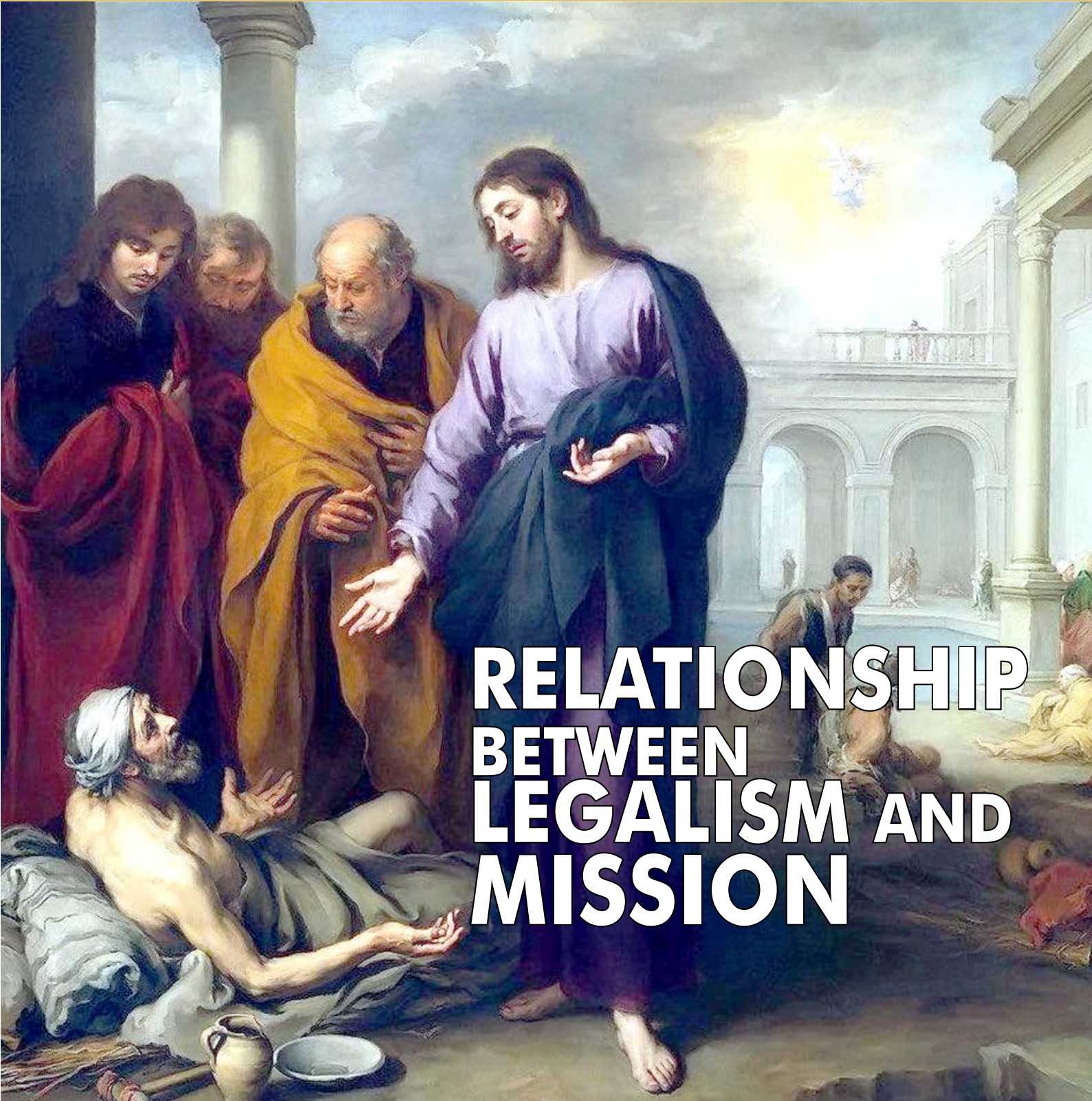


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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEGALISM AND MISSION



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THE CHURCH: ORGANISM OR ORGANIZATION?

God, with one another and with those outside the church.

In the Bible, the “church” implies a need for vision, mission, values, goals, strategies and processes—in other words, a sense of how to get “there.” The healthy church involves people filled with the Holy Spirit, given to worship and prayer, daily fellowship with others of like mind, hungering after God, growing in grace and knowledge of Christ. In a healthy church, organization becomes a means to accomplish God’s purposes in the lives of men, women and children.

All organisms, including the human body, are really complex organizations. It is no accident that Paul refers to the church as the “body of Christ.” The early church was organized and led by Spirit-filled leaders responsible for assimilating a great variety of people to accomplish what God intended. What are the signs of a healthy organism within the organized church? The list below is not exhaustive, but offers some guidelines on how we can evaluate whether our own churches function in the way God intends for them to function:

A healthy church organism is one that:

- Joins together orthodoxy and truth with love.
- Has a spirit of ongoing repentance and encourages avenues to make this possible.
- Experiences the presence of God’s blessing and victory even in the midst of tribulation, poverty and persecution.
- Possesses a spirit of discernment, love of truth and rejection of the world’s standards.
- Helps to remove stumbling blocks to faith.
- Regularly overcomes the lies of the enemy and of the culture with the truth of God.
- Joins the truth of God with deeds of love, faith and service to those within the church and outside the church.
- Submits to Christ as the living Word, not just as a correct theological idea.
- Possesses a clear awareness that the church represents a new kingdom, a new race of men, created by the New Adam, Jesus Christ.
- Experiences the open doors of God to enlarged avenues of ministry and service.
- Possesses a deep sense of God’s holiness.
- Silences those who mock the gospel by lives governed by God’s love, grace and power.
- Serves as a pillar of strength through perseverance.
- Possesses a spirit of overcoming the spirit of the world that often seems so strong.
- Possesses the peace of God in the midst of the most troublesome circumstances.
- Bases their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their group.

A healthy church organization will strongly reflect these characteristics in the people it chooses for leadership and administration.

In the Book of Revelation, our Lord commends the Church of Philadelphia as a model for other churches to adopt. Of the seven churches to whom John writes in obedience to the Lord’s command, Philadelphia is the only church that receives full commendation by Jesus Christ without criticism or condemnation. Other churches were larger and wealthier, but the Church of Philadelphia was the only one that ultimately prevailed.

The Church of Philadelphia must serve as our own model:

- Working together, its people sought works that were first of all, commendable to Christ.
- They expected commitment from their members and trained them for it.
- They refused to compromise the integrity of the word or their testimony of Christ for short-term gain.
- They were faithful to keep God’s commands and to endure patiently in times of trial and when God’s timetable didn’t match theirs.
- They sought for opportunities and open doors to advance God’s mission in their lives and the world around them.
- They refused to follow the crowd, expecting opposition and to be in the minority.
- They welcomed new faces and new believers.
- They trusted God’s provision for all things.

Any church that follows in the narrow way of the Church in Philadelphia will become an organism and an organization that glorifies God, advances the gospel and transforms peoples and nations in great and unexpected ways. May we and future generations see this wisdom in us.

Father God, I pray for revival in my heart and in my church that will bring full commendation from you. I pray that my church will advance your kingdom and the power of your gospel in new and exciting ways that glorify your great Name. Amen. ●

There is a popular concept among some church people that as far as the church is concerned, “organism” is good and spiritual, but that “organization” is bad and unspiritual. I believe this is false.

Organization is necessary for any enterprise. As far as the church is concerned, the vital question is this: what is the spirit that controls the organization? Is that spirit the spirit of the world or is it the Spirit given to us by Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ is the Architect, Builder and Head of the Church because He is the One anointed by the Father, the Son of the living God. Because of the church’s divine Authorship, not even all the forces of hell will prevail against the church (Matthew 16:16-18). Therefore, it is imperative that we, as church people, must make sure that we come fully under His divine and holy authority and fulfill His purposes. To do so brings His pleasure, blessing and joy, both for us and many others. To fall short in our divine mission as a church is to bring displeasure and humiliation from a holy God. We must get it right.

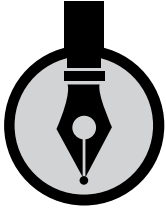
When He walked this earth, Jesus Christ harshly criticized the Jewish temple and sacrificial system, not because it was large, complicated and organized, but because it had forgotten the purpose for which God the Father established it in the first place. The sacrificial system was meant to prefigure the Lamb who would offer the perfect sacrifice for sin. The priests and religious leaders failed to see Him in their midst!

The temple and sacrificial system had come to exist only for its own sake. On the very day of Passover, God used the blindness of the priests to bring about Jesus’ perfect sacrifice on the cross and make the sacrificial system obsolete. In 70 AD, when the priests still didn’t get the point, God used the Romans to utterly destroy the temple and sacrificial system altogether. But it had died long before that. What God did to the temple and the Jewish sacrificial system should serve as a warning to all of us lest we become tempted to allow our church establishment to become the end rather than the means to the end.

What is the purpose of church organization in the plan of Christ? When Paul sent Titus to Crete to help repair its dysfunctional church organization, he concisely defined the vision of the church: *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:12-14).

Alwin J. Lindgren defines church organization in this way: “Church administration is the involvement of the church in the discovery of nature and mission ... to utilize all her resources and persons in the fulfillment of her mission of making known God’s love for all men.” In the Bible, the Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which refers to the assembly of God’s people whom He has called out of the world. It has the meaning of an actual gathering of people who relate to

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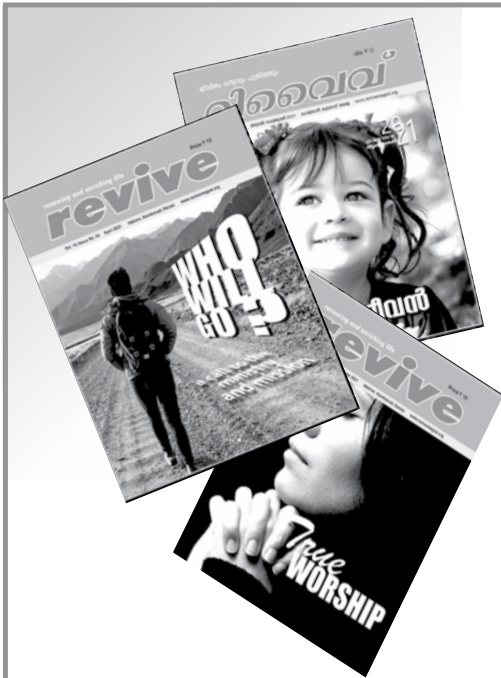
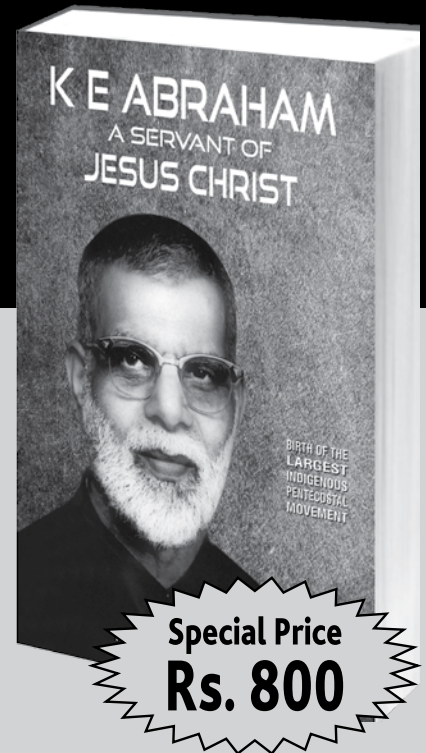
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Pastor Dr. John K. Mathew

SPIRITUALITY WITHOUT HYPOCRISY

In a prayer meeting, a gentleman prayed, "Thank you, Lord, that I am not like other ordinary people. They are robbers, evildoers, and adulterers. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. You can't find a man as gentle as I am, and I forgot to tell you that I am a Pharisee." It was a vain prayer.

Years ago John the Baptist called them a 'brood of vipers' and commanded them to repent and produce fruits in keeping with repentance. Without losing the Spirit of John The Baptist, Jesus said about them, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean" (Matt.23: 27). Does this have any significance in the Christian community today? I would say, it is more significant than ever before.

The Christian community including the Evangelicals, has deteriorated to be a community of 'Do's and 'Don'ts: three days of fasting prayer, four days of convention, and a few other routine spiritual activities wash away all the sins and ridicule other people for their spiritual ignorance. Nothing better than whitewashed tombs.

The following illustration seems fitting. United Parcel Service takes pride in the productivity of its delivery men and women. On an average, a UPS driver delivers four hundred packages a day. The company gets such high productivity, by micromanaging the details of a delivery man's routine. Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Robert Frank says, that with a battalion of more than 3000 industrial engineers, the company dictates every task for employees. Drivers must step from their trucks with their right foot, fold their money face-up, and carry packages under their left arm. Those considered slow are accompanied by supervisors, who cajole and prod them with stopwatches and clipboards. Today monitoring becomes easier in a technologically advanced society.

This approach may work well in the package delivery business, but it is a complete failure in the spiritual business.

Spiritual leaders should refrain from these kinds of business strategies or it will lead to legalism. What is legalism? Legalism is measuring spirituality by a list of Do's and Don'ts. Let us practice spirituality without hypocrisy. ●



CIRCUMCISION OF THE FLESH OR HEART?



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The difference between the outward observance of the Mosaic law and the inward experience of the heart was clearly stated by the Apostle Paul – “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28,29). Carefully following the Old Testament rulebook enabled many to boast in the flesh, but it did not prove any transformation of the heart, which was the true aim of the Holy Spirit. There are, of course, men and women who are Jews by physical descent, the natural children of Abraham, to whom the promise of the fathers was given, but there are others, not of Abrahamic bloodline, who show forth the nature of a true Jew through faith in Christ and reception of a brand new life, which is by grace and not of works “lest any man should boast.”

Circumcision is one of those ancient covenant rituals which has an important purpose and effect when obeyed in the correct light but can become another yoke of bondage when seen as a religious observance somehow required to please God. Just as Paul taught that obeying a certain dress code, observance of a particular holy day, celebrating festivals of new moons and so forth had nothing to do with a person’s justification before God, so whether a male has been circumcised is not a prerequisite to salvation. Nor is it an aid to salvation. But like any observance of something commanded in the Bible, a person, in my judgment is better off obeying the command than rejecting it. Such observances are matters of personal conviction, led by the Holy Spirit, not laws written in tablets of stone that a person had better follow ... or else!



Taking the mark

I'm not talking about the mark of the beast, rather the mark of consecration before God. "And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you" (Genesis 17:11). Circumcision left a distinguishing mark on the flesh. God's men are marked men. "Token" there means a sign or proof, something that certifies. The rainbow was God's token that He would not destroy the earth again with a flood. The Passover lamb's blood on the door was a visible token. Smearred blood on the ear of the redeemed leper and consecrated priest were tokens of their commitment to God.

Similarly, circumcision was a physical mark or sign that a person had been set apart for God. Paul was circumcised the eighth day. Jesus was taken to the temple and circumcised according to the Law. Acts 7:8 calls it the "covenant of circumcision". It was intended to be an external sign of an internal work. Like water baptism.

The Jerusalem Council gathered to settle the matter of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised. The Pharisees believed the practice was mandatory for acceptance before God.

Like partaking of the communion elements. Or bringing one's tithes to the altar. To do any of these with an impure or undedicated heart would negate their purpose – "For circumcision verily profits, if you keep the law: but if you be a breaker of the law, your circumcision is made uncircumcision" (Romans 3:25). That principle should be easy to comprehend.

Obeying the command

The Jerusalem Council gathered to settle the matter of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised. The Pharisees believed the practice was mandatory for acceptance before God. After deliberation, the whole assembled council agreed that Gentiles are not under the law and should only be required to abstain from fornication, eating blood and things sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:20,29). They chose to simplify, not amplify the rulebook.

Various “Christian” sectors today have their own lists, some long and tedious, and some questionably abbreviated.

I find it interesting that after the council met and decided circumcision was not required of the Gentiles, in the very next chapter Paul circumcised Timothy whose father was a Greek (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy’s mother was a “Jewess”, but he was not under any Jewish legal constraint. Instead, Timothy willfully submitted to circumcision, which tells me that adherence to religious law is a matter of conviction, not legislation. He chose circumcision in the flesh as an outward symbol of his circumcised heart.

We know that a person can keep the fine points of the law yet be full of the devil – “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision” (Titus 1:10). Paul added, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Corinthians 7:19). And again, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature” (Galatians 6:15). He was looking for change in men’s hearts, not changes in their physical appendages.

Abraham was justified by faith before he submitted to circumcision (Romans 4:9-12). Paul spoke of a spiritual cutting “made without hands” (Colossians 2:11). The New Living Translation said it was not “a physical procedure”, but that “Christ performed a spiritual circumcision – the cutting away of your sinful nature”.

Cutting the flesh

Rather than honor the strict proponents of circumcision, Paul wrote, “Beware of the concision” (Philippians 3:2). The Greek

word used is *katatome* which alludes to mutilation. It is a play on the word translated as circumcision, *peritome*. God hasn’t required blood from any of us, let alone mutilation. The simple incision of an eight-day old child is certainly not *katatome*. The Christian faith is not a heavy burden. His commands are not grievous, nor do they draw blood like some medieval priest flagellating himself in soulish remorse.

Goliath was chided as an “uncircumcised Philistine”. My question is, who did the examination? Paul spoke of “false brethren” who came in “by stealth to spy

Circumcision is the cutting of what is loose and unwashed, what swells up, like an inflated ego, you get the picture. I hate to even use such picture language.

out our liberty which we have in Christ” (Galatians 2:4). Yes, that means exactly what it says. Someone was spying in the men’s room to see whether the Galatian believers bore the Abrahamic “mark”. Believe it or not, we still have such spies doing similar exams today.

What then is the deeper meaning to the cutting of the flesh? For sure, it signifies the removing of the evil tendencies of the old, fallen nature. Joshua called for “sharp knives” for circumcising the males that would enter the Promised Land (Joshua 5:2). We need sharp, cutting-edge preaching in this day of moral laxness and religious lukewarmness. There was

a recovery time when the circumcised were “sore” (Genesis 34:25). The problem with today’s easy-believism is that once a pastor cuts away at a member’s carnal nature, the same member runs to the church down the street where an eager pastor comforts the bleeding disciple and undoes everything the Holy Spirit is trying to accomplish.

It was every father’s responsibility to circumcise his own son. We have few today willing to humbly surrender to the ministry of a caring yet serious spiritual father. Circumcision is the cutting of what is loose and unwashed, what swells up, like an inflated ego, you get the picture. I hate to even use such picture language.

And I might say to the pastor or mentor that mishandling the circumcision process can cripple a man’s ability to reproduce just as a misstep with a sharp knife could cripple one of Abraham’s precious sons. Circumcision is delicate surgery, to say the least, and is always performed in private. Plus, a father, pastor, or man of God, has no right to excuse himself for not performing the ministry of the sharp blade. Moses’ wife circumcised his son and threw the foreskin at his feet because he refused to do what all Hebrew males were commanded to do (Exodus 4:24-27).

Every Israelite male was to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10). It mattered not if they were eight days old or eighty years old. Abraham was ninety-nine when he went under the knife (Genesis 17:24). No one is too old to be reproved for righteousness’ sake. Circumcision was required before partaking of Passover, by which we can assume that the same cutting away of the old nature is mandated for New Testament communion (Exodus 12:44,48).

Circumcising the heart

Exodus gave the original Law; the stone tablets that were broken at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Deuteronomy is the second law, symbolic of a new order, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It dealt more with the heart than the physical flesh. Check out a couple of samplings – “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of



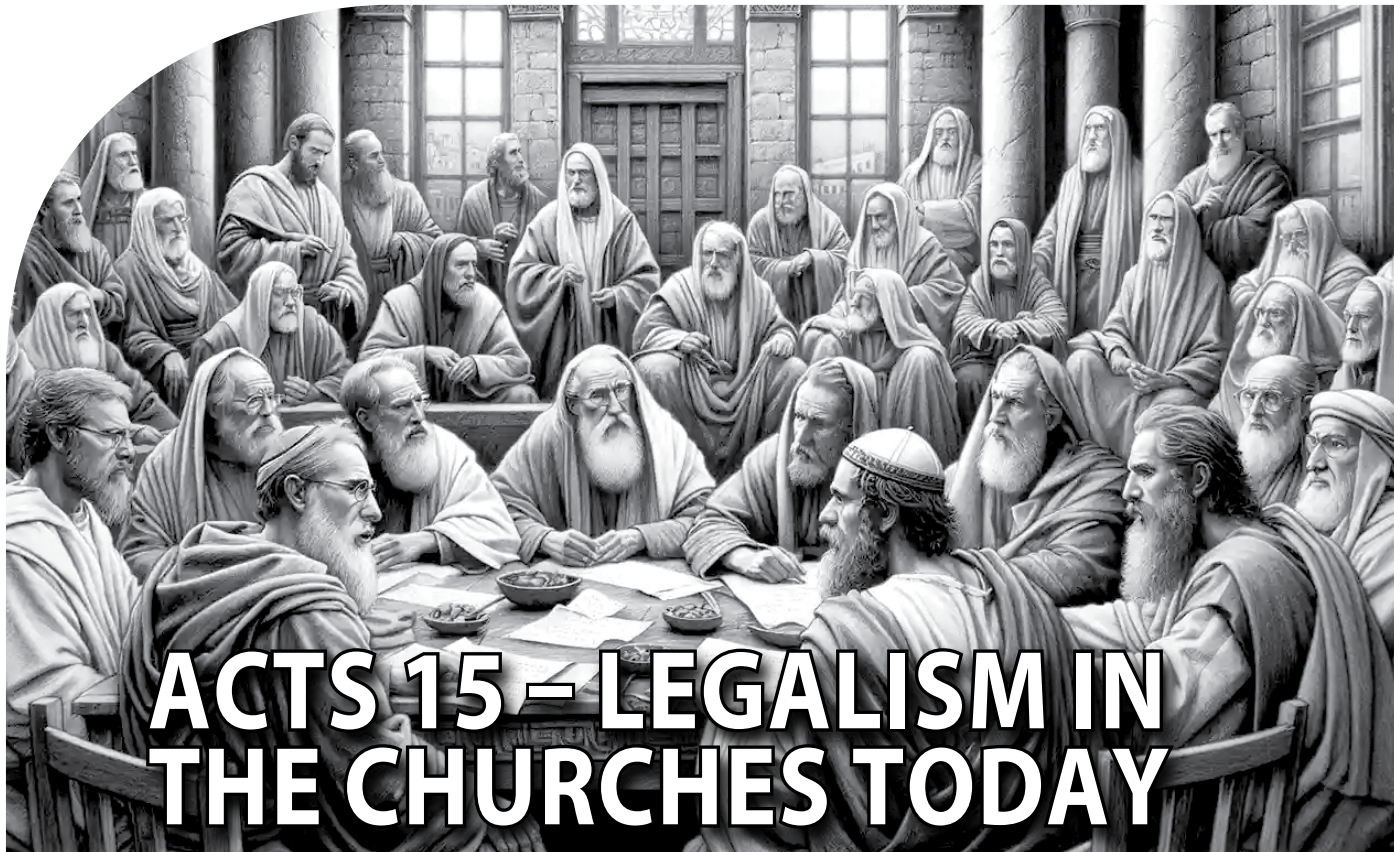
your heart, and be no more stiff-necked” (Deuteronomy 10:16. The purpose of the cutting is to be severed away from the world and separated unto God – “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your children, to love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6). You may feel like this “dying to self” business is killing you, but the end result is always “that you may live”.

They accused Paul of urging parents to forsake Moses and not circumcise their sons (Acts 21:21). He did nothing of the sort. Instead, he directed them to a circumcision that takes place in the heart, a severing that frees people from the loose, undisciplined, cloaked shame of their old natures. I really want to go so far as to say that this circumcision is the baptism of the Holy Spirit – “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). Cloven tongues were the token sign on the Day of Pentecost.

“
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 ”

The prefix “circum” means that the incision is around the full circumference of our lives. We are to walk “circumspectly” in all things (Ephesians 5:15), not just changed down in our hearts, but in our thoughts, actions and ways, literally in the foreskin of our entire lives, something that cannot be accomplished short of a baptism of the very nature of Christ.

Hoping no one misinterpreted my illustrations of the circumcision process. No, circumcision is not a requirement for New Covenant salvation, but yes, it is reflective of the sharp, painful slicing away of the old nature by God, the Holy Spirit. Many divine workings make the “old man”, the old Adam, cringe or become sore. But we are talking about organs or instruments of reproduction. The cloven heart with its cloven tongue shakes the powers of hell and brings a harvest to the foot of the cross. ●



ACTS 15 – LEGALISM IN THE CHURCHES TODAY



DR. DOMENIC MARBANIANG

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The Collins English Dictionary defines legalism as “strict adherence to the law, esp the stressing of the letter of the law rather than its spirit.” The distinction between the strictly literal meaning of the law (*litera legis*) and its general meaning, its spirit or its intention, is an important one in law and jurisprudence. Also, the fact that the presence of a criminal intent (*mens rea*) in an act establishes the doer’s culpability is universally accepted in all mature codifications of law.

It is in the New Testament writings of Paul that we first see the expressions “spirit” and “letter” in relation to the law of Moses (Rom.2:29; 7:6; 2Cor.3:6). Paul says that “the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” (2Cor.3:6). In essence, a legalistic person is carnal and sinful even if he meticulously observes what the law literally prescribes. He is like the rich young man who came to Jesus and claimed that he obeyed all the commandments, but when Jesus told him to sell all his riches, give them to the poor, and follow Him, his emotions attached to his riches took over him (Mark 10:17-22). His acts conformed to the letter of the law, but his heart was where his worldly treasure was. The same was so with Cain who killed his righteous brother Abel—his intentions were questionable, carnal and wicked (Gen.4:6; 1John3:12) though he seemed to be “rightly” bringing the offering (Gen.4:7, Septuagint).

While the Apostolic church was still predominantly Jewish, the problem of legalism did not arise. It was only when Gentiles started coming in, beginning with Acts 10, that the issue began to surface. The issue was so intense that even Peter, through whom the door of the church opened to the Gentiles, at a point could not resist the temptation of it. This happened when Peter visited Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas ministered, and where an increasing number of Greeks were being added to the church first through the ministry of Cyprian and Cyrenian believers (Acts 11:20; Gal.2:11). It is not certain whether this event happened before the Jerusalem Council in Acts



15 or after, but Paul's rebuke of Peter that he was forcing "Gentiles to follow Jewish customs" (Gal.2:14) seems to indicate that it may have been prior to Acts 15, i.e. prior to the Apostolic decision to not force Jewish practices on Gentile believers; for, in line with this, if it was after, Paul may have reminded Peter of his own words during the Council:

"God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction 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 the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers 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." (Acts 15:8-11)

It seems very improbable that a Peter who said these words in response to the query sent from Antioch would go back to Antioch and then violate the same principle. But, on the other hand,

This happened when Peter visited Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas ministered, and where an increasing number of Greeks were being added to the church first through the ministry of Cyprian and Cyrenian believers (Acts 11:20; Gal.2:11).

if one regards Galatians 2:11 as chronologically following the events of Galatians 2:1-10, then it does not seem improbable that this happened after the Jerusalem Council, shockingly. Legalism can be very subtle and compelling—Paul says that when Peter, out of fear of Jewish Christians, began to separate himself from the Gentile believers and fellowship only with Jewish Christians, other Jews, including Barnabas, followed suit.

If that had happened to Peter and Barnabas, it can happen to anyone. Both Jesus and Paul termed legalism as hypocrisy (Gal.2:13; Matt.6:2; 22:18; 23:13). It appeared to be externally clean, the "outside of the cup and dish," but was internally rotten with lust (Matt.23:25).

While Jewish legalistic issues such as circumcision in the flesh are no longer issues in the church today, we still need to ask whether there are ways in which the carnality and hypocrisy of legalism is afflicting and spiritually destroying churches in our times.

A few of the characteristics of legalism may be scripturally traced as follows:

- Legalism involves external conformity to a form of holiness that is man-made and man-approved (Gal.1:10; John 5:44; 12:43; Luke 20:46; 2Tim.3:5). Legalism seeks the approval of men rather than the approval of God. It desires to look holy rather than be holy. While legalists may deeply desire true holiness, their fear of human rejection and desire for human admiration prevents them from serving God in truth and spirit and their ministry is carnal thoroughly. In fact, if they think people appreciate those who confess their sins and talk of their weaknesses, they may



exactly do that, not to please God but to be admired by men. But God does not look at one's appearance; He looks at the heart (1Sam.16:7). The question to ask oneself is: "What is the spirit or intent of this action? Does it truly conform to the love of Christ? Is it something that Christ approves of?"

- Legalism involves carnal separatism, i.e. a separatism that relates to flesh (Gal.2:12; Jude 19; Luke 5:30; 1Cor.3:3; Luke 18:9-14). Love heals but the law only condemns. Therefore, legalism goes hand in hand with division and separatism. Separatism here means that which looks down on others and regards oneself or one's group as better and holier. It is loaded with spiritual pride about self and contempt for others and so

Jesus was not ashamed or afraid of talking to the Samaritan woman because He knew who He was (John 4:27). Separatism restricts the work of the Spirit. Just imagine, if Jesus had avoided the talk with the Samaritan woman, would the Samaritans have been able to meet Jesus?

leads to spiritual blindness and self-destruction (Psa.36:2; Prov.16:18). Imagine what would have happened if Paul had not rebuked Peter and allowed him to be influenced by the Jewish Christians to separate from fellowshiping with Gentile believers. Imagine what would have happened if he had not rebuked the Corinthians for becoming divided over preachers. The law of Moses prescribed divisions for social management; but what the Lord really seeks is the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph.4:1-3). That was what Jesus prayed for (John 17:21). Any form of fleshly-based separatism of church fellowship (be it gender, race, language, or culture) is misguided and derailed from the track of God's purpose for the church. Jesus was not ashamed or afraid of talking to the Samaritan woman because He knew who He was (John 4:27). Separatism restricts the work of the Spirit. Just imagine, if Jesus had avoided the talk with the Samaritan woman, would the Samaritans have been able to meet Jesus? The question to ask oneself is: "Do I look at other Christians or churches as inferior or superior for reasons that are purely external and carnal?" "Do I have cultural pride and regard people of other cultures as inferior?" "Does social status mean much to me?" "Do I cherish a group-identity?" "Do I restrict the work of the Spirit by entertaining some group-centered attitude?"

- Legalism undermines the work of Christ and perverts the Gospel of salvation by grace alone (Gal.1:6-10; 1Cor.4:7; Gal.2:21). Legalism essentially teaches salvation by observation of rules and regulations. The grace of God is not lawless and workless. Grace teaches us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit.2:12-13). God saves us by grace so that we will be rich in good works (Eph.2:10; 1Tim.6:18). The works of

grace exalt God and lift Him up. The works of law, on the other hand, attempt to exalt the self. The question to ask oneself is: "Am I proud of my talent and achievement or am I daily humbled by and grateful for the fact that everything that I have is given by God, something not to boast about?"

"Do I become excited when I sense that I am more preferred to others, or have a fan following?" (1Cor.4:7)

"Do I judge and condemn people without considering that I myself am the greatest of sinners and have been saved by grace?" (1Cor.4:4).

- Legalism emphasizes on minor things—related to particular rules about tithing, clothing, fasting—and ignores the weightier matters like justice, mercy and faithfulness—the ultimate spiritual values that are the basis of the particular rules, i.e., the spirit of the law (Matt.23:23; 12:7). For the Greek philosopher Plato, an understanding of the difference between ultimate values and particular applications in any political system determines the health of the governed city or polis. God has not called us to a blind observation of shadowy, particularistic rules but to true spiritual wisdom in matters of justice, righteousness, and mercy. By His death, Christ freed us from this world of shadows, of basic principles that merely concern perishable things, and lifted us up to sit with Him in heavenly places, to know Him and to be like Him (Col.3:1-4). As Paul said, "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.... Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their

harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Col.2:16-23). Let us ask ourselves: "Am I more worried about rituals and customs, or do I seek to know why these rituals and customs actually exist?" "Do I seek to fulfill man-made rituals and customs or do I seek to be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love?" (Col.3:12-14).

- Legalism locates the moral problem (and temptation) without rather than within and teaches that morality or immorality depends on how external situations are handled (Job 1:11; 2:4; Gen.3:12-13; Mark 7:21-23; 2Pet.2:7; James 1:13-16). In the early period of Christian history, there were some believers who left their towns and cities and went to the desert in search for holiness and purity. They became known as the desert fathers. They lived a life of isolation, meditation, and prayer disconnected from all the worries of city and town life. They thought that away from such world of temptations, they can grow closer to God and be purer. However, very soon they discovered that their battle with sin did not end by shifting to a society-free environment. The first of these monks, Antony, who became known as the father of monasticism said, "Who sits in solitude and is quiet hath escaped from three wars: hearing, speaking, seeing: yet against one thing shall he continually battle: that is, his own heart" (The Sayings of the Fathers, Book II). Paul confessed in Romans 7 that the law was only able to reveal to him how sinful he was rather than helping him become internally righteous. He would not have known that to covet was wrong if the spiritual law had not told it to him (Rom.7:7). Paul realized that the problem was within: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find" (Rom.7:18). Recently, the Taliban government in Afghanistan is reported to have made a new vice and virtue law

that bans women from raising their voice in public in addition to the earlier mandate to wear a full burqa in public and going out only when accompanied by a male. The underlying belief behind this law is that women are the cause of temptation for men and lack of control over their appearance can cause social disorder. But Jesus taught that, it is not the woman but the man who looks at her with an intention to lust who is the one to blame: "Whoever looks at a woman [with the intention] to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt.5:28). Legalism attempts to handle a problem by dealing with it externally. I have come across some churches where the leader prohibited all prophesying in the church when he discovered that some, especially the youth, were prophesying from their own mind. Instead, he should have tried to guide them. But by stifling them and imposing a self-made unscriptural rule or law to solve a problem, he discouraged the gift of prophecy from operating in his assembly. The children of the flesh persecute the children of the Spirit (Gal.4:29). The questions to ask oneself is: "What do I value in people, their external compliance to rules or their personal growth in Christ?" "Do I attempt to understand my child's feelings and struggles, or do I only focus on whether he or she is obeying the rules I set?" "Do I think that changing a city or even a church can get me closer to God or do I understand that I am God's temple, and Christ loves to dwell in me and have communion with me?" ●

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL - MISSION AMONG GENTILES



J.N. MANOKARAN

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I Introduction

Will the Christian spiritual movement that began on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem end up as a sect within Judaism? The Great Commission that embraces the whole world, and humanity will be diligently done by the Church. The danger was real, but the first Church Council, The Council of Jerusalem or Apostolic Council, happened around 48-50 AD in Jerusalem and is recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts. (Acts 15)

II Two questions

The issues centered on two questions: First, do the Gentiles first have to become Jews before they can become Christians? (Acts 15:1,5) Second, do the Gentiles have to observe the Mosaic Law after they become Christians? (Acts 15:11) Second question has a few sub-questions. How can the Gentiles ignore God's covenant law? How can there be fellowship between the Law-keeping Jewish Christians and Law-ignoring Gentile Christians?

III Centre of Gentile Christianity

The city of Antioch became the center of Gentile Christianity while Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians. Though Cornelius was already a believer from a Gentile/Roman background, there were not many disciples among them. (Acts 10) The leadership of the Antioch Church was multi-cultural, multi-national, and multi-racial. The five leaders were from three different known continents of that time. (Acts 13:1) The news reached some of the Jewish Christians that many Gentiles became also followers of the Lord. Although they were glad, they did have anxiety the Gentile Christians would be loyal to the Mosaic Law. They came to Antioch and taught that Gentile believers should be circumcised to be saved. That resulted in a need for discussion



and decision from the Apostles. Hence the gathering together of the Jerusalem Council.

IV Distraction and Division

The Jewish believers were zealous for the Law of Moses. They expected the Gentile believers to accept circumcision as the sign of covenant and follow the Mosaic Law. From Jerusalem, they visited Antioch. They began to teach that circumcision is essential for the salvation of Gentile believers. That means salvation is by faith plus work, the work in the specific context being circumcision. That created a division or difference of opinion among the believers and leaders in the Church at Antioch.

Covenant and salvation: Judaizers mixed God's covenant with the nation of Israel and salvation. Being a member of God's covenant community did not guarantee salvation. (Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25) Abraham was justified by faith, before circumcision. (Romans 4:9-13) Circumcision was a fruit

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or evidence of faith and not vice versa.

Grace and works: Imposing circumcision as a means of salvation is a distortion of the gospel and nullifies God's grace. (Galatians 1:7; 2:3-5,21) The Jewish believers advocated salvation is grace plus works. The work of Law was circumcision. Even today, many cults even denominations add human work to faith to receive salvation.

Privileged and unfortunate: Judaizers considered themselves as privileged and others as unfortunate or rejected people. Hence, for them, salvation was only for Jews or those who are converted as Jews. It denies the universal character of salvation. (Colossians 3:11; Titus 2:11) Even today, some denominations teach that there is no salvation apart



from the specific teachings or doctrine that they subscribe to.

Equality and fellowship: The Jewish Christian believers could not imagine how Gentiles could become their equals without becoming or converting to the Jewish faith and culture. These people came from Judea to Antioch to persuade the Gentile believers to become Jews first. Judaizers believed that the commonality for fellowship was circumcision and not the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, even today the churches are divided because of caste, class, race, denominations, and other worldly factors.

Mission nullified? By demanding Gentiles to be circumcised, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas was discredited, even nullified. They also said that the Gentiles could not be saved without the Law of Moses, which is a serious issue. Paul and Barnabas as true shepherds

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defended their flock and opposed the false teaching. Paul and Barnabas also decided to go to Jerusalem to discuss and settle the issue in consultation with the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem.

V Dissention and Debate

While there was a great number of Gentile believers in the Antioch Church this created dissention and debate. The Gentile believers could have been disillusioned and could have backslid. Judaizers were more concerned with external forms of religiosity, while Paul and Barnabas were concerned about the spiritual essentials of the Christian faith. There are many churches who emphasize on external signs of Christian faith, and neglect the inner spiritual transformation. Paul and Barnabas took a clear stand that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only essential for salvation. They feared that like Pharisees, there would Christian Pharisees, having more faith in legalism rather than the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

VI Discussion

It was decided to take up this issue for discussion with the Apostles and other leaders in the mother church, the Church at Jerusalem. There was a need for authentic decisions. As the Apostles were alive and available, it was wise for them to take up the matter to the Apostles in Jerusalem. Thank God that this happened at the beginning itself. God preserved the Church from fallacy and defeated Satan’s design to reduce the church to an insignificant cult of Judaism.

VII Distinction does not exist:

Peter explained that there was no distinction between the Jews and Gentiles. This he had realized and understood when he saw a trance and the Lord guided him to go to the house of Cornelius. (Acts 10) The trance helped Peter to understand that God does not discriminate against the Gentiles, though the Jews did. As God sent angels to the house of Cornelius, God sent Peter to the house of Cornelius. If an angel could go to the house of Cornelius, Peter also should go.

In other words, all humans whether Jews or Gentiles, are sinners and need the Savior Lord Jesus Christ. Paul asserts all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) All religious, social, economic, and political status ascribed by the world has no value in the spiritual life. Caste, Clan, Class, Family background, nationality, race, birthplace, intelligence, beauty/handsomeness, skin color, skills, club memberships, celebrity status, religious piety, and professional abilities...are of no value.

Peter suggested that a yoke should not be placed on Gentiles that neither our fathers nor we could bear. (Acts 15:10) Peter opined that the requirement of Mosaic Law in spiritual, moral, religious, social, ceremonial, hygienic, ritual aspects was a burden. Not only Peter's generation, even their forefathers also realized so. The New Covenant is the Law written in the hearts, by the loving God, and disciples respond in loving obedience. (Hebrews 8:10)

VIII Definition

The gospel is all sinners are saved (which is a gift), by the grace of God, when a person exercises faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter clarified and defined salvation as by grace. Later Paul writes to Ephesians mentioning that salvation is God's grace, God's gift received in faith. (Ephesians 2:8-10) There is only one name of the Lord Jesus Christ, through that name alone is salvation. There are not multiple ways according to culture or language or preferences or choices. One plus one equals two – This is the only right answer. One plus one equals three, four, five... are all wrong answers – billions of wrong answers. The Lord Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life. (John 14:6) Billions of wrong ways are there that leads to eternal death.

IX Defense

The success of ministry to Gentiles is given as reports at least on four occasions. Acts 14:27; 15:3; 15:4 and 15:12) The fruit of their labor in preaching the gospel and calling people to faith was evident. A tree is known for its fruits. (Luke 6:43-45)

The response was a great joy (15:3); and also protests. (15:1,5) Paul and Barnabas defended their position by sharing how God has worked among Gentiles with signs and wonders. They also explained how believers are found among Gentiles. According to some scholars Timothy and Titus were present in Jerusalem and they were seen as examples of God's mercy. Paul brought Titus to Jerusalem as a representative of all Gentile believers. (Galatians 2:1-4) Though his name is not mentioned, Titus is included in the other believers. (Acts 15:2)

X Decree

James, the Just – the half-brother of Jesus, brother of Jude, and author of the book of James spoke. (Matthew 13:55; Jude 1; James 1:1) He was the chairman of the council, not Peter or John. Apostle James makes the final decision after listening to various opinions, debates, and arguments. James the Wise quoted Amos, stating that salvation would come to the Gentiles as he had prophesized. (Amos 9:11-12) He asserted and affirmed that the Salvation for Gentiles has a strong Scriptural foundation. The Tabernacle (booth) of David had fallen according to Amos. It has been fulfilled as the Nation of Israel had rejected the Messiah and teamed with Romans to crucify Him. God rebuilds the fallen tabernacle or booth of David, through the Church, where Jews and Gentiles (nations) come together. Gentiles are called by His Name. They do neither become Jews nor are called as Jews but called by His Holy Name.

However, James determined that the Jerusalem Council would write to the Gentile believers to do certain practical things so that the Jewish community would not be offended, and the fellowship broken. Four best practices were similar to those of the Seven Noahide laws. 1) Abstain from food offered to idols; 2) sexual immorality; 3) the meat of strangled animals, and 4) blood. These were to differentiate between believers Gentiles and others. These practices were

especially mentioned because they are associated with the religious worship of gods and goddesses in many cultures. (Leviticus 17-18)

XI Dissemination and Delegation

The Jerusalem Council was pleased with the decision. The decision was documented, and it was sent as a letter through a delegation comprising of Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas. (Acts 15:22) Along with Paul and Barnabas who came from Antioch; Judas and Silas were deputed from Jerusalem Church to the Antioch church. It was good to know that the Jews who were Judaizers had humility and were teachable. This decree was disseminated among churches as a letter to several churches with mixed congregations of Jews and Gentiles. The letter states that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to the council to take such a decision. The Spirit of God controlled and directed the discussion as well as the decision.

XII Conclusion and Challenge

The Lord Jesus Christ broke the walls of hostility between the Israel and the Gentiles. Symbolically, the veil that divided the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. What God had opened, no one could shut. There is only One Gospel, One Savior Jesus Christ, Name, Way, Truth, and Life. Some misguided Jewish Christians with zeal for the Law were used by Satan to shut the door of salvation, hope, and eternal life for Gentiles. Sovereign God overruled such mischievous and malicious attempts and ensured that the Gospel is well defined, defended, and declared to the world. Similar distractive and disruptive strategies were adapted by Satan throughout the history of the church, he was always a defeated foe. ●



INDIA BIBLE COLLEGE AND SEMINARY

FASTING PRAYER

2024
October
23



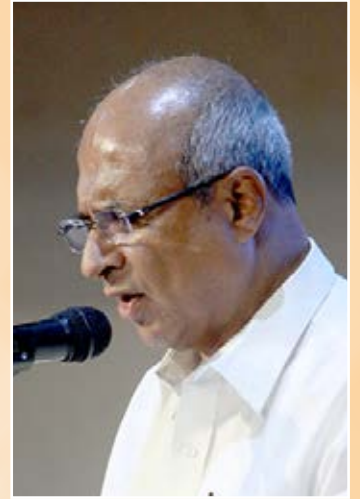
Principal: Dr. Saju Joseph



Pastor T.J. Samuel
ministered the Word



Prayer by Dr. Shaibu Abraham and Lt. Col. V.I. Luke



Pastor Varghese Chacko Prays, while Pastor D. Samkutty speaks at the evening session.
Rev. Justin Jacob translates.



Faculty and students who led singing and prayer during the sessions

COMMUNION SERVICE



Chaplain, Rev. Eldho K Mohan



Evang. Anu Koshy,
Malayalam Chaplain



Students led in worship and reading scripture





INDIA BIBLE COLLEGE AND SEMINARY **DAY OF PRAYER AND COMMUNION SERVICE**

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