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Bible 201 : New Testament
Paul and Timothy Q5

In Acts chapter 15 Paul and Barnabas went before the Jerusalem council to explain that the gentiles had received the holy spirit, but the Pharisees wanted them to be circumcised and required that they obey the law of Moses. Peter explains that God who knows the heart accepted them by giving the holy spirit to them as well; He further states that God made no distinction between Jews and gentiles and that he purified the heart by faith; this was very important to acknowledge. They came to a consensus that they would write to them and let them know that they are to stay away from food offered to idols, sexual immorality, and from blood.

Paul had Timothy circumcised as he became his traveling companion and as such he would frequent the Temple with Paul and not to cause any "disruption" with the culture and people, I think he allowed him to be circumcised. Paul knew that bodily circumcision does not make a person right with God as he told the church in Galatia; "Stand firm, in the liberty where Christ has set you free and do not let yourselves be burdened by a yoke of bondage." What Paul is telling them is by grace through faith that they have been saved, not of works of righteousness. The yoke Paul is talking about is the law because if you break one you break them all (Gal 5:3). That is why he had to call them foolish, because they had turned from the teaching of Grace through faith and back to following the law.

The teaching of circumcision has to be understood from the culture to which Paul was speaking to at the time. It may sound contradictory, but it is how it is interpreted.