

THE SOUTHEAST SOWER

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THOSE PHARISEES IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH SEWELL HALL

Having come to think of the church in Jerusalem as the model church, it is shocking to learn that visitors from there often caused problems in Gentile churches, insisting that Gentiles had to become Jews to be saved. And when Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to discuss it with the apostles and elders, “some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5). We wonder, “What were these Pharisees doing in the church?”

Ten years later, when Paul came to Jerusalem to bring relief to the needy saints, the gift was gratefully received, but “they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and

they are all zealous for the law’” (Acts 21:20). Sadly, some of them were more inclined to believe false reports about Paul than to believe Paul himself, and the effort to appease them resulted in four years of imprisonment for Paul.

Who were these Pharisees in the Jerusalem church? A. T. Robertson well observed, “They were Jews first, then Christians.” They had accepted the basic facts about Jesus and doubtless been baptized to become disciples, but when some of Christ’s teaching contradicted their Judaism, they chose to compromise their Christianity rather than their Judaism.

Why would Pharisees be tolerated in such a great church? For one thing, they were not a problem locally since all the members were Jews.

Jews could continue to observe many of the requirements of the law, as well as their traditions, as mere custom without denying the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for sin. Paul seems to argue for this in Romans 14. However, when they demanded such observance by Gentiles as a requirement for salvation, they had crossed a line and on this point Paul “did not yield in submission, even for a moment” (Gal. 2:5). To the credit of the “apostles and elders,” the Judaizers were not permitted to influence the letter that was sent to the Gentile churches regarding their observance of the law (Acts 15:23-29). In fact, those who had gone out causing problems in Antioch were repudiated (v. 24).

A similar problem plagued Gentile churches. It is hard to

The Southeast Church of Christ meets at:

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Mogadore, OH
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SERVICES:

Sunday

Bible Study:

10:00 am

Worship:

10:50 am

6:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study:

7:30 pm

believe that there were those in Corinth and Thessalonica who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. This, and later problems with Gnostics, resulted from the fact that they were Greeks first, then Christians.

Before being too quick to condemn these churches, we need to look at the congregations of which we are a part. How many among us are businessmen first, then Christians; hunters or fishermen first, then Christians; sports fans first, then Christians; alumni first, then Christians; Republican or Democrats first, then Christians; family first, then Christians; Americans first, then Christians; Caucasians first, then Christians; tourists first, then Christians? Is it even possible that some might be elders first, then Christians; or preachers first, then Christians? Business meetings can sometimes reveal surprising attitudes.

Furthermore, before judging other members of the congregation we need to examine ourselves. Is there anything that we are first, then Christians? What impression do others have of us? Do they think of us first as Christians? Or do they think of us as something else first, then Christians? Or perhaps they do not think of us as Christians at all? Have we sometimes excused ourselves for doing something we knew was wrong because of some other compelling concern? Whenever we

compromise any principle taught by Jesus for any reason, we reveal ourselves as only secondarily Christians.

It is not wrong to be a businessman, fishermen, sports fan, etc., or to involve ourselves in any of the other activities or concerns mentioned above. It is wrong, however, to compromise our Christian principles and commitments to accommodate any other interest. When we do so, it is a clear indication that our conversion is not quite complete.

Paul's conversion is a model for us all. He continued to be a Jew and even a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), but these were nothing to him compared to his loyalty to Christ. "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:5-8). "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Our King expects us to "seek

first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33).

The Christian's Pledge (author unknown)

- I will do more than belong; I will participate.
- I will do more than care; I will help.
- I will do more than believe; I will practice.
- I will do more than be fair; I will be kind.
- I will do more than forgive; I will work.
- I will do more than earn; I will enrich.
- I will do more than teach; I will inspire.
- I will do more than give; I will serve.
- I will do more than live; I will grow.
- I will do more than be friendly; I will be a friend.

Cant's and Cans (author unknown)

If you would have some worthwhile plans, You've got to watch your cant's and cans; You can't aim low and then rise high; You can't succeed if you don't try; You can't go wrong and come out right; You can't love sin and walk in light; You can't throw time and means away; And live sublime from day to day.