

For the Jews I Became Jewish, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:20

Code: B110912

When Paul wrote, “To the Jews I became as a Jew . . . to those who are under the Law, as under the Law” (1 Corinthians 9:20), he was not talking about accommodating the message. He was simply saying he would not jeopardize his ability to preach the message by unnecessarily offending people.

Several illustrations of that principle appear in the New Testament. In our last post, we looked at the example of the Jerusalem Council. Out of love and concern for Jewish unbelievers, the council asked new Gentile converts to abstain from engaging in cultural practices that the Jews found offensive. That was in Acts chapter fifteen.

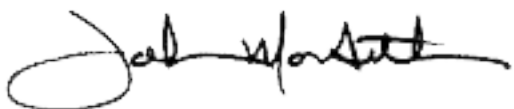
Acts chapter sixteen includes a *similar* illustration. It is the first time in Scripture we meet Timothy. Luke records that he was “the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1). Jews would have considered him a Gentile, because his father was a Gentile. Moreover, Timothy’s mother would have been considered a virtual traitor for marrying a Gentile.

Yet Timothy “was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him” (Acts 16:2, 3).

Wait a minute. Why did he do that? Paul certainly didn’t believe Gentiles needed be circumcised to be saved. In fact, Paul refused to have Titus circumcised when the Jerusalem legalists demanded it (Galatians 2:1-5). Furthermore, Paul once opposed Peter to his face because Peter had compromised with the legalists (Galatians 2:11–14). He asked Peter, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Galatians 2:14). So why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? Was he compromising the issue, demonstrating inconsistency?

No. Timothy wasn’t doing it for salvation. He obviously had *not* undergone circumcision when he was saved. And he wasn’t doing it to make hardened legalists happy or to tone down the offense of the gospel. He simply wanted to identify with the Jews so he might have an entrance to preach the gospel to them. Paul and Timothy were not hoping to pacify pseudo-Christian legalists, act the part of hypocrites, or mitigate the gospel in any way. They simply wanted to keep open lines of communication to the Jews they were going to preach to. This was not an act of compromise or men-pleasing. It was loving—and physically very painful—self-sacrifice for the sake of the lost.

Wherever he could acknowledge the strong religious tradition of a people and not offend their sensitivities, Paul was glad to do so—when it did not violate God’s Word or impinge on the gospel. But the apostle never adapted his ministry to pander to worldly lusts or sinful selfishness.



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