

# The Harvester



## Preparing Souls

## To Serve The Lord



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## Judaizers: Old and New (Part I)

By Brian R. Kenyon

Judaizing teachers, or Judaizers, refer to Jewish Christians who were still trying to bind elements of the Law of Moses on Christians of the first century. Though the terms “Judaizing teacher” and/or “Judaizers” are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible—they are humanly coined terms—insight to their teaching is summarized in Acts 15:1, 5, 10, as binding certain elements of the Law of Moses. The apostle Paul dealt with the Judaizing teachers primarily in two of his epistles; namely, Second Corinthians and Galatians.

From Paul’s statements, we can get a picture of the Judaizers of Paul’s day that will help us in identifying and dealing with “Judaizing teachers” of our day. Let us note some characteristics of the Judaizers about whom Paul wrote.

### Isolated Faithful Brethren

The Judaizers were zealous to isolate faithful brethren from other faithful brethren so that the isolated brethren would in turn become zealous toward the Judaizers. After reminding the Galatians how they once received Paul, even “as Christ Jesus” Himself (Gal. 4:12-16), Paul wrote of the Judaizers, “They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them” (Gal. 4:17a, NKJ). The Galatians showed good zeal for Paul when he was there, but by the time he wrote Galatians something caused their attitude to change. That something was the Judaizers! They were zealous toward the Galatians, but their zeal was not good because their motives were not pure.

This “zeal” may mean they were envious of the Galatians’ liberty in Christ and/or their relationship with Paul, and thus the Judaizers wanted to destroy that liberty and/or relationship with Paul by bringing the Galatians into bondage. “Zeal” may mean they were pretending to be deeply concerned about the Galatians in order to win them over and bring them into bondage.

The Judaizers’ motives were wrong. The purpose for the Judaizers’ excluding the Galatians was so the Galatians would be “zealous” for the Judaizers. The Judaizers wanted to create a vacuum and then fill it! Zeal is good when properly motivated, as was the case earlier in Paul’s presence among the Galatians (Gal. 4:18). When Paul was with them, they showed plenty of zeal, but in his absence, they did not (cf. Gal. 4:16).

### Taught Unsound Doctrine

When Paul wrote, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal. 5:7), he was asking a rhetorical question, the answer of which obviously referred to the Judaizers. Then Paul gave specific characteristics about the Judaizers’ doctrine that is relevant to our study. Initially, the apostle said the Judaizers’ doctrine did not originate with God (Gal. 5:8). Due to the Judaizers’ doctrine, the Galatians were in the process of not only rejecting Paul, but rejecting God himself (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7-8).

Next, Paul identified the doctrine of the Judaizers as influential, though it may have seemed insignificant to some (Gal. 5:9). “Leaven” literally refers to yeast that is

used to make bread rise—it only takes a very small amount to cause a very large amount of dough to rise! Figuratively, “leaven” is used for influence, whether good (Mt. 13:33; Lk. 13:21), or bad (Mt. 16:6, 11-12; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). In the figurative analogy, the “lump of dough” (NAS) applies to the churches of Galatia, who have allowed the Judaizers to influence them away from the truth.

Paul, however, was optimistic that the Galatians would realize their error and re-grasp the Gospel, when he wrote, “I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind” (Gal. 5:10a). Paul’s confidence is “in the Lord.” That is, it is based on the power of the Gospel and being “in Christ” (Rom. 14:14). While being optimistic of the Galatians’ future, Paul warned that the Judaizers would have to bear their own judgment, “but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is” (Gal. 5:10b).

## Reasoned Irrationally

The Judaizers were very irrational. If Paul bound circumcision, he would not be opposed by the Judaizers. He wrote, “And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased” (Gal. 5:11). The statement, “if I still [yet, KJV] preach circumcision,” may very well be a reply to accusations that he did preach circumcision when it suited him (cf. 1 Cor. 7:18) (Boice 490). The Judaizers would not be offended at Paul’s preaching if he included circumcision. Circumcision made a distinction between Jew and Gentile and male and female,

which distinction the Judaizers approved, but the Gospel Paul preached removed these distinctions (cf. Gal. 3:26-29).

The Judaizers were so irrational they might as well castrate themselves as to bind circumcision as a matter of salvation. Paul, perhaps sarcastically, wrote, “I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” (Gal. 5:12). Note the different ways this clause is translated: “I would they were even cut off which trouble you” (KJV); “I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves” (NAS); “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!” (ESV); “I would that they that unsettle you would even go beyond circumcision” (ASV). The term “cut off [mutilate, NAS; emasculate, ESV; go beyond circumcision, ASV]” is from a word that means to cut off or away (Mk. 9:43, 45; Jn. 18:10, 26; Acts 27:32). In the middle voice, as used here, it means to mutilate or castrate oneself, as evidenced by the Septuagint’s use of the word in Deuteronomy 23:1, translated “emasculated [wounded in the stones, KJV].” The point Paul makes is that if the Judaizers are so enthusiastic about circumcision (one form of mutilation without God’s authority), why not go all the way and castrate themselves (which would be another form of unauthorized mutilation, which, of course, pagans in Galatia practiced at that time) (Cole 201)! If Paul is being sarcastic, he would be saying, “I wish they would go ahead and circumcise themselves from us!”

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## Do Some Have These Characteristics Today?


While not exactly the same in every respect, there are some today who are similar to the Judaizers of Paul's day. Before comparing the characteristics of the Judaizers of Paul's day with those similarly minded in the brotherhood today, let it be clear that there is one major difference: the Judaizers of Paul's day preached a false Gospel every time, whereas those today may not necessarily. However, when they demand all others understand a particular subject (involving judgment and differences of Scriptural opinion) exactly as they do, with fellowship consequences for those who do not, they become like the Judaizers of Paul's day — they obsessively require from others what God does not! Having made that distinction, let us now make a comparison.

First, like the Judaizers of old, there are some today who are very zealous in seeking to isolate faithful brethren from other faithful brethren based on the acceptance or rejection of a particular hobby. This zeal is seen in the tremendous efforts that are put forth in such things as vigorously combing over the recorded sermons and writings of individuals whose supposed teachings and/or personalities are the focus of a particular hobby, creating websites dedicated to promoting a particular hobby (and destroying those who do not adhere to the particular hobby), and "carbon copied" emails to people who have little or nothing to do with the situation that launched the new Judaizer's particular hobby. All this is done in an effort to isolate faithful brethren who do not agree with the new Judaizer's position. Once faithful brethren are excluded from other faithful brethren, the only fellowship option that seems viable is to have fellowship with the new Judaizer's!

Second, like the Judaizers of old, there are some today who become doctrinally unsound. Again, this is not to say that every doctrine they teach that turns into their hobby is false, but even when a Biblical doctrine is taught to the point that this particular subject dominates a person's teaching and he demands that all others understand the particular subject exactly as he does or else the one differing will be disfellowshipped, then the hobbyist becomes doctrinally unsound. The influence of the hobby depends on the particular hobby and those involved. Sometimes, as in the case of the churches in Galatia, the influence can be devastating. In other cases,

because the hobby and the people involved are so ridiculous that most informed brethren can see right through it, the hobby is not as influentially devastating. However, any amount of harm done to the body of Christ is significant and must be avoided if possible (cf. Mt. 18:8; 1 Cor. 8:9-13). Thus, the doctrinal influence of all hobbies is damaging, though some more than others!

Third, like the Judaizers of old, there are some today who are irrational. Their irrationality is evident in at least two ways. One way is that their fellowship practices are extremely inconsistent. They will have no fellowship with select people who do not agree with their particular hobby, but when it comes to family members or certain friends, they apparently ignore the standards upon which they base fellowship. For example, they will have no fellowship with a congregation because they support a work that the new Judaizer does not approve, yet a family member who is active in that congregation will not be publicly marked as others are.

Another way new Judaizers are obviously irrational is the pseudo-logic they sometimes use. This pseudo-logic does not come from uneducated, logician "want to bes." Rather, what makes the irrationality so obvious is that some of the new Judaizers have well deserved reputations of being very logical in areas outside their particular hobby, but when they seek to justify their hobby and harm the reputation of those who do not agree, they become very illogical. Take, for example, some hobbyists' use of true or false questions. They of all people know that every precisely stated proposition is either true or false (as per the law of excluded middle), yet they will word true or false questions in ways that are not precise, even to the point of including, "as brother [so and so] teaches." How can that be precise? Why even include what "brother [so and so] teaches" in a true or false question (if not to incite prejudice or impress others in the "fellowship" of new Judaizers)? The irrationality of hobbyists sometimes has this writer, like Paul in Galatians 5:12, asking himself, "If they are so against faithful brethren who do not agree with their hobby, why don't they just go ahead and circumcise themselves from us!" 

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# WHAT TO PREACH . . .

The story is told of a young man having completed training at a preacher training school and beginning his first work in the state of Kentucky. The first Sunday he confidently spoke on the evils of beverage alcohol, showing the necessity of abstinence as a child of God. Being informed by a concerned brother at the back door that many of the members were employed at the local distillery, that bourbon and Kentucky were joined at the hip, and that more than a few kept such for colds, cough, and whatever else ails them, he might ought to reconsider his last sermon on that subject. The next Sunday his topic was the evils of tobacco. The same brother quickly pulled him aside and let him know that burley went with Kentucky nearly as tight as bourbon, that the fields surrounding the church building were filled with a cash crop that also help pay his salary as the preacher. The preacher got his point. The next Sunday gambling was this young preacher's subject. The same concerned brother informed him about the Blue Grass State, the derby, and that horse racing in Kentucky was right there with those other two things about which the preacher had dared to preach. The young preacher then asked the brother what he would suggest then for sermon subjects. He thought for a minute and then replied, "Why don't you preach on African witch doctors. We don't have any of them around here."

[The paragraph above is an excerpt from Freddie Clayton's chapter, "Preaching That Is Profitable," in our 2012 lectureship book.]

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