

The Jerusalem Council, Acts 15, and the FFOZ (Torah Clubs)

Circumcision and Baptism can't both be signs of belonging to Christ

IF as FFOZ claims, the Torah is permanent, normative for all believers, both Jew and Gentile, in both the Church age and the Messianic Age to come, by God's purpose and design: How can circumcision NOT be a prerequisite (or requirement afterwards) to salvation?

Genesis 17:14 New International Version

"Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

For everyone who wanted to be a part of God's covenant with Israel, even predating the Mosaic Law, circumcision was absolutely required of every descendant of Abraham. Those who failed to do so were to be "cut off", they could not remain a part of the people without it.

And yet, the Church is given a NEW sign, Baptism, to be the sign of belonging.

Matthew 28:19-20 New International Version

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

If the old sign is still normative because the Law cannot be fulfilled or amended, even by Jesus, why are we given another?

If the old sign is still in force, why did Paul and Barnabas oppose the Judaizers in Antioch who were advocating for gentile believers to be circumcised, and take the matter to the Jerusalem Council? Why hadn't Paul and Barnabas already required gentile believers to be circumcised if the Mosaic Law was still in force?

Acts 15:1-2 New International Version

15 Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

The Jews (and gentile converts) under the Old Covenant were indeed saved by faith (Hebrews 11), but in order to live in obedience, they needed to keep the Law, circumcision included. They failed to keep the Law fully, as only Christ could fully live according to the Law, but the requirement was real, to violate it was a sin. In the Old Covenant, failure to be circumcised was disobedience to a command of God, it was a sin.

IF Torah is permanent, how can this requirement have been changed by the authority of Jesus and the Apostles? What gives them the right to set aside Torah? That's exactly what the Pharisees thought.

Acts 15:5-21 New International Version

5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

16 "After this I will return

and rebuild David's fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,

and I will restore it,

17 that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,

even all the Gentiles who bear my name,

says the Lord, who does these things'—

18 things known from long ago.

19 "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. 21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

The Jerusalem Council, led by Jesus' half-brother James, with the Apostle Peter as a primary advocate, specifically and forcefully rejected the very question that the Hebrew Roots Movement seeks to overturn. For gentile believers to be required, encouraged, persuaded, coaxed, induced, or whatever else you want to call it, to put the yoke of the Law of Moses upon their necks not only ignores the book of Acts, it renders Baptism superfluous if not redundant, and ultimately begins believers down a path of works-salvation (a dangerous road indeed for it must fail) foreign to the spirit and intent of the Gospel. Despite the oft-stated protest that the Hebrew Roots Movement is about recapturing the faith and practice of Jesus and the Apostles, the claims fail utterly to meet either the standard of Church History or the wisdom contained in holy scripture.