REFUTING THE CIRCUMCISION GROUP

Titus 1:10 For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially of the circumcision group.

The Final Elder Qualification

Titus 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Was the Circumcision Group a Problem?

Titus 1:13&14 This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

I Timothy 1:3&4 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work - which is by faith.

I Timothy 1:5-7 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

What Did the Circumcision Group Teach?

Acts 15:1 Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Acts 15:5 Them some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”

What Did the Apostles, Elders and Whole Church Decide?

Acts 15:6-8 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.”

Acts 15:9-11 “He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

Acts 15:12-15 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up, “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:”

Acts 15:16-18 “’After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things – things known from long ago.’”

James quotes Amos 9:11&12 with some things from other prophets thrown in (verse 15). He does not quote Amos 9:15 “I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,” says the LORD your God.

Acts 15:19&20 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

Acts 15:21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

“Food polluted by idols” is covered in great detail in Romans chapter 14 and in

I Corinthians chapters 8&10.

“Sexual Immorality” is *“porneia,”* any sexual relationship other than one between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Sexual immorality is explicitly condemned in I Thessalonians 4:3-8. Verses 3& 8 say, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality...Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.”

“From the meat of strangled animals and from blood.” These things are clearly forbidden in the Old Testament but are no longer in effect. Mark 7:114&15, Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather it is what comes out of a person that defiles them,

Mark 7:17&18 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

What Was Dangerous in the Circumcision Group’s Teaching

It devalued what Jesus accomplished by His death on the cross. Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

It distorted how a person is saved. Ephesians 2:8&9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

It distorted what grace is. Romans 11:6 And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

It hindered the working of the Spirit in producing true righteousness. Romans 8:3&4 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 6:16 For sin shall no longer be your master; because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Colossians 2:20-23 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Things to Remember

Teaching that as Gentile Christians we are obligated to keep the Old Testament law was a major problem in the first century and is still a problem today.

Teaching that Gentiles are obligated to keep the Old Testament law distorts the Gospel and hinders victorious Christian living.

Teaching any rule system as a means to godly living is ineffective in producing godly living and victory over sin.