

Jewish Apologetic Acts

Romans would often dismiss the question of Christianity as being merely a Jewish religious squabble:

<i>Gallio, the proconsul</i>	¹² But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal ... ¹⁴ But ... Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵ But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things."	18:15
<i>Claudis Lysias, the tribune</i>	²⁶ "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. ²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews ... ²⁸ And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. ²⁹ I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment."	23:28-29
<i>Festus, the governor</i>	Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. ¹⁴ And ... Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying ... ¹⁸ "When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. ¹⁹ Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive."	25:18-19

To an extent, they are right. Christianity's great opponents in Acts are Jews and their quarrel is a theological one. Their primary accusation is that Christians are teaching *against the law* and *against the temple*:

Jewish Accusations	
6:11, 13-14	¹¹ Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ... ¹³ and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us."
18:13	This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.
21:21	they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.
21:28	This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place.
25:7-8	Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."
28:17, 19	Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers ... though I had no charge to bring against my nation

The relationship between the law and the Christian is an extremely complicated one informed by dozens of texts in the New Testament and has generated numerous different theological positions. A synthesis of Luke / Paul's approach to answering this challenge is attempted below:

Response to Jewish Accusations	
1 st	The Church teaches that <i>Gentiles do not have to follow the law</i> (15:1, 5) - <i>Because</i> they received the Spirit, and are therefore acceptable to God (10:28, 34-35), while uncircumcised (15:7-8) - <i>Because</i> the prophets anticipated that Gentiles would be saved <i>as Gentiles</i> without first becoming Jews (15:15-17) - <i>Because</i> both Gentiles and Jews are saved by grace through faith apart from works of the law (14:27; 15:11; 16:30-31) for the law was unable to produce righteous obedience to the (13:39; 15:10)
2 nd	However, <i>Gentiles are advised to observe a small number of sanctions</i> (15:20) so as not to offend Jewish sensibilities while in their presence (15:21), akin to Paul's teaching about the strong not putting a stumbling block before the weak
3 rd	Paul <i>never taught that Jews should abandon the law</i> (21:20-24)
4 th	In sharing his testimony, Paul effectively communicated, "<i>You think you're zealous for the law? I was even more!</i>" (26:5; 22:3-4) - "But," he continues, "I was wrong about Jesus" - <i>For the law points to Him!</i> (13:27, 29; cf. 17:2-3; 26:22-23; 28:23)
5 th	Paul summarizes his conflict with the Jews thus: <i>I am on trial with respect to the resurrection</i> (23:6-8; 24:21; 26:6-8; 28:20)

THE POINT: Again, for someone coming from the outside, like Theophilus, the massive rejection of Christianity by the Jews would be unsettling. What Paul explains through dense discourse and argumentation (Rom. 9—11), Luke explains in story: "*It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles*" (13:46; cf. 18:6; 28:28).