

Because Martin Luther misinterpreted the writings of St. Paul Protestants, who accept Luther's teaching, believe in the false doctrine of salvation by faith alone. This doctrine was not taught by Christ, the apostles, St. Paul or any early Church Father but comes from Luther's misunderstanding of the words "works of the law" in scripture.



Jewish Mohel performing a circumcision



The Council of Jerusalem AD 49

Less than twenty years after Pentecost the early Church found itself in a crisis that was tearing the young Church apart. The Jewish teachers taught that, ever since the time of Abraham, circumcision was required for every male Jew to enter into God's Covenant and that obedience to the laws handed down by Moses were also necessary for salvation.

A great dispute arose between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians. Must a Gentile Christian first become a Jew, be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved? To settle the issue the apostles and bishops of the Church gathered together for a Council in Jerusalem around the year AD 50.

From the *Jewish Encyclopedia* on circumcision:

"A religious rite performed on male children of Jews on the eighth day after birth; also on their slaves, whether born in the house or not. It was enjoined upon Abraham and his descendants as "a token of the covenant" concluded with him by God for all generations, the penalty of non-observance being excision from the people."

Genesis 17:9-14 "God said to Abraham....this is my Covenant which you shall keep between me and your descendants after you. Ever male among you shall be circumcised....so shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant."

Read the Jewish Encyclopedia [HERE](#)

From *Judaism 101*: "The commandment is binding upon both the father of the child and the child himself. If a father does not have his son circumcised, the son is obligated to have himself circumcised as soon as he becomes an adult. A person who is uncircumcised suffers the penalty of spiritual excision; in other words, regardless of how good a Jew he is in all other ways, a man has no place in the World to Come if he is uncircumcised."

Read *Judaism 101* [HERE](#)

Imagine that we are living in the first century. We are told that the Messiah was crucified and died for our sins. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. We hear these apostles teach that circumcision is no longer required for God's people. Would we have believed the apostles? Their teaching is radical. In generation after generation circumcision was necessary for salvation and now we are told it is not necessary? Many of the Jews believed. Acts 2:41 tells us that three thousand were baptized in one day. Those Jews who converted to this new religion that accepted Christ as the Messiah were pressured by very zealous Jews who were teaching that circumcision and the Law of Moses was still necessary to be saved. They were known as the **Judaizers**, those who observe the ritual laws of Judaism.

Galatians 2:14.....If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (**Greek** **ιουδαίζειν** Judaize)



Paul was teaching the Christian doctrine that we are saved by God's grace and not by circumcision and other laws given by Moses. In his letter to the Galatians Paul says he is "astonished" that the Galatia Christians are so quickly turning to a different gospel and he warns them: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be anathema." **Galatians 1:8**

Paul tells us that when the Judaizers came to Antioch from Jerusalem Peter saw them and stopped eating with the gentile Christians and Peter: "Drew back and separated himself fearing the circumcision party." **Galatians 2:12**.

Paul warns the Galatians again: "If you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you....you are severed from Christ you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace." **Galatians 5:2-4**

Paul became so frustrated with the Judaizers that he said: "I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves." **Galatians 5:12**

Paul preached against the Judaizers in Philippi: "Look out for the dogs, look for the evil workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." **Philippians 3:2-3**

Against them in Rome: "For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law." **Romans 3:20**

Paul said this to Christians: "Oh foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" **Galatians 3:1-3**

What is meant by this? Simply that the Galatians, deceived by the Judaizers, were looking to the 613 commandments of the Law of Moses including circumcision as the perfecting of their faith. Paul was horrified that they would consider doing this, which was a denial of the Gospel of grace.

In Acts 15 we are told that the Church called a council to settle the issue. After the Council's decision the Judaizers continued to harass new converts well into the second century.

Acts 15

THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

"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." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God, had done through them.

Then 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."

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. 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 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."

And all the assembly kept silence; and 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: "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.

"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. **For the Law of Moses** has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.

ABRAHAM



In trying to explain to the Jewish Christians that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, Paul uses the example of Abraham, their father in the faith.

The Judaizers were teaching that one must observe the Law of Moses and be circumcised to be saved. If that is true then Abraham must have been saved by works of the Mosaic Law, specifically circumcision.

Romans 4:1-3, 9-11: "What shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God! For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.....Is this blessing pronounced only upon the circumcised or also upon the uncircumcised? We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it reckoned to

him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised."

Paul is making the point that Abraham was declared righteous by God before he was circumcised. This proves, to the Judaizers, that it is not necessary to be circumcised to be in God's covenant and be declared righteous.

Righteousness/Justification is defined as "right standing with God." All who died in the Old Covenant lacked one thing to create this right standing -- a payment for the sin of Adam which would restore mankind to union with God. Circumcision could not do this. The best that circumcision could do was to put men into the Old Covenant -- the covenant of waiting for the Redeemer to come. But the New Covenant, made in Christ's Blood, provided a payment for Adam's sin, a restoration of mankind's relationship with God.

This is why St. Paul speaks of the "works of the Law" as not being able to save or make men righteous. It did not have the power to do so because it was attached to the Old Covenant. And circumcision which St. Paul was fighting was the premier act of the Law which could not restore men to God.

The Protestants of Luther's day totally missed this (and some still do so today) claiming that Catholics are trying to save themselves by doing "works" when **they completely miss what this term means**. It does not have reference to the works of faith, love of neighbor and keeping the commandments which we are called to do and upon which our lives will be judged on the Last Day. Paul is saying we are saved by grace through faith and not by the works of the Mosaic Law.

In a few days you will receive Protestant objections to the Catholic belief that we are not saved by faith alone.