

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Judaizers: Old and New (Part 2)

By Brian R. Kenyon

The doctrine of the Judaizing teachers may be summarized in Acts 15:1, 5, 10 as binding parts of the Law of Moses, along with the Gospel, as being necessary for salvation. In Part 1 of this study, we noted the following three characteristics of the Judaizing teachers of Paul's day: (1) they zealously isolated faithful brethren from other faithful brethren so that the isolated brethren would in turn become zealous toward the Judaizers; (2) they taught unsound doctrine that greatly influenced the churches of Galatia and Corinth to doubt the truth and to lose confidence in the apostle Paul; and (3) they reasoned irrationally as evidenced by their attitude/treatment of Paul, to which the apostle responded, "They might as well circumcise themselves from us!" (cf. Gal. 5:12). In Part 1, we also compared those characteristics with some today who demand that all brethren understand a particular subject (involving judgment and differences of Scriptural opinion) exactly as they do, with fellowship consequences for those who do not. These new Judaizers, like those in Paul's day, wrongly require from brethren what God does not. In this article, let us note the particular harm sought by the Judaizers, both old and new.

Seek To Harm Faithful Preachers' Reputations

In Paul's defense of his ministry, he makes several statements that indicate the Judaizers were attempting to ruin his reputation among the Corinthians. There are many passages that show this tactic, but let us consider only a few.

First, the Judaizers implied that Paul was too much of a cowardly low-life to meet them face to face. The apostle wrote,

Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you [the Corinthians] by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. (2 Cor. 10:1)

In the latter part of this verse (that begins, "who in presence..."), Paul adopts the description of himself that the Judaizers used. They taught that Paul was strong and forceful at a distance, but weak when in their presence! The word "lowly [base, KJV; meek, NAS; humble, ESV]" (from *tapeinos*, ταπεινός) most often means humble, lowly; poor, of humble circumstances (Mt. 11:29); downcast (2 Cor. 7:6), but here it is used in a "bad sense...expressing depression when it is the effect of the want of courage" (Rogers and Rogers 411).

This same character smear is found a few verses later, where Paul, speaking of what the Judaizers claim, wrote, "For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:9-11). The word "contemptible [of no account, ESV]" means to count as nothing (1 Cor. 1:28; 1 Thes. 5:20). From this verse, some have surmised that Paul was physically weak, but note that this was what "they [the Judaizers] say" about him! According to his opponents, Paul created a completely "different impression through his letters from that which was created through his appearance, causing him to appear 'two faced'" (Thompson 142).

“Weighty” letters are the opposite of “weak” physical presence, and “powerful” letters are the opposite of “contemptible [of no account]” speaking ability. Paul later accepted the charge of “weakness,” but as a likeness of Christ and thus a sign that he was a genuine apostle (cf. 2 Cor. 13:4).

New Judaizers likewise imply (and sometimes even explicitly state) that those who disagree with their hobby and/or refuse to engage them concerning it are “cowards”! Let us not be discouraged. If Paul, who followed the Lord (1 Cor. 11:1), suffered this kind of character assault, then we can expect the same (cf. Mt. 10:24-25).

Second, the Judaizers implied that Paul was living for the gratification of the flesh, perhaps even taking advantage of the brethren for his own personal gain. Paul wrote of some, “who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh” (2 Cor. 10:2). Paul went on to say that though living in the flesh, he was not motivated by the flesh, but was working his ministry according to Divine power (2 Cor. 10:3-5 cf. Eph. 6:10-12). There is a difference between living in the flesh and living according to the flesh (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 8:5-8)! New Judaizers often claim that those who do not agree with nor practice their hobby must be serving only for personal gain, whether it be for money, prestige, or a “cushy” job! They claim the only thing keeping others from believing their way is worldly concern. Such claims, however, are for the purpose of hurting another’s reputation, especially preachers.’

Seek To Please Men

Although Judaizers often claimed to be sincerely concerned about brethren and Christ’s church, their actions betrayed that claim. While Saul of Tarsus was never among the Judaizers (because he was not a Christian when he persecuted the church), his “hobby” included some of what the Judaizers taught—keeping the Law of Moses! In a verse that served as a transition from Paul’s introductory comments in the Book of Galatians to the main body of that epistle, he wrote, “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). Of particular interest to this study is the clause, “For if I still pleased men.” Serving Christ and pleasing people at the Gospel’s expense are completely incompatible! Being the slave of Christ means a willingness to give up all for Him, including having the favor of men (cf. Jn. 12:42-43)! The word “still [yet, KJV]” (from *eti*) shows that in the final analysis when Saul of Tarsus served Judaism, he was actually doing it to please men (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1-3), not to please God as he was deceived into thinking (cf. Acts 23:1). This also is true of today’s Judaizers. They may truly be deceived into thinking they are serving God, but in the final analysis, as their actions reveal, they are serving to please men, especially members and potential members of their new Judaizer “fellowship”!

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The point of Judaizers harming through men pleasing is illustrated by two passages where Paul defended his apostleship against the Judaizers' claims concerning him. First, Paul revealed the men pleasing status of the Judaizers when he wrote,

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? (2 Cor. 3:1)

This verse is found in a section where Paul defended his ministry by showing that it spoke for itself. Behind each of the rhetorical questions in the verse, expecting a negative answer, stood an actual or expected charge against Paul (Harris 332).

Behind the question, "Do we begin again to commend ourselves?," was the charge that Paul was recommending himself. The issue of commending was crucial in Second Corinthians (4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18). The fact that Paul was commended by the Lord separated him from the Judaizers! Behind the question, "[D]o we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?," was the charge that since Paul was not sent with letters of recommendation from the Judaizers, he must be suspect. Paul was not here negating the importance of letters (cf. 2 Cor. 8:16-24; Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:3, 10-11), but showing that there was no need for them in his situation—his work among the Corinthians spoke for itself! Just because brethren have letters of recommendation from among themselves, such as the Judaizers possessed, does not mean that they have God's approval!

Second, in a section where Paul showed his determination to be true to his ministry, he wrote,

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ²But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor. 4:1-2)

Paul refused to be discouraged, for his ministry was a result of God's mercy being received by him (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:12-16). Paul then described the conduct of his ministry both negatively and positively. Again, Paul's statements here seem to be a defense against the accusations of the Judaizers (cf. 2 Cor. 7:2; 12:16)—the opposite of these would apply to the Judaizers!

Negatively, Paul renounced hidden things that caused shame, "not walking in craftiness nor han-

dling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2a). "Renounced" means to disown. Paul did not deceive nor distort the word of God! "Craftiness [cunning, ESV]" is from a word that refers to trickery, deceit, craftiness, or cunning (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Cor. 3:19; Eph. 4:14). "Deceitfully [adulterating, NAS; tamper with, ESV]" means to use deceit, to use bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error, or to falsify. The Greek word is used only here, but its use in the papyri in relation to the dilution of wine suggests that "Paul had in mind the corruption of the word of God by mingling it with alien ideas" (cf. 2 Cor. 2:17; Col. 2:8, 18) (Kruse 102). Judaizers tampered with God's word, which resulted in their teaching a different Jesus (2 Cor. 11:4) and a different Gospel (Gal. 1:6-7).

Positively, Paul openly offered himself and his message for the close scrutiny of all—"by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2b). Paul commended himself and his coworkers, but not as his opponents did (cf. 2 Cor. 11:22-23). Paul appealed to his hearers' "conscience"! In other words, Paul had no problem in allowing anyone to unbiasedly evaluate his character and his teachings, which spoke for themselves, without having to isolate or force brethren to accept what he taught. "In the sight of God" is the opposite of "hidden" (2 Cor. 4:2a).

Like those of Paul's time, new Judaizers ultimately seek to please men. Though they often seem truly concerned, their actions betray sincerity. They must constantly do the things that please their "fellowship," even when they know better. For example, some new Judaizers know the inconsistency of their "fellowship's" practice, yet they go along with it, seemingly for fear of being outcast from those peers. New Judaizers must also "commend themselves" in order to maintain a sense of belonging. Yet Paul warned,

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. ...For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. (2 Cor. 10:12-18)

If new Judaizers are not careful, they too will end up preaching another Jesus and another Gospel in their efforts to advance their hobby and please men!

Conclusion

The Judaizers of Paul's day were among the most damaging of the church's enemies from within. They

bear a striking resemblance of some in our brotherhood today, who seek to require of God's faithful what He Himself does not. We have examined some characteristics of the old Judaizers and compared them with new Judaizers, and we have considered specific areas in which they harm. May the Lord give us the knowledge, wisdom, and courage to never lose focus on the whole counsel of God and to resist the temptation to ride a hobby or allow others to, resulting in the destruction of the church! 🙏

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