

# OpenTheo

## Should Christians Be Expected to Work for Free?

May 26, 2022



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why Paul circumcised Timothy in Acts 16:1–3 after the judgment against requiring circumcision was given by the Council of Jerusalem and whether it's wrong for Christians to expect other Christians to work for free since it's "for the Lord."

\* Why did Paul circumcise Timothy in Acts 16:1–3 after the judgment against requiring circumcision was given by the Council of Jerusalem?

\* Is it wrong for fellow Christians to expect me to work for free since it's "for the Lord"?

### Transcript

#STRask Should Christians Be Expected to Work for Free? #STRask Should Christians Be Expected to Work for Free? I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Koukl, thanks for listening to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. Alright, let's start, Greg, with the first question. This one comes from Charles Clackston.

Why did 's Why did Paul- Why did Paul- Clackston- Oh, because there's a Charles Thaxton who's an ID guy. Okay. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy in Acts 16 after the judgment of the Council of Jerusalem? Well, if you look at the passage, actually, the Council of Jerusalem judgment was just before that in chapter 15, and basically the details were that one did not have to- a Gentile did not have to keep the Jewish law in order to be a Christian under Messiah Christ, Messiah Jesus rather than that would be redundant in Messiah Christ.

And so there's a lot of detail in there, but then you have Paul immediately circumcising a Greek. Now we know from Paul's writing especially in Galatians chapter 5 that if you receive circumcision, then Christ is of no use to you. You have been severed from Christ.

You who are seeking to be justified by law. Okay. So in Acts 15 and in the Galatians 5, the circumcision issue is an issue that's theological and is related to justification.

Are we justified by law characterized by circumcision or are we justified by grace? All

right. The answer in Acts 15 and in Galatians 5 is grace. And so aggressively in Galatians 5, as Paul put it, that he says that if you receive circumcision for that reason being justified by law, you are severed from Christ.

It's one or the other circumcision on all the rest of the law on the one side or the Messiah and the grace of God on the other. If it's by law, it's not by grace. If it's by grace, it's not by law.

Okay. If you are justified by law, then Christ died. Needlessly.

These are different statements that Paul makes in different places. I think that first reference was Romans and the second one is Galatians also. So that's the theological dividing line.

All right. Timothy, son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was Greek. So he's got a Jewish mother, but a Greek father at that time, one's Jewishness, I guess, was determined more by the father because he have a patriarchy.

Later it became custom to consider Jewishness by the mother for a number of reasons. But nevertheless, it's still he's right in the middle. He could go one way or the other.

But since people knew that his father was Greek, then Paul had him circumcised. By the way, this is a young man who's well spoken of by the brethren who are in those areas, verse two. Paul wanted him to go with him.

So where's Paul going now? He wants to bring Timothy as a new disciple with him to travel around. All right. He's half Jewish, half Greek and took him, verse three, and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts for they all knew that his father was Greek.

So what you have in this case is a cultural accommodation, not a theological move. Paul understood perfectly and so did Timothy as a disciple of Paul that justification had nothing to do with circumcision. But part of what Paul did was to go to the groups of Jews, the diaspora Jews, those who were dispersed out around the Mediterranean region, in this case, Galatia, and then later on in Greece, et cetera, and meet with the Jews who were dispersed in their meeting places.

Now you can't have a meeting place where you bring a Gentile in. Okay, that's not accepted by those local Jews. And so what Paul did is he took a half Jew and had him circumcised, which would make him acceptable to the Jews coming in.

So that issue was not a barrier for them to consider the gospel. And there's complete legitimacy to making accommodations culturally to remove unnecessary barriers to people to becoming Christian. And here's a great example of that.

There's lots of application of this. Some Christians would never enter a bar, because they think it's wrong. Well, it's not against Scripture to enter a bar because there's alcohol in there because if that were the case, then Jesus could have gone into the upper room for goodness sake on Passover on a good Friday, because there was alcohol they drank.

So well, what about drinking? Well, Scripture isn't against that either. It's against the improper use of alcohol and there's different categories of that, whether it's excessive drinking or also certain circumstances where you want to be sensitive to others. However, when those issues are not issues, having a beer with a non-Christian person sometimes removes a barrier to them to be thinking about Christianity.

Somebody once said to me, "Well, you're going to ruin your witness if you drink in that kind of circumstance." I said, "What witness am I ruining? Well, Christians don't drink. Well, that's not a witness I want to support because that has nothing to do with Christianity. That doesn't ruin any meaningful witness.

Now, I'm not here to stir up people about the issue of drinking, but I do think it is a good parallel here because the whole question of circumcision was very volatile. And in chapter 15, they say, "Hey, don't require this." Well, Paul didn't do it in chapter 16 as a requirement of the law. He did it as an accommodation to a group of people for whom this thing mattered to increase accessibility to the gospel.

And I think that is kind of there's an analog in certain circumstances to drinking, sitting out having a beer with a glass of wine or whatever with a non-Christian. And that makes the environment more comfortable for them to hear what you have to say. And so anyway, I think that's what's going on there.

And maybe you have something to add to that, Amy, I don't know. But that's what's going on. This is not theological.

In Acts 16, it is cultural. And Paul's habit was to go to the Jews in those regions first before he went to the Gentiles. If he's dragging this half-gentle with him who's uncircumcised, that's going to impede his progress with the Jews.

So if he brings this person with who's half Jewish and circumcised, that removes the barriers. So if we get a little context for this, I'm thinking about when Peter was sent by the Holy Spirit to see Cornelius. And he had the vision about not calling things unclean that God has called clean.

And so he goes with the Gentiles to go speak to Cornelius. But he says to them is this, let's see here, and he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him." So what we see there is that among the Jews, they would not be willing to meet with Timothy if he were not circumcised. So if he's doing it so that, because remember that the Jews are not the

believers that he's talking about here, it's not that there are believing Jews that won't accept him if he's not circumcised.

He's talking about people who are not believers in Christ and would not associate with him if he were not circumcised. Yeah, regarding that first group that you just mentioned, Paul has made it very clear, there's neither Jew nor Gentile in the church. So if he's going there to reach them, obviously something has to be done with this.

And to put this in kind of more theological context, Paul describes his thinking on this in 1 Corinthians 9 starting in verse 19, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew so that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law as under the law, though not being myself under the law, so that I might win those who are under the law." And then he goes on.

So in other words, he is living in a way that will allow him to interact with the other people who are under the law and reach them. But he doesn't think he's under the law and he didn't think Timothy was under the law. You know, that's a thank you for that reference of 1 Corinthians, or maybe 2nd, but the Corinthian reference, because it highlights a very important point how it is appropriate to adapt and adjust to the culture and adopt cultural forms that are not immoral.

In other words, forms that are morally neutral. And I remember when I came back from Thailand, there was a big shift. This is 40 years ago now, but there had been a big shift while it was away and the way young people dressed.

And people said, "Look at those people, young people coming to the church. They look just like the world." And my question was now having done cross-cultural ministry, I said, "What do you look like? You look just like this. So you're Nordstrom's right.

You look just like the world too. You look just like the people in your cultural niche." And there's nothing moral or immoral about the way you dress, generally speaking, but this was the complaint. And so I think the idea of accommodation and morally neutral things is really important.

And that's what we find here with circumcision and Timothy. It's an accommodation to the culture where Paul is becoming someone like the Jews he's trying to reach, though not under the law. He is simply practicing the things that are appropriate to the law for those people who still believe in the law, so as not to create a fence and to create an atmosphere where it's easier for them to listen to what he has to say.

One other thought, Amy, now I'm not sure what your thinking is in this, but when Peter says, you know, in X10, it's unlawful for us to come into the house of a Gentile. I don't know, and I never looked this up, but I don't know if the Torah disqualifies that or this is

Talmudic. In other words, this is the traditions of the elders.

Remember, the elders had lots and lots of traditions that they imposed upon the people as legally required that were not required in God's law. And these are traditions of men that got in the way with the spirit of the law. So since the Old Testament, as many references to God's love for the Gentiles and the Abraham and covenant projects as its ultimate goal, its final T-loss, so to speak, the saving of the goyim, the Gentiles, the nations.

I'm just wondering if this reference to being unlawful is in the Torah, at least the circumstances that he was facing there, or whether this is part of the Talmudic tradition. Do you know? I don't think it's in the Torah. I mean, the only things I can think of that are in the Torah are things like you cannot marry outside of Israel.

And also the temple had sections for Jews only and also there's the court of the Gentiles where Gentiles could come and worship God-fearers. I can imagine that probably the rules built up over time about, since there are certain things you can eat and not eat, then therefore you stopped eating with Gentiles because you didn't know if you were going to have the right kind of food. For sure, right.

So it probably grew from there just a protection because they didn't want to break the law. So how much easier is it for them if they just say, "I can't associate with you," then you can't influence me. Now considering how much trouble they got into before the exile, because they were accommodating too many of the cultural things, you can see how this happened.

Right. But overreaction now, the Phar-Saic approach. Right.

But the Old Testament is very clear that you are supposed to treat the foreign person like the native-born person and you're supposed to, you're not supposed to treat them differently. I do know that is in the Torah. So I think these things probably built up over time as a protection as a reaction to the exile.

Well, there is a certain sense. I talk about this at length in the series that we have at STR that people can get online that's called the Bible Fast Forward and that the law did have a purpose of creating a wall around the Jews so they were not eclectic spiritually with these other cultures. The way they got arranged to have that done is to put all of these details in the laws that made them culturally distinct as well.

Now they violated this all the time. And then it was the Babylonian Talmud after the Babylonian captivity that, you know, the fifth or sixth century BC that this is when they started really getting particular about it. Now we're going to build a wall around the wall, so to speak, and make sure that we don't mess with, we don't break any of these rules.

So there is a divine purpose of protection for the Torah, for the laws there initially that

then got added, added to with a lot of man's traditions because of the regular violation of God's law prior to the Babylonian captivity. But now in the New Testament, this is very important in Ephesians 2, that even God's dividing wall, the law, has been broken down so that they can make the two, the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man. This is in Ephesians chapter 2 and it's really an important section and it identifies the foundation is the prophets and the apostles Christ Jesus being the cornerstone and then we are being built up Jew and Gentile into this new edifice.

That's a really magnificent characterization of the church there as contrasted to the old system. But a lot of people don't understand what's going on there. The law was meant to keep the Jews culturally separate so there's not any syncretism religiously.

But then that got way out of hand God's purpose anyways to remove that dividing wall so that the body of Christ with regards to those kinds of Mosaic distinctions there is neither Jew nor Gentiles. Fabulous. This whole situation just goes to show how sin can ruin everything.

You can go the wrong direction. If they're trying to be better followers of God and then they add all these things to it even better now their sins ruining it in the other direction. We just cannot be righteous by law.

We just cannot do it. This is exactly what Christian churches that are deemed fundamentalist in the pejorative sense have done and these are blue laws where in communities certain laws are passed to comport with Christian ethic like okay no businesses can be open on Sunday because you're not supposed to work on Sunday so we're passing these laws or we don't smoke drink or chew or go with those that do you know kind of thing. Well these are all additional things that human beings have put in.

There may be some wisdom to them as a personal guideline but they make them legalistic and that you have to keep these additional laws to really be considered righteous with our group and that's where Christian legalism gets in and it's a killer. It's an absolute killer and creates all kinds of opportunities for people. For judging other Christians in illicit ways on things that are not moral but they have been made to be moral by the local group.

That's legalism. All right let's squeeze another question in here. This one comes from Sapatati.

I hope I'm saying that right. I'm a graphic designer. Fellow Christians often expect me to work for free as it's quote for the Lord.

Is this wrong or even a sin? Yes and yes. I think it's wrong and it's a sin. All right the scripture says the worker is worthy of his wages.

The scripture says that in Corinthians that when you give Paul says he's asking for

money to help a particular need. When you give you are not to give under compulsion but cheerfully as the Lord has prospered you. So our gifts are not obligatory in a legalistic sense in the New Testament.

Tithing was a feature and a function of the Mosaic law. Anybody goes to Malachi and says if you're not giving 10% to this church you're stealing from the Lord. It does not understand the relationship of the old covenant to the new covenant.

The Jews under the Mosaic law were obliged to tithe. It actually was more than 10% when you look at all the different demands that were made on them. The John MacArthur says closer to 30%.

But in the New Testament there is no reference to tithing. Save one where Jesus in Matthew 23 says to the Jews they ought to tithe. But that was under the old covenant, a dispensation.

We know that because in the beginning of that very chapter he says that you should do everything that Moses tells you to do. So tithing was part of what Moses said for Jews under the old dispensation. We're in a new dispensation.

We are not under the law. Gentiles never were under that law anyway. And so consequently, I'm coming the long way around to this question, when we are not obliged to give in any circumstance, we are obliged to be generous in lots of circumstances and giving into your church, giving where you're fed.

This is a principle out of Galatian 6 that this is appropriate. And it is also appropriate when there are needs to give. And that's what Paul says in the Corinthians passage, but it's to be done with an open heart.

If a person now who's a graphic designer wants to do some work pro bono because he's working for a Christian ministry or give them a discount, well, he's certainly able to do that. He's allowed to do that, but it's a free will offering. It can't be demanded of him.

You know, well, this is for the Lord. And he could say, I already give to the Lord. It's also for me and my family.

And the scripture also says this is at least one references in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 that we are to work individually to provide for ourselves and also to be able to help others. In other words, we make enough for ourselves and also a little extra for those who have genuine need. Another text says, if you don't provide for your own family, you're worse than an unbeliever.

You've denied the faith. Okay. Well, then how could someone who is doing this kind of work, especially for a lot of Christian organizations not get paid and still provide for his family? I mean, this is all upside down.

The Christian decides what he wants to give for the Lord. That is between him and the Lord. It isn't the person who is personally benefiting from the application of this rule.

Oh, my work is for the Lord. Okay. Or he can use it as if.

Okay. Therefore, you got to give me money to spend for the Lord. All right.

And Frank, Turic has a line. I'm chuckling because I tricked him on it once. I won't get into that.

But Turic has a line. He says, all his book sales, all the profits go to Starvey Children, his own to support Starvey Children. Something into that effect.

I actually preceded him in an event before he got there into town. He was on Saturday. I was on Friday and I told that joke and that I told everybody.

Frank's going to tell us joke tomorrow when he's here. So I don't want anybody to even crack a smile. Don't say anything.

That's so mean. And he did give the joke and nobody smiled. And he went, wait a minute.

That's a good line. Did Coco do this to me? You know, it was really funny. Except I have Frank on the show later this morning.

So this afternoon, I should say in any event. So this is an illicit requirement. It's also, I think, an illicit request because you're just asking for a donation and you're suggesting that it's appropriate to expect that to be donated because this is for the Lord.

I think that the designer here can simply say, my work is for the Lord too. It's for my family. And that is a moral obligation I have as a Christian.

My work is for the Lord. So here's the other side of that. And this wasn't part of this request or part of the question, but very quickly because we're right now we're almost out of time.

Some Christians are expected to give a discount of their work to other Christians who take their work. Now this is actually, so your carpenter, your contractor, okay, I'm a Christian. Can you give me a 20% discount because I'm Christian? And the contractor could say, no, actually I'm charging you 20% more.

What? Why? Because I'm a Christian. Do you get that? Why should the client be the one who makes the extra money because he's a Christian instead of the vendor who makes the extra money because he's a Christian? What entitles them? Now if they want to give it, I'll give you a break and people have given lots of people have given me breaks on different kinds of things and I'm always happy. I never expected.



I never demanded it. I never asked for it. Never because that would be inappropriate for me.

I might say, hey, you're a believer. I'm going to pay you a bonus 20% bonus. Again, why does the why does the discount always flow in one direction in these kinds of situations anyway? So maybe that will help too.

That never occurred to me before, Greg. That's a really good question. I didn't plan this, both questions to have to do with 1 Corinthians 9, but this also is addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9. Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I'm not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the law also say these things for it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.

That is not concerned about oxen, is he? Or is he speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written because the plowman ought to plow in hope and the thresher to threshing hope of sharing the crops. Excellent, Amy. And by the way, that's now now I think he's talking about ministry, people getting paid for ministry, but he is taking a general principle and applying it to ministry.

But the general principle applies to everyone who works. The worker is worthy of his wages. That's the general principle.

And by application, the minister is worthy of his right wages. That's the way Paul is applying it there. But the general principle is still intact.

So I just want to tell one more funny story about this, but a friend of mine used to have a term that he used for people who kind of assumed that you would do free work for them. And it came from people saying, bro, can you just do this, bro? Can you do that? So he called it "Browing Below the Belt." Browning Below the Belt. I got "Broad Below the Belt." And then one last quick thing because if you're looking for a solution.

This is the third last thing, you know. I know, I know. There's a guy named John Ackef who he has talked about this a lot.

He writes about productivity and work stuff. What he said is a great line to say. If somebody asks you to do something just to make it clear that there's some expectation of being paid, the best thing to say is just, what's your budget? So they ask you to do something and then you say, what's your budget? Then you're making it clear that you can work with them, but you're expecting this to be part of your regular work that you need to be-- Yeah, you're compensated for.

That's excellent. So that might be helpful if you find yourself in that situation because I can imagine graphic designers probably do face this quite a bit. All right, we're out of

time, Greg.

We're over time. That's okay. This is fun.

We don't mind. Well thank you for your questions. Please keep sending those on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.

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