

## Direct references to the “party of the circumcision” in the New Testament

### *Who were they?*

Paul calls his antagonists in the letter to the churches of Galatia “the party of the circumcision” (Gal 2:12). He also calls them false brethren (Gal 2:4).

Other passages in the New Testament call them “the sect of the Pharisees who believed (Acts 15:5), “the dogs, the evil workers, the false circumcision” (Php 3:2)

They are commonly called “Judaizers”, but that label or name does not appear in the Bible. It comes from the Greek verb in Gal 2:14 meaning “to become a Judean” or “live like the Jews”.

The party of the circumcision made themselves out to be Christian Jews.

Do not confuse the party of the circumcision with the Jews who attacked Paul many times during his missionary journeys. They definitely did not consider themselves to be Christians.

The party of the circumcision were Jewish “Christians” who attacked the gospel, especially justification by faith. They required Gentile Christians to adopt the Law of Moses as their rule of life. The sign of this was circumcision, which they compelled the Gentile Christians to undergo.

The most succinct statement of their teaching is found in Acts 15:1 and 5:

Acts 15:1

15 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Acts 15:5

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

Here are all the passages I could find that mention the party of the circumcision directly:

### *In Galatians:*

Gal 1:6-9

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only **there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ**. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Gal 2:4

4 But it was because **of the false brethren** secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

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Gal 2:11-12

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of **certain men from James**, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing **the party of the circumcision**.

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Gal 3:1-5

You foolish Galatians, **who has bewitched you**, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain? 5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

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Gal 4:17

**They** eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.

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Gal 5:2-5

2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

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Gal 5:7-12

7 You were running well; **who hindered you from obeying the truth?** 8 This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. 10 I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but **the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is**. 11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. 12 I wish that **those who are troubling you** would even mutilate themselves.

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Gal 6:12-14

12 **Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.** 13 For **those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.** 14

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*In Acts:*

Acts 15:1-5

**5 Some men came down from Judea** and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But **some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed** stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

It is somewhat surprising that they do not show up more often in the book of Acts.

It is possible that Paul refers to them again in his farewell address to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:28-32. However, the "perverse things" that these savage wolves will utter are not explained further so it's impossible to tell.

*In other New Testament books:*

2 Cor 11:3-15

3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. 4 For **if one comes and preaches another Jesus** whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, **or a different gospel which you have not accepted**, you bear this beautifully. 5 For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. 6 But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? 8 I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; 9 and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

12 But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from **those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting**. 13 For such men **are false apostles**, deceitful workers, **disguising themselves as apostles of Christ**. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as **servants of righteousness**, whose end will be according to their deeds.

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In order that their claim of being an apostle of Christ would appear credible, they had to have been Jewish.

Phil 3:2-6

2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 **circumcised** the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, **a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;** 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to **the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.**

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1 Tim 1:3-7

3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may **instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,** 4 nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. 5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 **For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7 wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.**

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Titus 1:10-16

10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and **deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,** 11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. 12 One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, 14 **not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.** 15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

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Titus 3:9-11

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and **disputes about the Law,** for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

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