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OVERCOMING RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Teachings instilled into you when you were young tend to last a lifetime. They are the hardest notions to “unlearn” to embrace a greater truth.

This was a problem that plagued the Apostle Paul’s ministry. The Jewish converts to Christ still held strongly to the customs and rituals of the Mosaic Law. Paul had taught the gentile converts about grace and liberty apart from the law. However, the Jewish converts expected Paul to still practice all the rituals and expected him to strictly keep the Jewish laws and customs that were set by Moses.

Chapter 21 of Acts tells us of this. Paul was in Jerusalem with James [the Pastor] and all the church elders. The multitude of converts wanted Paul to show that he would abide by the Mosaic Law. They put Paul with four other men to vow to keep the law. They shaved their heads to embark on seven days of purification in the temple.

Just before the seven days of purification were completed, Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple and stirred up a ruckus. They cried out in public that Paul had been teaching people to go against the Mosaic Law. The people that heard this were so infuriated that they seized Paul, closed the temple, and went about to kill him. Roman soldiers rescued him.

Paul gave his defense in Acts 22. The point here is that even though these Jews had become followers of Christ, they were still dogmatically bound to the traditions with which they had grown up with. They could not receive the gospel of God’s grace, love, and salvation by faith alone. They believed that salvation still required observation and obedience to the Mosaic law. They would not change.

I can relate to that. I grew up in an old-fashioned Pentecostal legalistic culture. It took me decades to overcome the legalistic culture of “do’s and don’ts” considered by us to be the standard for “holy living.” I even prayed to God that He would restore my idea of “holy living” to the church.

Years later I then truly realized that holiness was not a matter of rules to live by. Holiness is a condition of the heart [your spirit] that guides our daily lives in the path of righteousness. It is the relationship with the Lord whom we choose to follow, love, and to please. That is the holiness without which no man shall “see” or fellowship with God.

We must lay down our old unbiblical concepts and embrace the good news [gospel] of God’s love, forgiveness, grace [favor], and liberty that are found in Christ Jesus.