

Circumcision Collision: Jewish Law and Jesus Followers

תורת משה בבשורת מתי, חזון יוחנן, ויוסטינוס מרטיר
 צבי אריה לאם – arilamm@gmail.com



Hieronymus Bosch, *St. John on Patmos*, 15th century

1) The “Circumcision Group”

Acts 15.1, 19-20 (early 2 nd century CE)
1 Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”... 19 [James said] Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.
Galatians 1.6, 2.4-5 (ca. 50s CE)
1.6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. 2.4 But because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us— 5 we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you... 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; 12 for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.

2) The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 5.17-20 (ca. 70-80 CE)	Luke 16.16-17 (early 2 nd cent.)
17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.	16 “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it. 17 It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.
Mishnah, <i>Sotah</i> 3.4 [MS Kaufmann] (early 3 rd century CE)	
הוא היה אומ'. חסיד שוטה, רשע ערום, אשה פרושה, מכת פרושים, הרי אילו מכלי(ה) עולם	[R. Joshua] used to say: A pious fool, a clever villain, a Pharisaic (? abstinent?) woman, the wounds of the Pharisees, these are the destroyers of the world.

Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah* (ca. 1145-1168) to Mishnah, *Sotah* 3.4

“The wounds of the Pharisees” – It's interpretation is as follows: the sages, peace be upon them, named themselves (?) “Pharisees,” on account of their separation from worldly matters – from the depredations, bad deeds, and general pursuit of worldliness [characteristic of human society] – and their turning to matter of the world to come, and to good deeds. But there were those [described by the sages (b. Sotah 22b)] who gloried in this [lifestyle], so that others should suppose that they had truly separated from base things and bad deeds...[but were] themselves base. And they accepted upon themselves extraneous stringencies, and made themselves conspicuous in their dress in order to mislead people [into thinking them more pious than they were]. For this reason [the sages] referred to the[ir actions] – on account of their excesses and their degradation of the Torah – as “wounds,” and spoke of “the wounds of the Pharisees.”

3) The Book of Revelation

Revelation 14.12 (late 1st – early 2nd century CE)

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 12.14

1 Corinthians 10.25-32 (ca. 50s CE)

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write... 14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication (πορνείαι).

25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, 26 for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” 27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— 29 I mean the other’s conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else’s conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks? 31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.

Revelation 2.8-9

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life: 9 “I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

4) Justin Martyr

Dialogue with Trypho 46-7 (ca. 156-167 CE)

"But if some, even now, wish to live in the observance of the institutions given by Moses, and yet believe in this Jesus who was crucified, recognising Him to be the Christ of God, and that it is given to Him to be absolute Judge of all, and that His is the everlasting kingdom, can they also be saved?" he inquired of me...

And Trypho again inquired, "But if some one, knowing that this is so, after he recognises that this man is Christ, and has believed in and obeys Him, wishes, however, to observe these [institutions], will he be saved?"

I said, "In my opinion, Trypho, such an one will be saved, if he does not strive in every way to persuade other men,--I mean those Gentiles who have been circumcised from error by Christ, to observe the same things as himself, telling them that they will not be saved unless they do so. This you did yourself at the commencement of the discourse, when you declared that I would not be saved unless I observe these institutions."