—

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. (Titus 2:14,15).<sup>23</sup>

The same is confirmed by the writer of Hebrews when he states:

---

<sup>21</sup> Remember the words of Peter (Acts 15:8, 9)... “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

<sup>22</sup> At the end of his vow the Nazirite had to offer various prescribed sacrifices, and thereafter cut his hair and burn it on the altar. After certain ritual acts by the priest, the Nazirite was freed from his vow. See Numbers 6:13-21.

<sup>23</sup> For “purification” or (cleansing) note (Acts 15:9) “And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which *was* a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; *Which stood* only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed *on them* until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:8-14).

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 10:10-14).

We already know that it is possible for even an Apostle to be intimidated into succumbing to these powerful advocates of the Mosaic system. Although Paul openly judged Peter for this at Antioch, we will not judge any Apostle here. Though it might be said that Paul committed error by participating in animal sacrifice at this point in his career, his motive may have been that of opening a door of witness to the Jews. Paul himself had previously taken a Nazirite vow in Acts 1:18 and admitted it to Felix in 24:17, 18. So, one could also interpret this act as Paul's attempt to become like one under the Law in order to win those under it, as he stated:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law (I Corinthians 9:19, 20).

One thing we know for certain is that this act not only did not appease the Jews, it caused a riot resulting in Paul's arrest and ultimate execution (cf. Acts 21:27-36). We have no record of James nor the "thousands" of Jewish believers coming forward to clear up the misunderstanding for Paul after being accused of polluting the temple by bringing Greeks into it. In fact, the accusation against him at the riot was similar to the rumor that was creating a problem in the church, as Luke recorded:

the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place (Act 21: 27b,28a).

So, Christ said these wolves would come; Paul said they would come; Peter said they would come, and they came. They were with Christ as Pharisees and lawyers.

They were with Paul as *Pharisees which believed*. They were with all the churches which Paul had founded and they were tried by the Ephesians and found to be liars (Rev. 2:2). Thus, we see that perhaps the greatest challenge to New Testament Christianity was the belief that ritual, rather than pointing to reality, was itself a reality which could regenerate and save the soul of the conforming sinner.