

## **“If I Still Preach Circumcision”**

*“But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then hath the stumbling block of the cross been done away”* (Gal. 5:11). It is clear from this question, that false teachers among Galatian brethren had taught that even Paul preached the necessity of circumcision. It is not known upon what basis they had made such statements nor whether there was any basis for which they made their claim. Men often make unfounded, untrue statements and false teachers are not adverse to knowingly do so, if it advances their cause. Whatever or whichever, the charges were false. Those who made such charges of Paul knew they were incorrect, else they would have ceased their opposition to him. One of the principal areas of objections among Jews who rejected the gospel was the teaching that circumcision was of no spiritual value.

Still, there was a circumstance which had occurred in the Galatian province which might have given rise to their charge against Paul. On his second journey, he and Silas came to Lystra and found a certain disciple there named Timothy, whose mother was Jewish and who had been reared in the Jew’s religion. Timothy was well reported of by brethren in both Lystra and Iconium. *“Him would Paul have to go forth with him and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those parts: for they all knew that his father was a Greek”* (Acts 15:3). However Paul made the second journey after the conflict in Jerusalem over keeping circumcision and the law at which time he adamantly refused to allow young Titus, his Gentile companion, to be circumcised (Gal. 2:3). Did Paul’s actions in regard to Timothy and Titus prove inconsistency on his part? Prejudicial Jews would likely see it that way.

However, as some say, comparing the two young men and Paul’s attitude toward circumcising them, was like comparing apples with oranges. The situations were entirely different. Paul did not come to alter harmless customs of either Gentile or Jew, although in later years his enemies would say that he taught *“thou teachest all the Jews who are among the gentiles to forsake Moses neither to walk after the customs ...”* (Acts 21:21). So long as circumcision was practiced as a national custom, there was no quarrel with it so far as Paul was concerned. And because Timothy’s mother was Jewish and that from a babe he himself had been taught the sacred scriptures, he was Jewish from every logical viewpoint. As Paul’s companion, he would not have easy access into homes of Jews whom he wished to teach about Jesus, having rejected, as they would have viewed it, the seal of the covenant God made with their fathers. Since *“circumcision”* really was unimportant, it was

advantageous that Timothy remove that hindrance so that he would be able to move freely among unbelieving Jews to teach them the gospel.

With Titus it was a matter exactly the reverse. He was not a Jew, but a Gentile, recognized as such. False teachers demanded that salvation of Gentiles necessitated that they be circumcised and keep the law. Paul was just as insistent they were wrong in their demands and resisted them at every point. He would not give place, "*in way of subjection, no not for an hour*" (Gal. 2:5). To have acceded to their demands to allow Titus to be circumcised would be to give up his arguments completely. He would not yield.

Paul did not continue to preach circumcision as some of his critics insinuated. The fact they still persecuted him was proof they did not believe the charges they had themselves leveled against Paul.

Jim McDonald