Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians

Commentary by Tim Hegg
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Note: This is a revision of the 2002 publication. Since the audio files that accompany the study through Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians referenced page numbers in the original edition, and since page numbers in this revised edition differ from its earlier counterpart, the original page numbers are noted in the margin in square brackets, e.g., [page 98]. This will allow the current revised edition to be used with the original audio recordings.
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The Date of the Epistle

The Importance of the Date for Interpreting the Epistle

Any one who studies the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians must reckon
with the issue of when the letter was written. While in all biblical studies
the background of the text is vital for a proper understanding of its mean-
ing, this is especially true regarding the date of Galatians. The pivotal issue
(as far as the standard commentaries are concerned) is whether Paul wrote
Galatians before or after the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15. If he
wrote it before the edict of the Council was rendered, then we must under-
stand his words to be a preface to the Council’s decision made without their
final word in place. If, however, he wrote after the Jerusalem Council, we
must interpret his teaching on the issue of Gentiles and circumcision as
some kind of “commentary” or application of the Council’s decision.

Often the dating of the book is linked to geographical issues. Let me
explain: in the province of 1st Century Galatia (Asia Minor), there were
congregations both in the north and south of the region. In Paul’s first
journey to establish congregations, he visited the cities of Iconium, Lystra,
and Derbe (Acts 14:1, 8, 20) all of which are in the southern part of Galatia.
Acts does not indicate that he travelled to the northern regions of Galatia at
this time. On his second journey, after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15,
Paul and his companions travelled through Phrygia (Acts 16:6) and many
scholars consider this to be a description of the northern regions of Galatia.
So it appears that Paul established congregations in the south before the
Jerusalem Council convened (i.e., on his first journey) and in the north on
his second journey after the Jerusalem Council.

How does this affect the issue of the date of writing? The answer lies in
who the recipients of the letter were. If Paul wrote this epistle to the congre-
gations located in the south of Galatia (those he established in his first
journey), then it seems reasonable to conclude that he wrote the letter
shortly after he had travelled there and before the Jerusalem Council. (It is
also possible, of course, that he wrote to the congregations in the south much
later, even after the Jerusalem Council.) If, however, the letter was written to
the congregations in the north, then it must have been written after his second
journey, and thus well after the Jerusalem Council.

The Data for Determining the Date

Much has been made of the Jerusalem visit as described in Galatians 2, and
whether the description given by Paul fits the venue of the Jerusalem Council
as described in Acts 15. There appears to be a clear discrepancy between the
two accounts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Galatians 2</th>
<th>Acts 15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul went up by revelation</td>
<td>Paul was sent by the congregation in Antioch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul was accompanied by Titus</td>
<td>Paul was accompanied by “some others”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leadership included John</td>
<td>John is not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The meeting was private</td>
<td>The meeting was public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No decrees are mentioned</td>
<td>The decrees are a central issue</td>
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Some have suggested that these “discrepancies” are not that significant and
can be explained various ways. But while there may be explanations, it seems
to me that the manner in which the two passages differ should not be swept
aside. Granted, other epistles of Paul obviously written after the Jerusalem
Council do not mention the decrees, but these epistles are not dealing with the
issue of circumcision the way Galatians does. Indeed, the issue of circumcision
is a central one in Galatians (2:3,7-9,12; 5:2-3,6,11; 6:12-13,15) and this was
the primary issue confronting the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-2). It hardly seems
likely that Paul would not have appealed to the decision of the Council to
bolster his thesis to the Galatians had he written after the edict was formu-
lated.

We may also note the behavior of Peter as described in chapter 2. Appar-
ently Peter was willing to eat with the non-Jewish believers until those from
Jerusalem came. When in the presence of the Jewish sages from the Holy City,
Peter withdrew from the non-Jews in conformity with a prevailing halachah
that one ought not to eat with Gentiles. Once again, would Peter have been so
brazen in this action after the Jerusalem Council? One would expect that Peter
would have conformed in halachah to the Jerusalem Council after the decree
was finalized. This would lend weight to the argument that the situation
described by Paul occurred before the Council of Acts 15.

The issue of whether Paul wrote this epistle before or after the Jerusalem
Council has been a hotly debated matter among commentators and scholars in
Pauline studies. Much has been written on the subject, but no clear conclusion
has been accepted by the majority. Many hold the position that there is simply
not enough clear and undisputed data to be dogmatic. In assessing the argu-

1 Silva takes the view that the letter was written to the congregations in the
south, but that it was written later, after the Jerusalem Council. Moises
2 Taken from Silva, Ibid., p. 132.
3 For the classic argument against this, i.e., that the letter was written after
the Jerusalem Council but that Paul did not want to appeal to the decrees
of the Council because he wanted to emphasize that he had received this
message directly from God and not from the Council, see J. B. Lightfoot, St.
Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (Warren Draper, 1891), pp. 43-61.
ments, I would say that there is more data supporting an early date than a late one. While there is not enough clear data to be dogmatic, I will opt for an early date of writing (most likely around 48-49 CE) and allow this to factor into the interpretation, though with caution since this conclusion is based primarily on inference.

*Galatians and the Jerusalem Council*

After all the discussion of the date of the epistle, and its connection with the Jerusalem Council, a more fundamental question remains: was the Jerusalem Council dealing with the same issues that Paul dealt with in his epistle to the Galatians? Or to put it another way, is Acts 15 and Galatians talking about the same thing?

Clearly, the issue revolved around how a person entered the Covenant God had made with Israel. The prevailing thought of the Judaisms in Paul’s day (at least as we understand them from the Pharisaic literature of the Mishnah and Talmuds) was that ethnicity, that is, being a physical descendant of Abraham, secured eternal salvation.

All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as it is said, Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified (Is. 60:21). m. Sanhedrin 10:1

Sanders has shown that this same perspective (that all Israel was secured a place in the world the come) shows up in other statements of the Rabbis as well, and that the prevailing belief was that all Israelites had a place in the world to come except those who willfully forsook the Covenant and denied God.

The issue before the Jerusalem Council, however, was not how a Jewish person secured eternal life (place in the world to come) but how a Gentile obtained such a blessing. Here we must understand the term “circumcision” to be a short-hand way of referring to the ritual of the proselyte, the rabbinic ceremony in which a non-Jew was accorded the status of a Jew. So the question posed in Acts 15:1 is whether or not a non-Jew needed to gain the status of Jew through the rabbinic ritual of the proselyte in order to be counted as “saved”:

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 15:1)

… from the perspective of the Rabbis, a Gentile could secure a place in the world-to-come only by becoming a Jew. This, the Rabbis taught, was possible through becoming a proselyte, a ritual based

4 For further discussion on this, see Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer* (TorahResource, 2008), pp. 235-36, hereafter abbreviated TLW.

5 The Talmudic discussion may be found at b. Sanhedrin 90a, though there is no direct comment on the opening phrase, “All Israel have a share in the world to come.”

entirely upon their rules but without any foundation in the Torah itself. In fact, the added phrase “according to the custom of Moses” in the opening verse of Acts 15 may point to the fact that the disagreement taking place between Paul and Barnabas was not over what the written Torah prescribed for Gentiles but whether or not the additional teachings of the Sages were binding upon them.

Thus when men from Judea taught that “unless you are circumcised (undergo the ritual of a proselyte) according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved,” they were simply applying the standard theology of their day. This is what the Council was dealing with: Did all Israel have a place in the world-to-come? Did Gentiles therefore need to submit to the man-made ritual of the proselyte so that, in accordance with the prevailing theology, they too could secure eternal life, that is, be saved?

It is instructive for us to understand that the Rabbis did see a way for a Jewish person to lose his secure place in the Covenant. While they listed a number of offenses through which a person could lose their place in the world to come, all of them may be distilled under the general heading of denying God, something more simply identified as idolatry. Idolatry was the acceptance of false gods, which in itself was a denial of the God of Israel Who proclaimed Himself as the only God.

Granted, the willful disregard for any commandment could be evidence of the denial of God Who gave that commandment, but the underlying sin is that of idolatry. This is important for a correct understanding of Acts 15, because the Council’s edict, consisting of four prohibitions, is directed against idolatry as it was customarily practiced by Gentiles in the pagan temples. The decrees formulate by the Council were not a direct answer to the primary question of how the Gentiles were to become members of the Covenant, but a directive to the believing Gentiles so that they would be received within the covenant community of which they were a part. They would need to prove that they had made a clean break with their former idolatry. Their daily living required covenant faithfulness, evidenced by their obedience to the One true God of Israel and their utter disdain for anything connected to idolatry.

Of course, the firm stance of the Council was that Covenant membership was granted on the basis of faith in Yeshua for both Jew and Gentile. That is clear—there was no disputed on this issue.

“And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” (Acts 15:8-11)

The decrees, then, were not a direct answer to the question of whether or not a Gentile needed to become a proselyte in order to “be saved,” but were the

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7 TLW, p. 236.
8 Note 1John 3:8-9: the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.
9 See TLW, Chapter 5.
necessary instructions to believing Gentiles in order to guard them from the accusation that they were still practicing idolatry (by participating in the meals at pagan temples). Had they been seen participating in the pagan Temple rituals, their viability within the Jewish community would have ceased. Thus, the four prohibitions given by the Council all relate to common practices within the pagan Temple precincts.

This is not, of course, how Acts 15 is usually interpreted. The majority of Christian commentators consider that in giving the four stipulations, the Jerusalem Council was answering the question: “how much of the Torah do Gentiles need to obey?” But what I am suggesting is that the question posed to the Council was whether a Gentile needed to gain the status of “Jew” in order to be received as a covenant member. This question they answered with a united “No!” A non-Jew was to be received as a righteous Gentile and therefore as a full-fledged member of the covenant. But whereas a proselyte was expected to take upon himself the full yoke of the Torah (which in Paul’s day included the extra rulings of the Sages or the Oral Torah), the Council decreed that the non-Jewish believer should adhere to the rabbinic restrictions pertaining to idolatry as at least the entrance requirements into the Jewish community.

How does this give us background for Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians? I would suggest that precisely the same issue of covenant status is what Paul is addressing in this epistle. I might further suggest that this issue is what prompted the need for the Jerusalem Council in the first place. Paul had taught the Galatians that membership status in the Covenant was through faith in Yeshua plus nothing. This was true for both Jew and Gentile (and thus the confusion that Paul was teaching Jews they no longer needed to circumcise their sons, Acts 21:21). But the prevailing view of the Sages (that covenant membership was available only to those who were Jews, and that therefore Gentiles needed to become Jews through the ritual of a proselyte) had been so deeply ingrained in the theology of the day that it was unthinkable for some that Gentiles should be admitted into the covenant community without becoming proselytes.

Thus, if this perspective is warranted, Paul’s polemic against circumcision in his Epistle to the Galatians is given to answer the very same issue the Jerusalem Council faced. The term “circumcision” is therefore a shorthand term for “becoming a proselyte” in both instances. Like the Jerusalem Council, Paul is not dealing with the question of whether a Gentile should obey Torah, but with the teaching of some that a Gentile needed to receive the status of “Jew” through the rabbinic ceremony in order to have bona fide membership in the Covenant. That the writing of Galatians may well have preceded the Jerusalem Council would indicate that Paul’s teaching on the subject was verified and substantiated by the Council.

With this in mind, we should also reckon with the fact that when Paul speaks of the “Law” (νόμος, nomos) in Galatians we cannot presume that he is referring exclusively to the written Torah. That the whole issue of becoming a proselyte involved rabbincally derived Oral Torah must likewise be taken into account.

The Specific Situation that Occasioned the Epistle

At the beginning of the Epistle Paul identifies the reason for writing:
only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Messiah. (1:7)

We shall have to consider more precisely what is meant by “the gospel of Messiah,” but suffice it to say at the outset that Paul, as the Apostle of Yeshua, was carrying to the people the gospel which found its source both in the person and teaching of Yeshua. Whatever “disturbing” influence existed within the congregations of Galatia, its primary evil was that it stood, in some measure, opposed to the gospel of Messiah. While we cannot surmise from this statement how the proponents of this “other gospel which is not another” (1:6-7) might have compared it to the gospel of Messiah as they knew it, we certainly can understand that from Paul’s viewpoint this teaching was clearly errant and a grave danger to the believers in Galatia.

Who were these people whom Paul identifies as “disturbing” the Galatians with contrary teaching? My perspective is that they were simply those who were pressing the prevailing, rabbinic halachah upon the Gentiles in the Galatian congregations, arguing that as Gentiles who had come to confess the One God of Israel, they needed to become proselytes according to the received, rabbinic authorities. That they had forsaken their paganism and confessed Israel’s God as their own was good, but there was more that was needed. Only Israel is granted a place in the world to come, and non-Jews must therefore undergo the proselyte ritual in order to be assured of eternal salvation.

This, of course, is not the prevailing view of Christian commentators. Their view may be represented by many popular titles on the book of Galatians: “Galatians: the Character of Christian Liberty” (Tenny); “Free from Bondage God’s Way” (Kay Arthur); “Galatians: Paul’s Character of Christian Freedom” (Morris); “Galatians: Epistle of Christian Liberty” (Brooks); “Free to Love: Paul’s Defense of Christian Liberty in Galatians” (Buckel); “Galatians: A New Kind of Freedom” (Somers); “Freed from the Law to be Led by the Spirit” (Wilder). The list could go on and on! But the point is obvious: the long-standing interpretation of Galatians among Christian scholars and commentators is that Paul is answering a Jewish insistence upon obeying the Torah with a clear message of freedom: the Christian has been freed from the Torah and is therefore at liberty to be led by the Spirit.

It is in the context of this perspective that those who were “disturbing” the Galatians are identified. They are often labelled as Judaizers, opponents (particularly of Paul), agitators or troublemakers, or Teachers. Generally (though surely not in every case) these are described as Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who were attempting to encourage the non-Jewish members to live according to the Torah, something that Paul considered anathema because the Torah had been abolished in favor of the grace which came through Messiah’s death and resurrection. Paul’s message, then, in contrast to that of those causing a “disturbance,” is that Messiah has made an end of the Torah (at least for Gentiles) and that the liberty found through the indwelling Spirit is the backbone of the believer’s halachah (way of life). While this description is overly general and brief, it nonetheless summarizes the vast majority of material written on Galatians since the rise of the Christian Church in the 2nd and 3rd

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10 This term was first used by Marcion in the mid-second Century CE, cf. Mark Nanos, The Irony of Galatians (Fortress, 2002), p. 115, n.9.
11 e.g., Hans Dieter Betz, Galatians in Hermeneia (Fortress, 1979), pp. 5ff.
12 Note the remarks of Mark Nanos, The Irony of Galatians (Fortress, 2002), p. 127ff. (Hereafter, Irony)
13 J. Louis Martyn, Galatians in the Anchor Bible (Doubleday, 1997), pp. 117ff.
Centuries, and particularly since the Reformation. Longenecker’s summary statement is telling:

…the common, almost uncontested view during the patristic and Reformation periods was that Paul’s opponents were Jewish Christian Judaizers.¹⁴

But the very term “Jewish Christian” betrays an historical perspective that needs to be scrutinized. Granted, the term “Christian” is found three times in the Apostolic Scriptures (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1Pet. 4:16). The reference in 1Peter is later, perhaps six or seven years before the destruction of the Temple. Thus, the only references to the label “Christian” that would fit the time-frame of Galatians are those in Acts. Yet regardless of the dating of this term, it is clear that its meaning before the destruction of the Temple and after cannot be assumed to be the same. At first the term identified those who were followers of Yeshua whom they declared to be the Messiah (Χριστός, Christos) which means “anointed one” and is the Lxx term for “anointed,” equivalent to the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ, mashiach). But it did not identify a group that was separate and distinct from the larger Jewish community as the word “Christian” does in our day. Indeed, by the 2nd Century CE the term “Christian” had taken on a nuance it did not bear in Paul’s day.

In Paul’s day, the term “Christian” defined a person who had confessed Yeshua to be the long-awaited, divine Messiah anticipated by the Judaisms of his day, and promised by the prophets of Israel. But this confession had not yet resulted in the division later to be defined by terms such as “synagogue” and “Church.” The people of “The Way” were considered, both by themselves, and by pagans, as a sect of Judaism.¹⁵

Therefore, the first thing we must reckon with as we come to identify the influencers¹⁶ in Galatia is that this was an “in house” debate, not a “synagogue vs. Church” struggle. I do not mean to diminish the stark differences of theology and belief between those who had confessed Yeshua and those who had denied His messiahship, but this chasm of difference could not have been any larger from a community standpoint than that which existed between Pharisee and Sadducee. The fact that after the division of the Synagogue and Church in the late 1st and early 2nd Centuries a very wide chasm developed should not be read back into the situation which Paul addressed in Galatia.

What can we learn, then, about those who were disturbing the Galatians as far as Paul was concerned? First, we should note those things which are not said about them because in the history of interpretation of Galatians, much has been assumed which cannot be sustained from the epistle itself. For instance, it is usually held that the influencers came from outside of the congregations, probably from Jerusalem. But the text never states this. The fact that Paul speaks of an earlier situation in Jerusalem (2:3ff) where “false brethren” came to spy upon Paul in order to trap him in some theological

¹⁵ Consider how the term “sect” (ἵαρείς, hairesis) is used in Acts to describe Pharisees, Sadducees, as well as Nazarenes and “The Way”:
¹⁶ This is a term Nanos has adopted to describe those who held a “different gospel,” Irony, p. 193ff.
error should not be considered a description of the current influencers in Galatia. Paul brings up that experience only as an example of theological error which had similarities with the false teaching facing the Galatians. In fact, there is no clear evidence that the influencers were “outsiders,” but it is even more likely that they were members of the Galatian communities.

Secondly, the language Paul uses to describe the influencers would indicate that from Paul’s perspective, they were not believers in Yeshua, at least as he defined saving faith. But this does not indicate that they had, from their point-of-view, a deceitful motivation or destructive goals. The experience of community within “Messianic congregations” or Torah Communities of our own times has awakened us to a scenario that may, in fact, very much parallel the situation which Paul addressed. Those within Torah Communities that have a strong attachment to the traditional synagogue find in that attachment something of great value. The cultural traditions, based in rabbinics, have formed deep social and religious categories from which they have derived valuable meaning for everyday life. Their desire to lead Jews and non-Jews alike into this life of rabbinic orthodoxy is motivated (at least from their vantage point) from a desire to see the “good” of such halachah developed in the lives of others. They have a “message of good” (i.e., a gospel) that has millennia to undergird it, and generations of examples of how this “good” has benefited the Jewish community. They believe that they can yoke a life of rabbinic orthodoxy with an acceptance of Yeshua as Messiah, and it is this message that they attempt to instill in the non-Jewish members of the community.

But this “gospel” seeks to find a way to “have Yeshua” while at the same time be accepted by the traditional Jewish community. In so doing they inevitably diminish the unique position of Yeshua (and especially His deity) in favor of finding common ground with the Jewish community who has denied Him. As such, the “offense of the cross” is likewise diminished, and the very core issues of redemption/atonement are often compromised. It is not uncommon to hear that some non-Jews have left the Messianic community, seeking conversion within an Orthodox Synagogue. When asked why, the answer often includes something like “we want to experience the ‘real thing.’”

Modern Judaism defines itself in numbers of ways, but one is consistent: a rejection of “Jesus” as the Messiah. As Gentiles begin to experience the realities of Torah life within a Torah Community or Messianic Congregation, they come to an appreciation of the deep significance of Sabbath, Festivals, Liturgy, and daily halachah. An increased appreciation for Jewish ways and culture produces a natural connection to the solidarity of traditional, modern Judaism. The reasoning is clear: “if I’ve gained so much in my personal life of worship by living out Torah, why not experience Torah life within the community that has kept it since ancient times?”

But this is actually a wrong assumption: modern Judaism has only some things in common with ancient Judaisms—it is by no means identical with any one of them. The desire to experience the “real thing” is naively understood as a doorway to ancient truths. The reality is that modern Judaism has evolved away from ancient Judaisms in similar proportions to the evolution of today’s Church away from the 1st Century sect called “The Way.”

Nevertheless, the perspective of some within Torah Communities, that conformity to modern, orthodox Judaism is the best way for living out Torah, is at odds with the gospel as it is found in Messiah. The reason is obvious: faith in Messiah declares Him to be just that—the Messiah. And modern orthodox Judaism defines itself, at least in one sense, as a community that has unabash-
edly denied that Yeshua is the Messiah. This sets up, in my opinion, a modern-day scenario that may well parallel the situation in Galatia. The influencers are convinced that the long-standing, prevailing theology of the Sages is the best form of halachah for all covenant members, Jew and non-Jew alike. But this prevailing theology, which requires the rabbinic ritual of proselytism, diminishes the unique role of Yeshua in the whole scope of salvation. The two cannot exist peaceably. The message of the influencers is one of “good,” that is, there is a way to please God in one’s life—that is to conform to the teaching of the Sages. But this “message of good” (another “gospel”) is not compatible with the “gospel of Messiah,” which proclaims membership in the covenant on the basis of faith.

So are the influencers believers in Yeshua? Not from Paul’s perspective. The “message of good” which these influencers proclaim is one which renders its adherents accursed:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Messiah, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Messiah. 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! 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 1:6–9)

The message of the influencers is not the “gospel of Yeshua plus Torah” (as the vast majority of Christian commentators have asserted) but a “message of good” that denies the central and unique role of Yeshua (though such a denial may have been subtle to the outsider). Paul would not make such a condemning judgment against those who were genuine believers even if they differed with him on non-essentials. The message the influencers are giving is not the truth.

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? (Gal 5:7)

Furthermore, they are hindering the non-Jewish believers in their pursuit of the truth. What is more, their driving motivation is not that Messiah should be honored, but that they would escape persecution for bearing His testimony:

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 Messiah. (Gal 6:12)

Their message is clearly opposed to Paul’s and he views them as those who cause him trouble:

From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Yeshua. (Gal 6:17)

We may therefore assert that the influencers who were disturbing the Galatians were those who most likely were members of the community, but who were committed to the prevailing, rabbinic theology of the day, and were therefore attempting to persuade the non-Jewish believers to undergo
the ritual of a proselyte in order to be fully received within the covenant community.

Were the influencers Jewish? Though the text never states this explicitly, it seems likely that they were. Twice Paul refers to the influencers as those who affect circumcision:

> 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 Messiah. For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Torah themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. (Gal.6:12–13)

While it is possible that these were proselytes who had taken upon themselves the role of urging other non-Jews to become proselytes, the more natural sense is to understand the influencers as Jewish members of the community who either performed circumcisions (a *mohel*) or who helped non-Jews through the process of proselytizing.

But their motivations for leading the non-Jewish members toward becoming proselytes were not entirely altruistic. They were apparently undergoing some form of persecution from the established Jewish communities on account of their willingness to associate with a community that allowed Gentiles full participation. Thus, at least some of their motivation was to prove to the wider Jewish community that the prevailing authority of the Sages (along with their theology) was well in place in the Galatian congregations as well. In other words, they wanted to be counted as within the established, traditional community, not outside of it.

It would seem, then, that the influencers were Jewish members of the Galatian congregation, who believed that the best thing for the non-Jewish members was to become proselytes because apart from their submission to this rabbinic ritual, they remained less than full covenant members.

**The Target Audience of Paul’s Exhortations**

Given the scenario suggested above, it becomes clear that Paul’s primary audience was non-Jewish members of the Galatian congregations who were not proselytes but who had come to genuine faith in Yeshua and had been received into the community on the basis of Paul’s teaching. They are clearly not circumcised (5:2-3) and had come out of paganism (idolatry) into the community of Israel (4:8). While Paul expects that all will hear the words of this epistle (Jew and non-Jew alike), and he writes with this in mind, his primary audience is the non-Jewish membership, and it is to them that the bulk of exhortations are directed.

**The Use of Irony in Galatians**

Mark Nanos, in his recently published *The Irony of Galatians*, makes a strong case for the use of irony in this epistle. He notes that irony was a literary tool well known in the 1st Century, used to make strong judgments and assertions without unduly distancing the reader from the author. The common elements in ironic style of the ancient world had the author expressing a mood of disappointment and reproach, but in an indirect way, and thus without direct condemnation of the readers. The use of the word “amazed” (*thaumazō*) is typical of ironic style (cf. 1:6). Paul used the word this way—it is clear he is not
so much surprised as disappointed or even disgusted. Yet in using ironic rebuke, he avoids the sense of publicly shaming the reader while at the same time communicating his dire concern at the situation. Nanos has shown that such a style of writing was not uncommon in Paul’s day.

The style of ironic rebuke may also be noted in the bold (almost crass) expressions which Paul uses. For instance, he suggests, by way of word play, that those who are encouraging the non-Jews to undergo the ritual of a proselyte (“get cut”), might actually castrate (entirely cut off) rather than merely circumcise (5:12). This shows the intensity with which Paul is approaching the primary subject, tempered (as it were) by the use of irony.

We should keep this in mind as we study through the epistle. Paul’s rapid, ironic style in places gives rise to less-than-perfect connections between his thoughts: he is “speaking” rapidly and with such intensity that at times he foregoes a full explanation, expecting his readers to “fill in the gaps.” Some of the passages that have caused no undue amount of trouble for commentators might be better understood within the sphere of ironic rebuke.

The Purpose of the Epistle

The proposed backgrounds to the epistle, given thus far, would yield the following scenario, and thus the purpose for Paul’s writing this epistle:

a) Paul had helped to establish congregations in Galatia comprised almost entirely of non-Jewish believers in Yeshua. They were following the commandments of God and living out their faith within the context of Torah life as they studied the Scriptures.

b) By Paul’s teaching, they were not concerned to become proselytes since they had come to believe that faith in Yeshua, the indwelling Spirit, and the Tanach, along with Paul’s instructions were sufficient for their life of righteousness.

c) Some Jewish members of the congregation, however, could not envision the possibility of non-Jews being received as covenant members apart from their submission to the ritual of a proselyte (being circumcised). These members were influencing the non-Jewish members to accept the erroneous doctrine that apart from their submission to rabbinic halachah, they were not full “sons” in the covenant.

d) Paul therefore writes to outline the means by which God brings sinners into the covenant, and to expose the erroneous teaching that adherence to man-made halachah (particularly the ritual of proselytizing) was necessary for full covenant membership.

e) The freedom that Paul enjoins upon the believing non-Jews is not freedom from the Torah, but freedom to live within the protection of the Torah as prescribed by God, not man.

The Use of the Word νομός (nomos, “Law,” “Torah”) in Galatians

There is no doubt that the issue of the Torah takes center stage in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians. The Greek word νομός (nomos) is found 32 times in the book (2:16,19,21; 3:2,5,10-13,17-19,21,23-24; 4:4-5,21; 5:3-4,14,18,23; 6:2,13). If one calculates percentages based upon occurrences per thousand words, Galatians comes in at 12.0, while the closest to this is Romans with
8.9. Just in terms of the frequency of the word, then, Galatians is dealing with a controversy related to the Torah.

But how is the word νόμος (nomos) used in Galatians? We discover that there are some reoccurring phrases utilizing the word nomos:

“works of the Torah” (ἐργά νόμου, ergôn nomou) which corresponds to ἡ μάζων, ma’asei halorah) is found six times (2:16; 3:2,5,10). In two cases “works of the Torah” is juxtaposed to “hearing with faith” (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως, ex akes pisteôs), 3:2, 5.

“under the Torah” (ὑπὸ νόμου, hupo nomon) is found four times (3:23; 4:4-5; 5:18)

“whole Torah” is found twice in the NASB (5:3, 14) though the Greek is different in each. In 5:3 the Greek has ὅλον τὸν νόμον, holon ton nomon (“the whole Torah”) while in 5:14 the Greek is πᾶς νόμος, pas nomos (“all of the Torah”).

Beyond this, it is clear that Paul uses the Greek nomos to refer to the Torah given to Moses on Mt. Sinai:

What I am saying is this: the nomos, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. (3:17)

Yet there is no reason to discount the very real possibility that Paul uses the term nomos to include Oral Torah (the collected rulings of the Sages regarding how the Written Torah was to be interpreted and applied) as well. Though there were debates on the relationship of Oral and Written Torah in the 1st Century CE, the data would seem weighted in favor of the view that to at least one extent or another, the traditions of the Sages were practically received on equal footing with the Written Torah.

The Rabbinic literature appears to teach that non-written laws or the traditions of the Sages were accepted and held by the Jewish community as Torah, and that they were held as equal to (or even greater than17) the written Torah. First, it is clear that the Rabbis use the term “Torah” for far more than the books of Moses. Verses from the Prophets and the hagiographa are cited in answer to the question “Whence do we prove this from the Torah?” not only in Tannaitic but also in Amorac dicta,18 though the rule was already known that “No inference may be drawn concerning Torah laws from statements in the post-Pentateuchal books of the Bible.”19 Daniel (9:10-13) speaks of תורת: “the Torah of Moses the servant of God” and “His תורת, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.”20

But secondly, the term “Torah” was also used of laws not explicitly found in the Tanach. M. Sanhedrin 11.2 states that people went “to the Great Court that was in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, whence Torah goes forth to all Israel.” This must be speaking of the halachic decisions handed down by the Sanhedrin.

17 Hillel’s Prosbol, a ruling that repayment of debts, and return of land at the Shemitta (Sabbatical year) were not necessary, is an example of oral halachah overturning clear, written Torah. Cp. Deut 15:2 with m. Shebi’it 10.3.
18 b. Avoda Zara 52b; b. Bechorot 50a; Tanhuma, Re’e, §13.
Thus, as the term תּוֹרָה (torah) was understood in a broad sense to encompass not only the Sinai legislation but also the story of Man, the biography of the Patriarchs, and the history of the nation of Israel, it is understandable how the term came to be used of the amalgamated teachings of the Sages that formed the accepted halachah of the community—indeed, which shaped the community. Urbach has affirmed that in the Rabbinic world up to the destruction of the Temple, “the tradition of the fathers, the enactments, and the decrees became Torah alongside the Written Torah.”

And . . . for the Jews of Alexandria, too, the term ‘Torah’ was not a word but an ‘institution,’ embodying the covenant between the people and its God, and reflecting a complex of precepts and statutes, customs and traditions linked to the history of the people and the acts of its rulers, kings, and prophets.

Whether the theological debates of the Sages would have affirmed the equality of Written and Oral Torah, the practice of the Jewish communities in the 1st Century most likely did. The purity laws, which by all calculations stood as priorities in 1st Century halachah, were entirely interwoven with the additional rulings of the Sages. No one in any of the divergent Jewish communities would have been reckoned as ritually pure had they not adhered to the halachah of the Sages in their particular community.

Indeed, we should not take the point of view that Oral Torah (the traditions of the Sages) were entirely inappropriate, or that they were viewed as such even by Yeshua and His Apostles. If one reads the Gospel accounts looking for instances of Oral Torah in the lives of Yeshua and His talmidim, the examples abound. Note the following from the Gospels:

Matt. 9:14–15 The argument of Yeshua, in which He defends the manner in which His disciples fast, is based upon a recognized halachah that it is improper to fast in the presence of a bridegroom. This is not found in the written Torah. Cp. b. Sukkah 25b; t. Berchot 2.10.

Matt. 10:24 In b. Berachot 58b, we read: “Enough for the servant that he should be like his master.” Likewise, in Sifra §251.2 we read: “It is sufficient that a slave be like his master.”

Matt. 12:5 The teaching or halachah which states that the priests break the Sabbath but are innocent is not found in the written Torah. Cp. b. Shabbat 132b. For other instances where the Sabbath may be profaned, cp. m. Nedarim 3.11 (circumcision); m. Pesach 6.1-2; t. Pesach 4.13 (Passover sacrifices).

Matt. 15:1 Pharisees are inquiring about the disciples of Yeshua: why do they transgress the traditions of the elders by not washing their hands according to halachah before eating? Yeshua rebukes them, citing also their use of korban to “hide” their wealth from aging parents who needed their support. In both cases, it is clear that the Pharisees consider the halachah,

22 Ibid., p. 289.
based on Oral Torah, as binding. Cf. m.Chagigah 2.5; b.Shabbat 13b-14a; y.Shabbat 1.3d; b.Yoma 87a.

Matt. 15:36  There is nothing in the written Torah about giving thanks before eating. Saying the berachah before eating is part of the oral Torah. The Torah only enjoins blessing God after eating (Deut. 8:10).

Matt. 22:40  Yeshua quotes the Shema and Lev. 19:18, stating that upon these two precepts hang (krematai) the Torah and Prophets. The terminology of the Torah and Prophets hanging from something is derived from Oral Torah, cp. m.Chagigah 1.8; b.Berachot 63a.

Matt. 23:16, 17  The Pharisees found a way to deny certain oaths (those sworn by the temple) and to allow others (those sworn by the gold of the temple), cf. m.Nedarim 1.3, 4; cp. also b.Temurah 32a-33b. Yeshua Himself argues that the Temple actually sanctifies the gold. This is not found in the written Torah.

Matt. 23:23  The matter of tithing very small amounts of produce from volunteer seedlings is not taken up in the Written Torah, but is part of the Oral Torah, cp. m.Maasarot 1.1; b.Yoma 83b; b.Nidah 5a; b.Rosh HaShanah 12a; b.Shabbat 68a.

Matt. 24:20  The whole issue of travel on the Sabbath is defined in Oral Torah, not Written Torah. There are no specific prohibitions in the written Torah restricting travel on the Sabbath. [The prohibition of Ex. 16:29 cannot mean that one is restricted to stay within his dwelling (the Hebrew has [מִׁמְּקֹמ] “place” not בַיִׁת, “house.” In the context, the prohibition seems to deal with the issue of going out to pick up manna on the Sabbath.) Yet the written Torah does not define the dimensions of one’s “place.” It was the Oral Torah that developed, for instance, a “Sabbath-day’s journey”.] cf. b.Erubin 4.5; Acts 1:12. Jer. 17:19-22 prohibits the carrying of loads out of one’s house, but this is clearly defined as “work.”

Matt. 26:20  Reclining is the position of eating at the Pesach meal, but is not prescribed in the written Torah. Cf. m.Pesachim 10:1. Reclining is a halachic requirement before one can eat the Passover.

Matt. 27:6  The Written Torah prohibits the wages of a temple prostitute to come into the Temple treasury (Deut. 23:19). Of interest is b.Aboda Zera 17a where Jacob, a disciple of Yeshua of Nazareth, is said to have had an interaction with R. Eliezer over a saying of Yeshua based on Deut. 23:19. The Oral Torah expanded this to include any money obtained for unlawful hire (cf. b.Temurah 29b).

Lk. 6:9  Cp. m.Shabbat 22.5. The issues of healing (see the parallel in Matt. 12:10) on the Sabbath are part of the Oral Torah, to which Yeshua no doubt refers.
The written Torah declares that a person is unclean from a corpse if he touches it or is in the same room with it (Num 19:11-15). The Pharisees extended the communication of impurity to any object overshadowed by a corpse (or part of a corpse) or any object whose shadow contacts a corpse or tomb (m. Oholot 16.1,2). The Oral Torah further elaborates the means by which impurity is transmitted from a corpse to an object. It appears that Yeshua accepted at least some of this Oral Torah as grounds for His illustration of the Pharisees as concealed tombs that rendered those who overshadowed them unclean.

The Written Torah suggests that a matter of Torah be carefully examined, but does not specifically say that the accused must be given the right to speak (cp. Ex 23:1; Deut 1:16; 17:4). Oral Torah, however, required that the accused be given the opportunity to speak for himself (Mid. Rab. Exodus 23.1).

Summary: nomos in Galatians

Paul’s use of nomos (νόμος) in Galatians must be determined from the context, but with the 1st Century idea of “Torah” well in mind. That the Judaisms of the 1st Century considered the Written and Oral Torah to comprise a unified whole is without question, though of course there were disputes about exactly what constituted the Oral Torah (i.e., disputes over which halachot were to be received). We cannot rule out the possibility that Paul included the category of Oral Torah within the scope of the word nomos. And one should be open to the very real possibility that the rabbinic ritual of proselytism is referred to under the rubric of “works of the Torah” (ἐργὰ νόμου).

Paul may also be using the term nomos to refer to the condemning aspects of the Torah. We should keep this idea in mind when we encounter the phrase “under the Torah” (ὑπὸ νόμου, hupo nomon). The unfortunate translation of Stern (Complete Jewish Bible) in which he uniformly translates hupo nomon as “legalistic use of the Law” has surely missed the mark. Note his translation of 4:4-5:

but when the appointed time arrived, God sent forth his Son. He was born from a woman, born into a culture in which legalistic perversion of the Torah was the norm, so that he might redeem those in subjection to this legalism and thus enable us to be made God’s sons. (Gal 4:4–5)

Paul’s point here, as we shall see, is not to construe the Judaisms of his day as “legalistic” (a charge which cannot be sustained from the rabbinic materials, as least as far as “legalistic” is defined by modern Christianity). Rather, he is showing that Yeshua died to redeem those who were under the condemnation of the Torah—a condemnation rightfully deserved, and thus justly administered by the Torah. When the Torah condemns sin, it is functioning exactly as God intends it to function. It is therefore accomplishing its Divinely ordained purpose, meaning it is righteous. Far from a misuse of the Torah, its condemnation of sinners is one of the Torah’s purposes.

Whether Paul uses nomos to mean “the principle of law” is questionable.
Some have suggested that when *nomos* is used without the article, Paul intends us to understand his meaning to be that of a “principle of law” rather than a reference to the Torah of Moses. First, the use of the article with *nomos* as contrasted with the anarthrous use does not warrant such a conclusion. For instance, the article is not used with *nomos* in 4:4-5, but the Torah of Moses is clearly in view. The same may be said of 6:13: the article is not found with *nomos*, yet it is evident that Paul has the Torah of Moses in mind.

We must therefore take each use of *nomos* and weigh it against the immediate context, as well as against the 1st Century background (as we know it) and derive the meaning in this way. To take a monolithic interpretation of the term throughout Galatians (as has often been the case with the Christian commentaries) is surely to misunderstand and misrepresent Paul.

**Select Bibliography**

The following are some of the commentaries which might be consulted within the study of Galatians. Most of the commentaries are from the standard, Christian perspective, i.e., that Paul is teaching the demise of the Torah in favor of Yeshua’s redemptive work. Though their theological perspective may be somewhat anti-Torah, they still may be profitably consulted for their contributions to the basic exegesis of specific texts.

I have utilized Dunn’s commentary as a primary reference my own commentary, and the reader will see that I quote from his work quite often. Among the commentators listed below, Dunn represents (in my opinion) the awakening to Paul’s positive view of the Torah among today’s scholars.

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Chapter One

Commentary

1–2 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Yeshua Messiah and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

As often in his epistles, Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Yeshua.1 The term “apostle” answers to the Hebrew שָלוּחַ, shaluach, plural שָלוּחִים, shaluchim.2 Thus, in m.Rosh Hashannah 1.3ff, the shaluchim go out to announce the new moon. These were messengers sent by the Sanhedrin to announce the official beginning of Tishri, and thus the beginning of the festival. Interestingly, Paul’s mentor, Gamaliel, sent epistles to communities outside of Jerusalem. Indications of three such epistles are preserved in the rabbinic literature (b.Sanhedrin 11b; t.Sanhedrin 2.6; y.Sanhedrin 1.2, 18d).3 These epistles contained reminders of official rulings of the Sanhedrin.4

For Paul to identify himself as the apostle of Yeshua was therefore not something out of the ordinary, at least to those who were familiar with the workings of the Jewish community in the 1st Century. Paul went forth, commissioned by Yeshua, to deliver His message. Such commissioned messengers did not construct their own message but carried the message of the one who had sent them. In like manner, we should not consider that Paul would have formulated his own ideas, but wrote as one delivering the message of Yeshua.

Paul’s perspective in writing this epistle is immediately seen in this opening greeting. For though such an opening had a generally recognized format, Paul interrupts the normal greeting with a theological statement related to his own authority: he did not receive his commission as apostle from men (ἀνθρωποι, anthropoi) nor from an individual (ἀνθρωπος, anthropos).5 The fact that Paul casts this in the negative would strongly indicate that this was one of the accusations levied against him by the influencers. As in 2Corinthians, Paul’s credentials were apparently being discounted as a means of undermining his message. Paul wants it understood from the outset that his message did not rest upon any group of men (i.e., those having some recognized authority) nor did his words emanate from a single man or teacher.

In fact, Paul is contrasting human agency with Divine agency. His message is not one with human authority but with the very authority of Yeshua and His Father. This is not to deny Yeshua’s humanity, something that Paul will clearly assert throughout the epistle. Rather, Paul here focuses upon the divine nature of Yeshua—His eternality, and thus His authorial equality with the Father. Since Paul’s commission came directly from Yeshua on the Road to Damascus, and since Yeshua only does what the Father commands, he reasons that his apostleship is fully established “in the mouth of two witnesses,”

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1 Rom. 1:1; 1Cor. 1:1; 2Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1Tim. 1:1; 2Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1.
2 cf. Jastrow, Dictionary of the Talmud, ([הנה], [reprint], 1903), “שלוח”.
4 See TLW, p. 39.
5 The Greek ἀνθρωπος could include both male and female, and should be understood in this instance as the equivalent to וָאֵין, adam. Paul’s emphasis is on that which distinguishes between mortal man and the Divine will in terms of his own commissioning.
Divine witnesses at that!⁶

One can hardly imagine that the influencers would have entirely discounted Paul’s credentials. His influence with the Galatian assemblies was no doubt too well entrenched for that. Moreover, Paul himself had founded these assemblies. Rather, it seems likely that the influencers were considering Paul’s credentials to be secondary to the credentials of the leaders in Jerusalem. Since Paul was sent out as an apostle by the Antioch assembly (Acts 13), and since this assembly was no doubt submissive to the rulings of the leaders in Jerusalem, they were reasoning that Paul likewise should give way to the leaders (at least some of the leaders) in Jerusalem who were pushing traditional halachah for the Gentile believers (i.e., their need to pursue becoming proselytes). Paul will address this issue more directly in chapter two. But here he makes it known from the beginning of the epistle that he considers his message to be that of Yeshua Himself, and one which therefore cannot be debated nor side-stepped.

It is most interesting that Paul identifies “God the Father” as the One who raised Yeshua from the dead. In Romans Paul notes that the resurrection declared Yeshua to be Son of God with power⁷ (i.e., the divine Messiah promised by the prophets) as well as securing the justification of the elect.⁸ The resurrection is the divine imprimatur upon the Messiah’s work. Thus, the resurrection stands as irrefutable proof that Yeshua is who He claimed to be (i.e., the promised Messiah) and that therefore He stands as the Sovereign authority over the entire universe. Here the authority of the Father is linked to that of the Son.⁹ If the Father put His stamp of approval upon the Son (verified through the resurrection), then Yeshua’s commissioning of Paul as His apostle stands with all the approval of the Father as well.

Were the influencers going to contradict the commissioning of the Risen Messiah? Such a position would be untenable to the wider congregations of Galatia.

_and all the brethren who are with me_ – Often Paul identifies himself with co-workers who are with him.¹⁰ Paul was not a “lone ranger!” He did not see himself as launching his own work, nor beginning his “own thing.” His mention of “all the brethren,” then, is doubtlessly to add weight to his words, since in the mouth of two or three a matter is settled.

The use of the term “brother” (ἀδελφός, adelphos) was common in the Greek-speaking world for religious associates¹¹ but it was also used among the Jewish communities.¹² It was therefore not a term coined by The Way, nor something that identified the emerging Christian Church as distinct from the Jewish communities out of which it grew.

To the assemblies of Galatia: The use of the word ἐκκλησία, ekklesia,

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⁶ If Paul had wanted to convey that his apostolic authority was from God the Father as mediated through Yeshua the Messiah, we might have expected him to write: “through Yeshua Messiah and from God the Father.” That he did not should be understood as an emphasis upon the unity of Father and Messiah in their authority and commissioning of Paul.
⁷ Rom 1:4.
⁸ Rom 4:25.
¹⁰ 1Cor 1:1; 2Cor1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1Thess 1:1; 2Thess 1:1; Philemon 1:1.
¹¹ cf. BDAG, “ἀδελφός”.
¹² Note its use in the Tanach: Ex 2:11; Dt 3:18; Neh 5:1; Is 66:20. Note also Tobit 1:3; 2Macc 1:1.
usually translated “church” in the English versions, would have been understood by Paul’s readers as referring to the assemblies in which they identified themselves. Since it was widely used in the Lxx to refer to the “assembly of Israel,” there is no need to posit some special meaning in its use here. These were the assemblies of believers founded by Paul.13

3–5 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Yeshua Messiah, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

Interestingly, Paul combines the typical Greek greeting14 (χαίρειν, charis, “grace,” a word that sounded very much like the common greeting) with the standard Jewish greeting “shalom” (using the Greek equivalent, εἰρήνη, eirene). While he no doubt had the standard salutations in mind, he nonetheless ties both to the work of God in Yeshua, Whom he designates with three names: Lord (sovereign), Yeshua (Savior), and Messiah (the One promised by the prophets).

It is not in mere passing that Paul applies the term “Lord” (κύριος, kurios) to Yeshua. Besides its basic meaning of “lord” or “sovereign” which would be evident in a Greek-speaking culture, it also was the common title used in the Synagogue as a substitute for the Divine Name (the Greek κύριος, kurios regularly translates יהוה, YHVH in the Tanach). The early followers of Yeshua did not shrink from applying this title to their Master, and in so doing, ascribed to Him a divine status while at the same time unflinchingly affirming their monotheistic belief in the One God of Israel. Note, for example, the manner in which Paul applies Joel 2:32 to Yeshua (“whoever will call upon the Name of the LORD will be saved,” cf. Romans 10:13).15

The combination of “grace” and “peace” may actually sum up Paul’s essential message: God’s grace, given in the Messiah, is the only means of genuine peace with the Father. This is the message of the gospel, and one which Paul learned personally from his own study of the Scriptures as well as his personal confrontation with the risen Messiah.

The Hebrew sense of “peace” (unlike the word’s meaning in Greek) did not merely convey the sense of “no more war,” but actually points to a positive reality: everything existing as it should. Paul’s gospel to the Galatians, and to us, is that life as God intends it may be realized only through the salvation offered by God through His Son.

Having first mentioned Yeshua, Paul goes on to identify succinctly the core truths of His work, namely, first, that He “gave Himself for our sins ….”16 This is substitution language which comes from the sacrificial ceremony: the spotless animal was given as payment in the place of the sinner, to atone for him. The Lamb of God fulfills this symbolism. It may well be that Paul emphasizes this at the outset of the epistle in order to bring into clear focus something that at least some in Galatia had apparently forgotten, namely, that the gospel is manifest in the selfless giving of the Son, and that this ought to characterize the

16 Cf. 1Cor 15:3–5.
lives of all who call themselves His disciples.

The emphasis is not upon whether Yeshua was given (cf. Rom 4:25; 8:32) or voluntarily gave Himself (cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25; 1Tim 2:6; Tit 2:14), nor is there much to be made of the various terms that are used (διδωμι, didomi; παραδιδωμι, paradidomi). The major point seems always to be simply that Yeshua became the substitute for sinners. It is in this “giving” that our salvation is made inevitable, and a realization of this transforms and conforms the heart of the believer to a life of giving as well.

Secondly, Paul notes that Yeshua’s having been given resulted in our being “rescued from this present evil age.” This follows the typical dualism of 1st Century Judaisms (at least those which held to the existence of the world to come) which universally saw the present age as characterized by evil, and the age to come as one of righteousness. This no doubt grew out of the apocalyptic works like Daniel (cf. Dan 2 and 7) and was furthered by the description of the world to come found in the prophets (e.g., Isaiah 65:25 where the lion and the lamb are at peace with each other). That apocalyptic works like 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch took this dualism to its final level only proves that it was extant in earlier years. What is more, this dualistic view is well attested at Qumran.17

But for Paul, the coming of Yeshua meant that the present evil age had been invaded by the Sovereign of the age to come, and in this way, the age to come had also entered into the current era, albeit only in part. The “rescue” is already happening, and those who are “in Messiah” are assured the final victory in the world to come.

Paul’s use of the term “rescue” here is interesting, primarily because this is the only place he uses this exact term (ἐξείρησις, exeirēsí). This Greek word is often used in the Lxx to translate the Hebrew נצל, natzal, “to save” or “to deliver,” a term which almost always speaks of salvation or deliverance from present, physical danger. Paul may well have this very idea in mind (which does not discount that he also had in mind the eternal salvation of the soul). Being saved from the present evil world means that the very death which characterizes this age, and which is the result of sin, is that from which the redeemed are rescued. Paul teaches us clearly that Yeshua’s work of giving Himself for us is the means by which we are rescued.

But having eternal life is far more than merely being promised a place in the world to come. Our rescue from the present evil age is also seen in that while we are in the world, we are not part of the world. We are not citizens of this present evil age even if we live in it. Our actual participation in the salvation afforded by Messiah means that we are seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). Our affections are set on things above, not on things on this earth (Col 3:2ff), and therefore we are already being rescued from the death of this present evil age.

In fact, it is this reality that assures us personally that we possess eternal life. It is in our being rescued (not merely our hope of being rescued) that we see and experience the life-changing work of the Spirit, a work given only to those who are “sons of God” (cf. Rom 8:14). A transformed life is the sure proof of our regeneration because it is possible only through the work of the Spirit within us.

Thirdly, Paul adds that all of this was “in accordance with the will of our God and Father.” The incarnation, the work of Yeshua as sacrifice and risen Lord, the ascension, His intercession, His return and His reign are all the

17 CD 6.10, 14; 12.23; 15.7; 1QpHab. 5.7.
outworking of the Father’s plan to bring about the salvation of His elect.
Yeshua is the promised Messiah, the one foreseen by the prophets and awaited by Israel throughout her history. As such, Paul brings the focus upon Him, and asks the Galatians, in the midst of their strife, to remember the centrality of Yeshua as Lord and Savior.

Perhaps it goes without saying (though I think we should say it nonetheless) that this must constantly be our focus as well. If we lose sight of the centrality of Yeshua in our attempts to live out a Torah life of faith, we have lost our footing indeed! He is the One in Whom our lives are formed, and it is only by His grace—by His work of sacrifice—that we are rescued from this present evil age, and assured a place in the world to come.

The use of the word “Father” in reference to God is not a “Christian” innovation. The use of the term “father” in the rabbinic literature as a synonym for God is common:

Said R. Aqiba, “Happy are you, O Israel. Before whom are you made clean, and who makes you clean? It is your Father who is in heaven, “as it says, And I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean (Ezek 36:25). “And it says, O Lord, the hope of Israel (Jer 17:13) - Just as the immersion pool cleans the unclean, so the Holy One, blessed be he, cleans Israel.” (m. Yoma 8.9)

Now it happened that when Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand fall, Amalek prevailed (Ex 17:11). Now do Moses’s hands make war or stop it? But the purpose is to say this to you: So long as the Israelites would set their eyes upward and submit their hearts to their Father in heaven, they would grow stronger. And if not, they fell. In like wise, you may say the following: Make yourself a fiery serpent and set it on a standard, and it shall come to pass that every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live (Num 21:8). Now does that serpent kill or give life? [Obviously not.] But: So long as the Israelites would set their eyes upward and submit to their Father in heaven, they would be healed. And if not, they would pine away. (m. Rosh Hashannah 3.8)

Upon whom shall we depend? Upon our Father in heaven. (m. Sota 9:15)

These examples indicate clearly that the designation “Father” for “God” was a common rabbinic expression. Such a usage was based upon the Tanach:

Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you. (Deut 32:6)

For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name. (Is 63:16)\(^\text{18}\)

Thus, the theological axiom that the “Father” and the “Messiah” are distinct yet one does not flow out of the later Christian, trinitarian theology, but from the ancient words of the Tanach and the teachings of the Sages.

Here, Paul follows a common way of referencing God, yet we should not overlook the importance of his words. In the midst of the controversy which

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18 Cf. Is 64:7; Jer 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10; Ps 68:6.
threatened to inundate the Galatian congregations, Paul calls them (and us) back to the foundational principle of God’s fatherhood—that in His lofty and majestic transcendence, He nonetheless comes near to His children, and establishes a father-child relationship. That God would be known as the “Father of the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5[6]) bears this emphasis beautifully.

The final brachah (blessing) of the opening greeting is “to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.” One immediately recognizes the common phrase inserted in the reciting of the Shema: “Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One. Blessed be His Name—may the glory of His kingdom be forever.” This was originally the response of the people to the High Priest during his duties on Yom Kippur. It was therefore well known and its words well rehearsed by anyone in the Jewish community. That Paul would include these well known words here emphasizes once again that from his perspective, Yeshua’s High Priestly work was the culmination of all that to which Yom Kippur pointed.

The addition of “amen” bespeaks the common, liturgical response of the community to matters of importance, such as oaths, blessings, and declarations. One can almost imagine Paul expecting his readers to respond as “to whom be the glory forever” is read.

6–7 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Messiah, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Messiah.

Paul moves from his greeting directly into a rebuke. Normally Paul follows his greeting with a word of thanksgiving or prayer for his readers (Rom 1:8ff; 1Cor 1:4ff; Phil 1:3ff; Col 1:3ff; 1Thess 1:2ff; 2Thess 1:3ff; Philemon 4ff). His immediate move to rebuke is therefore uncommon for him, and shows the level of his concern and disgust. While there surely could be matters for which he was thankful, the teaching of the influencers was so contrary to the Gospel as he knew it, there was no time for niceties, and nothing in their message for which he could give thanks. Their message undermined the very person and work of Messiah, and Paul’s impatience to deal with the matter is seen as he moves immediately into a stern rebuke.

He employs an ironic style in order both to hedge his disgust and to indicate the severe level of rebuke with which he is writing. The word “amazed” (thaumazō) signals this ironic style. The word itself often denotes the response of people to a miracle. But Paul is not expressing his amazement over the work of God but rather over the perverse teaching of the influencers. He only uses the word one other time (2Thess 1:10). It is thus not a common term in Paul’s vocabulary, and its use here is therefore all the more emphatic.

Paul is not “surprised” in the sense that he does not understand the issues at hand, nor is he “surprised” that there were those who would attempt to undermine his teaching and presentation of the gospel. But in casting the words in this manner, he is able to address those who are them-
selves the influencers, and those who may be in the process of being persuaded by them. Moreover, by using this form of irony, Paul is also able to warn the entire congregation about the deceitful practices of the influencers without judging them all. This may be compared to parents who, in the presence of all the children, speak to one wayward child and in so doing warn the other children that such behavior is unacceptable.

Paul does not hedge his words. He goes directly to the problem: they were deserting (μετατίθημι, metatithemi) the One (one) who had called them in grace. The word metatithemi means “to have a change of mind in allegiance, change one’s mind, turn away, desert”\(^\text{22}\) and shows that for Paul, there was no middle ground in the position of the influencers. Their position and teaching was not something that could be tolerated or somehow allowed as containing something of value for the congregations. Those who were accepting this teaching and acting upon it were actually defecting from the very faith they had once confessed. They were denying Yeshua.

The word metatithemi is only used here by Paul, and it is not common in the Apostolic Scriptures.\(^\text{23}\) In classical Greek it is used at times “to alter a treaty or legal agreement”\(^\text{24}\) and it is used in the Lxx of those who “move” (metatithemi) boundary markers:

Judah’s leaders are like crooks who move (metatigymi) boundary markers; that’s why I will flood them with my anger. (Hos 5:1)

Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that this same language is employed in 2Maccabees to describe the apostasy of the Hellenistic Jews from their covenant faith:

Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn (metatigymi) from the ways of his ancestors, and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs. (2Mac 7.24)\(^\text{25}\)

Paul is no doubt charging these influencers with “moving the boundary markers” of the Gospel. But he is possibly taking it a step further. In employing this language, he is suggesting that the influencers have actually transgressed the first two Words of the Ten, and that in abandoning the Gospel which is found in Messiah, they are worshipping another god!

If Paul has the aspect of covenant in mind (which the words he uses would surely suggest), then we may also understand his use of “quickly” in light of the Exodus from Egypt.

They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!” (Ex 32:8)

Like Israel of old, the Galatians were ready to abandon the very One who had

\(^\text{22}\) BDAG, ad loc.
\(^\text{24}\) Liddell and Scott, ad loc.
\(^\text{25}\) Cf. 2Macc 4:46.
redeemed them! It should be noted that the verb metatithemi, “abandoning,” is in the present tense, meaning that they were in the process but had not yet completed the abandonment: thus, Paul’s urgency.

The translations of this verse in the English versions are not consistent:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; (NAS95)

I am shocked that you have so quickly turned from God, who chose you because of his wonderful kindness. You have believed another message (CEV)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — (NIV)

I am astounded that you are so quick to remove yourselves from me, the one who called you by the Messiah’s grace, and turn to some other supposedly “Good News;” (CJB)

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— (NRSV)

The question revolves around the participle “the one who called” (tou kalēsantos, tou kalesantos) and to whom it refers. Most of the translations consider this to be a reference to God (the CEV actually adds the word “God” which is not in the Greek text), and this has good warrant in the Pauline letters, for he regularly refers to God’s calling of those who are redeemed.26 Some of the translations leave the matter up to the reader’s interpretation (NIV) while the CJB makes it clear that Paul is talking about himself—that the Galatians have abandoned him.27

There is a variant in the Greek of the verse. Some manuscripts add “of Messiah” in the phrase “… called you by (in) the grace of Messiah.” All of the above English translations accept “of Messiah” as original except for the CEV. There is not enough evidence to be certain, but it seems to me that it is better explained as an early scribal addition to the text rather than original. The overall meaning of the verse is not radically changed with either reading. Nor does the inclusion or deletion of the variant “of Messiah” help us decide who is the One (one) the Galatians were in the process of abandoning.

But the weight is clearly on the side that sees the referent as God. Nowhere does Paul use the word “call” with himself as the subject. Those who have come to faith in Messiah have done so, not by Paul’s calling, but by God’s. Everywhere in the Pauline letters, the idea of being called to salvation is cast in the terms of God’s eternal and sovereign call, a call that is linked with His grace. Surely this must also be the case here.

26 Rom. 1:7; 1Cor. 1:9,24; 7:15,17,24; Gal. 1:15; 1Th. 2:12; 4:7.
27 One presumes the Stern is not comfortable with the idea that those who are Jewish but have rejected Yeshua have likewise rejected God. But in this specific case (Galatia), these were those who confessed Yeshua initially and then rejected Him, not merely those who, after millennia of time, have rejected the Roman Catholic Jesus.
Thus, Paul’s rebuke is not for a difference merely with some obscure halachic matter, nor with something that could be considered peripheral. Paul is concerned that the Galatians may be ready to transgress the first commandment of the Ten, and to (wittingly or unwittingly) exchange their faith in the one true God for a counterfeit.

Here we find Paul’s “Christology” presented with a passion. The true faith in God, the one which characterized the faith of the patriarchs, can only be a faith in the Messiah Yeshua. Any other object of faith is ill-founded and cannot save. What is more, for Paul it is impossible that one could at the same time reject the Gospel as it is in Messiah (i.e., as it centers in and is in all ways fulfilled in Yeshua) and still have a genuine, lasting, saving faith in God.

Granted, there were no doubt those Jewish congregants who were in that time of decision—attempting to know for certain whether or not Yeshua of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah. But for those who had come face to face with the Gospel, had received it as the truth, and who were now ready to abandon that truth—for these there was no middle ground. Rejection of Messiah Yeshua would likewise be a rejection of His Father. One cannot receive the Father and abandon the Son.

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matt 10:32)

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (John 6:44)

Yeshua said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. (John 8:42)

He who hates Me hates My Father also. (John 15:23)

Here is the early “Christology.” It is not the formulation of the later Christian Church, but the message of Yeshua and His Apostles. And Paul applies it here. The Gospel of the Scriptures (for Paul this was the Tanach) is centered in the promised Messiah, and it is only by His stripes that healing comes. That the Galatians were toying with the notion that ethnic status (i.e., becoming a proselyte) was a valid way of gaining right standing before God constituted a life and death situation in the Apostle’s mind. Everything was at stake, and he comes to his flock with rod and staff in hand.

The mechanism employed by the influencers was “another gospel” (ἑτέρων εὐαγγέλιον, heteron euangelion) “which is really not another” (ὁ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλλο, ho ouk estin allo). Much has been made in former years over the switch in words of “another” and “other.” Lightfoot notes that ἔτερων, heteron “implies a difference of kind which is not involved in ἀλλο, allo.”28 But more modern lexicographers and commentators have disputed this. Dunn notes that the two terms are used interchangeably in Paul’s other writings (2Cor 11:4; 1Cor 12:9-10) and Betz agrees.29 The standard Greek Lexicon (BDAG) indicates that the two terms

28 Lightfoot, p. 219.
29 Dunn, p. 38; Betz, p. 49, n. 60. Blass, DeBrunner and Funk, A Greek Gram-
may be used without distinction.\textsuperscript{30} And Nanos, though recognizing that there might be a distinction between the two terms in certain contexts, also agrees that the two terms may be used interchangeably, and so is not willing to base his arguments upon a supposed, consistent distinction.\textsuperscript{31} We should conclude, then, that the older argument that the two words are distinct, that \textit{heteros} means “another of a different kind” while \textit{allos} means “another of the same kind,” cannot be sustained by the evidence. It is very possible (even probable) that Paul employs the two words as a matter of literary convention extant in his day.

But the phrase itself, and the context, clearly mark out Paul’s point. The influencers were bringing a message which they thought should be received by the Galatians as “news of good,” namely, that they could gain covenant status through the ritual of proselytism—that there was a way for them to be \textit{bona fide} covenant members, which they presently were not. While they may have considered such “news of good” as that which would gladden the hearts of the Galatians, Paul makes it clear that this message was not actually “another way,” i.e., a way for the Gentiles that was separate and different than for the Jews, but a denial of the very truth about God because it rendered the essential, salvific work of Yeshua as unnecessary.

What exactly was the “gospel” as far as Paul was concerned? First, we should reject the idea that the “gospel” as Paul knew and taught it was a well known formula—something repeated by initiates into the faith (as it became in the later emerging Church). In all of the descriptions of the gospel given by Paul, none are ever repeated as though having a set credal pattern. Clearly the gospel that Paul preached was centered in the Messiah Yeshua:

\begin{quote}
Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1Cor 15:1–5)
\end{quote}

Here the gospel is summed up in the death and resurrection of Yeshua, a gospel which was not formulated by Paul (even though he may refer to “my gospel”\textsuperscript{32}) but was received by him from those who were Apostles before him.

But this gospel is not something that became known only with the incarnation of Messiah, for this same gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal 3:8), even though it is veiled to the majority of Israel (2Cor 4:3f). It is thus the gospel that was proclaimed by Moses and the prophets, and the gospel which offered to them God’s way of salvation (“the righteousness of God,” as Paul references it in Romans). This salvation did not abandon the holy justice of God which required payment for sin, but rather provided that

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{BDAG}, “\textit{e\textarcdegree{t}e\textacute{o}r\textacute{o}z},” §1.g.

\textsuperscript{31} Nanos, \textit{Irony}, pp. 296f.

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2Tim. 2:8.
payment through an innocent substitute—life for life given in sacrifice—which satisfied God’s righteousness. Thus, the sacrificial system was a revelation of God’s method of declaring a sinner righteous, that is, through reckoning the death of the sacrificial victim to the credit of the guilty sinner. For Paul, nothing could be more plain: Yeshua was that sacrifice to which all sacrifices pointed, and His death and resurrection made it amply clear that God had secured the way for the salvation of His people.

The influencers, however, were “disturbing” the Galatians, seeking to “distort” the gospel which Paul had brought, the “gospel of Messiah.” The word translated “disturbing” is ταρασσóω, tarassō, and is used only here and in 5:10 by Paul. It’s meaning is “to shake,” “disturb,” and particularly to “cause inner turmoil.” It is used of political agitation in the Classical Greek. The word translated “disturbing” is ταρασσóω, tarassō, and is used only here and in 5:10 by Paul. It’s meaning is “to shake,” “disturb,” and particularly to “cause inner turmoil.” It is used of political agitation in the Classical Greek. While it may well be that the influencers were sincere and only intent upon the “good” of the Galatians, Paul’s characterization of them is that they were causing great turmoil within the Galatian community and that they should stop. He leaves no room for their message.

Their primary fault was that they were attempting to “distort” the gospel. “Distort” translates the Greek word μεταστρεφóω, metastrephō, “to change or alter,” used only here by Paul, and found only one time elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures (Acts 2:20, quoting Joel 2:28). It is sometimes used of a change to that which is opposite, as in Sirach 11.31, “for they lie in wait, turning good into evil,” and regularly carries a negative connotation.

Yet from the vantage point of the influencers themselves, their message may not have been considered entirely “opposite” of Paul’s. After all, they were followers of the God of Israel, and apparently intent upon obeying His Torah. What is more, there is every indication (as noted above) that they were part of the Galatian community, and not “outsiders.” As such, they may have been received by the community as those who had (in one way or another) confessed that Yeshua was, in fact, the Messiah.

What exactly is this “change” or “alteration” that constituted the message of the influencers to be something quite different than the gospel Paul preached? Surely the key is in Paul’s use of the word “grace” when he writes that the Galatians are “… deserting Him who called you by the grace of Messiah ....” We do not understand by this that the “news of good” that the influencers were teaching was entirely devoid of an emphasis upon God’s grace. Clearly the Judaisms of the day included the gracious acts of God as a central pillar of their theologies. One need only consider the barachot (blessings) which were being formulated in 1st Century Judaisms to see the emphasis upon God’s compassion, mercy, and long-suffering.

But Paul’s emphasis is upon the unique grace of God extended to those who are saved, not on the basis of their ethnic status, but purely because of God’s sovereign, elective love. Paul’s gospel is built upon his understanding of the covenant that God made with Israel, that this covenant was not made on the basis of physical lineage alone, but upon His gracious choice of Israel in the first place. Having realized that the covenant had always envisioned the

33 Liddell & Scott, “ταρασσóω.”
34 Note its use in Ps 78:57; 105:25; Testament of Asher 1:8.
35 Some commentators find a problem with the parallel phrase, “gospel to the circumcision” in 2:7, but this is only a problem if one speculates that there were different messages given to the Jews and non-Jews by the Apostles. That Paul considered the gospel message to be the same regardless of ethnicity is hardly in need of proof.
ingathering of the Gentiles to become equal covenant members in Israel, Paul also understood that the grace of God could not be demanded on the basis of physical lineage (Jewish ethnicity), but was a gift of God to all of His elect, both from Israel and the nations. It is in this manner of thinking that Paul could sum up the gospel in the Abrahamic phrase, “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gal 3:8). That non-Israelites should be brought into the covenant as equal, covenant members, demonstrates beyond doubt that the basis of covenant membership is not ethnicity.

Yet this was the “distortion” presented by the influencers. They were convinced, no doubt based upon a majority teaching at the time, that “a place in the world to come” was granted only to those who could be identified as having Jewish status. One could well imagine that they even considered this the teaching of the Messiah. For the prophets indicate that when the Messiah would come He would subdue the nations, eradicate their idolatry, and bring them to worship in the Temple:

> Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. (Is 56:7)

How else could the Gentiles fulfill this prophecy than to become circumcised, which for the influencers, equated to becoming Jewish? In 1st Century Jerusalem, no one was allowed in the Temple courts unless they are circumcised. Proof of this may be found in the very inscription posted on the balustrade that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews. Found in 1871 by Clarmont-Ganneau, it reads:

> No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death.36

As we know, Paul himself encountered severe trouble when it was reported that he brought a Gentile (uncircumcised) into the Temple (Acts 21:27ff). While the Torah itself does not prohibit an uncircumcised person from entering the court of the Tabernacle, the halachah of Paul’s day certainly did.

Indeed, from a rabbincic standpoint, the uncircumcised man is “repulsive”37 and has no place in the gatherings of Israel.38 Did not even the Torah prohibit the uncircumcised from eating the Pesach sacrifice (Ex 12:43ff)? And does not the prophet Ezekiel warn that in the Messianic era, no uncircumcised male would enter the Temple (cf. Ezek 44:7-9)? One can therefore understand how this became the prevailing halachah in the Second Temple era. If Gentiles wanted to be part of the covenant people, they would have to submit to the man-made ritual.

Thus, since in the 1st Century “circumcision” was understood by the Sages to mean “become a proselyte,” it is understandable how the message

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37 b.Yevamot 72b.

38 Whether a Gentile was considered ritually unclean is a matter of debate, though surely some Sages held such a view. See the discussion by Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, pp. 72ff.
of the influencers could have seemed quite proper and on the mark. Their message was no doubt based both upon passages from the Tanach as well as from the teachings of the most renowned Sages. Add to this the prophetic picture of Messiah conquering the nations, and compelling them to worship at the Temple, and the picture is complete. Gentiles who confess themselves to be worshipers of God will find their true covenant identity only as they become proselytes (receive circumcision). Apart from being circumcised, their covenant status remains dubious.

But while such a message may have seemed acceptable in the eyes of the Galatians, it was entirely unacceptable to Paul, and for good reason. It based covenant membership on ethnic status, not on God’s grace in Yeshua. And by doing so, it made the death and resurrection of Yeshua of no ultimate necessity. From the viewpoint of the influencers, God obligated Himself to the physical offspring of Abraham, and as such, their salvation was secured (as long as they were not cut off from the covenant by severe acts of unfaithfulness). While Messiah’s death may have paid for sins, it was not essential for the covenant—that rested entirely upon God’s promise.

This, of course, is intolerable to Paul. All of God’s promises rest upon and are fulfilled through the person and work of Yeshua (2Cor 1:20f). Apart from Yeshua, God is unable to fulfill His covenant promises, because apart from the eternal redemption which He effected for His people, there is no forgiveness of sins. The sacrifices of the Tabernacle and Temple have no efficacy, and Israel remains in her sin.

Thus, the message of the influencers, which they offered as “good news,” was actually a message of death and anathema. Those who would follow it would one day stand before the Judge and be condemned. It was not a message of good; it was something entirely different. It was a distortion of the “gospel of Messiah,” a “changing” it into something opposite. The true gospel rests entirely upon the Messiah Yeshua and His work of salvation, accomplished at great price. All other claims to righteousness will end in condemnation.

Paul considered the gospel message to be the same regardless of ethnicity is hardly in need of proof.

8–9 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! 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!

As if the words “deserting” and “distort” (with regard to the gospel of Messiah) are not strong enough, Paul now goes a step further. He pulls from his vocabulary the strongest word possible: “anathema,” “accursed.” No doubt he expected his readers to understand the Hebrew word חֵרֶם (cherem) behind the Greek ἀναθήμα (anathema). The word cherem could refer to something “dedicated” or “consecrated” to God, being put “under the ban” and dedicated entirely for sacrifice39 or that which was under God’s wrath and ultimate judgment.40 Paul always uses the word anathema in this second sense.41

Since the Hebrew word cherem meant that the object could not be acquired, and that all were to separate from it, the word anathema may also emphasize

39 E.g., Lev 27:28; Num 18:14.
41 Rom 9:3; 1Cor 12:3; 16:22.
Paul’s desire that the Galatians separate themselves from those teachers who might be offering this contrary message. Paul lays the responsibility upon the teachers—any teacher, regardless of his affiliation, who might bring a message different than the one Paul himself had originally delivered.

This holds, regardless of the credentials of the teacher. In marking out the “angel from heaven,” Paul may have reference to the “heavenly messenger” so often seen in the apocalyptic works and no doubt familiar to the people. Were the influencers using apocalyptic type messages to persuade the Galatians? Had they based their teaching upon visions and mystical experiences? Probably not. But Paul forms a kal v’chomer argument here—one which cannot be overcome. If the message of an angel is to be scrutinized, how much more the message of mere mortals!

The truth of the gospel of Messiah is likewise not the possession of Paul and his companions. Note he includes himself: “even if we....” Here we learn a most important lesson: the truth of God is the sole possession of no man. It comes to us through divine revelation of the Scriptures to which everyone must submit. The gospel was not something Paul formulated, nor something first given to him. The gospel of Messiah was revealed in the Torah, and carried along by the prophets, being fully realized and revealed in the incarnate Messiah Yeshua.

And Paul is not speaking alone—note the plural “we.” This may hearken back to the opening verses were he sends greetings from “all the brethren who are with me.” In good Hebrew fashion, Paul weights his strong words with the voices of multiple witnesses. The fact that he repeats himself in this strong admonition only heightens the urgency with which he gives it.

His switching to the word “received” (παραλαμβάνω, paralambánō) from the former “what we have preached to you,” also strikes a chord in the hearts of his readers, for they not only heard the message of the true gospel, they also responded to it by faith. In their receiving the message of the gospel, they had experienced the life-changing results of its power (cf. Rom 1:16ff). This “aroma of life resulting in life” (cf. 2Cor 2:16) was what Paul’s message had been to them previously.

That Paul includes the words “As we have said before” must, in some measure, reference his former warnings about those who would preach a different message. Apparently, in his initial visit to the Galatians, he had warned them about those who were teaching the need for proselytism in order to obtain covenant status. Perhaps this warning came as the aftermath of his confrontation with Peter, and the realization that the message of the gospel of Yeshua was being formulated differently by some (including Peter, at least at an initial stage). The fact that Paul had made specific warning about such a teaching, and that subsequently the Galatians were falling prey to this message in spite of his warning, only helps us understand his deeper consternation and disgust.

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42 Cf. Ezek 8:2ff; Dan 10:5ff; 1Enoch 1.2ff; 2Enoch 1.4ff; Apoc. Zeph 2.1f; 4Ezra 2.44ff; 4.1ff.
10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Messiah.

That this verse begins with the word “For” (γὰρ, gar) does link it to the previous section. Apparently, the influencers would have offered a “yes” to this rhetorical question, and Paul is intent on showing their answer to be wrong. He expects the Galatians to understand that he is not seeking the favor of men, nor attempting to please men in the presentation of his gospel, and if he were, such a perspective would be contrary to his apostolic calling as the bond-servant of Messiah.

In the Greek, the word “now” (ἀρτι, arti) stands first in this sentence, something quite unusual for this word in normal, Greek word order. The emphasis upon the word “now” is heightened by the following “still” (ἐτι, eti). Thus, Paul is contrasting his current message and mission to that which was formerly his, but which is now changed. We should understand that he is contrasting the current message of the gospel which he carries and preaches to that of his life and mission before becoming the bond-servant of Messiah. And this accords with v.13 where he speaks of his “former” activities within the scope of Pharisaic Judaism.

The meaning hinges on the words “favor” (πειθω, peitho, “to persuade”) and “to please” (αρέσκω, aresko). With regard to the first word, the NASB translates: “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God?” The Greek word translated “seeking the favor of” usually indicates “to persuade,” and has an extended meaning “to convince” or “win over” in the sense of “strive to please.” While Paul could be using this word to mean “find favor” as the NASB translates, a more obvious use of the word would be “to persuade,” and then we are left to understand what Paul might mean by “persuade God.” Betz has this suggestion:

Since Plato, philosophers and others have regarded the “art of persuasion” (ἡ πιθανοφυγική τεχνη) as something rather negative and unfitting. Rhetoric became identified with deception, slander, and even sorcery. Paul as well as other Christian writers share this view (cf. 1Cor 2:4; 2Cor 5:11; Col 2:4). The other expression, “persuade God” turns out to be a polemical definition of magic and religious quackery. This background means that we should take the questions as ironical and should expect an emphatic denial.

Paul did not think that he could “gain favor” with God by any other means than through the complete work of Yeshua, and this might also inform the present text. And Paul elsewhere denies outright that his motivation in the work of the gospel has anything to do with pleasing men.

The second term used (“to please”) confirms this meaning. Used in parallel

43 Though Blass, DeBrunner, Funk (Greek Grammar, §452) would indicate that the word γαρ may simply introduce a question of a rhetorical nature, it seems to me that there is a logical connection with the preceding context.
44 In the 12 times Paul uses this word (1Cor 4:11,13; 8:7; 13:12; 15:6; 16:7; Gal 1:9-10; 4:20; 1Th 3:6; 2Th 2:7), only here and in 1Th 3:6 does it stand first in the clause.
45 BDAG, ad loc.
46 Betz, Galatians, pp. 54-55.
47 Cf. 1Thess 2:4-5; 1Cor 10:33; Eph 6:6; Col. 3:22.
with the first word, it defines Paul’s meaning as “pleasing men in order to win their acceptance.” While his former motivation in matters relating to his mission appeared to be his zeal for the Torah, in reality he sought to “please men.” Only when the Torah was written on his heart by the work of the Spirit through faith in Messiah Yeshua was its light able to expose his true motivations.

Thus, his use of “now” and its parallel “still” in the two phrases of this verse would indicate that before his calling to be Yeshua’s bond-servant, he did, in fact, engage in rhetoric and persuasive speech that had its goal of bringing men to agree regardless of the tactics, and even with the thought that he could “control” the favor of God. After his coming to genuine faith in the Messiah Yeshua, his view of how he “gained favor” with God changed radically, as did his view of the “gospel” and the manner in which the gospel itself (energized by the Spirit) had the power to overcome the sinful heart and bring a person to faith (cf. Rom 1:16f).

In Paul’s current situation, he reckoned himself as the “bond-slave of Messiah” (δοῦλος, doulos), meaning that his motivation for proclaiming the gospel about Yeshua was not to win favor, but to serve obediently. What is more, this perspective of being a bond-slave of Messiah is not particular to Paul and his fellow apostles. It characterizes all who are disciples of the Messiah (cf. Eph 6:6; 1Cor 7:22-23; Col 3:25).

Were the influencers attempting to undermine Paul’s message by claiming that, in reality, he was simply trying to please men? It would appear so. How would their argument have been formulated? Perhaps this is a possible scenario. Since Paul had been preaching the message of justification (gaining a status of righteousness) through faith alone, and not through obtaining the status of “Jewishness,” this was understood to mean that the Gentiles were not obligated to any of the Torah. Since Paul did not require circumcision (=the ritual of becoming a proselyte) for the full inclusion of a Gentile believer into the covenant family of God, it was presumed that he likewise did not require the Gentile believers to keep any of the outward covenant signs of the Torah (such as food laws and festivals, including the Sabbath). As such, the Gentiles could remain within their Gentile, pagan culture without any persecution, but would still be allowed to enjoy the full privileges of being covenant members with Israel. We know that such outward signs of the covenant were looked down upon by the Greco-Roman intelligentsia, with circumcision in particular regarded as mutilation. Thus, in not requiring the Gentiles to become circumcised in order to “be saved,” Paul was accused of trying to find a way to accommodate the Gentiles, allowing them to remain within their pagan culture and still “be saved.” He was even accused of trying to “persuade God” that his “cut-down” gospel was an appropriate way to bring the Gentiles into the covenant on easier terms.

11–12 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Yeshua Messiah.

Paul therefore goes on to argue that the gospel he preaches is not some-
thing he concocted in order to make the Gentiles comfortable in their own
culture, but something that he received as a direct revelation from the Messiah.
This is not to deny that the gospel of Messiah is found in the Tanach itself, but
only to emphasize that the manner in which Paul himself was convinced of
this gospel was through a revelation of Messiah. The emphasis is upon “the
gospel which was preached to me.” Paul, at the point of his coming to faith in
Yeshua, was not under the tutelage of a particular mentor, nor was the message
specifically presented to him by one of the other apostles or disciples of Ye-
shua. He received the gospel (i.e., the awakening of his soul to the gospel
message which the Tanach reveals) through a revelation of Yeshua Himself,
while traveling on the road to Damascus.

Paul is emphatic in this (and thus the reiteration of the same theme in v. 12).
The gospel message which he was preaching, and which he had given to the
Galatians, was not a message first formulated by men, but is of divine origin.
Furthermore, whereas the message of the gospel had been received by them
from Paul, he did not himself receive it from any other teacher or apostle, but
directly from Yeshua. Like the Torah itself, given directly to Moses from the
hand of God, and thus fully trustworthy and authoritative when Moses gave it
to the people, so the message of the gospel, given directly to Paul and passed
on to the Galatians, was trustworthy and authoritative.

How should we understand this emphatic declaration of direct revelation
when compared to Paul’s words regarding the gospel in 1Corinthians 15:1–4?
There he writes:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to
you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also
you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless
you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what
I also received, that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scrip-
tures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day
according to the Scriptures… (1Cor 15:1–4)

It appears as though he “received” the gospel in much the same way the
Corinthians had received it, namely, through the witness of apostles much like
himself. The obvious reconciliation of these two passages is that in Galatians
Paul refers to his own faith experience, while in 1Corinthians he emphasizes
that the gospel as he came to understand it, was in every way in concert with
and the same as, the gospel which was preached by the other apostles of
Yeshua. For while his own personal experience came through a direct revela-
tion of Yeshua to him in a vision while on the road to Damascus, the gospel as
fully preached by him in his apostleship was in every way the same as the
gospel preached by the other apostles, and thus was “received” from them as
confirmation that his message was, indeed, the biblical gospel.

13–14  For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I
used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;
and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among
my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Paul presumes that his readers are aware of his well-known actions as a
persecutor of the followers of Yeshua in the days before he was confronted by
the living Messiah. Either his acts of infamy were known through word of
mouth, or perhaps Paul himself related his former acts of persecution against
The Way as part of his initial preaching to the Galatians.

We should note carefully that the word “former” (ποτέ, pote), which, when functioning as a particle means “once, formerly,” functions to modify the word “manner of life” (ἀναστροφή, anastrophe, “lifestyle”). It does not imply that Paul formerly lived within Judaism but that as of the time he wrote the Galatians, he was no longer living within Judaism. What he is contrasting is his personal “halachah” before and after his faith in Yeshua as Messiah, not his former life in Judaism as opposed to his present life apart from Judaism. We might compare his words in Ephesians 4:22:

that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.

Here, the “manner of life” (anastrophe) is the life of the believer before he came to faith. The issue at hand is the contrast of one’s actions before and after faith in Yeshua.

The word “Judaism” (Ἰουδαϊσμός, ioudaismos) is used only here (twice, once in v. 13 and once in v. 14) in the whole Apostolic Scriptures. It is found only five times in the Lxx (2Mac 2.21; 8.1; 14.38(2x); 4Mac 4.26) and then only in the Maccabees. Y. Amir, in a study entitled “The Term Ioudaismos: A Study in Jewish-Hellenistic Self-Identification,” comes to the conclusion that the word means a “a sort of fenced-off area in which Jewish lives are led.”

Does Paul’s use of the word here identify a split between “Judaism” and “Christianity” that had already occurred in his time? No, not in the normal understanding of the word “Christianity.” But it does, indeed, indicate that the people of The Way had already given a different definition to covenant membership, and that this fell outside of the boundaries of the Judaism which had been defined by a Pharisaic view of covenant membership status. Unfortunately, by the time following the destruction (post 70 CE), Ignatius had already identified this word as encompassing “Judaism” as that which stood opposed to “Christianity,” and in his Letters to the Magnesians, pits Judaism (he uses the same term as in our verses) against “Christianity,” a label he uses to define those who believe in Yeshua.

Do not be deceived by strange doctrines or antiquated myths, since they are worthless. For if we continue to live in accordance with Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace. (Mag 8.1)

It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, in which “every tongue” believed and “was brought together” to God. (Mag 10.3)

But to define the term in Paul’s letter in the same manner as Ignatius used it would surely be anachronistic. And unfortunately, this has been the case all too often among Christian commentators and modern English translations. Note, for example, the manner in which the REB translates our verses:

49 Paul uses ἀναστροφή only two other times: Eph 4:22, 1Tim 4:12. The word is used in a similar way in Tob 4.14 and 2Mac 6.23 (the only times it is found in the Lxx).
51 Cf. 1Mag 8.1; 10.3.
You have heard what my manner of life was when I was still a practising Jew: how savagely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it; and how in the practice of our national religion I outstripped most of my Jewish contemporaries by my boundless devotion to the traditions of my ancestors.\(^{52}\)

There is no doubt that Paul made a clear distinction between his former life, lived under the acceptance of the prevailing Pharisaic belief that Jewish status rendered one a member of the covenant, and his current life lived in the reality of the risen Messiah. But such a distinction said nothing about the place of the divinely inspired Torah, and its central importance in the life of the believer. What it did contrast, however, was the life of faith in Messiah Yeshua and the message of the influencers which insisted upon Jewish status as a prerequisite for covenant membership. Dunn’s comments, upon the question of whether Paul’s words indicate a separation, are worth including here:

The answer must be Yes, but only in the sense that ‘Judaism’ constituted a particular claim to and interpretation of Israel’s covenant and heritage which Paul had once embraced but now questioned, ‘Judaism’ as characterized by the attitudes and life-styles documented in verses 13 and 14. In fact, however, it was precisely the identity of the ‘Jew’ which was at issue (Rom. 2:28-9) — as still today in modern Israel. If Paul’s use of ‘Judaism’ here indicates a certain distancing of himself from the characteristic self-understanding of most of his fellow Jews, he still regarded himself as a Jew (2:15 1:14 – ‘my people’); and his description of the sect of Jesus Messiah as ‘the church of God’ … indicates a firm claim that the new movement with which he now identified was wholly part of and continuous with the Israel of old. It would be more accurate, then, to say that Paul converted from one Jewish movement, the Pharisees, to another, the Christians …\(^{53}\)

We might, however, even question whether Paul considered his identity with the people of The Way as entirely outside of the scope or boundaries of Pharisaism, since even after his confessed faith in Yeshua as Messiah, he considered himself a Pharisee (Acts 23:6, cf. Phil 3:5f). Yet Dunn’s words are generally on the mark, for Paul had realized that the predominate theology of Pharisaism, which attributed covenant status to all Jews, could not be sustained against the backdrop of the Tanach’s teaching on salvation, including election, forgiveness of sins, and imputed righteousness.

Once again, in these verses, Paul is showing clearly the difference between his gospel and that of the influencers. And he wants his readers to know that he understands the gospel of the influencers precisely because he not only once also adhered to their teachings, but that he was a student of this “gospel” (which is really not the gospel) excelling in his studies more than most. What is more, he was zealous for this message in a way that also outstripped his contemporaries. For beyond simply believing that covenant status was determined on the basis of Jewish ethnicity, he tried his best to eradicate those who would teach otherwise. He “persecuted the ekklesia of God in excessive measure and tried to destroy it.”

What was it about the teachings of The Way that would have allowed the Temple authorities (the Sadducees) to give Paul written permission to arrest

\(^{52}\) I have emphasized the words which correspond to the word Ioudaios.

\(^{53}\) Dunn, Galatians, p. 57.
those of The Way with charges of capital offense? It must have been that they were convinced those who were Gentiles were passing themselves off as Jews, and therefore were attempting (or would attempt) to enter the Temple court of the Jews and thus defile the Temple with their uncleanness. And it has been shown that defilement of the Temple could be construed by the leading authorities as a form of blasphemy, a charge which drew the death penalty.54

Of course, this was a smoke-screen in light of the real motivation. The genuine intent was to maintain Jewish identity in light of the encroaching Hellenism of the day. Such a threat to Jewish identity was real, for the events of the Maccabees were still very much in the near history of the Jewish community, and the fear of being marginalized through Hellenism was therefore present and could evoke an immediate response on the part of the Jewish community in general. The same, of course, is true in our day. Competing religions are not nearly the concern to the modern orthodox Jewish community as the threat of assimilation is. It is for this reason that Messianic Judaism is viewed as such a threat: within Messianic Judaism, the well-defined boundaries of “Jewish identity” are breached, and this appears to the orthodox community as a sure method of assimilation for the next generation of Jews.

Likewise, the fact that Paul indicates his former zeal for the “ancestral traditions” should not be read as though his appreciation and practice of these traditions had ceased in his life. In fact, at the end of Paul’s public ministry, he confesses that he lived according to the “customs of the fathers”:

After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, “Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. (Acts 28:17)

It is not the living out of traditional *halachah* of which Paul is speaking here, but the belief that salvation could be obtained through ethnic status, maintained through a prescribed body of *halachot*. For Paul, the teaching that one could obtain Jewish status through adherence to a particular *halachah* was nothing less than “the works of the Torah,” through which no one could be justified (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16).

14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

The verb προκοπτω (prokoptō), translated “I was advancing” is in the imperfect tense which might be understood to convey the sense “I kept on advancing.” Apparently Paul was known for his acumen both in studies and in practicing the strict *halachah* of his sect. Once again, the use of “Judaism” (Ιουδαιος) here points especially to the particular *halachah* and sect-identification of Paul, which was that of the Pharisees. While he still considered

himself a Pharisee, his halachah had changed drastically in some areas (most particularly, one’s association with Gentiles) and he could therefore speak of a “former” halachah or “way of life”, one in which he excelled among his peers.

It is possible, of course, that the influencers (whether native born or proselytes) identified themselves with the halachah and even the particular sect of Pharisees of which Paul had belonged. His claim here, then, that he had excelled in learning and practice within this sect gives him the right to judge their message and practice, and to warn the Galatians, not as an outsider, but as one who knew the influencers’ message even better than they did. Note carefully, however, that he still considers his former associates (the Pharisees commonly referred to each other as חָבָרִים, chavarim, “friends,” “associates”) as “my countrymen” (τῶ γενεί μου, tō genei mou), showing clearly that he had no intention of distancing himself from his own people in spite of the fact that his primary mission was to the Gentiles.

Paul indicates that he was “more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.” Here we see combined the two primary characteristics of the Pharisees: strictness to the letter of the Torah, and thus a diligent study of the Torah (both written and oral), and zeal to live out even the smallest aspect of the established halachah by way of the traditions (oral Torah).

Josephus witnesses to these characteristics:

And now the Pharisees joined themselves to her, to assist her in the government. These are a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately. (Wars, 1.110)

… the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These ascribe all to fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies,—but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. (Wars, 2:162)

… for there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. (Ant 17:41)

Philo mentions the presence of those who are zealous to uphold the strict application of the Torah as well:

… for there are innumerable beings looking on, zealots for and keepers of the national laws, of rigid justice, prompt to stone such a criminal, and visiting without pity all such as work wickedness, unless, indeed, we are prepared to say that a man who acts in such a way as to dishonor his father or his mother is worthy of death, but that he who behaves with impiety towards a name more glorious than even the respect due to one’s parents, is to be borne with as but a moderate offender. (Spec. Laws 2:253).
The zeal for the strict obedience of the Torah is also witnessed by Mishnah:

He who stole a sacred vessel, and he who curses using the name of an idol, and he who has sexual relations with an Aramaean woman— zealots beat him up. A priest who performed the rite in a state of uncleanness— his brothers, the priests, do not bring him to court. But the young priests take him outside the courtyard and break his head with clubs. A non-priest who served in the Temple— R. Aqiba says, “[He is put to death] by strangling. And sages say, “[He is put to death] at the hands of Heaven.” (m. Sanhedrin 9.6)

These historical witnesses accord with the words of Luke in Acts as he recalls the testimony of Paul:

I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. (Acts 22:3)

So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. (Acts 26:4–5)

So Paul’s life before his faith in Yeshua was one of maintaining the strict letter of the Torah as interpreted by the strictest sect of the Pharisees. But what was his motivation for such behavior? Was it pure love for the Almighty? Apparently not. Paul had come to realize that though his motivation at the time was directed toward the honor of God in His Torah, in reality he was attempting to “seek the favor of men” and “to please men” (v. 10). This was his “former manner of life” and something in which he could no longer engage — “We recognize no one according to the flesh” (2Cor 5:16). His heart had been changed, and his motivation was now to further the mission of the Messiah, Yeshua, by bringing in the harvest of the Gentiles through the proclamation of the gospel. There is little doubt that Paul’s new perspective toward the “traditions of the fathers” (=Oral Torah) were shaped by the words of Yeshua:

He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.” (Mark 7:9–13)

Yet we should not read into these words of Paul the wrong-headed notion that he had entirely given up the traditions in which he had been trained from his youth. He surely could not have sustained his claim to uphold the traditions (Acts 21:21; 28:17) if he had become known as someone who, in fact, did not live by them. We must understand his words here, then, to indicate that some of the traditions to which he had formerly adhered were dismissed because they conflicted with the gospel of Yeshua.
I would suggest that those traditions which were first jettisoned were those which aimed at separating Jew and Gentile.

In this regard we should also note that the article is used in each case with the word “Judaism:” “... former manner of life in the Judaism” and “... advancing in the Judaism.” If, in fact, the term describes particular boundary issues within which a Jewish sect defined itself, then it seems reasonable to understand Paul’s words as distinguishing between his former life within a particular Judaism (i.e., a strict sect of the Pharisees) and his current life in The Way which, though different, was still within the wider circle of the Judaisms of his day.

15–17 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

Paul here gives us a personal description of his “calling,” the divine action by which he had come to accept Yeshua as the promised Messiah, and had been inducted into His service as His apostle. The repeated first person (“my way of life,” “I persecuted and destroyed,” “I advanced”) of the previous verses is broken by the reference to the sovereign work of God in Paul’s calling.

The word “God” (θεός, theos) is missing in some of the important, early manuscripts, and for this reason some scholars do not believe it is original. Regardless, the subject is obvious by the context.55

Paul speaks of “being set apart from my mother’s womb.” This seems too close a parallel to Jeremiah 1:5 to be coincidental, and we should most likely presume that Paul considered his own calling (and thus his authority) to be like that of Jeremiah’s. What is more, if the meaning of the name “Pharisee” is (as many suspect) derived from the Hebrew פָרַש, parash, “to separate,” then Paul’s claim to have been “separated” unto the Lord from the time of birth would speak directly to the influencers. Paul’s association with the sect of Pharisees (of which they may have been party or sympathetic) came to an end when he recognized his true “separation” unto God through Yeshua, and his life’s mission which this separation entailed. But the fact that this separation was from birth would mean that his time within the strict sect of Pharisees of which he was a part, was not wasted but something necessary for his ultimate calling.

Paul says he was “called through His grace.” Like Isaiah, Paul realized that God had “called” him for his current work from the time of his birth (cf. Is 49:1, 5). Paul never speaks of his faith in Yeshua as a “conversion” but always as a “calling.” As Dunn notes:

... [Paul] never speaks of it as a ‘conversion,’ and would almost certainly have disputed the use of that word (in the modern sense) in reference to his Damascus-road experience, since he saw it not as a conversion from one religion to another, but as a recall to a proper

55 Θ. B (Vaticanus) G (9th century) do not have θεός, while the majority of the remainder of manuscripts do. The ESV and NET both leave “God” out of the sentence, while the majority of other newer translations (NIV, NRSV, REB) include it. Its addition by scribes to make certain the subject seems more likely than its accidental omission.
understanding of the grace-character of Israel’s calling.56

The use of the word “call” (καλέω, kaleō; κλητός, kletos) is used of all who are believers, not exclusively of the apostles. The Apostles regularly refer to believers as those who are “called.”57 In fact, the idea of “being called” is first and foremost in respect of being “invited” by God Himself into the circle of His grace, an “invitation” which brings with it the enlivening of the soul to receive the invitation, and the faith to act upon it. Furthermore, the term “called” or “calling” is not used in the Apostolic Scriptures in reference to service within the body of Messiah, nor even to an office (Overseer/Deacon) within the community of faith. The only use of the word in reference to a position of service is that of Apostles (and this, primarily by Paul). For an individual to speak of his or her “calling” as something different than the general call to salvation that is the possession of all who are redeemed, is to apply to the term a meaning it does not bear in the Apostolic Scriptures.

This is not, in any way, to deny that God has specific duties and ministries for individuals within the body of Messiah. This is clear from Paul’s “body analogy” in Ephesians 4:11ff. But to suggest that God gives individuals a specific, revealed “calling” often diminishes the grand and all-encompassing reality of one’s call to be a disciple of Yeshua, a “calling” that all who are His enjoy and must carry with due responsibility. Nor do I mean to diminish the fact that God may lead us in our lives to specific duties and positions. I only hope to raise the importance of every believer’s “calling,” that we all might reaffirm both the glory of it, and the responsibilities attached to it.

But Paul had a specific and unique “calling” as an apostle of Yeshua to the Gentiles. This he clearly recognized and it was, no doubt, an enduring source of stability for him as he lived to fulfill this calling. It was a source of stability because he recognized this calling to be divine, not something of human appointment. One could imagine that Paul may have often wondered if his life of ministry was honestly worth the struggles. This clear confession of his divine calling must have encouraged him to continue on, for God’s calling surely is accompanied by His enabling. In the Tanach, when God calls individuals to perform specific tasks, His promise “I will be with you” is often there as well.58

56 Dunn, Galatians, p. 63.
58 Note these example of God’s promised presence to those he calls: Ex. 3:12 (of Moses); Josh. 1:5; 3:7 (of Joshua).
or deserved. Everywhere in Scripture, the active work of saving sinners, done by the hand of the Almighty, is reckoned as flowing from His mercy and grace. It is therefore spoken of as a gift and not as something anyone could either purchase or demand. God’s blessings are a matter of His own, sovereign, good pleasure.

Paul must surely have the Damascus Road experience in mind here. He speaks elsewhere of “seeing Messiah” or of Messiah “appearing” to him (1Co 9:1; 15:8), and this corresponds to the use of “revealed” (ἀποκαλύπτω, apokaluptō) here. It is not as though Paul was unaware of Yeshua and His life in Israel during the first years of the century. But what was revealed to Paul in that life-changing event was the truth about Yeshua, and particularly the truth that He was, in fact, the Messiah. Here, as always, the difference between knowing about Yeshua, and knowing Yeshua as one’s own Savior, is revelation. The veil must be lifted, the eyes opened, and the heart made new in order to receive the truth. This, as Paul describes it here, is always a sovereign act of the Almighty, and cannot be manufactured or accomplished by men. Surely Paul was not seeking the truth about Yeshua! This is all the more clear when one remembers the mission in which Paul was engaged as he set out on his journey to Damascus. He went with the intention of doing all in his power to squelch the burgeoning growth of those who were the disciples of Yeshua. The farthest thing from his mind was that he might discover in Yeshua the truth that had eluded him up to that point. But it was God who intervened. It was the Sovereign One who entered into the schedule of Paul that day, and captured the zealot’s heart. Far from the picture, so often presented by modern Christianity, of Yeshua “knocking” on the door, seeking an entrance at the behest of the wayward sinner, the experience of Paul demonstrates the sovereign will of God as the Savior. The picture should rather be like this: the door is bolted and barred, and the resident is fast asleep, dead in trespasses and sins. To this door the Lord of Glory storms in, breaking it asunder, and capturing the bound soul, rescues it from sure destruction.

This was Paul’s experience. Knocked from his ride by the sheer glory of the Shekinah (note 2Cor 4:6, “… the glory of God shining in the face of Yeshua Messiah”), Paul was confronted by the living Messiah, forever shattering his disbelief, and confirming the truth against which he had fought. The Persecutor was reborn into the Apostle; the image of the risen Messiah would form the foundation of his life and message from that day forward.

Why does Paul speak of “revealing His Son in me” rather than “to me?” Actually, some Greek grammarians believe the use of the preposition ἐν (en), usually translated “in,” can also in some cases mean “to,” especially where the dative might be expected. Dunn, however, thinks that Paul’s use of “in me” is to emphasize the personal transformation which resulted by the revelation of the risen Messiah.

We should not miss the reference to Yeshua as God’s Son: “… was pleased to reveal His Son in me.” The use of “son of God” terminology is now recognized to have been a messianic term in the 1st Century, even if older scholarship denied this claim. Granted, “son of God” was used for other than messianic personages, but it came to have a particular messianic flavor by the 1st

59 See Blass, DeBrunner, Funk, Greek Grammar, §220(1). Note that the NRSV and ESV both have “to me” in the text.
60 Dunn, Galatians, p. 64.
Century. Its use in the Dead Sea Scrolls confirms this. Paul will bring the sonship of Yeshua up again in 4:4.

so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles – Paul’s calling was “to preach,” but in our modern times this translation might be misunderstood. In English we think of “preaching” as the activity of the speaker in a religious service. Here, the word translated “preach” is εὐαγγελίζωμαι (euangelizomai), from which we derive our English word “evangelize.” The Greek word often translated “preach” (κηρύσσω, kerussō) means “to make a public proclamation,” “to make an official announcement,” much like a town crier. The word used here, however, means “to speak the good news,” and had become a technical term meaning “to announce the good news of the salvation in Yeshua.” Simply put, Paul’s calling was to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. Note, however, that Paul does not here say that he preaches the “gospel” but rather he preaches “Him,” that is Yeshua. For Paul, Yeshua is the core of the gospel, and thus to “preach Him” is to preach the gospel.

The word translated “Gentiles” is ἔθνος (ethnos), and generally means “nations” or “peoples” (note our English word “ethnic”). Since this word regularly translated the Hebrew גּוֹיִם (goyim) in the Lxx, and since this term is often used in the Tanach of the nations that are “other than” Israel, ethnos is often found in the Apostolic Scriptures to denote the nations other than Israel as well. While the translation could be “so that I might preach Him among the nations,” the meaning is surely as the NASB has it, “… among the Gentiles.”

Paul does not speak of his Damascus Road experience as a “conversion,” but rather as a call to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. His use of the word “immediately” indicates that, having received the truth about Yeshua—that He was, indeed, the Messiah—he went right to the task of being His apostle. Rather than a conversion, this experience is viewed by Paul as a commissioning. For Paul, this is not unique to him. All who are baptized into the body of Messiah have the Spirit, and this equips each one to be His witness.

The point that his readers no doubt “heard” in these words of Paul was that the Divine purpose was not only (or even primarily) a calling of Paul as much as it was a revelation of God’s intention to bring in the Gentiles through the proclamation of the gospel.

The Gentiles from being outsiders, “strangers to the covenants of (the) promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12), had moved to the center of God’s purpose.

God had not commissioned Paul to make the Gentiles into Jews, but to bring them into the “covenants of (the) promise” through faith in Yeshua.

I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me – At first blush this seems wrong, that Paul would not “consult” with those who were the pillars of The Way. Would he not have found good counsel in those who were “apostles before him?” But no doubt the key to this is the word “consult” itself. The Greek

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62 1QSa 2.11-12; 4QFlor. 1.10ff; 4Q246.
63 E.g., Acts 14:5; 21:11, 21; Rom 3:29; 9:24; 1Cor 1:23; Gal 2:15.
64 Note Dunn, Galatians, p. 65.
65 Ibid., p. 66.
word, προσανατιθημι (prosanatitheimi), had a technical meaning in Paul’s day, which was “consult in order to be given a skilled or authoritative interpretation.” For instance, the same word is used regarding Alexander who received a “sign” and sought out a seer to understand its exact meaning. So while the word could mean “to receive general advice,” “to seek counsel,” it also could be used of someone who was attempting to find the authoritative meaning of an event or situation. This helps us understand Paul’s perspective. He did not need to find an “authoritative interpretation” of the vision he had on the road to Damascus. It was plain—indisputable: Yeshua is the long-awaited Messiah. The gospel as it was in Yeshua needed no further embellishments. The gospel was clearly centered in the person and work of the risen Messiah.

And his mission was clear as well. Since he was confronted by the risen Lord while on his way to persecute The Way, he was given a revelation of Yeshua. The point was clear: rather than persecute the Gentiles who were following Yeshua, he was to encourage them and add to their number. Thus, the gospel as it was in Yeshua, and his commissioning to take this gospel to the Gentiles, was the obvious meaning of the vision, and Paul needed no other authoritative interpretation to set him on his path.

nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me – Paul walks a “tight-rope” between his clear submission and appreciation of the Jerusalem leaders, and his apparent “independence” from them in his own, Gentile mission. In the next chapter we will see that Paul “submitted” his message of the gospel to the Jerusalem “pillars” and received from them their hearty approval. So he clearly was not “independent” of them as one who refused to submit to their authority. Yet the point he is making here is that he did not receive the gospel message from them, but received it directly from the revelation of Messiah Himself. His visit to Jerusalem subsequent to his Damascus road experience, and his time in Arabia, no doubt saw him in the company of “the twelve,” and it was at this time that the testimonies of those who walked with Messiah in His earthly ministry confirmed the reality of what he had seen in the vision.

The nuances here are important for our grasp of Paul’s argument: he acknowledges that the apostles in Jerusalem had, inevitably, a pre-eminent claim to represent and thus to speak of Christ — this much he concedes to his Galatian critics; but the point he really makes is that he did not consult their authority — since the God-given meaning of the revelation to him was clear in itself he did not need to depend on those whose apostleship took precedence over his ....

Thus, Paul was aware of the argument that might dismiss his message and apostleship on the basis that it was formed from a delusion rather than a true, divine revelation. For this reason, he will appeal to the authority of the Jerusalem apostles. On the other hand, the message of the Gospel he was bringing, with an emphasis upon the divine purpose for the Gentiles, was directly from Yeshua Himself, and would therefore have the highest authority.

but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. – These are the so-called “silent years” of Paul’s life. “Arabia” can refer to anywhere west of Mesopotamia, east and south of present day Syria and Israel, and could include the isthmus of Suez. Most believe he went to the Kingdom of Nabataea

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66 Diodorus Siculus 17.116.4, noted in Dunn, Ibid.
67 Dunn, Galatians, p. 69.
(called “provincia Arabia”), since in 2Cor 11:32 King Aretas is mentioned, which must refer to the Nabataean King Aretas IV. Likewise, Paul’s reference to Damascus, would opt for a region in close proximity, and Nabataea is immediately to the south of Damascus.

But the bigger question is why he went there. There is no reason to believe, necessarily, that he went to a desert or semi-desert region, though this is the common suggestion of commentators. Some imagine the huge psychological “tangle” Paul was dealing with, and the need to be away, in solitary surroundings. Likewise, some might want to parallel the wilderness temptation of Yeshua with these “silent years” of Paul, suggesting that, like his Master before him, Paul’s metal was being tempered in order to endure the trials he would face as an apostle. Others note that only in a desert situation could he not consult with “flesh and blood.” Yet at this time Arabia/Nabatea was a prosperous region with a number of large cities. For this reason, some scholars take the position that Paul went to Arabia to begin “immediately” to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Of course, there is no certainty as to the reason for his going to Arabia, except for the obvious reason he mentions it here: he was not in Jerusalem, and there was no one in Arabia with whom he might consult. Thus, his early reception and understanding of the gospel was directly from Yeshua and no one else.

But the issue at hand is not so much the content of the gospel (though this is surely a key factor in the overall message of Galatians), but the inclusion of the Gentiles within the scope of the Gospel. This is the core emphasis which Paul brings to the table, and which was the main focus of the revelation to him on his way to Damascus. The very ones he was planning to persecute were, in fact, those chosen by God to join the covenant. This divine commission to gather in the Gentiles is that which the influencers questioned the most, and it was therefore important that Paul ground this commission in the direct revelation from Yeshua, not from the counsel of men. The ingathering of the Gentiles as non-Jews was divinely decreed, not the idea of Paul or any other human being.

and returned once more to Damascus. – This would indicate that he completed his planned trip to Damascus, but with a very different agenda! Yet (and especially if the word “immediately” is understood to attach to all of the subsequent verbs), it must have been shortly after arriving in Damascus that he left for Arabia. How long was he in Damascus? Apparently the duration is not important since he makes no mention of it. He may have taken a mikveh there, and spent time with the believers (cf. Rom 6:3-4; 1Cor 12:13), who do doubt were at first very leery of admitting Paul into their community (cf. Acts 18:12-17). But his transformation from prosecutor to apostle of Yeshua must have been quickly accepted, his new life being manifest to all.

All of this fits with the basic outline of Paul’s salvation experience as recorded by Luke in Acts 9:3-19. But in spite of these parallels, we have no firm information for how long he was in Arabia, though the period as a whole (Damascus/Arabia/Damascus) was three years (v. 18).

We can only speculate what took up Paul’s time while away for these three years. I would suggest that he studied the Torah with “new eyes,” and that through the study of the Torah, his mission, that is, his “gospel” was well formulated, and his calling confirmed. And this might suggest a worthwhile paradigm for others who sense God’s burden upon them for
ministry: growing deep in one’s own convictions and understandings is necessary for a fruitful ministry.

18–24 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Messiah; but only, they kept hearing, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.” And they were glorifying God because of me.

Paul is intent upon giving his readers a careful, orderly description of his visit to Jerusalem, and thus his early connection with the leaders of The Way who resided there. He uses the word “then” (ἐπείτα, epeita, “then”) three times in the immediate context: v. 18, 21, 2:1). Apparently we are to understand that the listing of events is chronological.

“Three years later” actually translates “after three years.” This could denote an interval of fully three years, or could indicate that he traveled to Jerusalem in the third year, so perhaps after two years plus some time. His apparent point, however, is that there was a sufficient gap between the “revelation” of Yeshua on the road to Damascus, and his first visit to Jerusalem after acknowledging Him as Messiah.

The reason this is important to Paul must be related to his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Already, by the time of the writing of Galatians (for dating issues, see above, p. 6f), there must have been a question about the propriety of the Gentile mission. Paul may have felt that there was a growing animosity toward the Gentile mission, and that perhaps even some of the leaders in Jerusalem may have had misgivings. It would appear that the influencers may have been suggesting that Paul, in his Gentile mission, and particularly in his presentation of the gospel as not requiring them to become proselytes, had failed to submit himself to the “pillars” in Jerusalem. As such, his authority was undermined, and he was acting on his own initiative. Such a position would surely weaken his message.

But Paul has taken the position that he did not receive his commission to the Gentiles from the Jerusalem leaders in the first place. His commission came directly from Yeshua, and thus he was confirmed in it. If anyone was to suggest that his commission was not on track, they would have to reckon with the Master Who gave it.

I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas – Cephas (Κηφᾶς, Kēfâs) is the normal Aramaic name of the Apostle, with Peter (Πέτρος) being his Greek name. The majority of manuscripts have “Cephas” here69 while some later manuscripts changed this to “Peter.”70 There is little doubt that “Cephas” was original.

It is for the purpose of “getting to know” Cephas that Paul traveled to Jerusalem. The wording is chosen carefully. The word translated “to become acquainted with” (ιστορεῖν, historiai, from which we derive our word “history”) is used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. The translators are not sure how to understand the word: NASB, “become acquainted with;” NIV,
“get acquainted with;” ESV, “visit;” CJB, “make Kefa’s acquaintance;” NJB, “meet;” NRSV, “visit.” In the Classical Greek, the word means “to inquire into, or about, or from.” Thus, the word Paul uses might convey the idea that while he went to get to know Peter, it does not necessarily imply that he went there to seek approval from him, nor to garner support for his work and mission. It would appear that he went up to Jerusalem, rather, as an equal with the Jerusalem apostles.

That he should single out Peter indicates Peter’s acknowledged position within the leadership of The Way. Paul stayed with him 15 days, a period of time in which he not doubt relayed to Peter what he had received directly from Yeshua, and what his mission to the Gentiles was. The period was long enough to become well acquainted with Peter, but not sufficient to be called his disciple.

Paul regularly refers to Peter by his Aramaic name Cepha (2:9, 11, 14; 1Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5, note “Peter” in Gal 2:7-8 however). This might be an emphasis upon Peter’s status within the Jewish segment of the Way, even as his own preference for “Paul” marked himself as the apostle to the Gentiles.

But I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother – This most likely means that the rest of the Twelve were not visited on this initial trip to Jerusalem, save James. Here again, Paul is countering what must have been an underlying attack on his apostolic commission, made by the influencers to the Galatian congregation. That he simply writes that he “saw” James means that he only had casual contact, but not an extended time of being schooled or discipled.

One might wonder why he did not see the rest of the Twelve. The answer may be either that they were not in Jerusalem at the time, or that they avoided him, still fearing that he was intent upon persecuting The Way (cf. Acts 9:26). On the other hand, Paul may have been “sheepish” about meeting the rest, for his former actions against them were still too current in the memory of the sect, and he may have purposefully avoided them.

That James is referred to as “the Lord’s brother” is a clear indication that this had become a well used adjective describing James, and the recent ossuary which has inscribed “Ya’acov, son of Yosef, brother of Yeshua” may therefore have additional credibility by this text. Here, “Lord,” (κυρίος, kurios) has taken on the function of a title, so that for Paul, “the Lord” refers to Yeshua. Mark 6:3 lists James first, which might indicate that he was the next born after Yeshua. While some (particularly Roman Catholic scholars) would teach that James and the others mentioned were sons of Joseph from a previous marriage, there is no hint anywhere in the Apostolic Writings that James and the others in Mark 6:3 were anything other than legally full brothers of Yeshua, that is, legally Joseph and Mary were their parents.

James apparently was unsympathetic to his brother’s claims of messiahship during His life (Mark 3:21, 31-5; John 7:5), but the fact that he was among the first witnesses of the resurrection (1Cor 15:7) and named among the disciples following the resurrection (Acts 1:13) indicates that James had

71 Liddell & Scott, ad. loc.
72 See Biblical Archaeological Review, Nov/Dec 2002. Subsequent debate over the authenticity of this find has drawn a shadow over its usefulness. However, some still maintain its authenticity, and have good reason to do so. See Craig A. Evans, Jesus and the Ossuaries (Baylor Press, 2003), pp. 112–22.
come to believe Yeshua was, indeed, the Messiah. By the time of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) James has arisen as one of the primary leaders in the Jerusalem community of The Way.

The syntax of the clause leaves in question whether Paul included James as one of the Jerusalem apostles or not. It could just as well be read: “I did not see any of the other apostles (that is other than Cephas), the only one I did see was James,” (that is, James is not to be counted as one of the “other” apostles.” Perhaps Paul found it difficult to label James an “apostle” (one sent out) since he remained his life-time in Jerusalem.

In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! – Paul pauses to take an oath regarding the veracity of his statement. Some translations actually leave out a word that is in the Greek, the word “behold” (note the KJV). This word (ἰδοὺ, idou) corresponds with the Hebrew הִנֵה, hineh, and is used to arrest attention (much like our English “Look!”). Its inclusion here would indicate that Paul intends his readers to reckon fully with his willingness to take an oath before God.

In 1st Century Judaisms, the taking of oaths was a means of verifying the testimony of a witness.

Two [in court] lay hold of a cloak—this one says, “I found it!” — And that one says, “I found it!” — This one says, “It’s all mine!” — And that one says, “It’s all mine!” — This one takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than half, and that one takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than half. And they divide it up. This one says, “It’s all mine!” And that one says, “Half of it is mine!” The one who says, “It’s all mine” takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than three parts. And the one who says, “Half of it is mine,” takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than a fourth part. This one then takes three shares, and that one takes the fourth.⁷³

The point is that if a person is willing to take an oath that his testimony is true, then he must be believed (barring other issues, which the Mishnah goes on to delineate). The thinking is that no one would take an oath before God and willingly lie, because to do so would incur the Divine wrath. If, however, in the instance above, one of the two who claim ownership of a single object is unwilling to take the oath, then the ownership is awarded to the one willing to swear an oath.

This only gives an indication of how important an oath was within the 1st Century Judaisms. And thus Paul’s use of the oath formula makes certain that his readers would receive his testimony. I might also mention that Paul’s willingness to include an oath might appear to contradict the teaching of Yeshua where (as some interpret) He prohibits the use of oaths entirely.

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ’YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil. (Matt. 5:33–37)

But what Yeshua here denies is not the taking of oath entirely, but the taking of

⁷³ m.Bava Metzia 1:1.
oaths using “legalise” that will later render the oath void. In other words, taking an oath is good, as long as it is taken for the right reasons and with full intention on fulfilling it. Oaths that are based on the “fine print” are really just another form of deception and injustice.

Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia – As noted above, the continued use of “then” tells us that Paul was giving an orderly record of the events. After his brief visit in Jerusalem, he went immediately to the northeast quadrant of the Mediterranean (cf. Acts 9:30). It is likely that he went to Antioch, which was the largest city in Syria and seat of the imperial power in the whole region. This would also fit with the notice in Acts 13 that it was the community in Antioch that first sent Paul and Barnabas on their mission to the Gentiles.

I was still unknown by sight (literally, “by face”) to the congregations of Judea which were in Messiah – Paul continues with his main theme of this section, namely, that he was essentially unknown by the congregations centered in Judea, that is, connected in one way or another with the Jerusalem community. Some have wondered if this contradicts the record of Acts that Paul was persecuting the Judean congregations (cf. Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1), but it is most likely that while there may have been a few who felt the sting of Paul’s wrath, the majority of his antagonism was spent on Hellenistic targets (Acts 9:29), most likely in the diaspora. Thus, while some may have known him by his face, the majority did not. And certainly the language would indicate that he had not made it his habit to be there often.

The added “in Messiah” is typically Pauline. This is, of course, one of his favorite phrases, and one that might well define his theology. Here, the term “Messiah” has already gained a kind of technical status, so much so that “those who are in Messiah” becomes a label for the people of The Way.

Here, the identity markers for the group are set within the confines of belief and life in Messiah Yeshua. Whereas the influencers most likely were continuing to appeal to the Torah as the boundary marker for true covenant members, Paul appeals to the core issue of Yeshua and His Messiahship. While various Judaisms would define themselves halachically according to their particular understanding and application of Torah, Paul had come to find his own identity, and the identity of those to whom he ministered, as “in Messiah.”

This “in Messiah” identity also lays the stage for his later leveling of ethnic, gender, and social status, for in Messiah there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free. The message of the influencers which centered on the need for ethnic status is thus set against Paul’s gospel that finds covenant membership in no other place than “in Messiah.” To be “in Messiah” is the true identity for those who have placed their faith in Him.

...but only, they kept hearing, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.” – The fact that Paul was able to quote what had been said about him means it must have been widespread. As much as Shaul and his power were feared, in like measure the amazement at his change of heart was being shared. This is lashon hara in reverse, that is, lashon hatov, “good speech.” Shaul had become known as a “persecutor” of The Way (note the Greek, “the persecutor,” ὁ διώκων ημᾶς)—this was his reputation, and one only time could overcome. But his activity in preaching the faith was the first clear mark that he was now willing fully to identify with those he formerly persecuted.
preaching the faith – We’ve encountered the word “preach” (eüaggelivzomai) before, cf. v.v. 8, 11, 16. (For comments on “preaching,” see v. 16.) Here the object of Paul’s preaching is “the faith” (τὴν πίστιν, ten pistin). The word “faith” is found 243 times in the Apostolic Scriptures, of which 142 are found in Paul’s letters. The word shows up 22 times in Galatians, second only to 1Timothy in terms of percentage per words, indicating that Paul intends to emphasize “faith” in his argument to the Galatians.

The word “faith” (found here for the first time in Galatians) is with the article, “the faith,” indicating its objective use, as over against its subjective meaning, “to have faith, trust.” In its objective sense, it describes a core body of truth that those who were disciples of Yeshua had received and affirmed. We should not think of the later “creeds” or “doctrinal statements,” something that finds no parallel in the Judaisms of Paul’s day. Rather, by “the faith” we should most likely understand that core truth which resides in confessing Yeshua as the true Messiah.

For Paul, the central element of his “preaching” was Messiah, so much so that he can interchange “faith” and “Messiah,” saying that he preaches “Messiah Yeshua as Lord”:

For we do not preach ourselves but Messiah Yeshua as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Yeshua’s sake. (2Cor 4:5)

This interchange between “preaching the faith” and “preaching Messiah” shows concisely that the “faith” here spoken of is that central and foundation message that Yeshua is the long awaited and promised Messiah.

We should also keep this in mind for when we come to chapter three. There Paul writes:

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Torah, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Torah has become our tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua. (Gal 3:23-26)

It becomes clear when we keep in mind that Yeshua is the core issue of “the faith,” that Paul can just as easily say “the faith came” as “the Messiah came.” “The Faith” has become so bound up in Paul’s mind with the person and work of Yeshua the Messiah, it has become a circumlocution for the Messiah Himself.

And they were glorifying God because of me. – Here we find the perspective, both of Paul and the early believers—the turn of events in Paul’s life rendered a fitting cause, not for self-glorification (“see who we won to the Lord!”) but for giving glory to God. “Giving glory to God” means to give Him the reverence He deserves. The underlying truth of this statement is that God is the One Who controls all things. Had the early believers also reckoned with the fact that Paul, as their persecutor, was somehow being used in God’s overall scheme of things? One might imagine so, though this would have no doubt stretched their faith. But when Paul, through the sovereign intervention of the Almighty, came to faith in Yeshua, the praise was given to Him, not to man.

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74 Cf. Rom 1:5, cf. 1Tim 1:19; 4:1, 6; 6:10.
Chapter Two

Commentary

1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

Paul could move very quickly over his initial visit to Jerusalem because it was brief and of little consequence. Likewise, he could pack fourteen years into a sentence or two, since this period also had virtually nothing to do with the authorities in Jerusalem, and had resulted in only minimal contact with the diaspora congregations. But his second visit to Jerusalem is of vital importance for his message to the Galatians, so he slows down to give a more ordered and detailed account. He is still proving that his gospel was “not of human origin or from a human being” (1:11-12).

We are not sure if the three years (1:18) is included in the interval of fourteen years or whether it is in addition to it. Many commentators take it to be additional, meaning there was a time span of 16 or 17 years. But one cannot be dogmatic—the language is not specific. Thus, the time span from his Damascus experience to the Jerusalem consultation could have been as little as 12 years, or as long as 17 years. This is one factor that makes Pauline chronology so imprecise.

The debates about how this chronology should be reconciled to Acts are legion. Dunn outlines the issues:

According to Acts, Paul’s second visit took place at an unspecified date in order to deliver famine relief from the church of Antioch to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-20). But also according to Acts the issue discussed in the visit of Gal 2:1-10 was not discussed until a third visit, again from Antioch as the base (Acts 15: 2-29).¹

The solutions which have been proposed may be summed up under two heads:

1) Galatians 2 = Acts 11²

This is based upon the presupposition that the Acts record is historically accurate. Acts 11:30 does mention Barnabas as our text does, and since the Galatians 2 account indicates the meeting was “private” (v. 2), it does not fit with the later Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 which was clearly public. The conclusion, if this view is accepted, is that Paul is writing Galatians before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and that the Council may have been called in response to the troubles in Galatia, and perhaps elsewhere.

The problem some see with this view is that if the issue of circumcision was so decisively dealt with by the “pillars” of the Jerusalem community as Galatians 2:1-11 indicates, then why would it have come up again, and required the need for the Council in Acts 15? This has led some to adopt another explanation.

¹ Dunn, Galatians, pp. 87-8.
² For those who hold this view, see F. F. Bruce, Epistle to the Galatians (Paternoster, 1982), 43-56; R. N. Longenecker, Galatians (Word, 1990), lxxvii-lxxxi.
2) Galatians 2 = Acts 15

This view considers the events of Acts 15, along with the details (Barnabas, issue of circumcision) to be too close not to be the same event. As such, the notice of the meeting being “private” is discounted, and it is considered that Luke must have conflated events in his history and put the visit for bringing relief funds to the Jerusalem community in the wrong place. Interestingly, the majority of modern commentators opt for this view. Furthermore, this view puts the writing of Galatians after the Acts 15 Council, something some commentators find more agreeable with the overall chronology of Paul’s writings.

The problems with this view are obvious: a) it calls into question the accuracy of Acts, b) it discounts Paul’s notice that this meeting was “private,” not public, c) and it gives no explanation for why Paul would not have mentioned the decree of the Council, something that would greatly strengthened his argument in regard to circumcision for Gentiles.

It seems most warranted, then, to accept the first view and to understand the Jerusalem visit spoken of here in our Galatians text as one and the same with that which is record in Acts 11.

One always “goes up” to Jerusalem (from which we derive the modern Aliyah [עָלִיָה], “to immigrate”). This is because the city of Jerusalem sits at a higher elevation than the surrounding regions. Thus Paul uses the conventional terminology to describe his going up to Jerusalem.

With Barnabas – Barnabas is listed by Luke as one of the first landowners in Jerusalem to contribute to the common fund of The Way (Acts 4:36-7). He was a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and may have belonged to the “Hellenists” of Acts 6. If so, his native tongue was probably Greek. His personality may have matched his name, for Luke pays special attention to its meaning: “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). He acted as a peacemaker between the Hellenists and the Jerusalem leadership (Acts 9:27; 9:22-4). He apparently settled in Antioch where he became part of the community’s leadership. He was responsible for bringing Shaul/Paul to Antioch (Acts 9:25-6) and is named first among the leaders in Acts 13. He accompanied Paul on the first journey from Antioch to evangelize the Gentile cities. Paul likewise attests to his association with Barnabas (Gal 2:1, 9, 13) indicating that together they headed the mission to the Gentiles. If there was a breach between Paul and Barnabas over the issue of whether it was required for Gentile believers to become proselytes (Acts 15:36-40, cp. Gal 2:13-14), it most likely did not last very long (cf. 1Cor 9:6; Col 4:10).

Taking Titus along also – the word “taking” in the Greek is συμπάραλαμβάνω, sumparalamбанô, which is used only two other times, Acts 12:25; 15:37-38, and both in relation to taking John Mark along in the work of the gospel. The dispute over John Mark caused division between Paul and Barnabas, and it is interesting that in our current text, this word “taking” is singular, indicating that Paul had invited Titus, perhaps without the input of Barnabas. Paul was no doubt on the look-out for promising younger men to train as part of his team (cf. Acts 16:13 of Timothy).

Did Paul take Titus as a helper or as a test case in the whole circumcision issue? One cannot know for certain, but it may be that he had both possibilities in mind.

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3 For representation of this view, see Betz, Galatians (Fortress, 1979), pp. 81f.
It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

The word “revelation” in the Greek does not have the article, and thus we should not presume that this was a specific revelation previously known to his readers or to which he had previously referred (cf. 1:12). Rather, the anarthrous construction most likely conveys the basic idea of the thing, and thus the point is that Paul had received some kind of revelation (whether a prophecy, vision, dream, or inner impression, or even insight into the Scriptures of the Tanach) which he took as from the Lord. The substance of the revelation was simply that he should go to Jerusalem and seek the counsel of the leaders there. The point of this is to disclose Paul’s own motivations. He is not simply intent on being contrary when he opposes the majority view in this matter of the Gentiles and their need to become proselytes (circumcision). He was not asked by the Jerusalem leaders, nor even by the Antioch community, to go to seek counsel. Had that been the case, his going may have been viewed as reluctant. Rather, he discloses here that his going was in direct obedience to a personal revelation he had received, and this emphasizes that he was eager to know what was right in terms of the Gospel message which he was delivering to the Gentiles, and particularly if those who received the Gospel were obligated to become proselytes in accordance with the prevailing teaching of the Rabbis.

and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles – The word “submitted” is ἀνατίθημι, anatithemi, which means “to lay something before someone for consideration.” The word itself does not imply that Paul was asking for them to determine the truth of the gospel message itself, but to give him counsel on the manner in which he was preaching it, and its application to the Gentiles in specific. Here we note a very important truth: Paul was one who willingly submitted to his peers, and sought their counsel. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (Prov. 12:15). James was one to whom he sought this counsel, and it is therefore unreasonable to think that he could have been at odds with James over the issues of the Torah. When we read the Epistle of James and see how he instructs his readers in the “royal Torah” and the “Torah of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:8), we must consider that Paul also agreed with James and his view of the Torah in the believer’s life. We should not read anything, then, in Paul, as contradictory to what we read in James.

Here, instead of the former word for “preach” (euangelizo) we have κηρύσσω, kerussō, “to proclaim as a herald.” Actually, Paul may use these terms synonymously, though this latter word may emphasize his role as a “herald” of the good news. The verb “preach” is in the present tense: “the gospel which I am presently heralding among the Gentiles.”

but I did so in private to those who were of reputation – Why in private? One would have to imagine that the issue was becoming a volatile one. We know that later in the history of Acts, the fact that Paul was teaching the inclusion of Gentiles without their becoming proselytes had become an issue of large proportions. It is likewise conceivable that it had already become a heated issue by this time. It was therefore prudent to keep the dialog private.

Who were these men of reputation? The Greek verb δοκέω, dokeō, is masculine, so we know that this group consisted of men. The word itself can mean “those who are influential, recognized as being something, having a
reputation.”

It is most likely that they are the same ones described in v. 6 as of “high reputation,” and included James, Cephas, and John, though there is no need to limit the group to these three.

for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain – When Paul uses the phrase “that I might” (translated elsewhere as “lest somehow”), it indicates a real, not merely a hypothetical possibility. We must therefore realize that Paul is describing genuine concern here, that his method of speaking the gospel be right and proper. For the language, “to run in vain” indicates a failure to reach the goal. In other places Paul uses this metaphor in regard to a believer remaining faithful to the gospel and persevering to the end.

What exactly is Paul’s fear here? It is certain that he did not think he had the wrong message, or the wrong Messiah! That was not the issue. Rather, Paul’s fear was that after having preached the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles, the Jerusalem community and her leaders might not approve their membership in the believing community, and thus sever their relationship with the visible covenant people.

But even stronger is the implication that Paul saw the Jerusalem leadership’s approval of his gospel as vital to the success or failure of his missionary effort. The nuance is again important. It was not that he cherished any lingering doubts as to the truth and authority of his gospel; he had emphasized that point sufficiently by now. It was rather that his gospel made claims regarding its continuity with Israel’s promise and hope which Jerusalem’s effective disclaimer would render a dead letter. His gospel would still be the ‘power of God to salvation’ (Rom 1:16), but the Gentiles converted by it would be out of communion with the Jewish believers centered in Jerusalem. The oneness of the gospel, its character as the climax of Israel’s promise and hope, and consequently the communion of all in Christ, and so in Israel, would have been effectively destroyed from the start.

Indeed, the very nature of the gospel, as preached to Abraham (Gal 3:8) hung in the balance in terms of how the Gentiles would be received. The vital connection to Israel was not something peripheral to the gospel—it was at the heart of it.

Once again we see that the inclusion of the Gentiles is not a kind of “after thought” in the plan of God. Much to the contrary! The inclusion of the nations into the covenant blessings of God is, in one sense, the goal of the covenant made to Abraham. The blessing of Abraham’s offspring has the effect of blessing all the nations. For Paul, a frightening scenario would have been that the Gentiles who had come to faith in Yeshua might not be fully received into the covenant community of Jewish believers. His fear was not only that the victory of the gospel would be diminished by the exclusion of the Gentiles, or that by such an exclusion the Gentiles themselves might abandon the faith. This thought was no doubt egregious. But
Paul must have also feared that the exclusion of the Gentiles would also be detrimental for the Jewish community. After all, the prevailing rabbinic thought that salvation was somehow guaranteed by one’s Jewish lineage had been overcome in the lives of those Jewish people who had espoused Messiah. In spite of their ethnic status, they had come to realize that salvation was in Him, not in their ancestors. And the inclusion of the Gentiles was a seal of this realization—a visible proof that the salvation by faith which Moses and the prophets had preached was the power of God to the Jew as well as as to the Gentile. On the other hand, to exclude the Gentiles on the basis of their lack of Jewish ethnicity was to revert to a theology that undermined the very essence of that gospel. This was therefore foundational.

It also appears that Paul was not entirely certain how the leaders in Jerusalem would side on this issue. Though he surely must have known where James and Peter stood, he must have been keenly aware that there were mounting pressures in the Holy City to maintain the status quo. He therefore walks a kind of “middle-road” as he relates the history of his relationship with the Jerusalem leaders. On the one hand, the gospel he is preaching (that the Gentiles are covenant members through faith in Yeshua without becoming “proselytes” through the ritual of circumcision) was not received from men but from God. Yet the leaders in Jerusalem were apostles before him, and he therefore owed them his allegiance. What is more, he both valued their wisdom and knew that their support was vital for the success of his work, for the communities of The Way would surely follow their lead in the whole matter of the Gentiles. He therefore carefully seeks middle ground between the mission he was on, received directly from God, and the need to allow the Jerusalem leaders to “manage” his apostleship.

3 But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

Having given the chronological data in order to strengthen the claim that the gospel message he was delivering to the Gentiles had come directly from God and not the Jerusalem leaders, Paul now centers on the primary issue: the place of ethnic status in the whole realm of that gospel.

though he was a Greek - “Greek” (Ἐλλην) is used here, as often, not as a reference to the people of Greece, but as a description of a non-Jew. Since the spread of Greek culture through the conquests of Alexander the Great, and the revolt against Hellenism during the Maccabean crisis, “Greek” could not only identify the culture that had enveloped the Mediterranean, but could also stand in contrast to “Jew” as a way of categorizing the whole civilized world from a Jewish perspective. Paul often uses the doublet “Jew and Greek,” Thus, the phrase here means “though he was not a Jew.” And apparently Titus was well known as non-Jewish, thus the emphasis “not even Titus.” From Paul’s vantage point, if the matter could be sustained with regard to Titus, it would adhere for all Gentiles.

was not compelled to be circumcised – Like the word “Greek,” which had become a convenient label for “non-Jew,” so “circumcision” had become a moniker for “Jew.” Since the days of the Maccabean revolt in which Jewish identity was an issue of life or death, circumcision had been raised to a new level of cultural importance. All uncircumcised Jews were forcibly circum-

11 Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10; 10:12; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11.
circised.12 This same action was taken for all males in surrounding areas after the victory of the Hasmonaeans.13 And why not? Had not God demanded that all covenant members be circumcised (Gen 17)? And was not the penalty remaining uncircumcised to be cut off from the covenant people? Then surely circumcision was a minimum requirement for male covenant members. Circumcision was even considered the distinguishing mark of the Jewish people in the eyes of the Greco-Roman writers. Tacitus writes: “They have introduced circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples.”14 Likewise Josephus indicates that God commanded Abraham to practise circumcision “to the intent that his posterity should be kept from mixing with others.”15 Therefore it is no surprise that “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” become technical terms for “Jew” and “non-Jew” respectively. Note that it is not “the circumcised” versus “the uncircumcised,” but the simple noun “circumcision” and “uncircumcision.” This points to the evolution of the terms to fit sociological and religious categories of self-identification.

It is also easy to understand why the controversy had arisen. From the Jewish perspective, all covenant members needed to be circumcised, period. But this is not merely because the command had been given to Abraham. Rather, a theological shift had occurred sometime in or after the exile, to the effect that the covenant promises were secured to the physical offspring of Jacob. That is to say, all of those who were identified ethnically as “Jews” were secure in the covenant unless they committed transgressions that drew the penalty of being “cut off” from the covenant people. This in turn made it impossible for a Gentile to be a covenant member, for by definition, a Gentile was “uncircumcised.” And since by definition a Jew was “circumcised,” if a Gentile underwent the ritual of a proselyte and thus received circumcision, he was counted as a “Jew.” Such a perspective allowed the basis for covenant membership to remain one of ethnicity.

When Paul writes that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised, he means that Titus was not compelled to become a Jew in order to enjoy membership in the covenant. Paul never denied the fact that circumcision was a commandment of God in the Torah. But he is not speaking of the commandment itself, but of the ritual that had encompassed the commandment. There is no indication whatsoever to indicate that Paul was teaching the abolition of the commandment of circumcision. What he was combating was the prevailing view of covenant membership, based as it was upon physical lineage or ethnic status rather than upon faith in God and His Messiah.

Titus was not compelled to be circumcised, yet v. 5 would indicate that those urging the action were also addressing themselves to Paul, for he says “But we did not yield ….” The word “compel” (ἀναγκάζω, anagkazō) is used twice more in Galatians: 2:14 and 6:12. The word itself can mean either to “force” or “to strongly urge,” and this latter meaning is surely what Paul intends here.

Who was doing the compelling? Most have presumed that it must have been the “false brethren” referenced in the next verse. But it seems highly

12 1Macc 2:46.
13 Josephus, Ant. 13.257f, 318.
15 Josephus, Ant. 1.192.
likely that while they were the leading force in compelling Paul to have Titus circumcised, the leaders in Jerusalem may also have urged Paul along the same lines. One can imagine this scenario: those “of the circumcision,” who were zealous for the traditional understanding of covenant membership, were there to push for circumcision of Gentiles (meaning Gentiles would be received on the basis of a change in ethnic status). James and the others were not for this, but they understood the long tradition. More than that, they recognized the Torah commandment regarding circumcision for all covenant members. One can therefore understand why the Jerusalem leaders themselves may have urged Paul to give in to the demand as a concession for unity and peace. After all, for Titus, or any Gentile for that matter, to be circumcised could not possibly be construed as a sin—it is a Torah commandment! Thus, if Paul would give in on the issue, both the zealous Jews as well as the commandment of God would be satisfied. You can see how this might have been presented as a “win-win” situation.

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 Messiah Yeshua, in order to bring us into bondage.

The Greek does not form a complete sentence (note that the English has supplied a verb “it was”), and this is not uncommon for Paul. Lightfoot refers to this sentence as “broken, picked up, and again broken.” He concludes “From this shipwreck grammar it is even difficult to extricate the main incident, on which the whole controversy hinges.” One senses that Paul was “walking on ice” with his words, and was being so careful in walking his middle ground that he speaks with some obscurity. We may presume that the overall meaning of the mention of these “false brothers” was that they were the primary impetus for compelling Paul to have Titus circumcised.

In the Greek sentence, the word translated by the NASB as “who had sneaked in” (παρεισακτος, pareisaktos) is put to the front: “on account of the sneaked in false brethren ….” The adjective, however, is most likely to be construed as passive and thus as the NRSV, “But because of false believers secretly brought in …” or the CJB, “had been sneaked in.”

It is often concluded that these “false brethren” were of the same party as the “influencers” in Galatia, but that connection is never made by Paul. His point in the present passage is simply to demonstrate that the gospel he was given to proclaim was fully accepted by the leaders in Jerusalem. His point of bringing in the “false brethren” is only to heighten the obvious fact that the Jerusalem leaders did not change their minds even under the pressure of those who disagreed.

Thus, these “false brethren” were “brought in” or perhaps (better) “allowed” into the meeting, no doubt to “spy out” the issues at hand. The language might even indicate that they felt a delegated right to be there as “overseers,” as those whose responsibility it was to maintain proper halachah within the communities of The Way (much as Paul had done for the Sanhedrin in his earlier years!). Thus Nanos translates our verse:

16 This is called “anacoluthon,” note Blass-DeBrunner, Grammar, §467.
17 Lightfoot, Galatians, p. 282.
18 Martyn, Galatians, p. 195.
19 Note that the word translated “spy out,” (κατασκοπησαν) may be a play on the word ἐπισκόπος, “overseer.” See the comments of Nanos, Irony, p. 148.
in spite of the intruding pseudo-brethren, who came in alongside to inspect the freedom of ours which we have in Christ Jesus, in order that they might enslave us.20

From the vantage point of the “false brethren,” Paul’s gospel was dangerous for the purity of the community. He was advocating bringing in those who were, from their point of view, clearly not covenant members, and giving to them complete covenant privileges. As Nanos notes:

The threat is to the maintenance of Jewish communities represented by such disputable positions as, for example, the admission of Gentiles as equals (not just righteous Gentile associates) into the Jesus community or communities without proselytizing (i.e., Titus), and concomitant indiscriminate table fellowship with them (i.e., Antioch incident). These were arguably the very reasons for Paul’s former opposition to the movement and that which he now calls “the freedom we have in Christ Jesus.”21

“False brethren” (ψευδάδελφος, pseudadelphos) is a strong word! While they were convinced that covenant membership was based upon ethnic status of being a Jew, Paul judges them as being outside of the covenant themselves. Once again, we see that for Paul, this is no trifle. The issue he was facing here hit at the core of the gospel.

Who were these “false brethren?” Some have suggested that they were followers of James—those who would be zealous to preserve a more traditional kind of Judaism among the emerging sect called The Way. But though this interpretation may have representatives among the scholars, it hardly seems likely, especially if, as I have suggested, this is being written before the Jerusalem Council. In Acts 15, there appears to be substantial harmony between Paul and James. It seems more likely that these “false brethren” were a delegation from Antioch who had, on occasion, made trips to Judea, visiting the various groups that had formed around the Pauline teaching. They were gathering information in order to refute Paul’s acceptance of the Gentiles without them becoming proselytes. What bothers Paul is that he had come for a private meeting with the leaders of the Jerusalem community, most likely unaware that these “spies” would somehow be admitted to the meeting.

As far as Paul is concerned, the primary motivation of these “false brethren” was clear: “… in order to bring us into bondage.” This was contrary to the “our liberty in Messiah Yeshua.” What does Paul mean by “our liberty in Messiah Yeshua?”

21 Ibid., p. 148.
The word used in Galatians 2:4, translated “liberty,” is ελευθερία, eleutheria. It is found 11 times in the Apostolic Scriptures (Rom. 8:21; 1Cor. 10:29; 2Cor. 3:17; Gal. 2:4; 5:1,13; James 1:25; 2:12; 1Pet. 2:16; 2Pet. 2:19), seven in Paul, two in James and two in Peter. Its appearance four times in Galatians is significant in emphasizing a general topic Paul undoubtedly wishes to apply to the current situation in Galatia.

The basic word group (ελευθερός, eleutheros, “free”; ελευθερία, eleutheria, “freedom”; ελευθεροῦμαι, eleutherōmai, “to cause someone to be free”) has a basic sociological meaning, that is, to have a social status that is opposite of “slavery.” Its metaphorical use by the Apostles relates to the slavery caused by sin, and the liberty that comes through Yeshua, that is, the fact that sin and its subsequent condemnation no longer enslaves the believer. Thus Paul writes in Romans:

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:17-18)

Thus, a significant aspect of “liberty in Yeshua” relates to having been freed from the penalty and slavery of sin in order to be reckoned as righteous before God and walk in righteousness in our daily lives.

But Paul could not have been teaching that there was the possibility of slipping back into this bondage once someone was set free. For this freedom was gained through union with Messiah in His death and resurrection (Rom 6:8ff). The believer’s death and resurrection to new life in Messiah is something that cannot be reversed. The old man has been crucified, and the new man has been recreated after the image of Yeshua. To what, then, is Paul referring when he speaks about the attempts of “false brethren” to bring himself and others “into bondage?”

But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Messiah Yeshua, in order to bring us into bondage. (Gal. 2:4)

It was for freedom that Messiah set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)

What is this “yoke of slavery” to which Paul refers? The traditional Christian answer is that the yoke is the Torah, and that what Paul is urging upon the Galatians is that they leave the Torah behind, and move on to the “liberty” in Yeshua. Thus, the traditional Christian interpretation pits Yeshua against the Torah, forcing the believer to an “either-or” decision: either you take Yeshua and have liberty, or you accept the Torah and come under bondage.

But we know that this interpretation is short-sighted and even a bit naive. For Paul himself sings the glories of the Torah, calling it “spiritual,” and considering it “holy,” “righteous,” and “good” (Romans 7:12ff). And James considers the Torah to be that which brings liberty, not bondage:

But one who looks intently at the perfect Torah, the Torah of liberty, and
Excursus: Our Liberty in Messiah Yeshua

The freedom that Paul speaks of cannot mean a disregard for the Torah in the believer’s life. What is it, then?

For Paul, freedom from the bondage of sin is a freedom that not only saves from the final and ultimate condemnation of sin, but also frees the believer from the power of sin in this present age. The “freedom that we have in Messiah Yeshua” is the freedom to live holy lives. Before our salvation, this was impossible, because we were slaves to sin—not only to the eternal damnation that sin eventually brings, but slaves to the daily master of sin as well. Our lives were characterized by those things that God hates, and we were therefore “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), that is, recipients of God’s wrath (cf. Rom 1:18) on account of our lives of sin. For Paul, the regeneration of the soul through the work of the Spirit in connection with one’s salvation through faith in Messiah Yeshua does away with the old self, that which was a slave to sin, and recreates a new self who concurs with the Torah of God:

For I joyfully concur with the Torah of God in the inner man ....
(Rom 7:22)

This is the “liberty we have in Messiah Yeshua,” the ability to walk in obedience to our Master.

But this ability to walk in obedience differs in one crucial respect from our being freed from the penalty or condemnation of sin. For while the penalty for sin was taken away, and our status as righteous before God confirmed solely on the basis of the work of God in Yeshua, and not on our own efforts (since we were dead in our sins and therefore unable to effect our own freedom), the freedom that we have to walk in obedience is a cooperation between ourselves as God’s redeemed children and God (through His Spirit working in connection with Yeshua’s intercession). While the freedom from condemnation was a monergistic work of the Almighty, our obedience to God in our daily living is a sunergistic work—the redeemed soul working together with God in sanctification and conformity to the Yeshua. Therefore, in connection to our sanctification, it is possible for us to return to a kind of bondage which will, in the end, impede our obedience and cause stilted growth in our maturing process. Granted, God will inevitably bring about the sanctification of His children (Phil 1:6), but in the mystery of His divine providence, He has ordained that the child of God cooperate with the Spirit of God to bring about one’s growth in holiness. The believer is the one who must “reckon” himself dead to sin and alive to righteousness (Rom 6:11ff); the believer is the one who must seek the things above, set one’s mind on things above, consider one’s body dead to the sins of immorality and lust, put aside the sins of malice and anger, wrestle against the evil forces, run the race of holiness, put to death the deeds of the flesh, flee youthful lusts, and generally persevere in the things of righteousness. The life of sanctification is not one of relaxation but one of vigilant effort and struggle, always relying upon the power of the Spirit and the truth of the word to overcome sin.

Herein lies the meaning of Paul’s concept of liberty. And it does relate to the Torah. For while the Torah was considered by the Judaisms of his day as
the means for holiness, Paul understood the method of sanctification to be energized by the Spirit. This is not an “either-or” but a “both-and.” The Spirit writes the Torah upon the heart and in so doing enables the believer to obey the Torah and walk in righteousness. But the traditionalists of Paul’s day had developed a manner of life that was devoid of the Spirit, holding only to the letter. Even though the Sages had consistently taught that perfunctory duty to the Torah was not sufficient, the reality was that many had come to see observance to the Torah as the means of sanctification, and in so doing, had fallen prey to the notion that outward observance of the Torah was equal to righteousness. Even as Yeshua taught that the outside of the cup could be nicely polished while the inside remain full of refuse, so Paul recognized that much of the Torah tradition of his day had lulled the observant Jew into a spiritual lethargy devoid of the Spirit. Observance of the letter apart from the Spirit results in pride and arrogance, while the sanctification which results from the Spirit’s application of the Torah to the heart of the believers is marked by humility and love.

For Paul, however, the freedom from sin’s condemnation and the freedom from sin’s actual domination of one’s life are vitally connected. To put it in theological terms, justification is foundational for sanctification. This is key to understanding Paul’s view of liberty. For the prevailing view, that entrance into the covenant was the natural result of being a Jew (on the one hand) or through becoming a proselyte for the Gentile (on the other hand), included no necessity for a regenerating work of the Spirit, seen in a changed life. Paul knew first hand the manner in which outward Torah observance could be maintained without genuine faith and sanctification of the soul. And he also knew, first hand, the incisive work of the Spirit in regeneration through which the old man is crucified with Messiah and the new man, now with the aid of the Spirit, governs the actions of the believer, walking in the ways of Torah as an offering of praise to the Almighty.

The yoke of bondage, then, is a return to the mentality that observance of Torah renders one righteous, as over against the teaching of Paul that one observes Torah because he has been given the ability to obey it through the indwelling Spirit of God. The yoke of bondage is that view of the Torah which produced the polished cup full of refuse. The yoke of bondage was man’s view of the Torah as a means of righteousness. Paul’s “liberty in Yeshua,” like James’ “perfect Torah of liberty,” viewed the Torah as the delight of the soul already declared righteous through payment of sin by Yeshua.

One may think this is theological “hair-splitting,” but it is not, and community life in the realm of Torah makes this evident. The attempts to live out Torah apart from a genuine communion with the Spirit of God yields a harsh, often hypocritical life that hides the secrets of sin in the fine print of halachah. Indeed, one might rightly say that, although this was clearly not the primary motivation of the Sages, yet the result of much of their work was to make the Torah manageable. The Torah, lived out by the power of the Spirit, constantly brings the believer to recognize his or her shortcomings, and therefore to rely all the more upon the gracious forgiveness of God, resulting in humility. However, when the “letter” was emphasized to the exclusion of “the Spirit,” such teaching made the “observant person” feel confident he or she was blameless in regard to the statutes. This was Paul’s own testimony as he reflected on his life before faith in Yeshua:

as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in
the Torah, found blameless. (Phil 3:6)

The “liberty in Messiah” of which Paul speaks, therefore, is not liberty from the Torah, but liberty to actually obey the Torah from the heart. It was this liberty that Paul saw being undermined by the controversy in Galatia, and it is therefore understandable why he recognized the issue as of utmost importance.

-------- End of Excursus --------

5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.

Paul breaks off his sentence of the former verse with this interjection, and in so doing fails to return to the thought and (at least grammatically) finish the sentence. But his meaning is clear nonetheless. The position of the “false brethren” was that full covenant membership (i.e., to lay hold of the full covenant promises) was available only to Jews, with whom the covenant had been made. No other nation could claim covenant inclusion (e.g., Amos 3:2). Thus, non-Jews needed to “acquire” a new heredity through the “ritual of conversion” through which they would be affirmed as covenant members. Titus, of course, was a case in point, and one wonders if Paul brought him along for that very reason. Being a Gentile, Titus was being admitted, not merely to the community in general, but to the inner circle of the leaders, for he was traveling with Paul as his disciple. And it is clear that the “false brethren” found this not only improper but dead wrong. If Titus was to be given the privilege of covenant membership, convening and, no doubt, eating with the leaders of the Jerusalem community, he would need to become a proselyte, i.e., receive circumcision.

Paul makes it clear that he did not even entertain their point of view, “not even for an hour.” Though (as the next verses indicate) some of them were of high reputation in the community of believers, and thus held significant clout with the people in general, Paul found no compelling reason to submit to their requests. Indeed, he found very compelling reasons not to submit, and these reasons rested on the very definition of the gospel.

so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you – We have already encountered the use of this word “gospel” (1:6f), applied on the one hand to the true message centered in Yeshua, and on the other hand as a description of the influencers’ message. Therefore Paul emphasizes the truth (αληθεια, aletheia) of the Gospel. In the standard classical Greek, aletheia denotes that which has “reality” in contrast to that which has “mere appearance.” In the Lxx, however, aletheia often translates פיוות, ‘emunah, “faithfulness.” For Paul, the reality of the gospel was seen in the faithfulness to God which it produced in the lives of those who believed (cf. 3:1ff). The gospel he was proclaiming was the gospel that bore the truth in the lives of those who received it.

23 Liddell & Scott, “αληθεια.”
6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no
difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputa-
tion contributed nothing to me.

Paul identifies some who were “of high reputation.” Many equate these
with James, Peter (Cephas) and John, but this does not fit Paul’s argument
here. His point, at the end of the section, is that though there were those, even
of high reputation, who disagreed with his position on the gospel, the leaders
of the Jerusalem community gave him their hearty approval and sent him off
to complete his mission among the Gentiles. Indeed, v. 7 makes a clear contrast
between these who had a well-known reputation (who are grouped with the
“false brethren”), and Peter, James and John, who were also reputed to be
“pillars” but who approved of Paul’s mission and message.

Paul goes out of his way in this verse to choose his words carefully. These
men of whom he speaks were highly thought of, but the Greek used here
would indicate that in Paul’s estimation they no longer held this same level of
respect. The parenthetical statement makes this clear: “what they once were
makes no difference to me.” Though at one time “they were reputed to be
something” (the NASB “high reputation” is an interpretation of the simply
Greek word τί, ti, “something”), now Paul is indifferent to them. His reason is
that “God shows no partiality,” literally “the face of man God does not re-
ceive,” which corresponds to the Hebrew תָּנַשְׁא פַּנִיָמ, nas’a panim, “to lift the
face.” This combination is translated in the Lxx with the same Greek we have
here, “to receive the face” (προσώπων ὃς θεός ἀνθρώπον οὐ λαμβάνει, prosopon
[ho] anthropou lambanei). Paul’s point is simply that positions and acclaim
granted by men do not necessarily carry weight in the courts of God. Just
because a person may have prestige among men does not necessarily mean his
position is approved by God. Obviously for Paul, his direct calling from God
would take priority over a leader who would disavow his divinely sanctioned
mission.

Paul notes that those who (at least in his opinion) previously had positions
of reputation actually contributed nothing to him in regard to his work and
mission. The word translated by the NASB as “contributed” (προσανατιθεμι, prosanatithemi)
means “to add to an existing amount” or “to contribute some-
thing more.” The point seems to be that as far as Paul was concerned, he was
fully commissioned to the mission with which he was trusted without the need
for additional instructions and confirmation from those leaders (from Antioch)
who were of some reputation. While there is no indication that Paul disregarded
them, he simply states here that they did not play a significant role in the
formation and direction of his mission.

What might they have added or contributed to Paul by why of his mission
and message? Does Paul have circumcision in mind here? Perhaps he is simply
saying that while the leaders in Antioch did not contribute anything of sub-
stance to the direction of his mission, they likewise did not “add” to Paul’s
understanding of the gospel the necessity of the Gentile believer to become a
proselyte (i.e., become circumcised).

There is no doubt that admitting Gentiles into the covenant community
without them becoming proselytes was a clear break with the prevailing
tradition. But here we must keep in clear distinction the command of God

25 Cf. (Of judges) Lev 19:15; Deut 1:17; 17:19; Ps 81:2; Prov 18:5; Job 13:10;
regarding circumcision, and the proselyte circumcision built upon the traditions of the Sages. There is a difference between receiving circumcision as a matter of obedience to God, and receiving circumcision as part of a ceremony which supposedly is required in order to become a covenant member. While it is certainly true that the Torah requires male’s within the covenant to be circumcised (Gen 17), it is likewise true that circumcision was never thought of as a means of becoming a covenant member. Covenant membership was the result of drawing close to God through faith (note Psalm 65:4 where God’s choosing and a person’s drawing near are linked), not the result of completing a man-made ritual. Thus, circumcision was an act of obedience after one was constituted a covenant member, not as a means by which one became a covenant member.

Some, however, seem unable to note the distinction between the biblical commandment of circumcision, and the rabbinic ordinance of becoming a proselyte. Thus, it is presumed that Paul’s teaching regarding circumcision, and the acceptance of this teaching by James, Peter, and John was a direct disregard both of Scripture (Torah) and of tradition.

We should not underestimate how astonishing a decision was here made: the Jews, leaders of a movement focused on Messiah Jesus, should agree in considered and formal terms that circumcision need no longer be required of Gentiles wishing to be counted full members of what was still a sect of second-Temple Judaism — and that, despite the plainest possible teaching of scripture (Gen 17:9-14)! Anomalies like god-fearing adherents to diaspora synagogues, or even exceptional cases like Cornelius (Acts 10) or Isates (Josephus, Ant. xx.38-42), could be winked at as long as they did not become a public issue or point of principle. But Paul had had the temerity to make Titus a test case, whether by design or under pressure from the ‘false brothers.’ And the Jerusalem leadership had given him their backing, however unwillingly. That is to say, clear scriptural teaching and historic practice had been set aside — presumably on the grounds that Paul’s interpretation of agreed confessional formulae could claim not only heavenly authority (1:15-16) but also the validation of successful missionary work (2:8-9; 3:2-5). No wonder Luke gave the decision such prominence in his own account of the expansion of Christianity (Acts 15).

But of course, neither Paul nor the leaders in Jerusalem disregarded Scripture because the Scriptures never require circumcision as a means of becoming a covenant member. Membership in God’s covenant is on the basis of faith, and circumcision, like all other commandments, is the fruit of this faith, not the means by which one gains membership in the covenant.

But it is also understandable that after centuries of tradition that taught a different message, Paul’s message of the gospel, particularly directed to the Gentiles, must have been looked upon as revolutionary, and to some, even heretical. It would take time and effort to recover the gospel as it was clearly found in the Scriptures themselves. Much like the Reformation some 1500 years later, the message of the Gospel that Yeshua and His disciples taught was a return to the Scriptures in a radical way.

26 Dunn, Galatians, pp. 104–5.
7–10 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

“On the contrary,” that is, rather than yielding to those who were saying that Gentiles would most certainly need to become proselytes in order to be received within the covenant community, Paul held firmly to the gospel as it had been revealed afresh to him from the Scriptures.

We should not presume from this that Paul had recaptured the gospel, and that therefore the gospel as understood by others, even those who were from Antioch, was entirely inaccurate or false. The issue had to do with the Gentiles—how were they to be incorporated into the covenant community? The Jew and his offspring had a natural connection to the covenant, albeit on multiple levels. To the Jew who had not come to faith in Messiah Yeshua, his covenant membership, though valid, lay primarily in the physical, “this-world” aspects, having received the promises given to Abraham which were based entirely upon God’s faithfulness. These “this-world” blessings included such things as God’s blessing upon those who blessed Israel and cursing those who cursed them. Insofar as the Jewish person remained within the covenant community, he could count on God fulfilling this promise. But the blessing offered in the covenant went beyond “this-world” blessings, and extended to blessing in relationship to “world-to-come.” These spiritual blessings, however, were given only to those who by faith were doers of the Torah, not merely hearers (Rom 2:13). This message of faith was clearly being preached in the sect called The Way, and we may be settled in our estimation of those such as James, Peter, and John, that they recognized that the full blessings of the covenant came only to those who received Yeshua as Messiah.

But the issue that faced the Jewish community at this time was the ingathering of the Gentiles. The Gentile had neither “this-world” blessings, nor the “world-to-come” blessings because the Gentile was separated from the covenants of promise, without God, and therefore without hope in the world (Eph 2:11ff). It was only reasonable to think that, like the Jew, if the Gentile were to receive “this-world” blessings, he too must be circumcised like the Jew. Was it possible for the Gentile to enter the covenant at the “this-world” level, and then through faith attain the “world-to-come” blessings? Surely the influencers thought so, for this followed the pattern of the native born Jew, who, being circumcised on the eighth day, entered the covenant on a “this-world” basis before expressing his personal faith and personally securing the blessings of the “world-to-come.” For the native Jew, then, circumcision preceded personal faith. Why would this not be the same for the Gentile?

In fact, in the later, reformed soteriology, this same pattern obtained, for the child, baptized on the eighth day, “entered the covenant” in advance of his own personal faith. As such, so the reformed theologians explain, the “child of the covenant” benefits from the covenant community and the blessings attended therewith, before his own personal faith in God and His Messiah. Though without precise terms and explanation, the reformed soteriology holds that at the child’s confirmation (the expression of his own personal faith), he enters as
a full covenant member, a status he, in some measure, did not yet hold, though yet a *bona fide* member of the covenant.

For Paul, the message of the gospel, both to the Gentiles (uncircumcised) as well as to the Jews (circumcised) was essentially the same: salvation (the blessing of the “world-to-come,” including the guarantee of such by the indwelling Spirit) was available only to those who believed in Yeshua (trusted His work on their behalf as the means of God’s forgiveness and their right standing before Him). What was at odds, however, was the issue of how the Gentiles would enter the covenant on both levels. Could a Gentile participate in the “this-world” blessings without “becoming a Jew?” In other words, could a Gentile have “eternal life” without first entering the covenant people on a “this-world” basis?

Paul seems to be addressing this very question in Romans 4. Here he shows that Abraham received the covenant promises before he was circumcised, that is, before he “became a Jew” from the rabbinic perspective. What is more, he had already received the “this-world” blessings, once again, before circumcision. This no doubt formed the basis for Paul’s approach to the Gentiles. Like Abraham, they were compelled to “believe in God,” by which faith they were granted “eternal life.” But their covenant membership, granted solely upon the basis of their faith in Messiah, also afforded them “this-world” covenant status, since they had joined the people of Israel as *bona fide* covenant members. From this viewpoint, then, circumcision was simply a matter of obedience to the God of the covenant, but had nothing to do with becoming a covenant member. One would have to surmise that this was considered the “gospel to the uncircumcised.”

What is more, the “gospel to the circumcised” was the same message, albeit preached from a different angle. Since the Jew was already considered a covenant member on the basis of his lineage, the gospel came to him as one who faced the possibility of being “broken off” from the covenant through unbelief. His covenant position must be confirmed through his personal faith. And this faith, like that of Abraham’s, was faith in the Promised One, the Messiah. In essence, then, the gospel is one. Yet its approach to the Gentile and to the Jew was apparently different. One gave the opportunity for entering the covenant. The other gave the appeal to remain in the covenant. But both approaches centered upon the person of Yeshua and His work, and the need to commit oneself through faith in Him.

Paul uses the verbiage “seeing” (v. 7) and “recognizing” (v. 9). This must reference both the evident fruit of proclaiming the gospel, for many believed and thus confessed Yeshua as the Messiah, as well as the attendant evidence of the Spirit’s presence and work in those who had received the gospel. That the power of the gospel was evident in all who received it was proof that God’s purpose in the gospel was the same for Jew and Gentile alike: “for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentile” (v. 8). This One who worked is no doubt considered to be the Spirit of God Who regenerates the heart, opens the eyes of the soul to the truth of the gospel, and works within the believer to produce faith. As we shall see throughout

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27 Note that the Greek uses the word γινώσκω (ginōskō), “to know,” but in this case, the translation “recognized” is appropriate, see the comments of BDAG “γινώσκω”.

28 Cf. 2:8–9; 3:2, 5.
the epistle (indeed, throughout Paul’s epistles), it is the presence of the Spirit, evident through the changed life of obedience, that is the genuine mark of salvation.

That this occurred among the Gentiles as a result of Paul’s preaching is considered to be the evidence of “grace that was given” to Paul. The salvation of the Gentiles was not done through “slick salesmanship” nor through convincing rhetoric, but through the evident work of the Spirit fulfilling the purposes of God’s grace. God was the One Who had called the Gentiles into the covenant—it was not the plan or scheme of Paul. The success of the gospel was God’s gracious work, not the result of human efforts.

Paul does not consider his apostleship any less or greater than that of Peter’s, nor vice versa. The point is simply that the same gospel (though delivered from two different angles) was empowered by the same Spirit to the end that both Jew and Gentile were born again to a living faith in Yeshua. Here Paul comes back to his primary theme: the gospel he was preaching was no different than the gospel Peter had proclaimed. But in both cases, it was a gospel that had as its core element faith in Yeshua, not the fulfillment of ritual. And it was a gospel that knew no ethnic boundaries, for it was not ethnically nor culturally based, but it was the good news “to all who believed, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

Additional proof of the unity of the gospel message, whether given to Jews or Gentiles, was also found in the obvious fact that the “pillars” of the Jerusalem community had given to Paul and Barnabas the “right hand of fellowship,” meaning that they had commissioned them both to take this very message of the gospel to the Gentiles. It therefore had the clear backing of the Jerusalem community. If the influencers were saying that Paul’s gospel was spurious, or in some measure deficient, they were at the same time saying the same thing of the gospel that belonged to Peter, James, and John.

Paul says that the three were “reputed to be pillars.” It is not as though he is trying to diminish this report by the use of the word “reputed” (dókeō, dōkēō, “to think, believe, suppose, consider”) but rather, he continues to diminish in his argument the weight of words or opinions simply based upon one’s position or reputation. And further, it is not as though Paul disregards positions of authority. It is simply that here, in this phase of his argument, Paul is stressing the fact that his mission was the result of divine revelation, not that of assignment from anyone, even the “pillars.”

The term “pillars” (στύλοι, stuloi) must have the sense of those who supported the community, and by whose leadership the community thrived. That the pillars of Solomon (named Yachin and Boaz, cf. 1Kings 7:15-22; 2Chron 3:15-17) were considered a significant part of the First Temple may have figured into an eschatological expectation that the Temple would be restored to its former glory, and that prominent persons would be considered as pillars within it. Ezekiel’s prophecy of the Temple was no doubt seen as something different than the refurbished Second Temple, and there is some evidence that the Judaisms of Paul’s day foresaw some kind of destruction and restoration of the Temple in general. We should add to this the well-known fact that Paul uses the Temple metaphor to speak of the believers in general (1Cor 3:16-17;

Note Ezekiel 40-48; Jubilees 1:17, 27-28; 1Enoch 90:28-29; 2Bar 32:3-4; Testament of Benjamin 9:2. It is also evident that the Qumran society constructed their settlement to prefigure the restored Temple, and that they anticipated a time when the Temple would be restored to its proper holiness.
6:19f; 2Cor 4:16) as do other Apostles (Heb 3:6; 10:21; 1Pet 2:5), and thus the leaders of the believing community may have been considered as “pillars” in this metaphoric Temple.

The “right hand of fellowship” is replete with Semitic overtones. First, the raising of the hand was the normal manner for taking an oath. Note, for example, the following:

I will bring you to the land which I swore [lit., “lifted My hand”] to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD. (Ex 6:8)

Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, And say, as I live forever … (Deut 32:40)

But the raising of the hands was also a manner of bestowing blessing:

Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. (Lev 9:22)

The right hand was of particular importance in the Semitic cultures, being a sign of strength as well as a sign of that which was favorable and honorable:

for none of them will deceive you when once they have given you their right hands, nor will anyone doubt their fidelity, when that is once given, even though they were before suspected of injustice. (Josephus, *Ant* 18:328f)

You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them. (Ex 15:12)

… King Solomon … sat on his throne; then he had a throne set for the king’s mother, and she sat on his right. (1Kings 2:19)

The term “fellowship” (*koinωνία, koinonia*) is a favorite one of Paul.30 It’s meaning is much deeper than the term “fellowship” connotes in our times. It did not merely indicate a friendship or casual time of social interaction, but has the idea of holding things in common and thus speaks of a close relationship—one that presumes a sharing of life. Thus, the “giving of the right hand of fellowship” denotes a formal commissioning in which James, Peter, and John had committed themselves to Paul and Barnabas as sharing in the same gospel work. By such a notice, Paul has gathered the full support of the “pillars” for his gospel work among the Gentiles. Once again, the term “the circumcised” serves to identify Jews as over against Gentiles. Here Paul uses the contemporary language of his time, reminding us again of how much circumcision (and the parallel ritual of the proselyte) had come to define identity within the covenant.

The addition of the verb “that we might go” (NASB), “that we should go” (NIV) may, in fact, be misleading. The Greek clause has no verb, and we should most likely understand the preposition εἰς, *eis*, “to, into, for” to

30 Cf. Rom. 15:26; 1Cor. 1:9; 10:16; 2Cor. 6:14; 8:4; 9:13; 13:13; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; Philem. 1:6. 
mean “that we should be for the Gentiles and they for the circumcised.” Thus, what is misleading about adding the verb “go” as the English translations do is that it implies separate missions by way of geography, i.e., that Paul and Barnabas would go to the regions of the Gentiles, while Peter and his colleagues would go where the Jews live. But this misses the obvious point that the diaspora (where Paul and Barnabas travelled) had a higher population of Jews than did the environs of Judea. And we know from Acts that Paul regularly was in the diaspora synagogues, reasoning with his Jewish brothers and persuading them that Yeshua was, in fact, the long awaited Messiah. Therefore, what must have been the conclusion of the council that met in Jerusalem was that Paul and Barnabas should be responsible for the Gentiles, and Peter for the Jews. Paul and Barnabas would represent, act on behalf of, or be responsible for the Gentiles, and Peter along with the “pillars” would do the same for the Jewish community.

This, of course, was not some new “mission strategy” enacted by the pillars of Jerusalem, but was simply the confirmation of what God had already ordained (evident through the revelation given to Paul) and what was already in place. Thus Paul’s explanation of the part the “pillars” played in his own commissioning was only to confirm that the revelation he had received was recognized by the leadership in Jerusalem.

The final request of the “pillars” to all involved was that they should remember the poor as they labored among the Gentile and Jewish communities. Paul notes that this was the very thing they were already intent on doing. While the term “poor” (πτωκός, πτωκός) could encompass a wide range of needs, it most likely centers on financial need in this case. What is more, the request of the pillars surely is directed toward the growing need of the Jerusalem community as they shouldered the burden of many who barely had means of nominal subsistence. We know from Acts that the maintenance of the widows had become an issue (Acts 6:1) and that the famine foreseen by Agabus (Acts 11:29) had indeed come to pass, and that therefore many were in dire straits. Thus, in their attempts to reach out to the diaspora, whether to Jews or non-Jews, the welfare of the founding community in Jerusalem could not be lost sight of, and their needs were to be considered the responsibility of all. This was particularly germane for the Gentiles, who might otherwise not have a natural connection to the Jerusalem community, and might therefore not consider their own responsibility toward them. Paul later reasoned that if they (the Gentiles) had been enriched by the spiritual food of the Jerusalem community (in that they had received the message of the Gospel through their efforts and representatives), they likewise should share in the material things necessary for their maintenance (Rom 15:27). Of course, Paul had already demonstrated his willingness in this endeavor, for relief had already come to the Jerusalem community through him (Acts 11:30). But it should also be remarked that aid to the poor was a natural response for all pious Jews, and Paul’s immediate notice that this request was something already planted in his heart shows that his faith in Yeshua only enhanced his piety from a Jewish perspective—it did not diminish it in any way. What is more, that the Gentiles (over whom he had assumed primary responsibility) should see themselves as equally part of the larger Jewish community would be recognized as they likewise bore the burdens of the community as bona fide members of it. Their giving of support and aid to the poor in Jerusalem would affirm this in tangible ways. That call for relief is found often in Paul’s letters (Rom 15:22ff; 1Cor 16:1ff; 2Cor 8:4ff; 11:13) shows that the “handshake” he received in Jerusalem
was taken quite seriously. And even though some might misconstrue his gathering of funds from the Gentiles (as possibly as way of “buying” their acceptance into the Jewish community), such a possibility never discouraged Paul. As a matter of principle, it was the right thing to do, regardless of how some might have misunderstood.\footnote{I am reminded of recent statements by some Rabbis that relief sent to Israel from the Christian Church had ulterior motives connected to it (i.e., a softening of the Jews for Christian evangelism) and that it therefore should be rejected.}

11–13 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 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. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

The incident of Peter’s activity in Antioch is now addressed. Given the background of the previous verses, that all had entered into an agreement pertaining to the scope of their respective missions, it is all the more clear why Paul was particularly upset at Peter’s actions. He writes as a member of the Antioch community (“Cephas came to Antioch”) but also as one of the leaders commissioned by the Jerusalem pillars themselves to oversee and represent the believing community of the diaspora, particularly the Gentiles who were no doubt a growing majority of that community. For Peter to therefore act in a way that undermined the unity of the believing community, and to do so against the clear position of Paul and (at least initially) Barnabas, was doubly to undermine the truth of the gospel and the position of the community’s leaders. It seems clear that Paul’s abrupt shift to this narrative scene is done to highlight the contrast between the apparent shalom of the “handshake” in Jerusalem and the otherwise contrary actions of Peter.

To oppose someone “face to face” is a common Hebrew idiom. Note the following:

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (Ex 8:20)

He will deliver their kings into your hand so that you will make their name perish from under heaven; no man will be able to stand before you until you have destroyed them. (Deut 7:24)

No man will be able to stand before you; the LORD your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you. (Deut 11:25)

No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. (Josh 1:5)

In all of the verses above, the underlined phrases represent the Hebrew יָשבָה.
**yatzav, “to take one’s stand firmly, to resist”** followed by the Hebrew פָּנֶה, “front, face.” To “confront” in the Hebrew is “to stand before someone’s face,” or “to stand in someone’s face.” Paul simply puts this Hebraism into Greek with κατά πρόσωπον αὐτῶν, kata prosōpon autōn, “opposite of his face” = “face to face.”

Paul does not hide his disgust with Peter’s actions, not did he keep the whole matter private. Such outward actions of community division, based as they were on a denial of the heart of the gospel (as Paul will shortly explain), warranted public confrontation. Peter “stood condemned” (ὅτι κατεγνώσκετο Ἰην, hoti kategnosmenos en, “because condemned he was”). The precise meaning Paul intends here is not clear, but his words mean either that all right-thinking people would see the hypocrisy of Peter’s actions, and thus reason them to be wrong, or that Peter’s actions surely would have been condemned in the divine court, since he was acting contrary to the very agreement (handshake) in which he participated previously in Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul means that Peter was self-condemned, that he knew he had done wrong and was unwilling to admit it (cf. 1John 3:20-21, the only other place the word is used). Regardless of the precise meaning, the overarching meaning is clear: Peter had no righteous foundation for his actions—they were purely self-serving, not flowing from principles found in a life of faith based upon the gospel.

It is clear that the issue at hand was that of table fellowship—eating together as that which constituted covenant membership in the most practical ways. We would do well to investigate more what constituted table fellowship in the 1st Century.

**Excursus – Table Fellowship as Represented in the Rabbinic Literature**

In the general history of the Christian Church, it has been assumed that the Judaism(s) of the 1st Century strictly disallowed any observant Jew from eating with Gentiles. For instance, Strack and Billerbeck write:

Social intercourse of observant Jews with non-Jews was practically impossible .... Only reluctantly, one would enter a non-Jewish house; and a Jew would feel even more uncomfortable when having a Goy in his own home. Hence table fellowship of Jews and Goyim was hardly possible, whether the Israelite was host or guest.

However, more recent evaluations of the Judaisms in the 1st Century have opened the issue to new investigation. Yehezkel Cohen has shown that the Jewish sources themselves contain no precise prohibition for Jews and non-Jews to engage in mutual hospitality. In fact, Mishnah *Avodah Zera* 5:5 reads:

If [an Israelite] was eating with [a gentile] at a table, and, leaving in his presence a flagon [of wine] on the table and another flagon on the side-table, left him and went out—what is on the table is forbidden, but what

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32 HALOT, "יָצָאוּ.
33 Note BDAG “καταγγελόω” where they give parallels in non-biblical Greek to the use of this word meaning “commonly acknowledged to be condemned.”
is on the side-table is permitted.

The point of the Mishnah is simply that what is forbidden to the Jew is anything that has been offered to an idol. Since, if the Jew leaves the room the non-Jew might pour out some of the wine as a libation to the house idol, and since this would contaminate the whole flagon of wine as a libation to the idol, to drink of it would be to participate in the libation offering and thus render the person an idol worshiper. But what is important for the discussion at hand is the evidence that Jew and non-Jew eating together was so so common an occurrence as to require halachic discussions in the Mishnah.

Furthermore, the words of two prominent sages (R. Yoshua and R. Tsadok [both late 1st Century]) in the company of the Yavneh Sages extol universal love of mankind as practiced by Abraham and the Shekinah (visible glory of God). R. Meir is recorded as saying:

A certain gentile living in our town arranged a banquet for all the town’s dignitaries, inviting me too, and offered us of all that the Holy One, blessed by He, made on the six days of creation; nothing was lacking from his table but crack-nuts. What did he do? He took the beautiful table before him, worth six talents of silver, and smashed it…. I applied the verse to him, “[The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but] the belly of the wicked suffers want” [Prov. 13:25].

“Everything created in six days” means that there was kosher and non-kosher food. Yet R. Meir [mid-2nd Century] is apparently at the table. The point of the statement is that R. Meir considered the gentile a righteous man, since his table was full, and even then he would not settle for less than complete. We may also assume that there would have been a libation ritual at the pouring of the wine, and that this also did not hinder the rabbi’s place at the festival.

Why was R. Meir not concerned with contamination by the idol worshiper? It appears that he was willing to set aside his strict purity laws in favor of good relations with his neighbors. He even says that a Gentile who studies Torah is like the high priest.

But the Jewish literature also demonstrates a different opinion. For instance, a pupil of R. Meir, R. Shimon ben Elazar states:

R. Shimon ben Elazar says: Israelites outside of the land worship idols in purity. How? If a non-Jew prepared a wedding feast for his son and sent out to invite all Jews in his town—even if they have food and drink of their own and have their own servant waiting at them, they worship idols, they worship idols. Thus it is said: “[Lest you make a covenant … when they sacrifice to their gods and] when one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice” [Exod 34:15].

Another source confirms this contrary view. An anonymous quote in Seder Eliahu Rabba says:

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36 b.*Bava Kama* 38a.
37 t.*Avodah Zarah* 4.6.
38 Also called “Aggadat Bereshit,” Seder Eliahu Rabba is a midrashic
one should observe in his heart not to eat with a Gentile at table.... Thus they taught: anyone who eats with a Gentile at table, worships idols and eats sacrifices to the dead.

This perspective is confirmed in Jubilees:

And do thou, my son Jacob, remember my words, And observe the commandments of Abraham, thy father: Separate thyself from the nations, And eat not with them: And do not according to their works, And become not their associate; For their works are unclean, And all their ways are a Pollution and an abomination and uncleanness. (Jub 22:16)

And m.Oholim 18:7 states, “the dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean.” Tacitus records that the Jews “eat separately,” all of which is confirmed by the statements of Peter in Acts 10:14 and 11:3, 8. Thus, against the viewpoint that interaction with Gentiles was common, there existed the rulings and practice of some Sages that contact with Gentiles should be severely limited, and eating with them forbidden.

These data highlight a phenomenon well attested throughout the literature, namely, that the halachah of table fellowship between Jew and non-Jew was not yet completely settled in the early centuries. There appear to have been two opinions: one, that accommodation to the Gentiles was necessary and even acceptable, and a second, that close contact with Gentiles, especially in the realm of table fellowship, was not only unwise, but a compromise of essential covenant requirements. One could well imagine that the more lenient view was the majority, while the strict position was held by the few. If this were the case, then Peter could well have rationalized his vacillation as an accommodation of both camps.

We should remember the various ways in which table fellowship had taken on almost sacred proportions in the 1st Century. The long-standing Semitic emphasis upon hospitality, and the offering of a meal as an important part of that acceptance, meant that eating together was both a cultural expectation as well as a covenantal one. What is more, the barachah (blessing) said at the initial breaking of the bread was participated in by all through the “amen,” as well as by participating in eating the bread over which the blessing had been offered to God. Thus, even the common table took on a kind of “sacramental” nature.

But at the Jewish table of the 1st Century, all of the laws (both those well confirmed as well as those emerging within the rabbinic debates) governing purities came into play as well. These involved the separation of clean and unclean animals, the laws of ritual slaughter to assure that the blood had been properly disposed of, and a separation from all things tainted by the common idolatry of the pagan society in which Israel lived. Taken together, these concerns gave plenty of motivation for “building fences,” the most obvious being avoiding the Gentiles all together. In this sense, remaining separate from the Gentiles was more a conscious effort to maintain the purity laws than it was to uphold any prejudiced view against non-Jews. What is more, at a time when national identity was being threatened by Hellenism in general, it is understandable how purity laws and the food laws that went along with them worked incorporating earlier midrashic material. Its composition is very late, but it is possible that it reflects in some measure the period of earlier midrashim.

39 Histories 5.5.1-2.
became identity markers for the Jewish community.

The importance of these laws and traditions within second-Temple Judaism should not be underestimated. Uncleanness was a relative matter (prohibition from participating in the cult during the period of impurity); but disregard of the blood taboos entailed being ‘cut off from the people’; and anything which gave scope to idolatry infringed Israel’s loyalty to the one God. As with circumcision, the Maccabean crisis made the food laws a test case of national loyalty and religious faithfulness (1Macc 1:62-63; 2Macc 5:27).  

The erecting of “fences” in order to guard purity issues in regard to table fellowship most likely underlies the hand washing routines initiated by the Pharisees (note Mark 7:3ff).

-------- End: Exursus ---------

With these few data in mind, we may now ask some questions regarding Peter’s actions and Paul’s disapproval. First, the text is clear that the issue at hand revolved around table fellowship. At one point Peter willingly eats with the Gentiles, but when some “from James” came to Antioch, he withdrew eating with the non-Jews because apparently he knew these Jerusalemites would frown upon his practice, and he was more intent upon pleasing them then continuing his table fellowship with the Gentiles. Yet in light of what we have seen about the yet-to-be-settled nature of the halachah, it is a little easier to appreciate Peter’s dilemma. While his strict Jewish brethren were not in attendance, he bent to the majority opinion, that eating with Gentiles was okay. Moreover, these were believing Gentiles, so the larger issues of food impurities (at least from a biblical standpoint) or food offered to idols were a non-factor. But when the Jerusalem contingent arrive, who no doubt held the minority view, Peter vacillated back to the minority halachah, one he more than likely had personally held before. So while we will see that from Paul’s perspective Peter’s actions were a theological strike against the gospel, from Peter’s vantage point he may have simply been choosing between two acceptable norms, albeit at odds with each other in certain points.

A second question that presents itself is why Peter’s eating with Gentile believers would have been viewed as unacceptable by the group from James. What was the problem from their vantage point? Since, as the data have shown, there clearly were authorities who saw nothing wrong in eating with Gentiles as long as certain precautions were taken, why would the Jerusalem company not be willing to be more flexible, especially since these were not just any Gentiles—they were Gentiles who had confessed Yeshua as Messiah?

While the answer to this question is more elusive, some logical deductions may be made. First, it would seem obvious that the purpose of the visit from Jerusalem was the issue of Gentile inclusion. And we should likewise presume that those who came already had concluded that Gentiles

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40 Dunn, Galatians, p. 118.
41 The notice that “the Pharisees and all Jews” engaged in these purity issues should probably be understood as “the Pharisees and all Judeans,” the latter expression meaning those Jews who were particularly attached to the Temple and Jerusalem in a religious sense.
should not participate in the community on equal footing with Jews—they should undergo the ritual of a proselyte and make a complete and full commitment to being “Jewish” (at least from the rabbinic viewpoint). If they were coming with this conclusion firmly in hand, then table fellowship with the Gentiles in this case was a direct statement to the contrary. It was salt in a wound that was already considered painful enough. Secondly, we should not overlook the political factors that may have weighed in on this situation. In a time when Jewish identity continued to erode, the need for stricter boundary markers was all that much more valued. As such, the inclusion of the Gentiles as indistinguishable from the Jews only threatened the self-identity of the Jewish community, and was therefore frowned upon. Peter’s “fear of the circumcision” may therefore have gone beyond theological realm to that of the socio-political. Even as Paul, in his former years, had resorted to violence in the zealousness of his cause, it is likewise conceivable that the circumcision party was heightened in their zeal for national identity. Dunn notes:

Such pressure could very well lie behind Paul’s criticism of Peter that he acted ‘out of fear of those of the circumcision’; whether the criticism was justified or not, Peter’s action might well appear to be stimulated by fear of those who, like Paul before, had been prepared to use violence to maintain Jewish ethnic and religious distinctiveness. ‘Those of the circumcision’ (cf. Rom 4:12; Col 4:11; Tit 1:10) signifies a group whose self-identity was bound up with circumcision, that is, here at least, with maintaining the distinctive markers of Jewish identity which circumcision itself most clearly expressed; Peter could well have shown some trepidation at confronting such zealous Jews, believers included (cf. Acts 11:2; 2Cor 11:26; Rom 15:31).  

Thirdly, in attempting to understand Peter’s actions, we should simply presume a weakness on Peter’s part in regard to acceptance by those in his immediate company. We saw this during the trial of Yeshua (though admittedly, this is an extreme case). Peter may have been one who, at least in this phase of his life, was weak when it came to standing upon principle in the face of personal rejection. According to the previous verses, Peter and the “pillars” had been entrusted with the responsibility of the Jews, while Paul and Barnabas were representing the Gentiles within The Way. Peter may have been persuaded in his own thinking that he was, in some measure, being disloyal to his own people if he were to maintain his associations with the Gentiles. As such, he waffled at the approach of the Jerusalem group, desiring to be fully accepted by his own people.

A third question: did the group that came from Jerusalem represent the will of James? The text would imply this: “... prior to the coming of certain men from James ...” would indicate that they came representing James. But while this may be the implication, it is by no means certain, at least by the language itself. To “come from” (ἐρχόμεναι + ἀπὸ, erchomai + apo) is often used in geographical designations (e.g., “to come from Jerusalem”) and does not necessarily carry with it a sense of representation. It is possible, of course, that James himself had become persuaded that Gentiles should take on the covenant symbol of circumcision before being fully accepted within the community, but this seems unlikely. More likely, in my estimation, is that this group came from Jerusalem, appearing to represent James and the leadership there, but without any genuine official stamp-of-approval for their mission and message.

42 Dunn, Galatians, 123.
A fourth question revolves around the language of v. 12. What is meant by Peter holding himself “aloof” (NASB)? Actually, the word (ἀφορίζω, aphorizō) means “to separate,” and thus the translation “aloof” is interpretive on the part of the NASB. The NIV and ESV have it correctly: “and separated himself.” Peter’s withdrawal from table fellowship was a clear act of separation from his Gentile brothers in Yeshua. He was acting the part of a Pharisee, the name itself most likely meaning “to separate” (note the assonance with the Greek word as well). It was this separation that caused such consternation on the part of Paul.

A fifth question comes from v. 13. Who were the “rest of the Jews (Judeans)” who “joined him in hypocrisy,” even including Barnabas? These were, no doubt, the Jewish element of the Antiochian assembly, who previously were fellowshipping without reservation with the Gentile believers, but who were urged away from this unity to a separatist position by the message of the “circumcision party.” If we were to speculate that James was in agreement with their message, and with this notice that even Barnabas lended his support, it is clear that the pressures formed by the centuries of tradition were strong indeed. The gospel had been so long cast in a Jewish mold, that to envision it ever existing otherwise was not only impossible, it was also theologically errant. Here we come to understand that the message of Yeshua, and even more so, Paul, was revolutionary not because it was brand new or never before heard, but because it cut across so many layers of traditions. And having cut across so much tradition, it appeared innovative and new, when in fact it was a throwback to a time when Torah defined Israel rather than Israel defining the Torah.

Sixth question: (v. 13) how was it that Paul could judge them and Peter as being hypocrites? We should note the language which, though Barnabas is included, skirts the accusation that he too was a hypocrite, for Paul speaks of “their hypocrisy” which carried (interjecting a passive sense) Barnabas away. Surely this must have been a blow to Paul. To have his own working companion side with the others and against him must have been nearly devastating. Yet the language Paul employs might indicate that he considered Barnabas’ actions a lapse in judgment that would soon be corrected (and by all accounts, it was).

But what was the hypocrisy Dunn considers the use of the word “hypocrisy” as polemical, and just an indication of the fierceness of the disagreement. But while this may be true (after all, Paul is using rhetorical irony throughout the epistle), I doubt that this is Paul’s usage here. I think he did consider these actions hypocritical, if for no other reason than that they, to one extent or another, denied the very gospel that was the heart and soul of The Way. This Paul plainly states: (v. 14) “… they were not straightforward with the gospel ….” Here is the crux for Paul: the gospel message was null and void if it was not lived out in truth. The “truth of the gospel,” that is, its very heart and soul, is that salvation begins with God’s sovereign choice, and is made real in the life of the sinner through drawing close to God by faith in His Messiah. No one remains a covenant member who is not also changed in heart by the Spirit of God, and walks a life of faith, i.e., a life conformed to the image of Yeshua. To make ethnicity a fundamental factor in covenant membership is to miss the very reason for Yeshua’s death in the first place. For He died, not to make Gentiles into Jews, nor to erase Jewish identity in favor of some ethereal spiritual entity, but to bring together all the nations of the earth to be blessed in Abraham. Only a living, viable
community that demonstrated this reality could be champions of the gospel that Paul proclaimed. And eating together was at the heart of this expression, for it demonstrated in the common table the oneness of Jew and Gentile in the risen Messiah. Conversely, to deny the inclusion of the Gentile believers as Gentiles, was likewise to deny that the death and resurrection of Yeshua had accomplished what the Father had promised to Abraham: “in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Furthermore, such a denial was also a denial of the gospel as it is found to reside in the person and work of Yeshua. One cannot help but comment that the current debate among some Messianic groups, to the effect that the so-called “Messianic movement” is primarily for Jews and not for Gentiles, falls into precisely the same trap, and deserves the same rebuke that Paul directed towards Peter. While we each may have an ethnic identity with this people group or that, our ultimate and final identity is found in Yeshua and in Him alone. This in no way diminishes our ethnicity, but rather brings it to its intended purpose, whether Jew or non-Jew. But in finding our final identity in the Messiah, we likewise find solid ground for unity in the midst of our diversities. For each of us is a sinner saved by God’s grace without regard to our bloodline. And thus we find commonality both in our having been sinners as well as being saved from our sin through His sovereign work of salvation. We were all dug from the same pit, and we all were adopted into the same family, given the same privileges and responsibilities by the same Father. But simply affirming this as theologically true without living it out in the context of life and community is actually to deny that we believe it at all. The proof of our oneness is found in the “pudding” of our lives together: Jew and non-Jew functioning as the equal children we are in the family of God.

Paul’s public rebuke of Peter is therefore a statement about the gospel. As a leader, commissioned by the very same pillars who extended the handshake to Paul, Peter deserves open rebuke for his hypocrisy, and Paul was not timid to give it. “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how do you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (v. 14). Here Peter’s hypocrisy is evident: he was compelling the Gentiles to live like Jews? (v. 14). Here Peter’s hypocrisy is evident: he was compelling the Gentiles to do what he himself was not doing.

How was it that Peter was “living like the Gentiles?” Clearly the issue at hand, from Peter’s viewpoint and those who had come from Jerusalem, was that of identity and the boundary markers that governed this identity. “To live like a Jew” was to adhere to those boundary markers that were widely known as Jewish. Likewise, to “live like a Gentile” was to adopt those patterns of life which, sociologically, marked a person as a non-Jew. But we should understand these phrases as relative terms. Paul is not suggesting that Peter had entirely abandoned his Jewish way of life, nor that he had taken on pagan modes of living. Rather, the terminology is polemical, and no doubt reflects the verbiage of the controversy itself.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

What does “live like the Gentiles” imply? As Dunn notes, this seems to be the language of an “intra-Jewish polemic,” being a common term used within the dialog and debates of the “party of the circumcision.” For instance, we know that during the Maccabean and post-Maccabean period, some Jews saw them-
selves as “righteous” in contrast to other Jews they labeled as “sinners.” In Jubilees, those Israelites who failed to circumcise their sons are said to be “making themselves like the Gentiles” (15:33-34). Even more, those who used a different calendar were charged with “forgetting the feasts of the covenant and walking in the feasts of the Gentiles, after their errors and after their ignorance” (6:35). Dunn concludes:

It is incorrect, therefore, to say that ‘it would be quite impossible to describe existence under the (apostolic) Decree as living like a Gentile’. On the contrary, for one Jew to accuse another Jew of ‘living like a Gentile’ was wholly of a piece with the language of intra-Jewish sectarian polemic. When group boundaries are (preceived to be) under threat, a natural response is to castigate those who threaten those boundaries as polar opposites in order to strengthen the group’s own identity and distinctiveness (e.g., all those to the “left” of a “right-wing” party castigated as “communists.”)

One can almost hear the influencers in their private talks together committing themselves never to “live like the Gentiles,” by which they most surely would have included table fellowship with the Gentiles.

Indeed, current identity struggles among the Jewish communities of our own day have evidenced just such intra-Jewish polemic. From the point of view of some Orthodox groups, other Jews cease to be “Jews” in their opinion, if certain boundary lines are crossed. Thus, Jews who confess Yeshua are told that they are no longer Jews. There is little doubt that similarly heated opinions were held in Paul’s day as well. For while the Judaisms of the 1st Century were diverse, the struggle for Jewish identity grew more and more intense in the 1st Century, and therefore the need to strengthen the boundary markers also increased. There is no doubt that table fellowship played a major role in these boundary markers. We will misunderstand Paul’s rebuke of Peter if we neglect to take into full consideration this sociological backdrop.

From this vantage point, then, we should understand the phrase “live like the Gentiles” to be a common phrase of the intra-Jewish debate over the inclusion of Gentiles. The party of the circumcision must have used language like this to disparage those Jews who were willing to forego the halachah of separation from Gentiles, by judging them as having adopted a Gentile lifestyle. Paul uses the very language of the influencers to shame Peter. From their vantage point, anyone who engaged in table fellowship with Gentiles was as though he was “living like a Gentile.” While Peter may have disagreed in heart with this assessment, he was unwilling to allow himself to be viewed this way by his own community. After all, he was the Apostle to the circumcision.

Thus, it was not so much Paul’s assessment that Peter was “living like a Gentile,” but, by inference, the conclusion of the influencers. Paul is simply using their language to highlight the hypocrisy of Peter.

Peter’s hypocrisy consisted of his having engaged in table fellowship with the Gentiles when unobserved by the Jerusalem folk, but separating from the Gentiles when the group from James arrived, and even compelling

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43 Note also Psalms of Solomon 1:8 where some are castigated as being greater sinners than the Gentiles.
44 Dunn, Galatians, p. 128.
them to submit to proselytism in order to be accepted by the party of the circumcision. The Greek has ιουδαῖος, ιουδαίζω, “to live like a Jew,” used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. The Lxx utilizes this same verb in Esther 8:17 (the only time found in the Lxx) to translate the hapax legomena מִׁתְּּּיַהַדִׁים, mityahadim, “made themselves Jews.” Though the term is used only these two times in biblical literature, the meaning is clear: Peter had been swayed by the “party of the circumcision” to compel (ἀναγκαίζω, anagkazo) the Gentiles to submit to the ritual of a proselyte. Interestingly, Paul used this same word (Acts 26:11) to describe his attempts to “force” the believers in Yeshua to blaspheme in order to have a sure judgment against them.

Dunn thinks that the term may indicate something other than “circumcision” (=becoming a proselyte), since its only other use (the Lxx of Esther 8:17) has both the term “circumcised” as well as “made themselves Jews” (the verb ‘to circumcise” is lacking in the Hebrew). But the Lxx phrase (“and many of the Gentiles were circumcised, and became Jews, for fear of the Jews”) may well be simply a commentary on “becoming a Jew.” From the Lxx translators’ standpoint, this surely involved the ritual of the proselyte. It hardly seems possible that Paul would have so sharply denounced Peter if he was simply trying to persuade the Gentiles to take on Jewish customs. This hardly goes contrary to the gospel. Rather, it seems to me far more likely that Peter, for what ever reasons, was attempting to sway the Gentile believers over to the viewpoint of the “party of the circumcision,” that full covenant membership was only available to Jews.

From the viewpoint of the influencers, the whole matter turned on the observance of established halachah. But for Paul, the issue was that of the gospel: “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel ....” The word translated “straightforward” by the NASB (“not acting in line,” NIV; “their conduct was not in step,” ESV) is interesting. It is ὀρθοποδέω, orthopodeō, being made of two words; ortho, meaning “straight” (note our English “orthodontist”) and pous, “foot.” The obvious idea is “to walk in a straight path,” “to be on the right road.” Our modern idiom, “walk a straight line” fits the meaning well. It was not that Peter and those he was following were denying the gospel, nor attempting to undermine it directly. Rather, their approach to this whole matter was a detour from the gospel, and one that Paul feared would so sidetrack the Gentile believers as to keep them from reaching the goal.

How was it that the approach of the circumcision party was not a straight path to the gospel? The answer is clear: covenant participation is not based upon ethnicity, whether natural or received, but upon the elective love of God demonstrated in those who have exercised personal faith in the Messiah, and have thus drawn near to God. This was Paul’s gospel and the events of God’s salvation: election, which leads to faith in God, which secures covenant status guaranteed by the presence of the Spirit, which in turn produces a life of holiness. And all of this was secured through the infinite sacrifice of Yeshua, sealed by His resurrection, foreshadowed in His ascension, and guaranteed by His intercession (Rom 8:34). This was Paul’s “straight line,” and to introduce a man-made ritual which promised a new heredity as the means of covenant membership was, in light of this soteriology, most egregious. For rather than putting an emphasis upon the person and work of Messiah, the message of the
circumcision party put Jewish identity “front and center.” In so doing, they diminished the centrality of Yeshua, and the manner in which God saves sinners through Him.

Here we must reckon with a core issue of Pauline theology—the centrality of Messiah Yeshua. Of course, this is nothing new, as though only Pauline theology is Messiah-centered. We should reckon with the fact that the message of the prophets, diverse as it may be, is nonetheless woven around a central theme: the Promised One. From the first mention of the Promise in Genesis 3:15 straight through to the end of the Tanach, the Promise unfolds through narrative, poetry, legal prophetic literature, until Yeshua arrives. For Paul, the goal of the ages is summed up in Messiah, for in Him all the promises of God are confirmed and realized (2Cor 1:20), and only in Him. He is the first born of creation (Col 1:15) meaning that all of creation points to Him. Therefore, God’s plan of redemption, which encompasses all of the nations, is to be realized in Yeshua and in no one else. This was Paul’s gospel, as it was also the gospel of Moses. And anything that would detract from this centrality, or diminish the glory of the redemption which He had procured through His work as High Priest was, for Paul, anathema. It simply could not be allowed to stand as a viable “gospel,” for it was anything but “good news.” Only God’s salvation saves: all else condemns.

15–16 We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Torah but through faith in Messiah Yeshua, even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, so that we may be justified by faith in Messiah and not by the works of the Torah; since by the works of the Torah no flesh will be justified.

Here we have Paul’s direct answer to the issue at hand: how one “gets in” to the covenant and thus is granted the promises of the covenant. The actions of Peter had telegraphed a different theology, for if covenant membership meant covenant fellowship, then to withdraw from table fellowship sent the message that Gentiles were somehow not yet covenant members even though they had placed their faith in Yeshua.

But to understand this pivotal statement by the Apostle, we must first look at the structure of the verses. The NASB begins v. 16 with a strong contrastive: “nevertheless.” This makes it appear that v. 15 is Paul’s declaration, with v. 16 continuing his thought by way of contrast. However, the word translated “nevertheless” is lacking in all but a few, latter manuscripts. In fact, the Greek word ἀδερ, de, “and,” “but,” is not found in any of the early manuscripts.

The English translations differ in this regard. The NIV simply makes the subject of v. 15 (“we who are Jews”) the continuing subject of v. 16:

We who are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners” know that a man is not justified by observing the law ....

The NRSV adds the word “yet” to connect the two verses:

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law ....
The ESV does essentially the same thing as the NRSV, and the CBJ is no better:

We are Jews by birth, not so-called ‘Goyishe sinners’; even so, we have come to realize that a person is not declared righteous by God on the ground of his legalistic observance of Torah commands.

What the translators and most of the commentators miss, in my opinion, is that v. 15 continues the statement of the direct dialog between Paul and Peter begun in v. 14, only v. 15 is a kind of “digging quote” from the Jerusalem party themselves. In other words, Paul is reiterating the mantra of the Jerusalem people when he says, “we are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles.” Remember, Paul is most likely recounting (at least by giving the kernel thoughts) of the confrontation in Antioch. Having asked Peter the stinging question why he compels the Gentiles to live like Jews when he himself, by eating with the Gentiles, would be classed by his own group as “living like the Gentiles, Paul quotes (perhaps a bit “tongue-in-cheek”) the primary premise of the party of the circumcision: “we are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.” This is not Paul’s perspective, but that of the influencers. Dunn agrees:

This language rings oddly on the lips of Paul, until we realize what he was doing. Paul was putting himself in the shoes of a typical Jew who looked out at the rest of the world as outside the realm of God’s covenant righteousness and sinful (cf. Eph 2:12). More to the point, he was using the language of typical Jewish factionalism, which was ready to condemn those Jews who disagreed with the sect’s interpretation of what the law required as ‘sinners’— outside their sectarian understanding of the covenant, which meant, of course, from the sectarian viewpoint, outside the covenant. In fact, Paul was probably echoing the language used by the ‘individuals from James’ when they spoke against the Jewish Christians’ table-fellowship with the Gentile believers: such table-fellowship with ‘Gentile sinners’ was unacceptable.46

Thus, when Paul writes, “we are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,” he is deliberately using the language of those who were distancing themselves from the Gentiles, encouraging them to become proselytes in order to leave the status of “sinner” and enter the circle of “Jews by birth.”

This being the case, v. 15 is a continuation of the dialog/rhetoric of v. 14. We might paraphrase the two verses this way:

“... If you, being a Jew, participate with Gentiles even though the community halachah you have is against doing so, then why do you compel the Gentiles to follow your halachah when you’re not even willing to be consistent? Don’t you hear the argument of your chaverim ringing in your ears? “We’re Jews, not ‘Gentile sinners!’”

This is not the last time that we will find Paul quoting the stock cliches of the influencers. And it will be important for us to keep our eyes open for this kind of rhetorical device as we follow Paul’s arguments.

Thus, v. 16 begins Paul’s direct answer to the question that he had presented to Peter in vv. 14-15. And what is his answer? That final and ultimate covenant membership is gained through faith in Messiah, not through any ritual

46 Dunn, Galatians, p. 133.
of conversion (for Gentiles) or even by maintaining one’s covenant status through doing the mitzvot. For though Jews enter the covenant on a physical basis through lineage to Abraham, yet in terms of the spiritual blessings of the covenant, these come only to those who have the faith of Abraham—they do not come as a result of being physically related to the covenant people.

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<tr>
<th>Covenant Blessings: circumcision of the flesh</th>
<th>Covenant Blessings: circumcision of the heart</th>
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<td>• blessing for blessing; cursing for cursing</td>
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We should also take note of the use of the term “sinners” in the 1st Century. Neusner has shown that approximately 67% of the traditions attributed to the pre-70CE Pharisees by the Mishnah deal with matters relating to food taboos and table fellowship.47 While E. P. Sanders rightly critiques Neusner’s findings, in the end it would appear that Neusner is essentially correct:

In short, the evidence of the rabbinic traditions points clearly to the conclusion that the purity of the meal table was an important concern among many of the Pharisees of Jesus’ time or at least within a significant faction of the Pharisees.48

But what is of particular importance to us here is that table fellowship issues were a primary factor in group identification among at least some of the Pharisees. What is more, the Gentiles defined the “other” for such Pharisaic groups, and since the Gentiles were known to have a general disregard for the particulars of the food laws as mandated by the Pharisaic groups, it was an easy jump to using the word “sinners” (=Gentiles) to speak of those (regardless of ethnicity) who did not conform to table halachah as the Pharisees envisioned it.

As noted above, the term “sinners” was used to describe not only the Gentiles (i.e., those clearly outside of the covenant group) but also Jews who did not conform to a particular set of halachot set forth by a given sect. Thus, even within the Jewish community itself, some Jews labeled other Jews as “sinners” simply because they did not conform to the halachah that defined the given sect’s identity.

This may be well demonstrated by the Qumran sect. Time and time again, the sectarianists describe the Jewish community from which they had


48 Dunn, Ibid., p. 268, emphasis his.
departed:

They are the ones who depart from the proper way. That is the time of which it was written, “Like a rebellious cow, so rebelled Israel” (Hosea 4:16). When the Man of Mockery appeared, who sprayed on Israel lying waters, he led them to wander in the trackless wasteland (Psalm 107:40; Job 12:24). He brought down the lofty heights of old, turned aside from paths of righteousness, and shifted the boundary marks that the forefathers had set up to mark their inheritance, so that the curses of His covenant took hold on them. Because of this they were handed over to the sword that avenges the breach of His covenant (Leviticus 26:25). For they had sought flattery, choosing travesties of true religion; they looked for ways to break the law; they favored the fine neck. They called the guilty innocent, and the innocent guilty. They overstepped covenant, violated law; and they conspired together to kill the innocent (Psalm 94:21), for all those who lived pure lives they loathed from the bottom of their heart. So they persecuted them violently, and were happy to see the people quarrel. Because of all this God became very angry. (CD 1.13–21)

“… and lift up His gracious countenance upon you for everlasting peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). The Levites in turn shall curse all those foreordained to Belial. They shall respond, “May you be damned in return for all your wicked, guilty deeds.” (1QS 2:4–5)

What is more, the Qumran sect directed such polemic towards the Pharisees themselves, whom they described as “those who seek smooth things” and “deceivers.” While the Pharisees were calling others “sinners,” the Qumran sectarians were labeling the Pharisees with the same epithet! Indeed, the criteria used to differentiate the “righteous” from the “sinners” was nothing less than the “works of the Torah,” which were not all matters of clear Torah commandment, but which were heavily weighted toward the specific halachot which the sectarians themselves had determined were the mark of true “righteous.”

Thus, when the phrase “Gentile sinners” is used by the influencers, it means “Gentiles who fall outside of the boundaries of our own covenant community because they do not conform to the halachah we have determined is essential.”

But Paul’s answer in v. 16 is direct and to the point: the issue is not sectarian halachah but rather one’s status in terms of identity with Messiah Yeshua. Some have considered this verse so crucial to the overall message of Paul in Galatians, that they have considered all that follows to be commentary upon it. Paul appeals to what Peter and the rest apparently know (note that the word “know” is a participle, meaning it may well function as denoting what is characteristic): a status of “righteous” is not derived from group identity based upon sectarian halachah, but upon faith in the Messiah Yeshua.

We should note first that from Paul’s perspective this is true for all. . . .

49 E.g., CD 4.8; 1QS 5.7-11; 1QH 7.12.
50 1QS 6:18; 4Q394 f3_7i:5; 4Q398 f14_17ii:3; 4Q399 f1i:11.
51 See the comments below on 3:10 and the excursus there for additional thoughts on the “works of the Torah” as describing the particular halachot of a given sect, and the manner in which these halachot formed the identity boundaries for the group.
52 Dunn, Galatians, p. 134.
Covenant status, whether for the Jew or the Gentile, is gained through faith in Yeshua. Secondly, and perhaps most particularly in this context, the idea that a Gentile could gain a fuller covenant status through becoming a proselyte is to say that in some measure, covenant status is founded upon conforming to man’s rituals, for surely there is no hint of the teaching in the Scriptures that one can gain covenant membership through obedience. Obedience is the result of covenant membership, not the means to it.

The word that dominates vv. 16-17 is the word “justify.” This word is found 39 times in the Apostolic Scriptures (7 in the Gospels, 2 in Acts, 27 in Paul’s letters, and 3 in James) but Paul uses it the most, by far. The verb itself (dikaioû, dikaiô) comes from the law courts, and describes the judge’s responsibility to render a fair verdict and to “justify,” that is, acquit the innocent. Note Exodus 23:7:

Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit (Lxx = δικαίωσεν) the guilty.

The question, then, is what will appeal to God in terms of declaring righteous someone who is unrighteous in His eyes. For a given sect to come to the conclusion that their group, and their group alone, would be judged by God as righteous, and then to require conformity to man-made rules in order to enter the sect—this was the kind of thing that Paul was combating. For never did inclusion in any group afford one the status of “righteous.” Rather, righteousness was to be found in another—in the Messiah. And it is only those to whom His righteousness is applied, that may be assured of standing in the day of judgment and being welcomed into the presence of God as righteous. For Paul, the crux text relating this truth was Genesis 15:6, in which Abraham himself did not “earn” righteousness, but had it accredited to him through faith. Abraham stood as the paradigm for righteousness, and he gained his status of righteous before he was ever circumcised. Thus circumcision became a seal of his righteousness, not the means of it.

One hardly thinks that Peter or those who came from James (including James himself) had forgotten this fundamental truth. Note well the plural “we” throughout this verse and the next. But the strength of tradition had clouded their perspective so that apparently they could not see how their insistence that the Gentiles become proselytes was actually a denial of this foundational truth. For they were insisting that the Gentiles become proselytes in order to enjoy the covenant fellowship which was already theirs through faith in Yeshua.

The pivotal statement is: “even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, so that we may be justified by faith in Messiah and not by the works of the Torah.” What does it mean to “believe in Messiah Yeshua?” This “faith” is two-fold: it is first a “trust” that Yeshua is the promised Messiah Who would deal with the sin issue brought upon mankind by Adam, and secondly, a “faithfulness” which inevitably flows for this genuine “trust” and characterized by obedience to God seen through righteous living.

The phrase “justified by faith in Messiah” is δικαίωσεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ (dikaiothmen ek pisteos Christou), and some in recent days have thought it should be translated as “justified out of the faithfulness of Messiah.” Since the Greek word “faith” can just as well be translated “faithful”
(and the same is true of the Hebrew אֶמוּנָה, ‘emunah), it is warranted to translate the phrase as referring to Messiah’s own faithfulness. However, the thrust of the verse is clearly that those who are justified have been given this status because they have trusted in the One sent by the Father to die for sins, and that His righteousness would be accredited to their account. Dunn gives the following why the traditional rendering, “faith in Yeshua Messiah,” should be read here. (1) faith in the sense of “believe in” is the most natural understanding of the phrase in this context, (2) the verb and the noun (πιστεύω / πίστις, pisteuô / pistis) would normally have the same sense when used together as they are here, (3) both here and in Romans the primary issue being addressed is how some could be acquitted of guilt, i.e., declared righteous, and Abraham (Gen 15:6) is used as the model. In Gen 15:6, the emphasis is upon Abraham’s faith, that what God had promised, He would do, and not upon Abraham’s faithfulness (=obedience), (4) “faith” as trust in God rather than “faithfulness of Yeshua” is a better antithesis for “works of the Torah” with which it is contrasted, and (5) faith in Messiah best fits the overall emphasis upon the Gospel already given in the epistle, for faith in Messiah means an acceptance (trust of and in) both what Yeshua said and did, which forms the core elements of the gospel.53

Paul concludes the verse with a clear and emphatic statement: “for by the works of the Torah no flesh will be justified.” Here, as always, Paul makes no differentiation between Jew and Gentile, for he uses the term “no flesh” in the sense of “mankind,” “flesh” being a shortened form of “flesh and blood.” No one, including the covenant people of God (Israel), could stand before God and claim the status of righteous based upon what they had done, regardless if their deeds were deemed worthy or even very worthy. Even as the many will say “did we not do” (Matt 7:22) and be met with the stern “depart from Me you cursed,” so all who think justification is to be found by any other means than faith in Yeshua will be forever lost.

Here is the core of the Gospel—the genuine “good news,” for what man could not do himself, God has accomplished through His Messiah, Yeshua. And here is the linkage between Peter’s actions (even if they were somewhat naive in the sense of having been governed by galvanized traditions) and the denial of the Gospel. For any teaching that would require something more than faith in Yeshua for obtaining full and eternal covenant membership with God, was diminishing the unique and central place of Messiah in the Gospel itself.

17–19 But if, while seeking to be justified in Messiah, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Messiah then a minister of sin? May it never be! For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the Torah I died to the Torah, so that I might live to God.

What does Paul mean by “seeking to be justified?” We should give the word “seek” (ζητέω, zeteô) its normal sense of “inquiring,” “desire to obtain,” and understand justification to be, in its final and full sense, an eschatological reality. It thus envisions the time when those who are in Messiah are finally and eternally declared righteous at the judgment day. Those who have believed or put their trust in Messiah find themselves to be “in Messiah,” Paul’s favorite phrase. By this Paul envisions the safety of a fortress in which the dangers from without have no ability to overcome those within. “There is no

condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua” (Rom 8:1).

But apparently the party of the circumcision had labeled Jewish believers in Yeshua, who had openly fellowshiped with the Gentile believers, as “sinners.”

Even though they all, Jew and Gentiles alike, had ‘believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ’, the James faction still insisted on regarding Gentiles as ‘sinners’, and those Jews who disregarded or treated lightly the traditional boundary lines by eating with them as equally ‘sinners’.

Paul’s retort is pointed: “if you are willing to label us as ‘sinners,’ are you likewise willing to say that Messiah Yeshua is therefore a minister of sin, since He also taught that through the gospel Jew and Gentile would eat together in the kingdom” (Matt 8:11)? Here, as before, the word “sinner” must be understood as label used by the faction from James to describe those who, like the pagans (Gentiles), were characterized as outside of the covenant. And if Paul and those Jews who willingly received the Gentile believers as equal members of the covenant were, in the opinion of the James faction, participating in sin, then the same could be said of Yeshua. Such a thought was abhorrent to Paul, and thus he responds with the emphatic “may it never be!” It may well be that Paul has in mind the words of Yeshua (which he no doubt received through oral transmission) that He came, not to be served, but to serve (to be the Servant of HaShem), and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

The word translated “minister” in the NASB is διάκονος, diakonos, which had a common usage in the 1st Century of “table-waiter.” This all fits the picture of table fellowship well, and figures into the manner in which table fellowship had become the issue at hand, and a fitting illustration of covenant membership. Like Yeshua, Who had girded Himself with a towel and demonstrated servanthood to His disciples, so Paul believed that all should serve each other.

For if I rebuild what I have destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor – To what is Paul referring in this metaphor? What had he “destroyed” (καταλύω, kataluô, “to abolish, destroy, tear down”) that now he was under pressure to rebuild? We have a close parallel in his later epistle to the Ephesians. Here, in 2:14f, a wall once built which separated Jew and Gentile had been broken down (λύω, luô) by the death of Yeshua, a wall that consisted of ordinances (δόγμα, dogma). Everywhere this Greek word is used, it refers to the decrees and laws of men, not the Torah given by God. Thus, in Ephesians, Paul speaks of a dividing wall that consisted of man-made decrees and ordinances, a wall that kept Jew and Gentile separated. In Messiah Yeshua, however, the authority of these man-made halachot had lost their power, and a return to the written word of God, as demonstrated in the life and words of Yeshua, had united believer to believer, regardless of their racial identification.

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54 Dunn, Galatians, p. 141.
55 So BDAG, “διάκονος”.
56 See my paper, “Can We Speak of the ‘Law’ in the NT in Monolithic Terms?”, delivered at the 1996 NW Regional ETS Meeting, pp. 11ff. This paper is available at: http://www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html.
It would appear that the group from Jerusalem was trying their best to rebuild the wall of separation—to put into place among the congregations of Galatia those man-made rules by which a Jew and Gentile were separated. And it would likewise appear that they were pressuring Paul to agree to just such a rebuilding. But Paul would have none of this. He realized that the separation of Jew from Gentile was not merely a cultural or even religious issue, but it hit at the very core of the Gospel message. To rebuild a wall of separation was not merely to receive one halachah over another, but to commit transgression: “I prove myself to be a transgressor.” Separating from Gentiles on the basis of socio-ethnic grounds was, in some measure, to diminish the work of Yeshua as the sole means through which sins could be forgiven and righteousness accredited by God. Once again, Paul brings the debate to focus on the most important factor—the Gospel. For while it is conceivable that the Jerusalem group could have somehow believed that the Gospel of Yeshua and the demand for Gentiles to become proselytes could be compatible, Paul shows that they cannot. The wall had been broken down by Yeshua, and through the message of His gospel as delivered by Paul, its demise had borne its ultimate effect in the communities of the Gentile believers. The cross was the gospel’s hammer demolishing the man-made ordinances that had kept the Gentiles on the other side of the wall. Paul was not about to start rebuilding that wall.

But it was not only a wall that separated Gentiles from Jews, it was a wall that separated Jews from Gentiles. This was Paul’s personal experience, and it was his encounter with the risen Messiah that tore down that wall for him personally. No doubt, his “former life in Judaism” was that lived on the “other side of the wall,” a life built upon a socio-religious status which all crumbled in the light of the Messiah. He came to realize that the picture was much bigger than Israel, even though Israel was (and is) a strategic part in God’s overall plan. God’s plan was for all mankind, and the Gospel was the means to the success of that plan (cf. Rom 1:16).

for through the Torah I died to the Torah, so that I might live to God – Far from distancing himself from Torah, Paul recognized that it was through the divine revelation of the Torah that he had come to the truth.

The metaphor of demolishing and reconstructing has here been taken a step further: to the contrast of life and death. That which had been demolished was that which had died. The resurrected life which came as a result of that death was a life that could not go back—it was a life lived unto God. To reconstruct the wall would be like leaving life and returning to a state of death.

But at first blush Paul’s words seem strange. How is it that he “died to the Torah?” We should not attempt to diminish the stark reality of these words, as though Paul is merely saying “I died to the misunderstood Torah” or “I died to the Torah as misused.” Stern’s translation (in the CJB) makes such an attempt: “For it was through letting the Torah speak for itself that I died to its traditional legalistic misinterpretation ....” Surely there is a sense in which this translation might explicate Paul’s meaning here, but it rather misses the mark. Actually, Paul, no doubt based in some measure upon his own personal experience, had come to realize that the Torah apart from the Spirit of God is merely words written on stone and have no ability either to justify nor to sanctify. On the contrary, the Torah without the Spirit accomplishes death and condemnation, and is a harsh master without mercy. What is more, the Torah without the Spirit of God, that is, apart from genuine saving faith, only causes a person to sin more. And Paul was personally aware of all of these attributes of the Torah. Thus,
when he glories in the fact that he had "died to the Torah," we must understand this primarily to mean that he had died to the condemning, death-giving aspects of the Torah in all of its administrations. For not only did Paul stand condemned before the Almighty on the basis of the Torah itself, but in attempting to find his covenant status to be grounded upon the Torah and its man-made additions, he also discovered that his former life in the Torah was ultimately futile and without eternal reward.

Yet there was a point in time when "the commandment came ... and I died" (Rom 7:9). It was through the Torah (the coming of the commandment) that Paul died to self and became alive to God. But it was when the commandment itself "came," that is, when the Spirit of God made the commandment alive in the soul and heart of Paul, that his eyes were opened to see that the goal of the Torah is Messiah. This gave Paul an entirely new perspective toward the Torah. While before the Torah formed the basis for his zealous war to retain Jewish identity by persecuting those whom he thought were compromising it, it now was the very means by which he sought to find a oneness with Gentiles through faith in Messiah. Whereas before the Torah was the means by which Paul defined himself, now the Torah was a means for revealing Messiah in whom Paul found his full identity. Whereas before the Torah was perhaps the primary stimulus for action in his life, now the desire to honor His Messiah through his obedience to the Torah became the driving force in his life. For Paul, the Torah had not been abolished—no, not by any means! But it had taken on a new role in light of the Messiah. It was no longer the means of his self identification—that was now the role of the risen Messiah in Whose life Paul was entirely bound up. Living out Torah was no longer the means of covenant membership, but the result of it. Living in obedience to the Torah, as he says in the next verse, was now seen by Paul as the life of Messiah being lived within him—a life that in every way defined him.

Thus Paul, through the Torah, died to the Torah, in order that he might "live to God." It was not as though in his life before faith in Yeshua he did not also believe that he "lived to God." But here is another contrast in Paul's life, for while his "former life in Judaism" was no doubt considered as living to God, in reality it was living to self. With eyes blinded and Messiah veiled (2Cor 3), the duties and ceremonies that were supposedly God-ward were, in reality, self-serving. Rather than obeying Torah as the pure expression of joy and love to God for His boundless grace, the Torah had become a means of maintaining covenant membership ("covenantal nomism") and obedience to it was therefore viewed as one's connection to the covenant. While the perspective was no doubt to do the mitzvot with an eye to God and not man, in reality, the unregenerate man was unable to submit to the spiritual tenor of the Torah. Instead, its outward performance had become the primary goal.

This is not to deny that there were genuine people of faith who lived out Torah as their humble expression of love to God. Surely there were, but they were, apparently, the minority. If we combine the testimony of Yeshua and Paul, we come to the conclusion that many (and Paul numbered himself among them) had fallen into the trap of thinking that perfunctory performance of the Torah was their means of retaining covenant status.
I have been crucified with Messiah; and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Here Paul comes to the crux of his theology: union with Messiah in His death and resurrection. His statement “I died to the Torah” is now explained further: “I have been crucified with Messiah.” The Torah has not died—Paul has died, and in that death, no longer fears the condemnation which the Torah so readily pronounces against those outside of Yeshua.

Paul takes the picture of the sacrifices, detailed in the Torah, and recognizes in them the revelation of the death of Messiah. Even as the worshipper placed his hands upon the head of the innocent animal and in so doing confessed a union with the animal as his substitute in atonement, so Paul recognized that the death of Yeshua was a one-for-one proposition in which the sinner was reckoned to have died in Messiah, and thus received the payment for his sins, and was resurrected in Messiah, thus given a new life of righteousness. Paul’s having died to the Torah was nothing less than Paul having died with Messiah.

This shows conclusively that for Paul, the death of the Messiah did not present an opportunity for salvation, but actually accomplished the payment of sin for all those who died with Him. For Paul, the death of Messiah was an actual payment for sin, sins which could never again require payment at the bar of God’s justice.

We should notice that the tense of the verb “crucified” (sustauró, sustau-roũ) in the Greek is not aorist, which we might expect, but perfect. The basic nuance of the perfect tense is that of an action which took place in the past but continues to have effect in the present. “I have been crucified with Messiah, and I’m still hanging there with Him.” This is not to deny the resurrection, but to point to an ongoing reality in the life of the Apostle. The death of the Messiah was his death, and anyone who knew the “old Paul” would have to remark that the “old Paul” was still dead—still hanging on the execution stake without any hope of life.

The next bold, conclusive statement that Paul makes is remarkable: “and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me.” “This language is startling, and of course exaggerated.” Feeling the sharpness of the expression, some of the translations attempt to soften it: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me …” (KJV); “I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me …” (NJB). But that is not Paul’s point. His point is that he is no longer alive—he has died! While the statement is quite clearly hyperbolic in nature, it should not be understood as fanciful. It truly reflected Paul’s theological perspective: “the Paul you now see living is not the old Paul—he is dead. My life now has as its goal to be a reflection of the Messiah Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” The old Paul is gone; the image of Messiah remains.

But the exaggeration was obviously to make a point. And the point was to bring out the very radical nature of the personal transformation effected by Paul’s encounter with the risen Christ. The old “I” was dead, and had been replaced by a new focus of personality. That meant, on the

57 The versification (punctuation) varies within the Greek manuscripts. Most put the first clause of v. 20 with v. 19 (so UBS 4th Edition [and previous editions], Nestle-Aland, etc.) while a few put it with v. 20.
58 Dunn, Galatians, p. 145.
one hand, that Paul was no longer the “I” of 1:13-14—the “I” which had found its identity “in Judaism”, as one for whom maintenance of the law in order to preserve Jewish distinctiveness was the very reason for existence. That was why reversion to a table-fellowship which excluded Gentiles as Gentiles was impossible for Paul; it simply would not have been him.59

The idea of Messiah “living within me” is not uncommon in Pauline literature (Rom 8:10; 2Cor 13:5; Col 1:27; Eph 3:17) but it is far less common than the reverse: the believer in Messiah. Yet in one sense the two are saying the same thing: it speaks of union of the believer with Messiah Yeshua. Life enveloped within life; the purpose of the One being the purpose of the other.

Here is the testimony of the Apostle, but it comes down to us as a paradigm for each one who believes. Can we say that the life of Messiah is seen in us? Do others recognize Him in us—in our mitzvot and in our halachah? In our family, our work, our play? Does the life of the Messiah so permeate our lives that thought and action reflect Him? This is the goal and the reality, for if indeed we have been crucified with the Messiah, then surely we are alive to God through Him, and our lives have been transformed.

Yet Paul was not denying the reality of life in this fallen world. He speaks of “the life I now live in the flesh.” Here Paul uses “flesh,” σάρξ, sarx, to mean “life in this human sphere with all of its weaknesses and corruptibility,” not “life under the rule of the sinful nature” as he sometimes uses the word “flesh.” But we might take the meaning of “flesh” a bit further, for at times it appears that Paul uses it to denote “ethnic origin.”61 If that meaning is included in his use of “flesh” here, then he is carefully emphasizing that in his death with Messiah, and the life which Messiah now lives within Him, he has not ceased being Jewish, nor is he trying in any way to deny his Jewishness. To the Corinthians he wrote that Jews should retain their outward, Jewish identity after coming to faith in Messiah (1Cor 7:18-20). Thus, in the current controversy which threatened the very unity of the Galatian congregations, Paul may want the influencers to recognize that he is not diminishing his Jewishness by holding that Gentiles did not need to become proselytes in order to be full-fledged covenant members.

Yet the life he lived as a Jew, “in the flesh,” he nonetheless lived, not with a primary focus toward the Torah (as before), but with a clear focus toward the One upon whom the Torah itself focused, even Yeshua. Thus Paul writes: “I live by faith in the Son of God.” The expression itself could be taken one of two ways: “I live by faith in the Son of God,” (where τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ functions as an objective genitive) or “I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God,” (where τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ functions as a subjective genitive). The CJB opts for this second way: “I live by the same trusting faithfulness that the Son of God had …,” though most of the other English translations take “Son of God” to be the object of faith. And this is the more natural way to understand the Greek (note the NIV, NRSV, ESV).

Paul substitutes “Son of God” for what we might expect, i.e., Messiah.

59 Dunn, Galatians, p. 145.
60 Cf. 2Cor 10:3; Phil 1:22, 24; cp. 2Cor 4:11.
61 Cf. Rom 1:3; 4:1; 9:3, 5, 8; 11:14.
But this figures into his overall message, namely, that covenant membership is not dependent upon physical lineage. Thus, to emphasize “Son of God” is likewise to bring to the table the concept of “sons of God,” a designation that rightly applies to all who have come to God through faith in the Messiah (John 1:12). If we are in Him, and He is in us, then we are all one in the family of God.

The death which Yeshua died was a demonstration of His love: “who loved me.” For Paul, the love of God, so often expressed in its covenant connections in the Tanach (Deut 7:8, 13; 1Ki 10:9; Ps 47:4; Is 43:4; Jer 31:3; Hos 3:1) is one and the same with the love of Messiah for His own, for the death of Messiah for the elect is for Paul the full expression of the Father’s love. But here again, the personal one-for-one perspective of the sacrifice comes into focus: “who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Once again, this is sacrificial language wrapped in the context of the covenant. “Love” is a covenant expression—to remain loyal to the stipulations of the covenant. Thus Yeshua, in faithfulness to the covenant in which the Father had promised Him a people for His own possession, endured the cross and despised the shame (Heb 12:2). His love for Paul was first His love for the Father — “not My will but Yours.” But it was also His love for Paul, and for all chosen by the Father to inherit eternal life. Yeshua set Himself to give the ultimate sacrifice in order to bring us near to God. Thus, He “gave Himself up” (παραδότος ἑαυτὸν, paradontos heauton), a term that strongly pictures His self surrender to the Father, and ultimately to the penalty of death as payment for sins. In the Lxx, the word is most often used in a military sense, of surrendering something of great value, such as land or troops. Thus Yeshua surrendered to the penalty of death as the sin-bearer for us.

21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Torah, then Messiah died needlessly.

Having spent sufficient time addressing the Antioch incident, Paul now returns to his main point, that his calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles, and the grace that was given to him to succeed in this calling, is in no way diminished by his proclamation of the Gospel that binds Jew and Gentile as one in the family of God. When he insisted that the Gentile be fully accepted on the basis of his faith in Yeshua alone, this was not a nullification of the “grace of God” given to him as an Apostle, but actually a manifestation of it. Rather, if Paul were to agree with the influencers, that the Gentiles could only become bona fide covenant members if they became proselytes (i.e., were given the status of a Jew), this would, in fact, nullify God’s grace. For since only those within the covenant of God are deemed righteous by Him, to claim that a full entrance into the covenant was possible through becoming a proselyte (“the works of Torah”) was in effect to teach that there existed a way of righteousness apart from the death of Yeshua. Taken to its logical end, there was really no need for the Messiah to die. But the fact that He did die, and that this alone is the means by which sinners may be made righteous, is proof that becoming a proselyte does not offer a genuine means of gaining the status of righteous.

This is the first time we have the word “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosune) in the epistle to the Galatians. It will be used three more times (3:6,21; 5:5). What exactly Paul means by this word has become one of the turning points in Pauline theological studies.

The Lxx uses the same Greek word, dikaiosune, to translate צדק, zedekah, the majority of the time. The concept of “righteousness” in the Tanach centers first
and foremost on the activity of God toward His people, and specifically in His loyalty and faithfulness to the covenant. Note the following:

Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. (Ex 9:27)

The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He. (Deut 32:4)

So now, take your stand, that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did for you and your fathers. (1Sam 12:7)

O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this. (Ezra 9:15)

Thus, God is seen to be righteous when He fulfills His covenant word. And perhaps the zenith of His covenant promises is that He would make His chosen people righteous:

Gen 18:19 “For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.”

It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us. (Deut 6:25)

He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. (Ps 23:3)

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive a blessing from the LORD And righteousness from the God of his salvation. (Ps 24:3)

Then all your people are righteous; They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified. (Is 60:21)

Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith. (Hab 2:4)

Therefore, there is a clear interwoven motif: God Himself is righteous, meaning that He always acts in justice and truth. His faithfulness to the covenant, made with the fathers, is proof of His righteousness, and this secures the end result: His covenant people will themselves be made righteous. They are not righteous in and of themselves, but they are made righteous by God’s own righteousness. And thus the chosen people are treated by God as those who will be made righteous by His faithfulness.
The “status of righteous” or “right standing before God” is therefore neither purely forensic nor purely experimental—it is both. For in God’s choosing some to be His own people, He also sets Himself under the promises of the covenant to actually make them righteous. They cannot attain to this righteousness on their own, since none seek after God, and since all turn aside from the righteous ways of God. Since the heart of mankind is deceitful and desperately wicked, only when God, in faithfulness to the covenant promises, takes the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19; 36:26)—only then are His people enabled to love His commandments, to walk in His ways, and to live righteously.

Having determined that He would do this work of grace within them, He therefore acts toward His chosen people with compassion and faithfulness, for He reckons them to be what they will become. Since He sees the end from the beginning; since He has committed Himself to making His people righteous, He treats them as beloved children, loving them with the disciplines of a correcting Father, making them to be righteous as He has planned. This He does by writing the Torah upon the heart through the agency of His own Ruach HaKodesh.

But their unrighteous deeds cannot be discounted—they have transgressed the righteous ways of God. And thus, the payment of sin, at the hand of His Messiah, pays for their transgressions, and shields them from the just wrath that they deserve. Having been washed clean by the blood of the Messiah, applied to them through the sovereign appointment of God Himself, the chosen ones are protected, preserved, and maintained as the objects of His covenant faithfulness.

It is in this way that the righteousness of God, and the righteousness of God’s people, are interconnected. No one earns his covenant status by his own righteousness, for no one is able to become righteous apart from God’s work. Each is therefore left up to the sovereign work of God. The Torah, God’s standard of righteousness, is not able to effect righteousness. It remains the eternal standard of righteousness, but is powerless to change the wayward heart and give the ability to live righteously. This ability is rather given by God Himself as He reckons the sinner righteous on the basis of Messiah’s sacrifice, and gives the Ruach in His work of making the sinner righteous.

This is Paul’s perspective on how a sinner attains the status of “righteous” before God. Consider the other verses in Galatians that utilize the word “righteousness:”

Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. (Gal. 3:6, quoting Gen 15:6)

Is the Torah then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a Torah had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on Torah. (Gal. 3:21)

For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. (Gal. 5:5)

The Scriptures, then, do not make a clear-cut distinction between so-called “positional” and “practical” righteousness. They are two sides of the same coin. God’s determination to be faithful to the covenant means that He treats all of His chosen ones as righteous, meaning that His own righteousness (faithfulness to the covenant) makes their actual righteousness an inevitability.
The prevailing theology of Paul’s day was not, on the one hand, so far off the mark. Yet on the other hand, it had entirely missed the mark. For the idea that all covenant members would be counted as righteous by God is true, and this was the presumption of the Sages. God is righteous and would secure the promises of the covenant to all covenant members. But the misdirection was in answering the question of how one became a covenant member. Where the Sages had gone wrong was to presume that physical lineage, or membership in the people-group called Israel, secured one a place in God’s covenant. And therefore such membership status also guaranteed a status of righteousness. As long as one maintained Torah obedience, a righteous status was theirs. Such a perspective had placed primary importance upon group membership (“being Jewish”) rather than upon faith in God. And thus, the idea that God could also choose Gentiles to be covenant members was out of the question: Gentiles were not part of the covenant people.

This, then, becomes the crux issue: what are the criteria by which God’s covenant people are chosen? How do the covenants made with Abraham and with Israel intersect? It is to this question that Paul now turns.
Paul begins this section by an appeal to the “practical” righteousness that the Galatians had themselves experienced. There is little doubt that the primary audience Paul is now addressing is made up of non-Jews who were being compelled to become proselytes, i.e., become circumcised. So it is also the case that these Gentiles had forsaken their lives of paganism and turned to walk in righteousness. Their ability to do this, to overcome the deeply ingrained culture of idolatry, was nothing less than proof that God had done a miraculous work in their lives, a work enabled and energized by the Ruach. This was a clear reality in the lives of the Galatians, and Paul now appeals to this as the first argument that they are already fully covenant members and do not therefore need to take further steps to become covenant members.

1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Yeshua Messiah was publicly portrayed as crucified?

Having carefully discussed and explained his own experiences, and the Antioch incident (which was for Paul very similar in principle to the very issues being faced in Galatia), Paul now turns to the primary problem facing the Galatian congregations. He already has explained the actions he took with Peter in Antioch, and it is clear his perspective has not changed. Here, in his first direct address to the Galatians since 1:13, Paul emphasizes the work of the Spirit in the believer, a theme which is central to the overall message of this epistle.

You foolish Galatians – Paul has returned to his sharp rhetoric! He is thoroughly amazed that those who had so evidently seen the work of the Spirit through changed lives could equally be so easily dissuaded by the Influencers. Is it possible that they did not understand and personally know the reality of their own salvation? Impossible! Something else must be at work here.

who has bewitched you – Paul is convinced that the Influencers have mesmerized the Galatians through their smooth words and sophistic strategies. But it is not beyond reason to suggest that Paul may have also considered a demonic influence at work, since it is beyond his thinking that something less could account for the Galatians’ about-face. Had the Influencers put the “evil-eye” upon the Galatians!? Indeed, to use such language fired a shot across the bow of the Influencers! Their message was not merely an alternative theology, it was the kind of thing with which even the demons could work. The word “bewitched” (βασκαίνω, baskaino) is used only here, and may have a sense of “begrudge.” Some have suggested that

The implication is that the other missionaries in Galatia must begrudge the Galatians’ experience of the Spirit, received without any commitment on their part to observe the works of the law.

Whatever the case, Paul’s perspective is clear: the reality of the work of God among the Galatians was irrefutable evidence that He had drawn them into the covenant.

1 Dunn, Galatians, p. 152.
before whose eyes Yeshua Messiah was publicly portrayed as crucified – “Their looking at the cross ought to have had sufficient power to avert or counter any evil spell.” Here is the center of Paul’s message—here, and always (cf. 1Cor 1:23; 2:2)—the crucified and risen Savior. First and foremost Paul wonders how anyone who had clearly seen (i.e., understood) the death of Messiah for them could turn from it to seek other ways of right-standing before God. Apparently Paul had so graphically and biblically explained and “painted the picture” of Yeshua’s selfless death for His own (note the Greek προεγράφη, proegraphe, “to set forth for public notice”), that he could speak of the Galatians as actually witnessing the crucifixion. For all practical purposes, they had stood at the foot of Yeshua’s execution stake.

Here is the core issue for us as well. How easy it is to become overly familiar with the “message of the cross,” so familiar that we fail to see it as central and foundational to all we are and all we hope to be. Paul came preaching “Messiah crucified,” and it was this message, energized by the Spirit, that fastened onto the hearts of the Galatians in the first place and arrested them from their lives of idolatry, drawing them into the covenant family of God, confessing Yeshua to be their Master. Like Paul, we must ever see the atoning work of Yeshua as the very warp and woof of the fabric of faith in which we live. A stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks, the death of the Messiah must constitute for us the very theme of our song. For it is by the blood of Messiah that we are set free to worship the Creator. It is by His death for us that we are made the righteousness of God in Him. It is our union in His death and resurrection that constitutes for us the very life that is the totality of our existence.

Here, as in 2:19, the tense of the verb “crucified” is perfect where we might expect the aorist. The risen Savior, alive at the right hand of the Father, is nonetheless constantly bearing the scars of His sacrifice for us. He was crucified once, never again to taste death, but never can that picture be erased from the spiritual conscience of the believer. For while glorying in His resurrected life, we can never forget the supreme price He paid that we might be His. “Crucified, and still portrayed as crucified” is the sense that Paul gives. And after seeing such a sacrifice, how could one ever turn to another way?

2–3 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Torah, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

The question Paul now puts to the Galatians is significant. It does not center on what Paul did for them, nor seek to shame them for their apparent lack of allegiance to him as their teacher and mentor. He does not ask them to think back at a point of decision, nor some ritual event that gave them “membership” in a group. Rather, he asks them to make a careful assessment of how it was that the Ruach HaKodesh did His evident work in their lives. Here we see a clear principle in the Apostle’s theology: the life of faith is one characterized by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. It is out of the question to think that salvation could be summed in what modern

2 Ibid.
3 BDAG, “προγράφω”.
theologians have called “positional righteousness.” As noted above, the right-
eousness of Messiah, imputed to the believer, secures and in every way guar-
antees the actual or “practical” righteousness of the child of God. Thus, Paul
may point to the evident work of the Spirit in the lives of the Galatians as proof
that they have been drawn into the family of God. This happened, not through
a man-made ritual, nor through so-called Torah observance, but by God’s
sovereign grace infused into the life of the believer through the indwelling
Ruach HaKodesh, the Spirit of holiness.

Here, as before, the “works of the Torah” refer to those stipulations set forth
by the Influencers (and those they represented) as the requirements for “group-
membership.” Like the Qumran sect (who also used the phrase), the Influenc-
ers were teaching that covenant membership—to be a full-fledged, bona fide
covenant member—was afforded only to those who were the “seed of Abra-
ham,” something naturally given to the Jew, but something acquired by the
Gentile through becoming a proselyte (=circumcision). But Paul’s point is clear:
did they receive the Spirit or not? Were their lives overtaken by the Spirit of
God, evidenced by their pursuit of righteousness, and their lives of holiness?
And if so, was the Spirit of God active in their lives because they had become
proselytes, or because they obeyed (heard) the gospel message, received by
faith? The answer is clear. Like Cornelius and those Gentiles gathered with him
who received the Ruach HaKodesh (much to the surprise of Peter, Acts 10:44ff;
11:15–18), so these Galatians had received the Spirit, evidenced by their
changed lives and perseverance in the faith. And like Cornelius and his house-
hold, the fact that the Ruach HaKodesh took up dwelling with them was proof
that God had received them into His covenant. For surely God Himself does
not dwell with the unrighteous.

The phrase “hearing with faith” is literally “the out from faith hearing” (εξ
ἀκοῆς πίστεως). We should understand the word “hearing” in its Semitic sense
of “obeying,” “acting upon what one hears.” Thus, it was not that the Gala-
tians simply heard the message of the Gospel as Paul delivered it, but that they
obeyed the message through the exercise of faith. This, no doubt, resulted in
evident repentance of sin, and a calling out for God’s mercy as displayed in
Messiah Yeshua. Thus, “obedience that comes as the result of faith” is contrast-
ed by “works of the Torah.” One is the gift of God, the other is the program of
men.

Are you so foolish? – Paul has asked a question, but he already knows the
answer. So here, as previously, he is using rhetorical means to bring the Gala-
tians to their senses. Surely they received the Spirit as the gift of God’s grace
through their confession of Yeshua as the Messiah, and their willingness to
submit to the Gospel message. To think otherwise could only be the “logic” of
a fool. But it is understandable how these non-Jewish believers could be
overwhelmed by the unified voice of the Influencers, especially with the
apparent backing of James. (We should presume that the Influencers referenced
James and the Jerusalem community as agreeing with their position.) After all,
the Gentile believers were the “newcomers.” How could they stand in the face
of this formidable opposition? Moreover, the Influencers did not present
themselves as the “opposition,” but as representatives of a long standing
tradition and reality. As far back as they could look, the Gentiles had entered
the covenant through becoming proselytes. Why should it change now? The
story told by tradition had great strength.

This line of reasoning could not have escaped Paul either. Did he honestly
think that these Gentiles, some of them no doubt new to faith in God through
Messiah, could reason against the generational “widsom” of Jewish leaders, the so-called “party of the circumcision?” One must consider the very real possibility that Paul’s language here is, in fact, ironic rebuke, in the sense of expecting his words to shame the Gentile believers into action, the kind of action of which they otherwise may have felt incapable.

Having begun by (with) the Spirit … – Paul uses the terms “begin” (ἐναρχομαι, enarxomai) and “finish” (ἐπιτελεῖον, epiteleõ): what does he mean by these? While enarxomai has the basic meaning of “begin,” epiteleõ can mean “to bring about a planned result,” “to accomplish.” The two words are used together in 2Cor 8:6 and Phil 1:6—

So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. (2Cor 8:6)

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Messiah Yeshua. (Phil 1:6)

It seems clear that Paul is considering the aspect of justification (being declared righteous) as the “beginning” and the on-going accomplishment of sanctification (righteousness within the life of the believer) as the work of “completing” or “finishing” one’s salvation. The fact that the other two times Paul uses these words together also clearly reference the relationship of justification and sanctification would strengthen the idea that he also has them in mind here.

But the primary antithesis is that of Spirit and flesh, an antithesis not uncommon in Pauline literature. Here, as also possibly in 2:20, Paul most likely uses the word “flesh” to denote ethnic identity. The idea is certainly not that the Influencers were teaching that living righteously (being completed) was something done apart from God. Rather, the more obvious message of the Influencers was that to be reckoned as a “complete” covenant member required a conversion process through which one acquired a new pedigree. The matter of one’s ethnicity (“flesh”) was all important in the minds of the Influencers.

Paul’s point, then, is parallel to Romans 4. For there, Paul argues that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised. From being in the class of “sinner” as the Galatians were being told they were, they, like Abraham, had been declared righteous without circumcision (=ritual of conversion). Abraham, at the beginning of Genesis 17, was admonished to “keep on walking before Me and be perfect.” My translation “keep on walking” is based upon the fact that the verb הָלַךְ (halach, “to walk”) is in the hitpael which has the sense of “walk around,” “walk here and there,” “walk back and forth.” The idea conveyed, therefore, is of continuing action. Abraham was already walking with God, and already demonstrating his faith by his obedience. Thus, circumcision came as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he already had. He gained no further covenant status by being circumcised. Rather, circumcision was a sign of the covenant of which he was already a member.

The same was true of the Galatians. Their faith in Yeshua had confirmed them as bona fide covenant members. They did not need circumcision in

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4 Rom 8:4-6,9,13; 1Cor 5:5; 2Cor. 7:1; Gal 3:3; 4:29; 5:16-17; 6:8; Phil 3:3; 1Tim 3:16.
5 HALOT, “⾛,” hitp.
order to “complete” their covenant status. This they had, not on the basis of the “flesh” (=pronounced ethnic status on the basis of becoming a proselyte) but on the basis of the work of the Spirit Who produced faith in them and marked them as covenant members by His evident presence in their lives.

For Paul, the presence of the Ruach was an indication of the eschatological blessing promised by the Prophets. Ezekiel said that in the last days God would sprinkle Israel with clean water (a reference to the ceremony of cleansing by the ashes of the Red Heifer), and put a new spirit within her (Ezek 36:22ff). Joel likewise prophesied of the pouring out of the Spirit upon all “flesh” in the last days (Joel 2:28ff [Heb. 3:1ff]). Isaiah 44:3 promises that the Spirit of God would be poured out upon the descendants of Israel in the last days. For Paul, then, the evidence of the Spirit within the lives of the Galatian believers was proof that God was keeping His promise and that they had been gathered into the covenant by their faith. For the Galatians to go back to Paul’s “former life in Judaism” in which covenant status was based upon ethnic identity was in no way a “completion” but an undoing of the Gospel message itself. Such thinking was sheer folly.

We should note here that for Paul, the evidence of the Spirit accompanies the “beginning,” not some second phase of one’s salvation. For Paul, as well as for Yeshua, the reception of the Spirit was the beginning of true discipleship, not some “second blessing” subsequent to initial faith. The presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer (i.e., a life changed by the Spirit’s work into one of obedience and righteousness) is, for Paul, the sure proof of right-standing before God. It is not some additional, extra blessing, but the very essence of salvation itself. “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom 8:14). Thus, for Paul, the activity and presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer is the norm, not the exception.

Moreover, he was concerned about a teaching on completion or perfection which actually ran counter to and nullified the shared experience of the Spirit, as both the common basis of all Christian fellowship (2Cor 13:13) and as characterizing the whole life of discipleship from the beginning. As is also implicit in Paul’s talk of the Spirit as “first fruits” (Rom 8:23), the “end” is already contained in the “beginning.”

4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

The word “suffer” (πάσχω, paschō) can have a broader meaning than “suffer.” BDAG notes that the word originally meant all the experiences that befall a person, whether good or bad, but that as the word evolved it was used more and more of those things that cause trouble in a person’s experience. Thus, the word can mean “have a good experience,” and they translate the phrase in v. 4 as “have you had such remarkable experiences in vain?” So the NRSV translates our verse: “Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing.”

It would appear, then, that a neutral sense for the word may well be warranted, and that Paul is pointing to their own experience in their life of faith, comprised of both experiences of joy and of sorrow. Surely they may have suffered rejection by their families, and may have experienced economic loss. But they also witnessed the moving of the Spirit among them (in signs and wonders) and the evident change of their lives as they were conformed to the
ways of God.

The fear that Paul labored under was that somehow all of this would be "in vain," that having run, he might not finish (cf. 2:2). The failure that Paul speaks of here is most likely not that of salvation at its core. Surely the Influencers believed that they were saved and that they also had received the Spirit. To have denied these things would have marked them in unmistakable terms as "unbelievers." Rather, Paul is concerned that the open door to the Gentiles was being closed, and that their inclusion into the covenant God made with Israel was now to be choked off by the insistence upon a man-made ritual, the "works of the Torah," which would ultimately undermine and deny the Gospel as it is in Yeshua. It seems clear that in Paul's mind, Galatia was a test case, and a core one at that. If the Galatians could be persuaded that they were second-class citizens apart from becoming proselytes, then the whole mission to the Gentiles would be skewed and would ultimately fail. It appears to me that this is Paul's greater concern.

5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Torah, or by hearing with faith?

Paul returns to the foundational question: what are the sure identity markers for those who are "in Messiah?" His answer, which he has already given in v. 2, is the evidence of the Spirit in His work of sanctification. Paul speaks of God "providing" (ἐπιχορηγεῖν, epichoregeô) the Spirit. This Greek word is used four other times in the Apostolic Scriptures but never in relationship to the Spirit. Paul never accredits the giving of the Spirit to Yeshua even though the Gospels record Yeshua's promise that He would send the Spirit. The two texts which caused such division in the 6th Century Christian Church (over whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father only, or from the Father and the Son, known as the filioque controversy) are:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26)

When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me .... (John 15:26)

Paul always ascribes the giving of the Spirit to God (1Cor 2:12; 2Cor 1:2; Gal 4:6; 1Thess 4:8; cp. Eph 1:17). In the mystery of the Godhead, Paul maintains a careful balance in which he ascribes to Yeshua the divine nature but keeps certain roles separate. The fact that the word "who provides" is a present participle in the Greek would indicate that Paul considered the present work of the Spirit within the life of the believer to be an on-going activity by the benevolent action of the Father. In other words, from Paul's perspective, the presence of the Spirit is evidence of the abiding work of grace in the lives of believers. This continual activity of "providing the Spirit" would paint a picture, not of repeated endowments of the Spirit but a steady supply (in the picture of the metaphor). The point for Paul's current argument is that the initial giving of the Spirit in the conversion of

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7 2Cor 9:10; Col 2:19; 2Pet 1:5,11.
the Galatians was not simply a past event, but something that was the initiation of a life lived in the Spirit. The relationship they enjoyed with the Father was made possible through the sustained presence of the Spirit. Thus, the grace of God in the continual supply of the Spirit to the Galatians as Gentiles was all the proof necessary (at least for Paul) that God was pleased with them, and that they needed no additional ceremony (works of the Torah) or ethnic status (flesh) to obtain a full covenant relationship with the Almighty.

But the evidence of the Spirit among the Galatian believers was not only in the daily walk of sanctification. He had also manifested Himself in the working of miracles. Once again, the verb “working” (ἐνεργεῖν, energēi) is a present participle, so that we might translate: “He who keeps on providing you with the Spirit and keeps on working miracles among you ….” Miracles is δυνάμις, dunamis, a word that means “power” but is often used of the miraculous work of God. It is not uncommon to see the word “powers” (miracles) used with “wonders” (τέρας, teras) and “signs” (σημεῖον, semeion). What Paul implies here is that the presence of miracles among the congregations of Galatia were, in fact, proof of the Spirit’s presence. Here we have Paul’s firsthand report that miracles were in existence in the earliest gatherings of The Way, something to which the Apostolic Scriptures give ample evidence. These miracles functioned as signs to substantiate Yeshua’s promise to the disciples, that they would receive the “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). As they went about performing miracles, and as the believing communities formed and also witnessed miracles, the victory of the risen Messiah was manifest without dispute.

These miracles, then, were the sure proof of the Spirit’s work, given to verify the reign of Yeshua as Messiah. Having stated this, Paul returns to his primary question: did the Galatians experience these miracles as a result of becoming proselytes or as the fruit of the gifts of the Spirit given to them when they believed? The answer to the rhetorical question is obvious: the holy presence of the Lord in the abiding work of the Spirit was the seal of their genuine membership in His family.

1. The Words Used

τέρας, teras – usually translated “wonder” (16x in the Apostolic Scriptures)

In the Apostolic Scriptures teras is always used with either σημεῖον, semeia, “signs” or δυνάμις, dunamis, “power” or both. Only once does it stand by itself, and that in a quote from the Tanach (Acts 2:21 quoting Joel 3:3 [Eng 2:30]) for the Hebrew לְפֹתָּים, mophthim, “signs.” The order of words when used together seems to bear no significance on the meaning, though usually teras stands second: “signs and wonders.”

The basic meaning is “wonder,” “omen” and is doubtlessly added to semeion and dunamis as indicative of the amazement or astonishment which accompanied these supernatural events.

The Patristic literature regularly employs θαύμα, thauma, “object of wonder,
amazement” to describe the miracles, though this term is never so used in the Apostolic Scriptures. \(\text{θαυμάσιος, thaumásiós} \) ("wonderful things") is used in Mt 21:15, and the verbal form, \(\text{θαυμάζειν, thaumazein} \) ("to be amazed") is often the consequence among those who view the miracles. In ecclesiastical Greek \(\text{παραδοξός, paradoxós} \), "strange, wonderful, amazing" is often found in notes about the miracles but is employed only at Lk 5:26 in the biblical texts.\(^{12}\)

\(\text{σημείον, semeion} \) – usually translated “sign” (77x in the Apostolic Scriptures, 75 if the long ending of Mark is discounted)

The basic meaning of semeion (and related forms) is a sign (usually visual though also auditory at times) “by which one recognizes a particular person, or thing, a confirmatory, corroborative, authenticating mark or token.”\(^{13}\) Semeion is itself not necessarily miraculous and, in the Greek mind, “its reference is to disclosure as the indispensable presupposition of all knowledge.”\(^{14}\) The aspect of “miraculous” attaches to the word by context or by being used with the adjoining terms such as teras or dunamis.

Seméion corresponds to the Hebrew \(\text{_enum, 'ot} \), with essentially the same meaning. ‘ot as well does not necessarily denote the miraculous, though the context often makes it clear that this is the meaning. The signs given by Adonai in the Tanach vouch for the validity of His word and promise, as the blood of the Pesach (Ex 12:13), the rainbow (Gen 9:8f), circumcision (Gen 17:11) and the Sabbath (Ex 31:13, 17). Signs are used to authenticate the message or authority of the messengers, as with Moses in Egypt (Ex. 7).

The Hebrew which corresponds to \(\text{σημεια και τερατα} \) (signs and wonders) is \(\text{אוהות ומופתים, }\)‘otot umof’tim\) and is used primarily in the period of Adonai’s miraculous dealings by the hand of Moses (Ex 7:3; cf. Dt 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 29:2; cp. Jer 32:20; Ps 78[77]: 43; 105[104]:27; 135[134]:9; Neh 9:10). The “signs and wonders” of the Tanach are not seen as so “extraordinary” as in the later Greek and Roman cultures. All events are from the hand of God so that signs and wonders only confirm the fact that God is able to do all things; they emphasize His might and glory and enforce the truth that Adonai stands as the only true God. Thus, Israel and all nations are to encounter and recognize Him as sovereign (Dt 4:35; 1Ki 18:36ff; Ps 86[85]:10). The ultimate purpose of signs in the Tanach is to authenticate the glory of the divine Name, i.e. His character (Ps 72[71]:18f) and thus unbelief and disregard are marks of an unexplainable hardness of heart (cf. Ex 7:3; Num. 14:11; Ps 95[94]:8ff).

In the Tanach, miracles are primarily found in three groups: Moses (and the exodus), Elijah and Elisha (and conflict with pagan religions) and Daniel (during the exile). Miracles do occur in other periods but not with the same frequency and not entirely devoid of natural means in the scope of God’s providence. In every case, however, those who view the miracles from the foundation of faith see in them the revelation of God’s power and glory.

In the Apostolic Scriptures, “signs and wonders” and equivalent terminology carry on the basic meaning of the Tanach, i.e., the acts of God which


\(^{13}\) \textit{DNTT}, 2:626.

\(^{14}\) \textit{TDNT}, 7:204.
authenticate His presence among His people. The primary focus in the gospels is the agency of Messiah in the performance of these signs and wonders.

The word “sign” (semeion) is found in the Gospels (48x), Acts (13x), Paul (8x), Hebrews (once), and Revelation (7x). Semeion is entirely lacking in the other literature of the time.\(^{15}\)

The miracles of Yeshua may be grouped into three categories:

1. Miracles of healing (casting out demons, healing lepers, blind, lame, deaf-mutes)
2. Raising from the dead (daughter of Jairus, Mt 9:18-26; Mk 5:21-43; Lk 8:40-56; widow’s son, Lk 7:11-17; Lazarus, Jn 11)
3. Miracles of nature (stilling the storm, Mt 8:18, 23-27; Mk 4:35-41; Lk 8:22-25; feeding multitudes, [the 5000, Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:32-41; Lk 9:11-17; Jn 6:5-13]; [the 4000, Mt 15:32ff; Mk 8:1-10]; walking on water, Mt 14:22-23; Mk 6:45-52; Jn 6:15-21; cursing the fig tree, Mt 21:18f; Mk 8:12ff, cf. Lk 13:6-9; coin in the fish’s mouth, Mt 17:24-27; catch of fishes, Lk 5:1-11; cf. Jn 21:1-19; water into wine, Jn 2:1ff).

Messiah’s comments concerning the signs and wonders performed, point to the conclusion that their purpose was to identify Himself as the promised Messiah, and that consequently, His appearance at this time in history marked the beginning of the promised age of God’s visitation and restoration of Israel. This is apparent from His message to the doubting John the Baptizer (Mt 11:1-6, cp. Lk 7:18-23) and His quoting of Isaiah 35 and 61 as applying directly to Himself. Luke 13:32 has language reminiscent of Isaiah 35:5. The text seems to indicate that His healing miracles should have even convinced Herod that Yeshua was the Messiah, and (if Herod was so witty as a fox) he should know that to overthrow the Messiah is an impossibility.

Yeshua regularly rejects the demand for signs (Mt 16:1; cp. Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16) but points to the sign of Jonah (Mt 12:38ff; 16:1ff; Lk 11:16, 29ff). In like manner, the message of Yeshua is that if one will not believe the word of God, he will not be brought to repentance by miracles (Lk 16:27ff).

Interesting in this regard as well are the times when Messiah instructs those healed not to tell anyone about the miraculous event (Mt 8:4, 30; Mk 5:43; 7:36; Lk 8:56). By analogy, this compares to the use of the parables in the teaching of Messiah. As the parables were directed to those whose understanding was already founded in faith, likewise miracles required faith for their proper understanding and interpretation. Those who viewed the miracles apart from faith came to improper conclusions (cf. Mt 12:24; Mk 2:5, 6; 3:22; 6:1-6; Lk 11:15). It appears that Yeshua purposed to do miracles in the presence of those who were believers and declined to perform signs and wonders in the face of blatant unbelief (cf. Mt 13:58; Mk 5:37; 6:5-6).

In Mk 6:5 the phrase seems difficult: kai ouk edunato ekei poiesai oude mian dunamin (“and He could do no miracle there …”). The interpretation must center upon the purpose of the miracles, even as the statement of John that “the Spirit was not yet” (Jn 7:39) must be understood in the context of the coming of the Spirit in His new covenant work. As Cranfield notes:

> “The point of kai ouk edunato [“and He was not able”] is not that Jesus was powerless apart from men’s faith, but that in absence of faith He could not work mighty works in accordance with the purpose of His

\(^{15}\) DNTT, 2:629.
ministry; for to have worked miracles where faith was absent would, in most cases anyway, have been merely to have aggravated men’s guilt and hardened them against God.16

In the same way, those who experienced the miraculous, healing touch of Messiah also were those whose sins were forgiven and who continued on being His disciples (Mk 2:5; 5:34; 7:29; 9:23f; Jn 4:50-53; 11:40). The point is that faith precedes the miraculous in the ministry of Messiah if the miracles are to fulfill their purpose as “signs.”

It is noteworthy that Jesus’ miracles presuppose faith, they do not first create it. Miracles are not proof which silence all opposition: if the believer sees God at work, the verdict of his opponents is that Jesus is in league with Satan (Mt 12:24; Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15).17

δύναμις, dunamis – “power,” “deed of power,” “miracle,” “wonder”

The miraculous works of Yeshua and His Apostles are frequently referred to by the word dunamis, denoting obviously the divine power by which these events occurred. While the word itself has a wide range of use, when employed to denote the miraculous, it is found most often in the plural. It is found alone (Mt 7:22; 11:20, 23; 13:54, 58; Lk 10:13; 19:37) and also in connection with the previous words studied, i.e., teras and semeion (Acts 2:22; 2Co 12:12; 2Thess 2:9; Heb 2:4).

The command of Yeshua to the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until “power” was received traces a vital link between the “mighty works” of Messiah and those to be performed at the hands of His Apostles and witnesses (Acts 1:2-8).

The word finds particular expression in Acts, at times used substantively to denote the miracles themselves (Acts 2:22; 6:8; 8:13; 19:11) while in other instances the word is used (in the singular) to speak of the power by which the Spirit’s work is performed (3:12; 4:7, 33; 10:38). In the story of Simon (8:10), the word is used as a title given by the people because of his great magic (Acts 8:9).

The three terms so far discussed are found all together in four places (Acts 2:22; 2Cor 12:12; 2Thess 2:9; Heb 2:4) though in differing order, proving no necessary priority in their usage. They describe, from differing vantage points, the miracles themselves: their purpose (signs), their effect (wonders), and their source (powers).

ἐργόν, ergon – “work,” “deed”

In the Synoptics ergon is used rarely, only in two occasions of the miraculous work of Messiah (Mt 1:2; Lk 24:19). By contrast, John in his gospel uses ergon 27 times, 18 of which refer specifically to the miracles of Messiah. Again, in contrast to the Synoptics, John’s use of dunamis is entirely lacking. This is striking in light of the fact that dunamis is the most frequent word employed by the Synoptic writers to speak of Messiah’s miracles. The point must be that for John the miraculous constitutes nothing more nor less than the work (ergon) of Messiah. “What to men are miracles are to God and to

17 DNTT, 2:631.
Christ no more than “works.”\textsuperscript{18}

All that He does, He does by the divine power of the Spirit and every movement of His life is in direct harmony with the Father’s will. Thus, Yeshua does the Father’s work (Jn 17:4). His life, i.e., His work, marks Him out as the theanthropic One and can be precisely duplicated by no one (Jn 15:24). The work of the Son is to reveal the Father, His own actions verifying His divine attributes and unique ability to reveal the Father (10:37ff).

Summary

The miracles of Yeshua in the Gospels give a unified voice as to their purpose. They were done to show to Israel and thus to the nations that the promised Messiah had come and that the kingdom of light had come with great power into the kingdom of this darkness. That the miracles of Messiah are not done to evoke His great and widespread acceptance is indicative of their purpose. They were signs of His mission, done in a manner that could not be adequately refuted, thus demonstrating the power of God. They were the direct fulfillment of the prophets who spoke of the Messiah as yet to come. Rightly understood, they marked Yeshua of Natzeret out as the promised Messiah, as the object of true faith, the promised One who would make the Father known. Thus, once recognized as Messiah, He would be accepted by all who trusted Him as the only object of true saving faith and the only avenue to the Father.

\textbf{-------- End of the Excursus --------}

Paul now leaves the obvious proof of the Galatian’s own experiences in their walk of faith, and moves to an argument based upon Scripture (it will extend through chapter 4). This is his third line of argumentation: the first was the Gospel agreed upon in Jerusalem, the second, the Galatian’s own experience in faith, and the third, the witness of Scriptures.

We should not think that Paul leaves the argument based upon Scripture for last because the proofs from experience were more weighty. Much to the contrary, it appears as though the Scriptural argument is left for last because it is precisely the foundation upon which the experiential evidence must be built and interpreted. Thus, Paul now takes us to the very foundations of his argument in the redemptive covenants of Israel.

And as we might expect, he begins with Abraham. Surely, for Paul, Abraham stood as the primary model of faith. And the point that made Abraham such a good example for the Galatians is that he was accorded righteousness on the basis of faith before he was circumcised. Thus he quotes Genesis 15:6. He will combine this with a quote from Genesis 12:3 in which the scope of the Abrahamic covenant is seen to embrace the Gentiles (nations).

It seems most likely that the remainder of Chapter 3 is given over to an explanation and application of these two key texts and their bearing upon the salvation of the Gentiles within the overall scope of God’s redemptive plan.

6–7 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

Paul begins with the Greek καθὼς, kathos, meaning “just as,” to the degree that,” “in so far as.” He uses this word to introduce his quote from Genesis 15:6, most likely as an abbreviation of the common “just as it is written” (כתוב, kakatuv). It is clear that the Jewish communities of the 1st Century held the written Scriptures in very high regard. But it is also a particularly Pharisaic method of argumentation to quote a text of the Torah in support of one’s argument. Paul appeals to the final word of the Scriptures in support of his basic premise.

And what is his basic premise? In short, Paul has set himself to answer the simple question of how one can be constituted as a member of God’s covenant and enjoy the promises guaranteed by that covenant. His answer is straightforward: one gains full covenant membership through faith in Messiah Yeshua—there is no other way to become a covenant member. And the paradigm for such covenant membership is none other than Abraham himself. This is because Abraham stands as the exemplar for God’s sovereign choice, a response of faith, and a life of righteousness. What is more, all of this occurs before Abraham is circumcised, a major factor in Paul’s use of Abraham in his appeal to the Galatians.

When I say that there is only one way to enter the covenant, and that through faith in Yeshua, some might immediately object that unbelieving Israel, though having rejected Yeshua, is nonetheless within the covenant, a factor that appears to discount the premise I have suggested. I would respond by agreeing that unbelieving Israel is, in fact, within the scope of the covenant, but only because God has promised by His sovereign power to bring her to faith. That is to say, there is a sense in which unbelief may cause a cutting off from the covenant (illustrated by Paul’s olive tree metaphor and the broken off branches). From man’s vantage point, genuine faith is only evidenced by a confession of Yeshua as Messiah, and willingness (coupled with the ability) to live righteously by faith. What we cannot see is God’s sovereign purpose of election to bring all those He has chosen to full and final salvation. Thus, from man’s viewpoint, those who have rejected Messiah are not within the covenant boundaries and cannot expect to be blessed with the covenant promises. However (and this is a most important factor), from God’s viewpoint, and with His full knowledge of the election process as He has determined it, all the chosen ones are covenant members regardless of present status in regard to faith. God sees everything in the eternal present, so that He accords covenant membership to those who, from mankind’s viewpoint, have not yet believed. From man’s point of view, there appears to be two levels to the covenant: one pertaining to this world, and one to the world to come. The covenant has been guaranteed to the nation of Israel because of the promises made to the fathers (Rom 11:28), and God has set Himself to bring her, on a national scale, to faith in Messiah Yeshua (Rom 11:26). He sees Israel in the completed reality of His divine providence. From our vantage point, however, we

19 The idea that the “unbelieving” branches are “broken” (ἐκκλάω, ekklaô) but not severed from the tree is possible, but in my perspective not probable. Unbelief (ἀπιστία, apistia, cf. Rom 11:20) for Paul is not merely a “wound” but a decisive factor.
cannot see God’s eternal plan and purpose. From our limited viewpoint, only those who confess Yeshua in genuine faith are covenant members. Yet we do not despise the nation of Israel, for unlike any other nation, God has made promises to her regarding her eventual repentance and covenant status.

Here we have the distinction between the national covenant status of Israel, and the covenant status of the individual. This is demonstrated in the covenant text of the Tanach. For while an individual could be “cut off” from the covenant through disobedience (neglect of circumcision, breaking the Sabbath, etc.), such individual disobedience does not negate the covenant as a whole. Thus, the promises are secured to the nation on the basis of God’s faithfulness, but they accrue to the individual only by faith. There is no corporate faith that is reckoned to each individual. The faith of Abraham is not reckoned to his offspring. Or to put it another way: there is no corporate righteousness. The righteousness reckoned to Abraham as a result of his faith is not reckoned to his offspring. Faith is an individual reality, not a corporate one.

Herein lies the crux difference between the theology of “the circumcision” and Paul. The Influencers were teaching a corporate righteousness—a corporate “faithfulness” accredited to all who were part of the corporate whole. Paul, on the basis of Torah texts like Genesis 15:6, held that righteousness, reckoned on the basis of individual faith in Yeshua (which was the inevitable fruit of God’s sovereign election), was the only means of covenant membership. Thus genuine faith in Messiah Yeshua gave the believer covenant status, not vice versa. We may represent the two opposing views like this:

The Influencers’ Viewpoint:

- God chooses the nation of Israel as His covenant people
- Individual enters covenant community (by birth or through becoming a proselyte)
- Covenant community is reckoned as righteous
- Individual is reckoned as righteous

In summary: corporate righteousness → individual righteousness

Paul’s Viewpoint:

- God chooses the individual to become part of His covenant people
- Individual exercises faith in Messiah Yeshua
- Individual is reckoned as righteous
- Covenant community made up of righteous believers

In summary: individual righteousness → national righteousness

The point of the above illustrations is this: the Influencers’ teaching was based upon the idea that Israel has corporate righteousness and thus anyone who is a member of Israel (has legal status as a Jew) is also righteous. In this
perspective, righteousness of the individual depends upon being part of corporate Israel. Paul’s perspective (which is also the perspective of Yeshua and the Scriptures as a whole) is that righteousness is accredited by God to the individual who has exercises saving faith in God and His Messiah, and that such righteousness is the means of membership in the corporate people of God.

Thus, Abraham becomes the primary example for Paul’s viewpoint. What must have struck Paul is the manner in which Genesis 15:6 speaks so directly of Abraham’s personal faith: “And Abraham believed in God . . .” (Αβρααμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, Abraam episteusen to theo). Abraham did not gain righteousness by joining a corporate entity that was reckoned righteous by God, but through personal, individual faith in God and His promises, promises that were to be realized in the promised Messiah.

But Paul does not stop with quoting Genesis 15:6. He also quotes Genesis 12:3, “all the nations will be blessed in you.” Since the covenant promises were made to Abraham and to his seed (offspring), Paul understands covenant status to be the possession of Abraham’s seed. But who constitutes the seed or offspring of Abraham? For Paul, the answer is: those who participate in the same faith that Abraham had exercised, that is, those who, like Abraham, have personal, saving faith in God and His Messiah.

The notion that physical lineage to Abraham (corporate identity) provided the individual with righteousness before God had apparently become the prevailing idea among the Judaisms of Paul’s day. This was based on the idea that Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, which was likewise based upon Genesis (chapters 17-29), and other texts, like Isaiah 51:2:

Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain; When he was but one I called him, then I blessed him and multiplied him.

Israel likewise thought of herself as the “seed of Abraham” based upon the words of the Tanach:

But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend … (Is 41:8)

O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! (Ps 105:6)

What is more, it is clear that the Jewish people of Paul’s day considered their descent from Abraham a matter of pride:

Said R. Aqiba, “Even the poorest Israelites do they regard as gentle folk who have lost their fortunes. For they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Anyone in whom are these three traits is one of the disciples of Abraham, our father; but [if he bears] three other traits, he is one of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked: (1) a generous spirit, (2) a modest mien, and (3) a humble soul—his is one of the disciples of Abraham, our father. (1) a grudging spirit, (2) an arrogant mien, and (3) a grudging spirit, (2) an arrogant mien, and (3) a

20 m.Bava Qama 8.6.
proud soul—his is one of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked. What is the difference between the disciples of Abraham our father and the disciples of Balaam the wicked? The disciples of Abraham our father enjoy the benefit [of their learning] in this world and yet inherit the world to come, as it is said, That I may cause those who love me to inherit substance, and so that I may fill their treasures (Prov. 8:21). The disciples of Balaam the wicked inherit Gehenna and go down to the Pit of Destruction, as it is said, But you, O God, shall bring them down into the pit of destruction; bloodthirsty and deceitful shall not live out half their days (Ps. 55:24).

... look upon the descendants of Abraham, O Father, upon the children of the sainted Jacob, a people of your consecrated portion who are perishing as foreigners in a foreign land.

[THEN THE LORD GOD FORMED] THE MAN: for the sake of Abraham. R. Levi said: It is written, The greatest man among the Anakim (Josh 14:15): ‘man’ means Abraham, and why is he called the greatest man? Because he was worthy of being created before Adam, but the Holy One, blessed be He, reasoned: ‘He may sin and there will be none to set it right. Hence I will create Adam first, so that if he sins, Abraham may come and set things right.’

R Berekiah commenced: We have a little sister—אחות (Song of Songs 8:8) – this refers to Abraham, who united (איחה) the whole world for us. Bar Kappara observed: Like a person who sews a rent together.

These are but a few of the many references to Abraham in the rabbinic literature that show the reverence accorded to the Patriarch. Recognizing this fact will help us appreciate the weight of Paul’s words as he utilizes Abraham as the exemplar of faith and righteousness. For Abraham, in Paul’s theology, is not simply the father of his physical offspring, but he is more particularly the father of all who participate in the same faith which he had.

It is easy to see how such a position could evolve into replacement theology. If Abraham is the father of those who participate in the same faith which he had, then disobedient Israel appears to be disowned. This, of course, was not Paul’s message. Rather, Paul, and Yeshua before Him, called the nation to become what they were intended to be: those who believed as their father Abraham believed:

They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Yeshua said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.” (John 8:39)

Yeshua was not discounting their heritage, nor their lineage to Abraham. But He was emphasizing what the Torah emphasizes, namely, that covenant

21 m.Avot 5.19.
22 3Mac 6.3.
23 Mid. Rab. Genesis §14.6
24 Mid. Rab. Genesis §39.3.
membership is not guaranteed on the basis of bloodline. Disobedience can result in being cut off. Only on the basis of true faith, the kind of faith which Abraham had, could a person be reckoned by God as righteous, and righteousness that would therefore become actual through the work of God within the believing individual (a change of heart), which in turn secured his or her covenant status as the object of God’s grace and thus recipient of His covenant promises.

Genesis 15:6 holds an important place in Paul’s message. It is quoted in the Apostolic Scriptures five times,²⁵ four by Paul and once by James. It will be important for us to look at this crucial text itself within the context of Genesis 12-17.

The narrative flow of Genesis 12-17 is structured to emphasize the promise of offspring to Abraham. The covenant, initially given in 12:1-3, requires offspring for its realization. Abram will be blessed by God, which includes making Abram into a great nation, making his name great, multiplying his offspring, protecting him, and making him a blessing for all the nations. Obviously, the idea of a great nation requires offspring. Likewise, a “great name” (ךְָּוְּאַגֲדְּלָה שֶמ, ve‘agadelah shemecha) means a name that is remembered from generation to generation. Furthermore, in order to be an influence of blessing upon the nations, Abram would have to have children to carry the blessing to subsequent generations. Thus, the covenant promises themselves set up the necessity for offspring.

This need for children raises the tension in the narrative. The first event which occurs is the coming drought, and the descent of Abram and Sarai to Egypt looking for food. Here, the question of offspring meets a crucial junction: Sarai is taken by Pharaoh, a pagan king, for a wife. Abram’s unwillingness to protect her as the one through whom the promised offspring would come has thrown suspicion upon the successful outcome of the covenant. This, however, is precisely the point of the narrative. The covenant, cast as it was in the form of an unconditional Grant Treaty, is dependent upon God, not Abram. The story has set the stage to show this. Pharaoh, warned in a dream sent by God Himself, releases Sarai back to Abram, and sends with her all manner of gifts and recompenses. Abram, who cowered in fear of Pharaoh, is now solicited to pray for him as the prophet of God! He begins to act out the promise of blessing to the nations.

When Abram and Sarai returned to the Land, they brought back so much wealth that there was not sufficient room for them and for their relative Lot. This meant separating and finding sufficient grazing land for the increased livestock. It also meant that Abram and his family, blessed with material wealth, were the targets of military incursions by surrounding nations. Lot and his family are taken, along with all his wealth. But the blessing promised to Abram is once again highlighted in the story by the fact that he goes with his 318 men, overcomes the marauding band, retrieves Lot, his family and all his possessions, and returns with even more booty.

Upon returning, Abram meets Melchizedek, another portent of the blessing that God intended to bestow upon Abram as His chosen covenant partner. For Melchizedek, priest of El Elyon, blesses Abram once again, emphasizing that the covenant promises were still intact and that God was being faithful to His word.

²⁵ Rom 4:3, 9, 22; Gal 3:6; James 2:23.
The complication of the narrative, however, is heightened when it is clear that Abram is still without children. After God reaffirms His intent to bless Abram (15:1), Abram responds with the urgency of the matter (15:2-3):

“O Lord GOD, [אֲדֹנָי יהוה] what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.”

What arrests our attention initially is the use of the combination אֲדֹנָי יהוה (Adonai YHVH) in Abram’s address to God. This is the first time in the Torah where this particular combination occurs. As such, it marks the crucial point of the covenant, the point at which God gives Abram a sign of His intentions to bring a promised son through whom the covenant blessings will be realized.

This particular combination, אֲדֹנָי יהוה, Adonai YHVH, is not commonly used in the Torah. Besides the two times in our text (15:2, 8), it is only found elsewhere in Deut 3:24 and 9:6. Interestingly, however, it is used repeatedly in 2Sam 7 (7x), in connection with the Davidic covenant. And it becomes more prolific in the prophets (particularly Isaiah, 25x) until it is used as the common name for God by Ezekiel (217x). It seems clear that the use of this particular combination was understood to signal a messianic hope, used as it was this first time in connection with the promise of seed to Abram. And the fact that it becomes the Name used by David in his prayer of thanksgiving for the covenant bestowed upon him would emphasize that, like Abram, David realized that the ultimate blessing of the covenant was to be realized in the Seed who is Messiah, the son of David.

This was not lost on Paul. For he connects the promise of “the seed” with the promise of Messiah, and comes to the conclusion that in the final analysis, the “seed” in which all the nations would be blessed is none other than Yeshua (Gal 3:16ff).

So it is in the context of this promise of the “seed” that Moses makes his theological interjection. In a kind of soliloquy by the narrator, Moses make a most profound statement in Gen 15:6.

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<th>MT</th>
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<td>יהוה</td>
<td>και ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ ἐις δικαιοσύνην</td>
<td>Καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.</td>
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It can be readily seen that Paul quotes the Lxx verbatim. Moreover, the Lxx is an accurate translation of the MT, utilizing the dative (τῷ θεῷ, τῷ θεό) to represent יְהֹוָה (ba’donai), “in YHVH.”

The crucial question is: what is meant by the phrase “believe in Adonai”? Even before one looks at the wording itself, the narrative structure gives the answer: Abram believed that God would fulfill His promise to give him a son. Or could we make it even more specific and say that Abram believed that God will fulfill His covenant promises to him through a son that He would give? That is to say, Abram had come to understand that all of the promises of the covenant rested in the appearance of a son, and he was willing, at this moment...

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26 The patach on the preposition [contains:1] represents the intended pronunciation of the circumlocution for the Tetragrammaton, i.e., אֲדֹנָי.
in time, to cast himself upon the faithfulness of God, and trust Him to fulfill what He had said. Thus, “to believe in or on Adonai” (hifil of נאמן followed by the preposition ב) does not mean “to be faithful to Adonai,” but to “trust in His word,” that He will do what He has said.

This construction, the hifil form of נאמן (“to stand firm,” “trust”) followed by the preposition ב (“in,” “on”) and יהוה is only found five times in the Tanach.27 It is used to characterize the nation of Israel after crossing the Red Sea (Ex 14:31). In 2Ki 17:14 the nation is rebuked for not believing in Adonai, and in 2Chron 20:20, the nation is admonished to put their faith in Adonai. In each case, the context is that of taking God at His word and acting upon it, i.e., the very essence of true faith.

The same construction but with אלהים, Elohim, is found in Psalm 78:22, recounting the wayward history of Israel as those who did not trust in the Lord.

In each case, the phrase “to believe in Adonai/Elohim” means to take His promises as true and to act accordingly. But of all these instances where the same verbiage is used, only Gen 15:6 is in the singular. Here we have the record of a man, Abram, to whom was given an eternal promise—a promise that envisioned and encompassed the whole of mankind—and it is at the point in which the promised seed is explicitly promised that the statement of his faith is made. Surely Abram trusted God before this time! He had left his family and country, and followed the commands of a God he had before never known. Surely his life of faith in this unknown God is sufficiently documented (in spite of his own foibles and failures) to demonstrate that Abram “believed in God” prior to the events of chapter 15. We must conclude, therefore, that Moses interjects this statement at precisely this point in the story, because from the perspective of Moses, the promise of the seed was the capstone of the covenant, and he therefore awaited this specific time to make the categorical statement regarding Abram’s faith.

For Paul, the fact that the promised seed was the capstone of the covenant, and that Moses signals this by waiting until that point in the story to declare Abram’s faith, was too charged with theological ramifications to be overlooked. For Isaac, the promised seed to Abram, stood as a foreshadowing of the ultimate Seed of Abraham, that is, the Messiah. Recognizing that Isaac’s birth was a miraculous event, being born to Sarah when she was beyond childbearing capability, the miraculous birth of Yeshua is all the more the anti-type of which Isaac is the type. The statement of Abram’s faith in God, then, can be utilized by Paul to demonstrate faith in Messiah. Just as Abram understood the covenant to hang upon the coming of the promised son, so the covenant would ultimately rest upon the victory of the promised Son Who would stand as Abraham’s seed in the ultimate sense. Paul is not misusing Scripture when he makes this claim. He is attempting to understand the whole context of the statement in Gen 15:6. As such, he recognizes that Moses has penned these words within the narrative structure to signal the pivotal place the promised son played in the realization of the covenant. From Paul’s vantage point, this can only be fraught with prophetic significance, pointing to the Son of God Who alone fulfilled and maintains the covenant.

27 Gen 15:6; Ex 14:31; Deut 1:32; 2Kings 17:14; 2Chr 20:20.
6–7 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

So Paul begins with Abraham, and with the central verse regarding his faith in God. He has already argued that the gospel he is proclaiming is that which was agreed to be true by the pillars. He has further argued that the experience of faith among the Galatians themselves was a second witness to the reality and truthfulness of his gospel. Now he has moved to an argument based upon the Scriptures themselves.

Covenant membership is the question, and how one becomes a covenant member. Did the Influencers reference Abraham as a model for their point of view? It is likely that they did. One could imagine that they pointed to the fact that Abraham was circumcised, and (though anachronistic in its approach) this proved that he had become a proselyte. If the Galatians were therefore to follow in the footsteps of Abraham, they would likewise become circumcised as proselytes. This might have been a powerful and persuasive argument to the Galatians.

As such, Paul cannot resist the challenge to begin with Abraham as the model of faith, not circumcision. His point is obvious: the statement of faith, and the promise of the covenant, is made before circumcision, not after it. But even more important was the fact that the Scriptures pronounced Abraham righteous, not on the basis of what he had done via circumcision (which was yet to come), but on the declaration of God based upon his faith.

But this could not have been news to the Influencers! Surely they knew the order of events in the book of Genesis. Rather, the issue that was clearly at hand was whether Abraham’s “faith” should be understood as a basic “trust” in God, or whether it should be considered as “faithfulness.” In fact, it was a fairly common rabbinic perspective that the statement of Gen 15:6 was simply a prophetic statement foretelling Abraham’s faithfulness on Mt. Moriah (Gen 22).

Some have suggested this was James’ viewpoint. For in his second chapter, he notes (v. 21) that Abraham was “justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar.” Then in the immediate context (v. 23), he quotes Gen 15:6. But for James, Gen 15:6 is not a prophetic statement awaiting the faithfulness of Abraham in offering up Isaac. Rather, his willingness to obey God in the ultimate test was a proof of the faith he already had. The statement of Gen 15:6 is for James, what it is for Paul—a clear and unabashed statement of Abraham’s personal faith in God and His word. The akedah is clear proof of that faith. For James, the two combine in the sense of faith (Gen 15:6) and works (Gen 22), a necessary combination if faith is genuine.

Nonetheless, the Jewish literature does tend to interpret Gen 15:6 as speaking prophetically of Abraham’s faithfulness, demonstrated at Mt. Moriah. Note 1Macc 2:52:

Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?

Jubilees likewise presents Abraham’s connection to God as based upon his faithfulness:

And it came to pass in the seventh week, in the first year thereof, in the
first month in this jubilee, on the twelfth of this month, there were voices in heaven regarding Abraham, that he was faithful in all that He told him, and that he loved the Lord, and that in every affliction he was faithful. And the prince Mastema came and said before God, ‘Behold, Abraham loves Isaac his son, and he delights in him above all things else; bid him offer him as a burnt-offering on the altar, and Thou wilt see if he will do this command, and Thou wilt know if he is faithful in everything wherein Thou dost try him. And the Lord knew that Abraham was faithful in all his afflictions; for He had tried him through his country and with famine, and had tried him with the wealth of kings, and had tried him again through his wife, when she was torn (from him), and with circumcision; and had tried him through Ishmael and Hagar, his maid-servant, when he sent them away. And in everything wherein He had tried him, he was found faithful, and his soul was not impatient, and he was not slow to act; for he was faithful and a lover of the Lord. (Jub 17:15–18)

Pirkei Avot 5:3 says:

Ten trials were inflicted upon Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace, and he withstood all of them, to show you how great is His love for Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace.

The perspective seemed to be that Abraham’s close, covenant relationship with God was the result of his faithfulness under trial and not vice versa. But for Paul, the text of Gen 15:6 could not be interpreted this way, and he no doubt believed that his readers would agree with him, at least as far as the basic meaning of the Genesis text was concerned. Abraham believed in God, by which is meant that he accepted what God had said about Himself and about Abraham, and that he was willing to make his life decisions based upon that belief. As such, Abraham’s faith was the kind of faith that renders a person righteous in the eyes of God, for it is a faith which is itself a gift from God. Such saving faith secures one’s place in God’s covenant family, and thus also secures the blessings of God.

Paul’s conclusion, after quoting Genesis 15:6, is straightforward (v. 7): “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.” Here Paul comes to his primary point in this section: how does one become a “son of Abraham?” Since the language of the Abrahamic covenant was “to you and to your seed,” covenant membership is tied to being reckoned as the offspring of Abraham. This, of course, was the exact same message of the Influencers, with one major difference: how one could claim the status of Abraham’s descendant. For them, the means was physical lineage (birth) or becoming a proselyte. For Paul, the means was faith. Even physical descendants of Abraham who refused to be obedient to the covenant could be cut off, as he demonstrates in his olive tree metaphor of Romans 11. Faith, therefore, was the key.

But what was also very important to Paul was the sequence of events in the Genesis narrative, which clearly shows that God’s declaration of Abraham’s righteousness came before the akeidah event that proved Abraham’s utter faithfulness (obedience) to God. That Paul has sequential events in mind may be seen in verse five, dealing with the presence of the Spirit among the Galatians. In asking the question of how the evident work of the...

28 Paul makes this a central point of his argument in Romans 4.
Spirit came about, he uses the preposition **ἐκ, ek**, “out from”: “does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it out from the works of the Torah, or out from the hearing with faith?” We should understand this to mean: did the evident work of the Spirit follow (i.e., come as a result of) your experience of faith, or did it follow (i.e., come as a result of) becoming a proselyte? The question is rhetorical: surely the manifest work of the Spirit came following their genuine exercise of faith in Yeshua.

This was the pattern as described in Acts. The Spirit came upon Cornelius and those with him, not after they became circumcised, but before (Acts 10), much to the astonishment of Peter. They were constituted as covenant members by the mikveh of the Ruach, not by the mikveh of rabbinic conversion.

The same was true for Abraham, who became a member of God’s covenant as a result of God’s sovereign choice, confirmed by his faith (Genesis 15:6), not as a result of obediently following God’s commandment of circumcision (Genesis 17). The sequence of events makes this clear. And thus the only conclusion that can be reached from the Genesis 15:6 text, when viewed in the light of the Abrahamic narrative, is that he was a covenant member before he was circumcised. This, for Paul, established a clear axiom: covenant membership was possible on the basis of faith without being circumcised. And the logical conclusion to be drawn from this axiom was that Gentiles, as Gentiles, could be bona fide covenant members. Therefore, when one asks regarding who constitutes the “sons of Abraham,” the answer must begin with the issue of faith, not obedience to Torah.

But what does it mean to be a member of the covenant God made with Abraham? The language of Genesis 15:6 explains this in the words “reckoned” (**חָשַׁב, chashav**; **λογιζόμαι, logizomai**) and “righteousness” (**צְדָקָה, tzedakah**; **δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosune**). To be “reckoned as righteous” means to be received into fellowship with God; to be invited into His company as one acceptable in His sight. The Hebrew word means “to think” or “to consider.” Since faith lays hold of the promise of God, that He would offer a means of dealing with sin on the scale of justice, such faith also accepts the evaluation of the Judge that He will render the sinner forgiven and cleansed, that is, righteous. But God’s determination to provide a means of payment for sin is coupled with His plan to make the sinner righteous by changing his heart and empowering him through the indwelling Spirit. Those who believe are therefore accepted by God as righteous because He knows what He intends to do on their behalf, that is, to make them righteous after the pattern of His own Son.

The Greek word **λογιζόμαι, logizomai**, which is translated “reckon,” comes from the world of commerce.** It means to write a value in a ledger book, to credit something to a person’s account. God is able to credit righteousness to the sinner because Yeshua’s sacrifice paid for the sin, thus balancing the debt owed. But righteousness is also credited to the sinner’s account because God has determined to make the sinner righteous, conforming him to the pattern of Yeshua Himself (Romans 8:29).

Rather than adopting the view that “righteousness” is something “reckoned” but not actual, or that “righteousness” speaks strictly of one’s personal obedience, the context of Genesis indicates a “both-and” rather than an “either-or.” God reckoned Abraham as righteous because He credited to Abraham the payment of sin made by the Seed in whom Abraham’s faith was placed. But He also reckoned Abraham as righteous because in His sovereign design He

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29 **BDAG**, “λογιζόμαι”.
purposed to produce obedience within Abraham. And since God sees the end from the beginning, He is able to reckon as true what for us is yet future. Thus, obedience (personal righteousness) is the inevitable fruit of saving faith. But the sequence is crucial: faith precedes obedience, not vice versa. In the following context, then, Paul is not disparaging the Torah. Rather, he is showing that Torah does not produce obedience. Rather, faith produces obedience to the Torah. Those who are “out from the Torah” but who are not “out from faith” can never hope to be reckoned as righteous in God’s eyes.

8–9 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Paul has linked the crucial concepts of “faith” and “righteousness” in the pivotal quote from the life of Abraham (Genesis 15:6). Likewise, he has linked to this “righteousness by faith” the identification of Abraham’s descendants: those who participate in the same faith which Abraham possessed may, like him, be counted as covenant members. But here is one more significant link: the Abrahamic covenant envisioned the Gentiles.

However, it is to be noted that Paul does not begin this sentence with “For” (γὰρ, gar). The sentence actually begins with the post-positive particle δὲ, de, which is a general connective particle in this case. He is not so much offering further support for his statement that those “who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (v. 7). He is rather connecting this axiom to his next point, that the Gentiles figure into Abraham’s family as well.

The quote is synthesized from Genesis 12:3 and 18:18, but is clearly from the Lxx:

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<tr>
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<td>καὶ ἐνευλογηθοῦσαι εἶν σοὶ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς</td>
<td>ἐνευλογηθοῦσαι εἰς σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἐθνη</td>
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<tr>
<td>וְנִבְּרְּכוּ בוֹ כֹל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ׃</td>
<td>καὶ ἐνευλογηθοῦσαι εἶν αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ ἐθνη τῆς γῆς</td>
<td>... in you all the nations will be blessed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>And in you all the tribes of the earth will be blessed. (12:3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (18:18)</td>
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30 Cf. Gen 18:19, where “chosen” (NASB) is actually the verb ידוע, “to know” – “For I have known him (Abraham)...,” which speaks in covenant terms, denoting the intention of God to bless Abraham with the promises of the covenant.
The quote is from the Lxx, but conflates the texts of Genesis 12:3 and 18:18, utilizing the second person singular “you” from 12:3 but taking the word “nations” (rather than “families” or “tribes”) from 18:18.

The Scriptures (ἡ γραφή, he graphe) are personified as a prophet, looking into the future and seeing when the Gentiles would flock into the covenant of Abraham. Paul gives his own interpretation of the text (Genesis 12:3; 18:18) in the manner in which he introduces the quote: “God would justify (reckon as righteous) the Gentiles by (‘out of’) faith.” Personified as a prophet, the Scriptures “preach” the Gospel “beforehand” (προευγγαλίζω, proeuangelizomai). The Greek verb is used only here, and describes for Paul the heart of the “blessing” promised to the nations: the Gospel, the good news of Messiah, was announced to Abraham, not only in regard to himself and his seed, but also in regard to the nations who would be blessed through him. Here is clear proof that Paul’s gospel was not something newly fashioned by him, nor something unknown in the Torah. Abraham had the same gospel proclaimed by Paul!

But we should also not overlook the significance that this text has in Paul’s theology. For not only is the Gospel evident from the very first covenant promise given to Abraham, but the covenant is equally incomplete apart from the Gentiles. God’s grace, given to Abraham, is diminished if it is not also seen to have had its effect upon the nations. Insofar as the Influencers were suggesting a change of ethnic status for the Gentiles via the ritual of proselytism, they were also proposing something that rendered the promise of the covenant unfulfilled. Without the Gentiles, the Abrahamic promise is not all that it should be.

But what is of particular importance to Paul in this context is that the Gospel, encapsulated in the Abrahamic covenant, envisioned the Gentiles. In Paul’s understanding, the “blessing” promised to the nations was nothing less than that they would be declared righteous by faith. This fits the Hebrew perspective of “blessing” (ברך, barach), for far from merely words of consolation or eulogy, blessing in the Hebrew sense means to bestow grace and peace, to sustain and to cause the person to prosper. One need only consider the Aaronic blessing given to the priests to pronounce over the people (Numbers 6:24-26). This blessing envisions nothing less than God’s full provision of protection, sustenance, and covenant relationship. Thus, the promise that the nations would be blessed in Abraham is charged with covenant significance. In the same manner in which Abraham and his family are promised blessing, so the nations share in this blessing in every way.

This emphasizes the continuity in Paul’s gospel and theology. The covenant which God had made with His chosen people was the revelation of His saving purposes for mankind. There is not a hint of a “two-covenant” scheme in Paul’s teaching. From the beginning God intended to save all of His chosen ones—both from the descendants of Abraham as well as from the nations—through His Messiah, Yeshua. The plan envisioned a single host of people from every tribe, kindred, and tongue, worshipping in a unified manner, praising the One God of the universe, and carrying out His will through obedience to His Torah. As Dunn writes:

31 The five Genesis texts that describe the blessing upon the nations (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) are mixed in the words used to describe the nations. 12:3 and 28:14 both use משפחות, “families,” while the other three references use עמים, “nations.” It is possible that 12:3 and 28:14 form an inclusio for the whole.
The promise which constituted Israel as heirs of the promise, seed of Abraham, also placed the blessing of the Gentiles to the forefront. Paul takes the ‘all the nations’ seriously—Gentiles as well as Jews, not Gentiles distinct from Jews. The promise to Abraham’s seed was incomplete without the Gentiles’ sharing in the same blessing. Consequently, Paul did not see himself as doing anything which was contrary to the spirit and character of his ancestral faith. On the contrary, his mission to the Gentiles was nothing other than the fulfillment of Israel’s mission.32

The force of these two Scripture quotes (Genesis 15:6 / 12:3 / 18:18) taken together offered but one conclusion for Paul: “So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer” (v. 9). The manifestation of the Spirit among the believing Galatians had been the result of (“out from”) faith, not the result of submitting to the ritual of a proselyte. In like manner, the Gospel preached to Abraham prophesied of the time that the Gentiles (“nations”) would enter the covenant as a result of (“out from”) faith. The experience of the Galatians has only proven what the Scriptures of Moses had promised: the nations (Gentiles) would become covenant members with Abraham and his descendants through faith in the Messiah Yeshua.

In this verse we have the phrase “out from faith” used a third time. In this instance it is used substantively of those who have believed: “So then, those who are out from faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.” The word that describes the covenant members (οἱ ἐκ πιστεως, hoī ek pisteōs) is the same word that describes Abraham (τῷ πιστῷ, to pistro, “the believer”). And even more to the point is the use of the preposition συν, sun, meaning “with.” The Gentiles are not blessed in their own realm, or in their own covenant, but they are blessed with Abraham. One covenant, one people. It was thus the combination of the two texts (Genesis 15:6 and 12:3/18:18) that had formed Paul’s perspective. The quote from Genesis 15:6 was linked via גֶּזֵירָה שָוה, gezeira sheva (linking of texts that have similar words or key ideas/concepts). Paul’s logic is this: Abraham was promised blessing; this blessing (according to Gen 15:6) came as result of his faith. The promise made to Abraham also included a blessing upon the nations (Gen 12:3). Thus, the conclusion is that the nations would likewise receive this blessing as a result of their faith.

It is noteworthy how Paul writes this sentence, for he uses the word “faith” as an adjective. We might translate it more literally as, “Therefore, those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” Nearly ever time a similar construction is found in the Apostolic Scriptures (singular use of πιστὸς, pistos, “faith/faithful” with the article), it seems to describe “faithfulness” (Matt. 24:45; Luke 12:42; 16:10; Col. 4:9; 1Pet. 5:12; Rev. 1:5; 2:13; 3:14). One might think that such a construction rather hurt Paul’s argument than helped it. For the Influencers would have capitalized on the fact that Abraham was counted as righteous because he was faithful, proven by his obedience to be circumcised. Paul does go to great lengths in Rom 4 to explain himself, but here he simply makes the statement. When comparing his fuller statement in Romans, it becomes clear that Abraham’s faithfulness was a mark of his previous “faith/trust” in God, and that is Paul’s point here. We therefore come to understand that for Paul, there was no bifurca-

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32 Dunn, Galatians, p. 165, emphasis his.
tion between “faith” and “faithfulness.” They are two sides of the same coin. One may therefore speak of either with the full assurance that the other exists.

10 For as many as are of the works of the Torah are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Torah, to perform them.”

The abrupt shift in emphasis in this verse indicates that Paul has anticipated the polemic of the Influencers and hastens to address it. Paul had just linked the faith of Abraham with the blessing to the nations, reasoning that they too would receive this blessing by faith even as Abraham did. The Influencers would have been quick, however, to show from the same Genesis narrative that Abraham was blessed because he was obedient (Gen 22:15ff). The question, then, was the place of the Torah in the whole matter of blessing from God. Did obedience to Torah (in this case, accepting circumcision as a proselyte and all that came with this act) precede God’s blessing of righteousness, or did God’s blessing of righteousness come first, effecting a change of heart that resulted in obedience?

Excursus: The Works of the Torah

This is now the sixth time we have seen the phrase “works of the Torah” (ἐργα τοῦ νόμου, 2:16(3x); 3:2,5,10) and we should stop to investigate it more closely. One of the difficulties we have when encountering the word “Torah” (usually translated “Law” because of the Greek word νόμος, nomos) in the Apostolic Scriptures is that we wrest its meaning away from the 1st Century context in which its meaning is derived. It is clear that in the 1st Century the Oral Torah (the rulings of the Sages that had taken on halachic authority) had found its place alongside the Written Torah. In some cases it was viewed as secondary to the Written Torah, but in practical measures it was received as equal or even superior. The prevailing view was that the Oral Torah gave the proper manner in which the Written Torah was to be obeyed. We must remember, then, that when we encounter the word “Law” (νόμος, nomos) in the Apostolic Scriptures, we can not simply presume that the Books of Moses are its referent. Such a monolithic approach to the word ignores the historical setting. We must, in every case, at least give way to the possibility that Written and Oral Torah are viewed as a unified whole (to one degree or another) in the use of the word “Law.”

This is particularly true with the phrase “works of the Law” or “works of the Torah.” Until the discovery of the text from the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMMT), we had no extra biblical instances in which the phrase “works of the Law” or “works of the Torah” was used. Now that this Qumran document has been discovered, we have another source to consider, and another witness as to what Paul might have meant when he spoke of “works of the Torah.”

The document itself has been titled “Maseket ma’asei haTorah,” “some of the works of the Torah.” Because of its fragmentary nature, there is no complete consensus on who the author and recipients were. Stegeman34 believes it was written by the Teacher of Righteousness, the Qumran leader, to the High Priest in Jerusalem, and that the “homily” is a rebuke for the lack of Torah obser-

33 See above, p. 92, n. 56.
vance by the Jerusalem Temple. Others have suggested that the document represents a schism within the Qumran society itself, with one faction rebuking the other for failure to observe Torah in accordance with the sect’s halachah. Whatever the case, the general thrust of the document seems clear: certain matters of halachah and Torah-observance were being either neglected or disregarded by some, and as a result they were in danger of the curses of the covenant and the judgment of the final day. However, if they were to accept the halachic understanding of the Torah issues which are raised in the text, and begin to practice them, then it would be “reckoned to them as righteousness” and all would be well.

These are some of our pronouncements [concerning the law of Go] d. Specifically, some of pronouncements concerning] 5 (B2) works of the law that we have determined ... and all of them concern [defiling mixtures] 6 (B3) and the purity of [the sanctuary ....35 
And it will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him, to your own benefit*3*36

What were the issues which 4QMMT raised? Here is a topical list:

1. Ban on offerings using Gentile grain
2. Ban on sin offerings boiled in Gentile or copper (?) vessels
3. Ban on sacrifices by Gentiles
4. Ban on eating the peace offering on the 4th day (Lev 7:11-18)
5. Rulings on the purity of those who prepare the red heifer
6. Ban on bringing skins of cattle and sheep into the Temple
7. Ruling on skins and bones of unclean animals
8. Ban on Temple entrance after contact with skins of a carcass
9. Ruling on who is fit to eat the holy gifts
10. Ruling on what constitutes “outside the camp” for the place of sacrifice
11. Ruling on the sacrifice of pregnant animals
12. Ruling on eating the fetus after a pregnant animal is sacrificed
13. Ban on the inclusion of the unfit into the congregation of Israel
14. Ban on the entrance of the blind into the Temple
15. Ban on the entrance of the deaf into the Temple
16. Ruling on poured liquids and how they might contract impurity
17. Ban on dogs in the Temple
18. Ruling on fruit trees as pertains to first fruits
19. Ruling on cleansing of lepers; unintentional/intentional sins
20. Any part of a bone constitutes corpse impurity
21. Offspring of unlawful marriages still produces legitimate children
22. Ruling on crossbreeding animals which are clean
23. Ruling on intermarriage of priest with the people.

Obviously, this list contains matters taught directly in the Written Torah. But there are a significant number of issues which are clearly sectarian, suggesting that the Qumran interpretation and it alone is the proper halachah. What is more, if the recipients of the admonition expect to be counted

36 4Q398 f14_17ii:7 (C31), translation, Ibid.
as righteous, they will adhere to the halachah as laid down by the Qumran Teacher. Furthermore, since the Qumran society considered itself the community of the righteous, it is also clear that for one to enter the Yachad (community), he would have to prove himself to have both received these teachings and practiced them (where possible).

The fact that both the phrases (“works of the Torah” and “counted as righteousness”) are found in this document is incredibly important for understanding the same phrases in Paul. What we now see is that the phrase “works of the Law/Torah” was used in Paul’s day to refer to specific sets of rules or halachah which a given group required in terms of its self-definition. Simply put, such a list of “works of the Torah” constituted the entrance requirements into the group. Since the group would no doubt consider its own interpretations of the Written Torah to be the correct interpretation, they would also have held that only those who adhere to their halachah would actually be obeying the Torah and living righteously. “Works of the Torah,” then, refers to halachah required for entrance into the covenant community (as envisioned by each sect), not personal obedience to God’s word. And since covenant membership was considered one and the same with the status of “righteous,” it is not difficult to understand how adhering to a given set of halachot to gain membership in the community was one-and-the-same to being reckoned as righteous.

---------- End of the Excursus ----------

For the Influencers, the proselyte ritual (circumcision) was their “works of the Torah.” It was necessary for the Gentile believers to become proselytes in order to enter the covenant community, something in turn which was necessary to gain the status of “righteous.”

Paul, then, anticipating their argument that even Abraham was obedient to the commandment of circumcision for which he was reckoned as righteous, directly confronts their position by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26.

In terms of how the section is structured, it would appear that Paul is making a direct contrast to his former statement of blessing. Those who participate in the same faith that Abraham had are likewise blessed as he was blessed. In contrast, those who are of the works of the Torah are under a curse. We should not forget that the influencers’ “good news” is not “faith in Yeshua plus Torah,” but that unless the Galatians would become proselytes, they were not covenant members, that is, were under God’s wrath. Those who were insisting that conversion to their Judaism was necessary for salvation had rejected the idea that faith in the Messiah was all that one needed to be reckoned righteous as a member of God’s covenant.

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<th>MT</th>
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<th>Paul</th>
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<td>אָרוּר אֲשֶר לֹא־יָקִים אֶת־דִׁבְּרֵי</td>
<td>επικατάρατος πᾶς ἀνθρώπως ὃς οὐκ ἐμμενεῖ</td>
<td>επικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>הַתּוֹרָה־הַזֹּאת לַעֲשוֹת אוֹתָם</td>
<td>ἐν πᾶσιν τῶν λόγων τοῦ νόμου τοῦ τοῦ ποιήσαι</td>
<td>ἐμμενεῖ πᾶσιν τῶς γεγραμμένος ἐν τῷ</td>
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<td>Cursed is he who does not</td>
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<td>establish the words of this Torah to do</td>
<td>does not abide in all of the</td>
<td>does not remain in everything</td>
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<td>them.</td>
<td>words of this Law to do</td>
<td>that is written in the book of the Law to do</td>
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In the ears of the Influencers (and those they represented), the boldness of Paul’s statement must have been shocking. Granted, he had just finished speaking about “blessing,” so to continue on about “curses” might seem appropriate. And for any Jewish audience, “blessings and curses” would send one’s mind immediately to the concluding chapters of Deuteronomy and the covenant enactment there. But what would have sounded brash and bold was the linking together of those who “relied on the works of the Torah” with those who stood ready to “be cursed.” Establishing the words of the Torah by doing them (as Deuteronomy 27:26 commands) was no doubt the perspective of those who were preaching the “works of the Torah.” From their perspective it was the others who were in danger of God’s covenant judgment and wrath, not them.

Most Christian commentators have interpreted this section based upon their assumption that by the “works of the Torah” Paul means those who attempt to find their own righteousness through keeping the Torah. Paul therefore quotes Deut 27:26 to show that it is impossible to keep all of the Torah, and that to fail to do just that renders a person under the Torah’s curse. A further assumption by the typical commentators is that the Torah required perfect and continual obedience in order to escape its curse, something humanly impossible. Therefore, no matter how zealous a person may be, since they fail to abide by every word of the Torah perfectly, they are doomed to receive the curses.

This standard interpretation has manifold problems. First is that such a reading of Deuteronomy simply cannot be sustained. The book is written with the perspective that God intends Israel to obey His Torah, and that she is able to obey it. Paul is quite aware of Deuteronomy 30:11ff (he quotes it in Romans 10):

For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

No one in Paul’s day believed that anyone could live out Torah perfectly, and no teacher would have required such a thing. To “abide” in the things of the Torah meant living within the provisions of the Torah, including its provisions for what a person was to do when he or she sinned (i.e., transgressed the Torah). As Dunn comments:

That Judaism, against which Paul here reacts, called for an impossible perfection is not part of the context of the argument at this point and should not be read into it.  

What, then, is Paul’s point and the basis of his argument? I would suggest that emphasis should be placed upon the manner in which Paul describes the Influencers as “those who are of the works of the Torah.” The phrase “of the works of the Torah” is literally “out from the works of the Torah.” That is, they find their covenant status to be based upon the exclu-

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Dunn, Galatians, p. 171.
sive position which Israel enjoys in the covenant, a position offered to the Gentile Galatians through obeying their halachah, that is, by becoming a proselyte. As such, the Influencers (and the Galatians, if they were to follow them) would be relying upon “the flesh” (ethnic status) as a means of being reckoned righteous before God. Paul knows from his own experience that such a position may render one blameless when judged against the halachah of the Sages, but when standing before the Almighty, the truth would be made known. For Paul, though he could confess his life before faith in Yeshua to be “blameless” as pertaining to the Torah (Phil 3:6), he realized after he experienced genuine faith that he, in fact, was not blameless; that his hatred against the Gentile believers of The Way was a blatant disregard and breach of the Torah (which enjoins mercy and hospitality toward the foreigner), and that in reality, the Oral Torah of the Sages for which he was no doubt doubly zealous, had actually set aside the Torah of God, just as Yeshua had taught (Mark 7:9): “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.” It was not as though Paul or the Influencers were suggesting that complete and perfect obedience to the Torah was required or even could be attained. Nor were they teaching that failure to maintain a supposed “perfect record” in terms of obedience to the Torah would result in divine curses.

Rather, what Paul had come to see was that the teaching “Israel is all righteous” had led to a dependence upon man’s traditions at the expense of God’s Torah. As such, to deny that Yeshua alone was the way to the Father (John 14:6) left a person doomed to a life of deception, that he was actually obeying the Torah when in fact he was not. Only faith and the Spirit Who came to those with faith could open one’s eyes to see the Torah as God intended it to be seen, and to live it out in humble obedience to God.

Paul knew all too well that the life of Torah prescribed by the Influencers was a life of pseudo-obedience. The cup could be well polished on the outside, but the heart could be full of filth. If the Galatians were to succumb to the theology that their conferred status of “Israelite” had won them righteousness, then they would also be relying upon salvation through their status rather than salvation through faith in Yeshua. As such, they would prove themselves to be without faith, and likewise unable to live in obedience to the Torah. What is more, since the Torah everywhere points to Messiah and enjoins one to cast himself in faith upon Him as did Abraham of old, to deny Him is to deny the very goal of the Torah. How could one claim to live according to the Torah and deny its essential message? Those who deny Him, regardless of how well they may claim to live out the precepts of the Torah, will one day stand before the Judge and have the reality of their lives revealed. And when they do, they will be receiving not the blessings of the covenant but the curses.

Here, then, was the crux issue: were the Galatians going to accept the Influencers’ standard for righteousness (covenant status based upon being an Israelite) or God’s standards? Regardless of how persuasive the Influencers were, with their arguments based upon a long-standing teaching of the Sages, their message was wrong because it disregarded the Messiah. And apart from the Messiah and the Spirit Who is given to those who are His, the Torah would remain letters on stone, followed by the traditions of men, and therefore would fail to bring about genuine righteousness. As such, the curses prescribed in the Torah for those who disregard its precepts would be enacted in justice. If the salvation offered by God, pointed to in the Torah, and realized in Messiah is disregarded, one should expect the curses, not the blessings. Paul is not degrading the Torah for having curses! Rather, when God enacts the curses of the
Torah upon those who REGARD IT, He is acting in faithfulness to His word. But the only possible hope for actually living according to the Torah is to be led by the Spirit of God: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” And only those who are “in Messiah” have the Spirit.

Paul’s quote of Deuteronomy 27:26 is neither directly from the Lxx nor a close translation of the Hebrew. It appears that Paul may be paraphrasing the Lxx or quoting it in a general way. While he uses slightly different terms, the meaning is nonetheless the same. In the larger context of Deuteronomy, the statement that one must abide by all the words of the Torah is an emphasis upon the unity of the Torah. Those who are truly covenant members are not allowed to “pick and choose” the statutes and ordinances which they want to obey. The Torah comes to the covenant members as a whole, and they must accept it as a whole if they are to prove themselves to be covenant members. Such a full acceptance of the covenant will also result in the acceptance of the Messiah. This is important to Paul because from his perspective, the Messiah (and thus, Yeshua) was the central aspect of the Torah. To fail to be faithful to Him was a clear breach of the Torah which could only result in cursing, not blessing. That is because faith in the Promised One of the Torah is itself the avenue by which one is able to obey. Dunn’s comments are worth noting:

What the covenant law demanded, in Paul’s view, is the obedience which expresses such faith (Rom 1.5), the love which is the outworking of such faith (Gal 5.6), not requirements of the law understood and practiced in such a way as to deny the sufficiency of the very faith on which the covenant was based.  

Indeed, the Torah consistently enjoins upon Israel her careful welcome of the Gentiles, not their exclusion. If the Gentiles were chosen by God to be covenant members as the promise to Abraham clearly indicated, then to restrict their involvement on the basis of man-made rituals (that of the proselyte ceremony) was contrary to Torah. This Paul proves by quoting Habakkuk 2:4—

11 Now that no one is justified by the Torah before God is evident; for, “THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”

Habakkuk 2:4 formed a central principle in Paul’s theology: he quotes it also in Romans 1:17. Since Abraham was declared righteous (“justified”) because he believed in God, the statement of the prophet only confirms what Moses had written. One did not stand righteous before God based upon his inclusion in Israel but by his faith in God, and thus in God’s Messiah. The question of whether “by faith” should attach to the subject (“the righteous by faith”) or the verb (“shall live by faith”) is actually moot in this context, for Paul agrees to both. A person is declared righteous on the basis of faith, because genuine faith always leads to godly living, that is, living righteously. God declares a person who believes as righteous, because He will inevitably make him righteous: what He has begun He indeed will finish (Phil 1:6).

So obvious is this in Paul’s understanding that he (either rhetorically or...
ironically) presents it as an indisputable axiom which is likewise evident (δηλος, delos) in the minds of the Influencers and therefore in need of no further proof. The word does means “to make clear,” “to reveal,” “to make understandable.” Paul’s underlying message is this: anyone who knows the Tanach would also know that right-standing before God begins with faith, not with the works of the Torah. The phrase “justified by the Torah” in this verse should most likely be taken as a short-hand form for “justified by the works of the Torah.” Paul is not in disagreement with James who taught that one is seen to be just (justified) by his obedience to the Torah (James 2:21ff). His statement that no one is justified by the Torah should be understood in the context as stating that “no one is justified simply because he is reckoned as part of Israel.” And to be even more specific in terms of the context of Galatians, “a Gentile will never be reckoned as righteous on the basis of becoming a proselyte.”

If we were to grasp the perspective of the Influencers by their core message, it would be: “Gentiles can never be part of the covenant.” Only Israel has been given the covenant, and thus entrance into that covenant was through joining Israel by acquiring the legal status of “Jewish.” In contrast, the core message of Paul, Yeshua, and the Prophets was that righteousness (covenant membership) was the fruit of saving faith because (like Abraham), faith in God and His Messiah always brings about righteousness. The basic message of Paul, then, was “all who have faith are covenant members.” Dunn39 represents this essential difference like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>covenant</th>
<th>works of the Torah</th>
<th>exclusion of Gentiles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>covenant</td>
<td>faith</td>
<td>blessing open to all nations</td>
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In this representation, the Influencers’ perspective may be explained this way: covenant membership is granted to all who are within Israel. Gentiles come into the covenant through becoming proselytes, which means they are no longer Gentiles. Thus, no Gentiles are ever covenant members. The second representation, that of Paul, is that the covenant consists of those who are of the faith of Abraham, and as such, covenant status may be extended to all who have faith, including the Gentiles.

Since the Influencers’ perspective excluded all Gentiles from the covenant (since their entrance into the covenant changed their pedigree), it also denied the final promise of the covenant, that “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” In this regard, it denied the Torah rather than establishing it. On the other hand, covenant membership on the basis of faith fulfilled the covenant and thus the Torah.

What is more, the prevailing view (represented by the Influencers) also produced an over-confidence in the possession of the Torah as marking a distinction between the Jew and the nations, and such over-confidence blinded one to the seriousness of sin. Since the Torah was viewed as an ethnic marker separating Jew from non-Jew (and thus covenant member from non-covenant member), “the Jew” felt safe within the Torah, putting him all the more under sin (Romans 2:1-3:20). In this situation, he was blinded to the fundamental importance of faith and the Messiah (and His work) as the object of that faith. And he was therefore also blinded to the fact that the covenant was, from its beginning, a matter of God’s grace. As such, any view of the covenant, includ-

39 Dunn, Galatians, p.173.
ing one’s method for bringing Gentiles into the covenant, which lacked conformity to this ever present principle of grace, was itself spurious and contrary to the nature of the covenant itself.

Could this line of reasoning have resonated in the minds of the Influencers? One can hardly think so. But it might have found a reasonable acceptance among the Galatians. After all, they had experienced the presence of the Spirit in their early steps of faith, and all they needed to help them past the arguments of the Influencers was the assurance that their faith had, indeed, placed them within the covenant. Paul’s insistence that the covenant was based upon God’s mercy and grace and not upon obedience to the Torah offered that solid foundation which they sought.

Paul’s quote from Habakkuk 2:4 is, once again, neither directly from the Hebrew text (MT) nor from the Lxx.

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<tr>
<th>MT</th>
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<th>Paul</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>תָּהֶֽה עֻפְּלָה לֹא־יָשְּרָה נַפְּשׁוֹ בְּ</td>
<td>εἰἀν ὑποστειληται οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχή μου ἐν αὐτῷ ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως μου ζήσεται</td>
<td>ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תַּאֶדְרֵיכָּה בֵּאָמֵנָתָה יְהִי:</td>
<td>If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him; but the righteous one shall live by My faith.</td>
<td>The righteous one shall live by faith.</td>
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</table>

Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous one will live by his faith.

The Hebrew text has the possessive pronoun “his faith,” (אֱמוּנָת) while the Lxx has “my faith” (πίστεως μου). Paul, on the other hand, quotes the text as an axiom or principle which therefore needs no possessive pronoun. Either one could have fit his argument well, whether the righteous one lives as a result of his personal faith in God (“his faith”), or he lives because God is faithful to His promises (“My faith”) makes little difference for Paul in the current argument. The point is simply that covenant status (at least from the human point of view⁴⁰) is the result of faith which leads to obedience (faithfulness) and not vice versa. One is not first a covenant member and then believes resulting in faithfulness. One first exercises faith through which he is seen as a covenant member, whose life within the covenant is one of faithfulness (=obedience).

Paul substantiates this divine order of covenant membership through yet another quote from the Tanach, Leviticus 18:5.

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⁴⁰ From the divine perspective, covenant status begins with God’s sovereign election of the individual or the nation, not their response to Him in faith. But from the human perspective, the response of faith is the first certain indication of genuine covenant membership.
Paul appears to combine the MT and the Lxx in his quote. He does not include the word “person” (הָאָדָם, ānqrwpov) as the MT and Lxx do, but he includes the direct object “them” (אֲוֹתָה, aŭta, aŭta, “do them”) which the MT has but the Lxx lacks. Once again, Paul is quoting this as an axiom or principle, and as such wishes to make it universal. Therefore, the inclusion of the term “person” is not necessary.

Paul wishes to stress what the original context of Leviticus 18:5 indicates: the life of obedience is one of covenant membership, not entrance into the covenant. Those who do the statutes and judgments are those who are already within the covenant, for Leviticus 18 is describing covenant life, not a proscribed method for entering the covenant.

Thus Paul introduces the quote from Leviticus 18:5 with the words, “Now the Torah is not of (out from) faith.” If we count the expression “from the hearing of faith” (literally, “out from the hearing of faith”) found twice in the opening verses of this chapter, this is the seventh time in these few verses that we have the expression ἐκ πιστεως, ek pistis, “out from faith.” Paul has utilized this expression to contrast the “works of the Torah,” his short-hand way of expressing the Influencers’ viewpoint, that covenant membership is based upon ethnic identity, itself characterized by Torah observance. Since this contrast is the central theme of this section, Paul can simply use the word “Torah” to mean “the works of the Torah,” as he did in verse 11: “no one is justified by the Torah,” meaning “no one is justified (gains covenant membership) through becoming a proselyte.” It seems clear that he is doing the same here: “the Torah is not of faith” means “the works of the Torah/becoming a proselyte is not out from faith.” This he proves by quoting Leviticus 18:5 which teaches that obedience to the Torah characterizes covenant membership but is not the means of entering the covenant.

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12 However, the Torah is not of faith; on the contrary, “he who practices them shall live by them.”

Paul begins the sentence with the connective δὲ, de, translated “however” by the NASB (NIV gives no connective; ESV uses the word “but”). The flow of thought surely connects to the previous quote from Habakkuk 2:4, by which Paul emphasizes that essential nature of faith in the covenant relationship. This, however, was not the message of the Influencers. They were teaching that Torah observance was the essential requirement by which a Jew retained covenant membership (possessed by virtue of having been born a Jew) or by which a Gentile could gain covenant membership (by acquiring Jewish legal status through becoming a proselyte). Paul’s categorical statement that “the Torah is not of faith” (ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἐστιν ἐκ πίστεως) must be seen in this context, namely, that the Torah as a marker of one’s legal status as a Jew is not the basis for covenant membership because the “works of the Torah” do not produce faith. Faith is the gift of God to His chosen ones by which they are enabled to see the Torah for what it truly is: the revelation of God that leads to Messiah (Rom 10:4). Apart from faith, the Torah functions only to condemn—it can never bring life (covenant membership). In fact, genuine obedience to Torah (obedience which includes right motives as well as right actions) flows from faith. Thus, the Influencers had the sequence backward: Torah does not produce faith, rather, faith produces obedience to the Torah.

This biblical sequence (that faith leads to obeying the Torah) is proven by the quote from Leviticus 18:5. The context of Leviticus 18 is that of instructions to covenant members (Israel) as she anticipates entering the Land. She is not to “walk” as the nations “walk” (i.e., in immorality and unrighteousness) but she is to obey the statutes and ordinances of Adonai, precisely because she has been redeemed by Him and therefore belongs to Him. Thus, living by God’s commandments is the characteristic of those who belong to Him. Their life is to be known by conformity to His statutes and ordinances.

Paul’s emphasis, therefore, in quoting Leviticus 18:5 is to show that obedience flows out of covenant membership, and not vice versa. One does not obey in order to gain covenant membership, but rather, one’s obedience is proof of covenant membership already possessed.

That this is Paul’s understanding of Leviticus 18:5 is corroborated by noting his use of the same text in Romans 10:5. There he likewise shows that there is a righteousness which conforms to the Torah, but that this righteousness (sanctification) is the result of faith (justification), not the means of faith. In both cases (Romans and Galatians), Paul is consistent in his use of Leviticus 18:5.

13 Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Torah, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—
expect to experience the blessings.

But it is not only the Gentiles who find themselves under the curse of the Torah (even though Gentiles are the primary focus of Paul at this point). All who fail to reckon with God’s method of salvation (the “righteousness of God” in Romans) will likewise experience the curses. Thus Paul is able to switch to the first person plural (“… having become a curse for us …”). God’s justice does not allow simply negating the curse—it must be enacted upon those who rebel against the covenant. Paul recognizes in the sacrificial system revealed in the Torah that God’s method of forgiveness is not to negate the curses which He promised, but rather to enact the curses upon a representative in order that those He represents may go unpunished. Like the redemption of the first-born (cf. Num 3:44-51) in which a sacrifice stands in the place of the first-born who is therefore redeemed, so the sinner who stands to be cursed is freed by the sacrifice of Yeshua. This “one-for-one redemption” stands at the heart of the Gospel and thus at the core of Paul’s teaching.

Redemption (Paul uses the word ἐξαγοράζω, exagarazō in three other places: Gal. 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5) always involves the payment of a price. The use of the compound term here (ἀγοράζω plus the preposition ἐκ) is most likely perfective, thus adding emphasis. We might translate “completely redeemed.” Redemption requires the payment of a price because the very character of God demands that the curse be administered since it is the wages of sin. Moreover, the one who is redeemed by price belongs to the one who paid the redemption. Thus, when the “price” which the curses required is paid, the redeemed sinner belongs to God.

“become a curse” (γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα, genomenos huper hemôn katara) is simply a more emphatic way of saying “became accursed. We might even understand the phrase to mean: “He became one who was cursed on our behalf.” Here, the “one-for-the-many” is the point, and evokes the “last Adam” theology more clearly laid out in Romans 5. It is more than simply a man laying down his life for his friend. The thought which Paul emphasizes here is that Yeshua acted as a representative for His people, even as Adam represented his people. Yeshua, in dying a substitutional death for His people, took upon Himself the curse of the Torah which was rightly theirs, and in so doing, fully exhausted the curse so that none is left for those He represented. In His death, He paid in full the debt which sin had incurred.

That the Torah promised a curse upon those who rebelled against the covenant (those who are “outside”) is substantiated by a quote from Deuteronomy 21:23.

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<th>MT</th>
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<th>Paul</th>
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| לאַל תַּלִּינָה נִבְּלָתוֹ עַל־הָעֵץ | ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ζῶντος ̔ἐπὶ τοῦ ἕλους ἀλλὰ ταφῇ ὁμαλῶς τὸν ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ | ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὁ κρεμάμενος ἐπὶ ἔλου |*
| כִּי קוֹבֵר תִּקְּבְרֶנוּ בַיוֹם הַהוּא | ζωῆς διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶς κρεμάμενος ἐπὶ ἔλου καὶ οὐ μιᾶτε τίνι γῆν ἢν κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου ἀπὸ τῶν συνόντων σοι ἐν κλήρῳ | Cursed is everyone hung on a tree. |
| כִּי קִלְּלַת אֱלֹהִים תָּלוּי | τὸν ἀνθρώπον τὸν ἐπὶ τὸν ἕλους καὶ οὐ μιᾶτε τίνι γῆν ἢν κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου. | |*
| לֹא תֶּטַּמֵּא אֶת־אַדְּמָתְּךָ אֲשֶׁר יְּהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְּךָ נַחֲלָה | οὐκ ἐπικοιμηθήσεται τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἕλους καὶ οὐ μιᾶτε τίνι γῆν ἢν κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου | |*

...his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

...his body shall not remain all night upon the tree but you shall by all means bury it in that day; for everyone that is hanged on a tree is cursed by God; and you shall by no means defile the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance.

The context of the Deuteronomy quote is the halachah regarding what is to be done with the corpse of one sentenced to death by hanging. Since one who receives such capital punishment is cursed of God, it is a defilement of the Land to allow this cursed one to remain in public view day after day. Therefore, the body was to be buried the same day in which the sentence was enacted.

By the 1st Century, however, the Deuteronomy text was understood to apply to all who were given capital punishment by crucifixion. Note the following from the Dead Sea Scrolls:

If a man is a traitor against his people and gives them up to a foreign nation, so doing evil to his people, you are to hang him on a tree until dead. On the testimony of two or three witnesses he will be put to death, and they themselves shall hang him on the tree. If a man is convicted of a capital crime and flees to the nations, cursing his people and the children of Israel, you are to hang him, also, upon a tree until dead. But you must not let their bodies remain on the tree overnight; you shall most certainly bury them that very day. Indeed, anyone hung on a tree is accursed of God and men, but you are not to defile the land that I am about to give you as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

And chokes prey for its lionesses; and it fills its caves with prey and its dens with victims (ii, 12a-b). Interpreted, this concerns the furious young lion who executes revenge on those who seek

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44 1QTemple 64:7–13.
smooth things and hangs men alive, [...] formerly in Israel. Because of a man hanged alive on the tree, He proclaims, ‘Behold I am against you,’ says the Lord of Hosts. 45

Paul’s point, however, is simply to show that the Torah itself considered the one who rebelled against the covenant, and who therefore was punished by being hung on a tree, as also one who was cursed by God. There is little doubt that this was used as a polemic against the early followers of Yeshua. Since He was executed by being crucified (hung on a tree, cf. Acts 5:30; 10:39), it was argued that He had been cursed by God. Rather than trying to refute such a polemic, Paul simply turns it to prove his point: Yeshua was, in fact, cursed by God, because He took the curse of the Torah, due to His people, upon Himself. But His being cursed results in blessing for His people, which is the point Paul wishes to stress.

14 in order that in Messiah Yeshua the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Though the Gentiles were “outside” of the covenant, and therefore in the place of curses rather than blessings, through the redemption made by Yeshua, those chosen from among the Gentiles may now come into the blessings of the covenant. Once again, the essential “position” of those who are blessed is “in Messiah.” 46 Union with the Messiah through faith is the means of ultimate covenant membership, which results in a life of righteousness, and thus attracts the blessings promised by God to all who obey Him. It is in this way that the promise of blessing upon the nations, given to Abraham, is realized.

Thus Paul’s position is clearly seen: the fulfillment of the covenant blessings promised to Abraham, and particularly the promise for blessing upon the nations, is not to be gained through obedience to Torah (something that comes as the fruit of faith) but through faith in the crucified and risen Messiah. Here is the kernel of Paul’s gospel and it is all the more understandable, therefore, why the Influencers’ message was so egregious to Paul.

so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. – The structure of the sentence helps us understand that Paul is not linking each clause of this verse as dependent upon the former, but is actually saying the same thing twice. That is, reception of the Spirit is not dependent upon the blessing of the Gentiles, as though the idea is: “the Gentiles are blessed so that we might receive the Spirit.” Rather, the double “so that” (iμα δηνα, cf. 4:4-5) should be understood to mean: “in order that the Gentiles might be blessed, or another way to say it is, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” For Paul, the presence of the Spirit in the life of a person is proof that he has been accepted by God. As such, the presence of the Spirit is the same as having the status of righteous: “But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Messiah, he does not belong to Him…. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom 8:9, 14). The promise of blessing upon the nations, given to Abraham, is proven to have taken place when the Spirit of God indwells the lives of those chosen from the nations, and empowers them to walk in obedience to God. Thus, the blessings of the covenant (whether upon Jew or Gentile)

45 4QpNah (4Q169) 1:7-8.
46 Note the contrasting “righteousness in (by) the Torah” of v. 11 (εν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται).
are manifest by the presence of the Spirit.

Note that the promise of the Spirit is “through faith.” The indwelling Spirit is not the result of some special blessing subsequent to faith, nor the result of some charismatic experience. The promise of the Spirit in the lives of the elect is simply the direct result of faith in Messiah. All who believe are granted the promise of the indwelling, enabling, and comforting presence of the Spirit of God. Being a child of God (coovenant member) and having the Spirit are one and the same.

This brings Paul’s argument full circle: he began by arguing that the Galatians evidenced the presence of the Spirit subsequent to their initial believing. Here he concludes that the presence of the Spirit is the sure proof of true covenant membership.

But the intertwining of the promise of the Spirit with the “blessing of Abraham” has focused attention upon the role of the Spirit in the eschatological fulfillment of the covenant as a whole. The prophetic picture of the eschaton, in which the restoration of Israel and the establishment of peace and righteousness are foremost, also includes the special work of the Spirit (Is 32:15; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:1-14; 39:29). And the fact that in this last days’ glory, the Spirit would be poured out “upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28-29), necessarily includes the elect from the nations. This fits Paul’s emphasis perfectly. The presence of the Spirit upon the Galatians is proof that the future has invaded the present, that the “new age” had arrived in the person and work of the Messiah. This forms a bridge between the current work of the Spirit and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise.

15 Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.\textsuperscript{47}

Paul alerts us to the fact that he is about to draw an illustration from the common legal code of his day. Recognizing that the Greek word διάθηκη, diatheke could have a wide variety of meanings (“covenant,” “last will and testament,” “promissory note,” etc.), Paul plays on the word. While in the Lxx diatheke is used primarily to translate ברית, b’rit, its use to denote a will was also well established. As such, we should most likely understand the word in this verse to be a “last will and testament” or referring to a covenant made for the transfer of land.

It is for this reason that Paul begins by saying that he is speaking “in terms of human relations.” He is drawing an illustration from the common practices of his day, but one that also illustrates a point he is about to make regarding the covenants made with Abraham and Israel (Sinai). He may even concede that the illustration may be an inadequate parallel to the covenants of God, but he wants to establish the point nonetheless. And his illustration of how a last will and testament functions will establish his point, namely, that once the will is legally drawn up and deposited, it cannot be changed or set aside. This, of course, is the very reason one drafts a last will and testament, so that one’s wishes will be carried out after one’s demise. The same would be true if by diatheke Paul has in mind a covenant made in order to transfer property. Once the covenant is established as

\textsuperscript{47} The Greek word translated “adds conditions” (ἐπιδιαθάτωσεται) literally means “add clauses” or “adds a codicil.”
legal, it cannot be changed or altered.

Yet some have questioned how Paul’s illustration can actually “work.” In Roman law, a will could be altered by the original testator by writing a second will, or by adding a codicil to the first document.\footnote{Cf. Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Alpha Pub., 1979), p. 114; Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 155f.} It is for this reason that some prefer the הָעֵנֶה בְרִיא, *metanat b’rii*, “to establish a gift” (a document that establishes the transfer of property) as the referent of Paul’s illustration. Apparently a gift established when one is in good health and sound mind cannot be controverted by any later document.\footnote{See m.*Barou Batra* 9.6f.}

But Paul’s point, regardless of the exact subject of his illustration, is obvious: in a case where a legal document is established, it cannot be overturned by some later amendment or new document. This, of course, will now be applied to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, for Paul intends to address yet another underlying issue of the Influencers’ argument. Having demonstrated from the Tanach that entrance into the covenant was a matter of faith, the argument which still remained unanswered was that of Torah obedience. The Influencers’ apologetic may have gone something like this: since faith and faithfulness are two sides of the same coin, obedience to God’s covenant is just as important as trusting God. This is demonstrated in Abraham, who not only believed (trusted) but also obeyed (was circumcised). Had he not obeyed (i.e., become circumcised) he would not have been allowed into the covenant.

A Mishnah illustrates this perspective:

> Rabbi says, “Great is circumcision, for, despite all the commandments which Abraham our father carried out, he was called complete and whole only when he had circumcised himself as it is said, Walk before me and be perfect” (Gen. 17:1).\footnote{m.*Nedarim* 3:11.}

How does Paul answer this unspoken but obvious viewpoint of the Influencers? First, Paul is surely in favor of obedience to Torah. The fact that he presents Torah obedience as the essential characteristic of life in the Spirit (Romans 8:1–8) proves this, as does his clear statement in Romans 7:22 that he “concurs with the Torah in the inner man.” Furthermore, Paul’s use of ἁνωμος, *anomos* for “lawless”\footnote{Rom 4:7; 2Thess 2:8; 1Tim 1:9; Titus 2:14.} (which actually means “unTorah”) shows quite conclusively that he considered righteous living to be in accordance with Torah.

Secondly, the issue that confronted Paul was not obedience to Torah per se but the manner in which ethnic status had become the basis for covenant identity. While one could look at circumcision from the standpoint of obedience to God’s commands, the current situation in which he found himself had transformed circumcision into a ritual of ethnic switching: a Gentile became a Jew through becoming a proselyte. Until circumcision could be returned to its biblical significance, it would continue to be a stumbling block to any Gentile who received it.

Thirdly, circumcision in Paul’s day had migrated from being a stipulation of the Abrahamic covenant to being a significant mark of the Mosaic covenant. Circumcision and Torah obedience had been welded together in the theology and practice of the current Judaisms, since circumcision had become an ethnic
marker. For the Influencers, to forego circumcision was a breach of the Mosaic covenant, for one who was not circumcised could not rightly (in their minds) be considered an Israelite, that is, a member of the Sinai covenant (where Israel received her national identity as God’s covenant people). Yet it is obvious from a Torah perspective that circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, not that of the Mosaic covenant (of which Sabbath is the sign). In taking circumcision back to its original place (as a sign of the covenant status one already has), Paul is attacking this final argument of the Influencers. He intends to do this by showing the historical context to which the two covenants are bound, and by thereby showing their relationship to each other.

16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Messiah.

Paul now uses an ingenious midrash to bolster his point, namely, that identity with the Messiah (being “in Messiah”) is the true way for establishing covenant membership. He has returned to his former point: “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham” (v. 7). Since Abraham entered into covenant relationship with God (gained righteous status in God’s eyes) through faith and not through circumcision, it is reasonable to argue that those who desire covenant membership must likewise following Abraham’s example.

But Paul “proves” this by means of a very nice midrash based upon the word זְּרָע z’ra’, “seed,” “descendant.” The Hebrew word is a collective singular, meaning it is grammatically singular even though it may represent a plural entity (much like our English word “fish” in the phrase “I caught a hundred fish!”). Only one time does the word z’ra’ show up in the plural, in 1Samuel 8:15, and here it is talking about the harvest of grain. Everywhere else, the word is found in the singular. Like a good rabbi, Paul no doubt had considered why the divinely inspired Torah would constantly use this word in the singular. There must be a theologically significant reason, and in Paul’s mind, that reason was obvious: because the ultimate “seed” of Abraham, the consummate Israelite, was none other than Messiah Himself. As such, the promises were ultimately given to the Messiah, and therefore to all who are “in Him.”

This is not to deny the obvious, which Paul also recognized, that the word “seed” could just as well stand as a collective singular. He uses the same word (seed, σπέρμα, sperma) numbers of times when it clearly refers to a group of people. In fact, he uses the word “seed” to refer to all those who are believers in v. 29. He is not, therefore, engaging in some kind of “grotesque exegesis,” but is employing a very acceptable midrashic technique in the ears of his audience. While the word can often have a collective sense, it must likewise admit to a singular usage as well, based upon its constant appearance as a grammatical singular noun.

52 This is true even if, as Cohen has argued, in practical measure, circumcision was not that useful in identifying Jews (The Beginnings of Jewishness [Univ. of California, 1999], p. 49). While this may well be the case, in theological/legal texts, circumcision is surely used as an identifying marker of Jews, and the same is true in the Pauline literature as well.

53 Rom 4:13,16,18; 9:7-8; 2Cor 11:22.
It is true that there is nothing specifically in the Rabbinic literature that parallels “seed of Abraham” with “Messiah.” But since the seed of David was understood (correctly) as referring to the Messiah, to parallel “seed of Abraham” and “seed of David” was an obvious connection. It is interesting that the word “seed” is used in the Davidic covenant of 2Samuel 7 and is clearly used in a singular sense:

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. (2Sam 7:12)

The word “seed” is seen to be singular in this case by the following 3rd masculine singular verb יֵצֵא (“will come forth”) and the 3rd masculine singular pronominal suffix “his” in “his kingdom” (מלכתו). It seems at least possible that a text such as this moved Paul and others to see the Messiah as the fulfillment of the “seed” promises made to Abraham, for surely the promises made to Abraham intersect with the promises given to David.

When we understand that the word “seed” is used at times in the Tanach to refer to a single individual, we do find the Rabbis in agreement, and thus supporting Paul’s midrashic use of the term. Note, for instance, Midrash Rabba on Genesis 4:25:

And she called his name Seth: For God has appointed me another seed, etc. R. Tanchuma said in the name of Samuel Kozith: [She hinted at] that seed which would arise from another source, viz. the king Messiah. 54

Here, the collective singular term “seed” is clearly understood by the rabbis, in accordance with the context of Genesis 4:25, as referring to an individual, that is, Seth. But it is also understood as prophetically pertaining to Messiah who would come “from another source,” that is, through the lineage of Ruth, a non-Jew.

Paul’s midrash, then, in which he finds the singular referent in the promises (particularly dealing with the Land that would be given to Abraham and “to your seed”55) to be Messiah, is well within the scope of rabbinic exegesis. It would appear that the Galatians understood this, or at least Paul presumed they would follow his exegesis, and that it would constitute a solid argument in his favor.

We should not overlook the obvious lesson that we learn, as well, from Paul’s use of the Scripture at this point. Not only is he willing to make a point based squarely upon the minutiae of Hebrew grammar, but he also evidences a viewpoint regarding the Scriptures, that they are both divinely given and divinely preserved. For Paul was using a text of the Torah which was thousands of years removed from its original writing. Yet he presumes that the text is accurate, even down to the letters and words used. What is more, he interprets the Genesis texts as fully inspired and therefore endowed with the Divine stamp of truth upon which he may build his own exegesis, theology, and ultimately his faith. We do well to emulate the Apostle’s perspective of Scrip-

ture.

Thus, Paul’s conclusion from this grammatical insight, and the midrash upon it, is that the Messiah stands as the final and ultimate recipient of the promises made to Abraham. Given that conclusion, it is obvious what his next point will be: all who are in Messiah likewise share in the promises given to Abraham.

17 What I am saying is this: the Torah, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

Paul is now intent upon showing the sequence of events as they relate to the promises given to Abraham. Abraham received the promise of the covenant (Gen 12, 15) before the command of circumcision was given (Gen 17). The command of circumcision (connected as it was in the minds of the Influencers with the Sinai legislation) could not change the character of the covenant previously given (based upon his previous axiom that no one can invalidate a covenant previously ratified). The covenant given to Abraham is characterized as one of “promise,” and thus circumcision, given later (Gen 17) must be in concert with the “promise.” It cannot change the covenant made with Abraham into one characterized by something other than promise. If the covenant came to Abraham as a matter of God’s grace and not as reward for obedience, then the stipulation requiring circumcision (which came later) could not overturn the nature of the covenant and controvert it into something other than the unilateral covenant it was.

It should be noted that the word “promise” is singular here, even though it was plural in the previous verse. Paul is narrowing the scope of his argument in order to prove his point. The promises (plural) included blessing, protection, land, and the blessing for the nations. All of these are important in Paul’s mind, but the blessing of the nations becomes the pinnacle of the promises, for it is the final and widest blessing, and rests upon the work of Messiah. Thus, the promise (singular) which draws Paul’s primary focus is the crowning promise: “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” The final and ultimate promise of blessing upon the nations confirms the gracious and promissory nature of the covenant, and it is this promise upon which Paul intends the Galatians to focus their attention.

There was, even in the time of Paul, a controversy regarding the chronology of the time in Egypt and the exodus. In our verse Paul notes that the Sinai covenant, the Torah, was given “four hundred and thirty years later.” This is taken directly from Exodus 12:40, “Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.” The original prophecy given to Abraham (Genesis 15:13) calculates 400 years: “God said to Abram, ’Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.’” We may add to these the statement of Paul (Acts 13:19) that enslavement in Egypt, the wandering in the desert, and the conquest of Canaan took “about four hundred and fifty years.”

The Lxx felt the difficulties of this chronology, and thus added a phrase to Exodus 12:40: “And the sojourning of the children of Israel, while they sojourned in the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan, was four hundred and thirty years.”
While the chronology of Israel in Egypt is not a significant issue in Paul’s argument here, it does raise some questions. How are these various figures to be reconciled? Should we just presume that the various authors are using “round figures” or should we look for other answers? Let’s look first at the chronology of the Patriarchal narratives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham enters Canaan</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Gen 12:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishmael born</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Gen 16:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac born</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Gen 21:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac marries Rivka</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Gen 25:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham dies (Jacob is 15)</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>Gen 25:7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacob goes to Haran (62 yrs later)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Gen 28:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob marries Leah &amp; Rachel</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Gen 29:21-30; 30:1, 22-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph born (7 years later)</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Gen 30:25; 31:38-41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob &amp; Family move to Canaan</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Gen 31: 17-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph sold into slavery (17 yrs old)</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>Gen 37:2-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac dies (he was 180 yrs old)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Gen 35:28-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph given high position (30 yrs old)</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>Gen 41:39-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob &amp; Family move to Egypt</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Gen 45:6; 47:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob dies</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>Gen 47:28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it is impossible to be certain about the actual dates of these events, the following is an attempt to reconcile the various notices given for the length of sojourn in Egypt:

This scenario may well fit Paul’s argument for at least a couple of reasons. First, the confirmation of the covenant to Jacob may have been considered a particularly significant event in the minds of the Influencers, as well as for Paul. It was from Jacob that the Twelve Tribes descended, and the confirmation of the covenant to Jacob meant the realization of the covenant to his sons. Thus, it makes perfect sense to see the beginning of the 430 years to be at the
point where Jacob’s name is changed to Israel (i.e., Gen 35). Secondly, the exodus itself is viewed as the result of God’s faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:24; 3:6; 15-16; 4:5; 6:8; 32:13; 33:1). In linking the exodus with the Sinai covenant, Paul advances his argument, namely, that the Mosaic covenant (the Torah) came to assist the Abrahamic covenant, not to destroy it. Or to say it another way, the Torah is given to carry the Promise. The two covenants are not at odds with each other. In fact, the two covenants are viewed as so woven together as to be one: the sign of the Abrahamic (circumcision) had become the mark of the Torah covenant in Paul’s day.

Paul therefore lays the foundation for his argument that the Gentiles are covenant members without “becoming Jews” (becoming proselytes) by emphasizing the divine initiative and ratification in the Abrahamic covenant. If God ratified (προκυρώ, prokurod) the covenant to Abraham before giving the Sinai covenant, then He surely will maintain His faithfulness to the covenant, including His promise to “the nations” (i.e., Gentiles). He would not give a second covenant (the Torah) which would nullify (ἀκυρώ, akurod) with the intent to destroy (καταργέω, katargeo) the promise of the previous covenant.

As a side note, the general argument of the Christian Church in our day appears to take the point of view which Paul here argues against. That is to say, the argument of Paul rests upon the axiom that a former covenant cannot be annulled by a subsequent covenant. Yet what we hear most often from Christian theology is that the “new covenant” established by Yeshua has set aside or in some way rendered the previous covenants void. If one understands that the covenants all build upon each other and are, in fact, a unified whole, then one is able to see the manner in which the covenants together bring and establish the promise.

The theme of “the promise” is a dominant one in the writings of Paul. Note the following texts:

For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself. (Acts 2:39)

From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Yeshua, (Acts 13:23)

that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Yeshua, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.’ (Acts 13:33)

And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; (Acts 26:6)

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Torah, but through the righteousness of faith. (Rom. 4:13)

For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Torah, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (Rom. 4:16)

remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, exclud-
ed from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:12)

It is obvious that for Paul, “the promise” (επαγγελία, epangelia) was the focal point of the covenants and as such, bound the covenants together in a unified whole. Interestingly, there is no word in biblical Hebrew that is equivalent with the Greek epangelia; it is therefore not surprising that epangelia shows up only scarcely (3x) in the Lxx of the canonical books.\(^\text{56}\) In the Hebrew, the simple word מדבר, davar, “to speak” signifies “to promise” in certain contexts (cf. 1Kings 2:4; 8:56; 2Chr. 1:9 for examples).

The word itself functioned for Paul to describe both the promise of the Messiah as well as the divine initiative in bringing Him. That is, the primary purpose of the covenants, indeed, the very reason for their existence, was ultimately to bring the Messiah. But Paul also appears to recognize the unilateral nature of the Abrahamic covenant in his use of the term “promise.” For though the Sinai covenant (Mosaic covenant) is bilateral, meaning that the two parties of the covenant (God as the Great King and Israel as His vassal) have mutual responsibilities relative to the outcome of the covenant, the Abrahamic covenant is decidedly one-sided. Only God takes the oath as demonstrated in the covenant enactment of Genesis 15. There, in the covenant ceremony in which the parties pass between the slain pieces of sacrificial animals in the oath taking, Abram is put into a deep sleep and the symbols of the Divine presence (smoking pot and flaming torch) traverse the path provided by the heaps of slain animals. The word “promise,” then, emphasizes the Divine monergism in the Abrahamic covenant.

This Divine monergism also emphasizes several essential aspects of the Abrahamic covenant as far as Paul is concerned in our immediate context: 1) the divine grace that is revealed therein, and 2) the divine omnipotence that will secure the covenant to the offspring of Abram. Paul realized that if the covenant made with Abraham (the sign of which was circumcision) was dependent upon the obedience of Abraham and his offspring, this would put the promise of the Messiah in jeopardy. Could the redemption of mankind have been left to the obedience of man? Certainly not! Thus, God promised the blessing upon mankind as a matter of His divine sovereignty, not upon the basis of man’s obedience.

Here we see, in the Abrahamic covenant, the revelation of God’s sovereign grace, for He intends to bless mankind with salvation, and nothing will stand in the way of His intentions—not even man’s disobedience. As Clements notes:

The Abrahamic covenant stood as a witness to the primacy of grace in all of God’s dealings with his people Israel, and testified to the belief that election was an act of God, and not a state to which men could attain by their obedience to a law.\(^\text{57}\)

This is particularly germane for Paul’s argument here, for his primary focus is on the election of the Gentiles to become full-fledged covenant members within Israel. The argument would go like this: Abraham and his offspring were sovereignly chosen by God to be His covenant people. Within the cov-

\(^\text{56}\) In the entire Lxx the word is found in 1Esdr 1:7; Esth 4:7; 1Mac 10:15; 4Mac 12:9; Ps 55:9; Ode 12:6; Sol 12:6; Amos 9:6.

enant given to Abraham was the promise of blessing upon the nations (Gentiles). It follows, then, that the Gentiles likewise are sovereignly chosen by God as a matter of His grace. To suggest that their inclusion in the covenant was based upon their obedience to the rabbinic ritual of proselytism is therefore contrary to the covenant itself.

18 For if the inheritance is based on Torah, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

First, it is interesting to note the typical Pauline style of writing in this verse. It literally would read: “For if out from Torah is the inheritance, no longer is it out from promise.” Here, as in the previous verses, the use of the preposition “out from” (ἐκ, ek) means “having its source from” or (as the NASB has it) “based upon.” NIV has “depends on” which also gives the sense; ESV, “For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise ….” Any translation will have to supply words to interpret Paul’s use of the preposition “out from,” and all of the above have surely captured the sense: the covenant promises were not given as rewards for obedience, but as the sure and sovereign promise of God. To teach that the promises were rewards is likewise to put the promise of Messiah and the salvation He brings as dependent upon mankind. This turns the whole covenant on its head.

Thus Paul introduces the term “inheritance” (κληρονομία, kleronomia), but this concept has been implied in the previous verses in that blessings are promised to the subsequent generations of Abraham as well as to the generations of Gentiles who would be chosen for blessing. “Inheritance,” then, is equivalent to “the promise.” The inheritance which God ultimately promises to all covenant members is the blessing that comes through the “Seed,” that is, Messiah.

The fact that Paul begins this verse with “For” (γὰρ, gar) marks it as proof of his previous argument. As such, it shows that Paul was not arguing for the superiority of the Abrahamic covenant on the basis of priority in time. Rather, his argument is based upon the fact that God’s covenant blessings are grounded first and foremost in the exercise of His sovereign grace, and that this gracious stature of the covenant cannot be controverted by the later bilateral covenant at Sinai. When he says “if the inheritance is based on Torah,” he means “if the inheritance is based upon obeying the Torah,” including (for sake of argument) Oral Torah, then it falls outside of the covenant since the covenant was given to Abraham as a unilateral promise not based upon his obedience. Thus Paul states that God granted (χάρισμα, charismatō) blessing (salvation is the zenith of this blessing) to Abraham by means of promise. And we should note that the Greek verb here is in the perfect tense, emphasizing the historical action of grace to Abraham, but also that the same gracious character of the covenant continues in the present.

Paul’s argument, then, is based, not on the temporal priority of the Abrahamic covenant so much as it is upon the essential nature of it. As Dunn writes, “Paul stakes his case on the theological axiom that salvation is always, first to last, a matter of divine initiative and grace.”

58 Note that the Greek word for “grace,” ἵλισς, charis, is the noun which is cognate to χάριζω, charizomai.

59 Dunn, Galatians, p. 186.
does not deprecate the Torah, but places the Torah in its proper place within
the Divine scheme of redemption. Torah leads to faith and specifically to the
object of faith, Yeshua. As such, it is good and valuable. But it is not the means
of covenant membership. To attempt to put Torah in this role is to make it out
to be something God never intended, and is therefore to diminish and even
distort it.

19 Why the Torah then? It was added because of transgressions, having been
ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would
come to whom the promise had been made.

The obvious question that would arise in the minds of Paul’s detractors (in
this case, the Influencers) is “if the Torah was not given as the means of enter-
ing the covenant, then what was its purpose?” As usual, Paul anticipates the
questions of his audience and sets himself to answer them. He has given a
threelfold argument in verses 15-18 that the inheritance of blessing is realized 1)
by promise, 2) in the Seed (=Messiah), and 3) that such a promise cannot be
modified or nullified by the subsequent giving of the Torah. Now Paul must
answer the question of the Torah’s role, for otherwise it would appear as
though the Torah was superfluous. If the blessing comes entirely apart from
the Torah, then is the Torah really necessary? Contrary to the stance of Historic
Christianity, Paul teaches us here that the Torah is not only necessary—it is
essential.

It is unfortunate that this verse has almost universally been interpreted in a
negative sense by Christian commentators throughout the centuries. Light-
foot’s comments are representative of this negative view of Torah:

Had the law, then, no purpose? Yes; but its very purpose, its whole
character and history, betray its inferiority to the dispensation of grace.
In four points this inferiority is seen. First; Instead of justifying, it con-
demns; instead of giving life, it kills; it was added to reveal and multi-
ply transgressions. Secondly; It was but temporary. When the seed came
to whom the promise was given it was annulled. Thirdly; It did not
come directly from God to man. There was a double interposition, a
twofold mediation, between the giver and the recipient. There were an-
gels, who administered it as God’s instruments; there was Moses (or the
high-priest), who delivered it to man. Fourthly; As follows from the
idea of mediation, it was of the nature of a contract, depending for its
fulfillment on the observation of its conditions by the two contracting
parties. Not so the promise, which, proceeding from the sole fiat of God,
is unconditional and unchangeable.60

Contrast this with the viewpoint of the Sages:

“Precious are Israelites, to whom was given the precious thing.” It was
an act of still greater love that it was made known to them that to them
was given that precious thing with which the world was made. “as it
is said, For I give you a good doctrine. Do not forsake my Torah (Prov.
4:2).61

What was Paul’s assessment here? Is he teaching that the Torah was given

60 J. Lightfoot, Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (Draper, 1891), p. 258.
61 m.Avot 3.14 (Neusner’s translation).
in order to “trap” Israel, to entice her to transgression so that she would be guilty? This, of course, is usually the way the verse is read. But to read this verse in such a negative light is to disregard what the Torah says about itself. Moses makes it clear (Deut 30:11f) that the Torah which God had given to Israel was not too difficult for them, nor was it out of their reach. The reason was because God has set Himself to circumcise their hearts (Deut 30:6f) and thus to enable them to obey Him as He desired. Far from being an instrument of death, the Torah was given to Israel for life (Deut 30:15f). Granted, her unfaithfulness would bring about the curses of the Torah, but this was not its purpose—its purpose was to lead her in the paths of righteousness. This is because the Torah was given to Israel as God’s redeemed nation—as those who should have already committed themselves in faith to Him. Yet the Torah would surely mark those who were of true faith and those who were only giving lip-service to God. The word of God is a sharp sword, and it does divide (Heb 4:12f), but to those who have had their hearts circumcised by the Spirit, the Torah comes as a divine blessing, guiding and instructing in the ways of God.

The language of our present verse would indicate that we should read it positively, not negatively. “Why the Torah? It was given (added to the revelation already given in the Abrahamic covenant) to reveal the divine method of dealing with transgressions,” i.e., “for the sake of transgressions” (τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν). The Greek particle χάριν (charin) indicates “the goal” to which something points or proceeds. The Torah was given with the goal of revealing God’s method of dealing with transgressions.

But already prejudiced against the Torah, the typical Christian exegesis misses the fact that a great deal of the Torah centers upon the Tabernacle/Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. How were the covenant members to deal with the inevitable presence of sin in their personal and corporate lives? The Torah gives the answer: by repentance and acceptance of God’s gracious gift of forgiveness through the payment of a just penalty exemplified in the sacrifice. It was the Torah that revealed in clear detail the method which God had provided for transgression, and it was this method—the sacrificial system and priesthood—that pointed to Messiah, the ultimate sacrifice and means of eternal forgiveness.

Thus Paul adds: “until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.” In the Greek, this clause follows second, immediately after “it was added for the sake of transgressions.” The ESV has the order correct: “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.” The Torah was given in order to reveal God’s gracious manner of dealing with transgressions, i.e., through the death of an innocent substitute. Paul therefore immediately makes this point by adding “until the seed would come ….” Here, as often, the word “until” (ἀχρί, achri; Hebrew הָיוּ, ’ad) has the primary meaning of “marker of continuous extent of time up to a point, until.” The point is that the revelation of the Torah regarding how God provides redemption in the face of transgressions has its focal point in Yeshua. Once Yeshua had come and offered Himself as God’s eternal sacrifice, the ultimate revelation to which the sacrifices pointed had been given. This is Paul’s consistent

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62 BDAG, “χάριν”.
63 BDAG, “ἀχρί”.

The use of “until” in the phrase “until the seed would come” does not mean that once Yeshua has come, the Torah is no longer of any value. What it does mean is that the revelation of God’s redemptive plan, the means of forgiveness given as it was in the Torah, is eclipsed in the brightness of the revelation in His Messiah. Even this does not mean that the revelatory value of the sacrifices has been nullified. But it means that the revelation of God’s salvation finds its greatest expression in Yeshua who is the fulfillment of the Torah’s revelation.

The final clause of the verse (as it is in the Greek and some English translations) notes that the Torah was given “by the hand” (a straightforward Semitic idiom) of a mediator (=Moses) ordained through angels. Once again, this has been misinterpreted by Christian commentators to mean that the Torah had less than divine origins. We’ve already seen Lightfoot’s assessment (see above). Others take it even further: “a categorical denial of the divine origin of the Torah;”64 the law “is the product of demonic angelic powers;”65 “on the way to a Gnostic understanding of the law.”66 Have these commentators forgotten that the tablets which Moses brought down from the mountain were written with the very finger of the Almighty (Ex 31:19; Deut 31:10)? To put such nonsense in the mouth of Paul is ludicrous. Paul believed the Torah to be of divine origin: “All Scripture is God breathed …” (2Tim 3:16) and the only Scripture Paul had in hand was the Tanach.

Rather, the mention of a mediator (Moses) and the role of angels in the giving of the Torah would have come across to any Jewish audience as praise, not deprecation. Paul did not want the Galatians to think that just because he was putting a great emphasis upon the promise made to Abraham, that he thought the Torah to have little value. Far from it! He simply wants to show that the Torah has a divine purpose in the plan of redemption, and that to give it its proper place is both honoring to God, the Giver of the Torah, and good for believers who will walk and live according to its precepts. The mention of Moses and angels puts the Torah in a place of honor, not one of diminished value.

The presence of angels at the giving of the Torah was a familiar motif in the Judaisms of Paul’s day. It was most likely based upon the interpretation of Deut 33:2 as translated by the Lxx. The Hebrew reads: “He said, ‘The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.”’ The Lxx translated it this way: “And he said, The Lord is come from Sinai, and has appeared from Seir to us, and has hasted out of the mount of Pharan, with the ten thousands of Cades; on his right hand were his angels with him.”

The Midrash confirms this angelic motif in the giving of the Torah:

When He goes forth to battle, He goes alone, for it says, The Lord is a man of war (Ex 15:3), but when He came to give the Torah on Sinai, myriads of angels accompanied Him, as it says, ‘The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands’ (Ps 68:18). (Mid. Rab.

64 J. W. Drane, Paul: Libertine or Legalist? (SPCK, 1975), p. 34.
Likewise, the Apostolic Scriptures affirm the role of angels in giving the Torah (Acts 7:38; 53; Heb 2:2). The point is simply that the Torah came with great majesty, and was given to Moses as the trustworthy mediator to the people of Israel. That he was “faithful” in the discharge of his duties is directly stated in Scripture (Heb 3:2-5).

Thus, rather than lowering the Torah to some obscurity, Paul here elevates it to its proper place as the vehicle of God’s divine revelation in the matter of man’s salvation. To deny the Torah a role in entering the covenant in no way diminished its proper purpose. Paul does not want to be falsely accused of dismissing the Torah, and thus he adds these clauses to emphasize its glory and value. What Paul does wish to do is to establish the Torah’s proper role in God’s redemptive scheme, and in so doing, to give the Torah its proper due.

20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

This verse has baffled commentators since ancient times. Lightfoot notes that he is aware of more than 250 different interpretations,\(^{68}\) and Bruce points out the various “tortuous” attempts to makes sense of the verse.\(^{69}\) The Greek is very succinct: \(ο\ δέ \ μεσιτής \ εἰὼς \ οὐκ \ εἰσὶν, \ ο\ δέ \ θεός \ εἰς \ εἰσὶν,\) literally, “the mediator of one is not, and (but) God is one.” Yet the meaning in context seems quite clear: there is no mediator when only one party exists (since a mediator by nature of his office stands between two people), but God is one. Paul is talking about the difference between the types of covenants represented by the Abrahamic and Sinaitic. Whereas the Abrahamic is a unilateral covenant (patterned after the Royal Grant Treaty) wherein only the Covenant Maker Himself secures the success of the covenant and is therefore in no need of a mediator, the Sinaitic is patterned after the Suzerain-Vassal treaty in which both parties swear to uphold the covenant, and thus the successful outcome of the covenant is dependent upon both.

Excursus: Covenant Types & Paul’s Argument

Essentially two types of covenants existed during the time of the patriarchal era (2nd millennia B.C.E.) and may be distinguished: the Royal Grant covenant or treaty, and the Suzerain-Vassal covenant or treaty. While it is wrong to suggest hard and fast boundaries between the two kinds of covenants, it seems clear that the differences which separated them were recognized and practiced in the Ancient Near East. Below is a chart comparing the basic characteristics of each.

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67 Other Jewish sources that mention the role of angels in giving Torah are: Jub 1:29-2:1; Philo, Som. 1.145; Josephus, Ant. xv. 136; Apoc. Mos., preface. These are listed in Dunn, Galatians, p. 191.
68 Lightfoot, Galatians, p. 260.
Royal Grant Treaty/Covenant

- To protect the rights of the Vassal
- The Great King (Suzerain) takes the oath
- The curses are against those who might deprive the Vassal of the Suzerain’s gift
- The Grant (gift) is promised to all future generations of the Vassal
- The Grant is a reward for faithful service

Suzerain-Vassal Treaty/Covenant

- To protect the rights of the Suzerain
- Vassal takes the oath
- The curses are directed toward the Vassal
- No guarantee for future generations
- The Suzerain-Vassal covenant is primarily political in nature

The Royal Grant Treaty is well attested in the remains of the Ancient Near East. The primary distinctives are that the Suzerain takes it upon himself to grant to his favored Vassal a gift of Land as a reward for his faithful service. In contrast, the Suzerain-Vassal Treaty is made in order to assure the rights and authority of the Suzerain in the land of the Vassal. It is clear that even though there may be requirements attached to both types of covenants, the primary difference between them is simply that the Royal Grant covenant is a non-conditional covenant in which the Great King promises to reward the Vassal, while in the Suzerain-Vassal covenant or treaty, the relationship between Suzerain and Vassal is maintained only as long as the Vassal continues to demonstrate loyalty and fidelity to the Suzerain. Clearly, the Abrahamic is modeled after the Royal Grant, and the Mosaic after the Suzerain-Vassal.70

Yet even in light of this seemingly obvious fact (that Paul is emphasizing the different types of covenants), many commentators still choose to see in this verse a further reason for downgrading the Torah (Sinaitic covenant) in contrast to the Abrahamic. For instance, Dunn suggests that since the Torah was given through the agency of angels, and since the Judaisms of Paul’s day understood the angels to be appointed to look after the nations (in contrast to Israel who was guarded by God Himself), “to submit to the law’s demands was a form of slavery to the elemental forces,”71 a lowering of Israel to the level of the nations.

From my point of view, nothing could be further off the mark. The presence of angels at the giving of the Torah was, from the viewpoint of 1st Century Judaisms, most likely a mark of the great ceremony which accompanied the event, and therefore worked to glorify the Torah, not diminish it. Paul is not going to win his argument in this section by downgrading the Torah! His approach is not to indicate that the Torah is bad, or that it is inferior to the Abrahamic covenant, but to show how the Torah works in concert with the Abrahamic covenant, and thus supports rather than nullifies the promise to the nations (Gentiles). The Torah is given as a means to realize the promise which is granted to Abraham’s offspring, and (in Paul’s argument here) specifically to the Seed Who is Messiah. His point is not to degrade the Torah, but to show its proper use in the overall scope of God’s covenant promises.

It may be that the phrase “but God is one” has actually tripped up the commentators. It is obviously from Deuteronomy 6:4, and was at the time of Paul, as it is now, the primary confession of monotheism by all who claim God to be the only true God. But in the course of time, especially within the polem-

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70 For a fuller discussion of the Royal Grant and Suzerain-Vassal Treaties, see my paper, “The Covenant of Grant and the Abrahamic Covenant” available at www.torahresource.com (Articles in English).

71 Dunn, Galatians, p. 192.
ic of the Christian Church, the phrase “God is one” took on a purely ontological significance. That is to say, in the early centuries of the emerging Christian Church, the controversies over the multiplicity within the godhead gave rise to the dogmatic theology of the Trinity. The orthodox conclusion of these controversies is contained in the Athanasian Creed, in which the doctrine of the Trinity is philosophically delineated. Yet with such an emphasis upon the multiplicity within the godhead, the Christians were accused by their Jewish counterparts as being polytheists—believing in and worshipping more than one god. This, of course, was flatly denied, for even in the newly founded Christian Church, monotheism was a primary mark of orthodoxy. Thus, the phrase “God is one” began to be interpreted as “God is a unity” (one, τὸν ἕν, echad, being understood as a single union of a plural number). Thus, “God is one” became an ontological statement about the nature of God’s person or being. “God is a unity” fit the philosophical argument of Athanasius perfectly. For instance, the third paragraph of the Athanasian Creed reads: “And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.” The concept of “one” had been defined ontologically as “unity.”

This argument still persists in our day among those who attempt to use the Shema as proof of multiplicity within the godhead. Yet I am convinced this is not what is meant in the Shema by the word “one.” Please understand what I am saying: surely the Hebrew word “one” (אֶחַד) can mean a unity of things, as in one day (which consists of evening and morning, Gen 1); one people (which consists of many persons); one in marriage (consisting of male and female, Gen 2:24), and so on. But while the Judaisms of Paul’s day were doubtlessly affected by the Hellenistic thought and culture of their times, the Hebrews were not nearly as concerned with matters of ontology as were the Greeks and Latins. Indeed, it was not until the emerging Christian Church felt the necessity to approach Christological questions from an ontological perspective that the questions (and problems) of the nature of God’s being surfaced. But it is not surprising that this was the case: the emerging Christian Church arose under the leadership of predominantly Greek and Latin clerics.

It should be remarkable to us that not once in all of the Apostolic Scriptures do we have the problem of God’s being, or of Yeshua’s essential nature, brought forward from an ontological frame of reference. In the closest thing we have to such an issue, the matter is still thoroughly Hebrew in viewpoint. I speak of Yeshua’s pointed question to the disciples: “Who do men say that I am?” and His still more penetrating question to them, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:27f; Matt 16:13ff). Yet here, Yeshua is asking if the people have understood His message of the Kingdom, and specifically if they have realized His messianic claim. Do they say that He is the Messiah or not? And what response does Yeshua elicit from the disciples? That they have reckoned with the fact that He is, in fact, the long-awaited Savior of Israel.

This is not an ontological question, but a question of mission, function, and office. So once again, the phrase in our verse “but God is One” will bring all manner of variations in understanding if it is deemed necessary to interpret it from the perspective of Greek ontology. But if the meaning found in its original source (Deut 6:4) is applied, it seems to me that the meaning is not only obvious but very germane to Paul’s present argument. For in the Shema, the most obvious contextual meaning is that of “unique”
or “the only one.” Surely this is a statement of monotheism, but it is even more suited to Paul’s present argument in which he is contrasting the two differing types of covenant. Even as in the Shema in which the declaration that God is the “only one” (the only God), so when Paul connects this reality to the Abrahamic covenant, it means quite simply that He is the only one able to bring the covenant to fruition. But what is even more, He alone took the oath relative to the Abrahamic covenant, and thus is the only one within the covenant structure itself to accomplish its goals. There is no need to mediate the Abrahamic covenant between two parties of the covenant, because the success of the covenant depends entirely upon God alone.

We may conclude, then, that Paul’s point here is simply a buttressing of his original statement: a covenant made later cannot add to nor annul a previously ratified covenant. And since that previously ratified covenant, by its very nature, is dependent solely upon God’s faithfulness and omnipotence, we may be certain that it will, in fact, be completed. This means that God has set Himself to bring in the Gentiles as a matter of His grace (promise), not through them becoming Jews through a rabbinic ritual.

But it means even more than this: it means that the Torah is given as a “helper” to the Abrahamic covenant. The Torah’s purpose (as Paul will now show) is not to set aside the promise of the Abrahamic, nor to add stipulations to it, but to assure its success (cf. Genesis 18:17). In this way, the Torah is not contrary to the Abrahamic promise, nor does it in any way change the promise, but it comes to assist in bringing the promise to fruition. If we were to couch this in theological terms, we would parallel the Abrahamic promise to Paul’s teaching on justification, while the Mosaic covenant would be parallel to sanctification. The Influencers had these two confused: they were teaching the Gentile believers that entrance into the covenant of promise (justification) can only be achieved through adherence to their form of the Mosaic covenant (sanctification): they had the cart before the horse. But Paul would not have ever ventured to express a downgrade of sanctification! Growing in holiness is the result of justification, and a means of realizing covenant membership in its fullness. Sanctification is the inevitable result of justification, not the means of obtaining it.

---------- End of the Excursus ----------

21 Is the Torah then contrary to the promises of God?72 May it never be! For if a Torah had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on Torah.

Here Paul makes his point clear: his teaching about the Torah should not be received as saying that the Torah and the promise are somehow at odds. As Dunn remarks,

The response indicates clearly that Paul would deny the very antithesis between law and promise which so many infer from verse 20. On the contrary, the role of the law is consistent with, integrated into that of the

72 There is a variant in the Greek here: some manuscripts include “of God” and others do not. The majority of the oldest manuscripts include it, but Vaticanus (B) does not. The UBS editors include “of God” in the text but in brackets to show that it is questioned.
Indeed, Paul makes it crystal clear that the promises of God, which include blessing, salvation, protection, and the coming of Messiah to accomplish all of these, are not in any way distinct from nor contrary to the Torah. The two fit together to bring about God’s purpose in redemption. The difficulty comes when one attempts to use the Torah in a way God never intended.

And what way would this be? To think that one’s attempts at obeying the Torah would be received by God as a means to forgiveness of one’s sins. Or to say it another way: that one could atone for his own transgressions through obedience to the Torah. To make it specific to the Galatians: to think that a Gentile would be received into the covenant on the basis of his obedience to Torah (both Written and Oral).

When Paul here speaks of “imparting life,” he is obviously referring to “life as a covenant member,” that is, life lived in the reality of sins forgiven and under the blessing of God. In short, Paul is speaking of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Forgiveness of sins goes hand in hand with the Torah written on the heart, clearly a work of the Spirit. But such a work of the Spirit is not earned nor gained through man’s efforts, but by the sovereign grace of God reaching to the sinner, taking out the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh. God never intended by giving Israel the Torah, that it would be the means by which a change of heart could be effected—that the Torah, in and of itself, could impart righteousness. Had God intended that the Torah function in such a way, then clearly it would done so, and righteousness would have been based upon Torah.

We should note that the word “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosune) has the definite article here. While we may not be able to make too much of its use here, one might suggest that he includes the article in order to specify what he means by “righteousness,” that is, the same righteousness that God reckoned to Abraham on the basis of his faith (3:6). This is also emphasized by the fact that in the two lines of our verse, “righteousness” stands as parallel to “impart life.” No one would deny the fact that the Torah, when implemented into society, does in fact work a sort of righteousness (and thus the so-called “third use of the Law” delineated by the Reformers). But this is not the righteousness to which Paul refers here. He is speaking of being declared righteous by the King of all the earth—having one’s heart changed in order to walk in His ways and actually grow in righteousness before Him. This the Torah could not do, because it was never designed for this purpose. As I have noted above, the Torah was given to a redeemed people. In the metaphor of redemption worked out in the history of Israel, the Torah is given to a people already redeemed, not in order to achieve their redemption. This is Paul’s point. God gave the Torah for a specific purpose, that is, to teach and lead the redeemed people in the way in which they should go (Lev 18:1–5)—to constantly lead to the Messiah as the fullest revelation of God’s will. The Torah is for covenant members; it is not a means of becoming a covenant member. Had God intended the Torah to function as a means of becoming a covenant member, then surely it would have succeeded in this mission, but it was not for this purpose.

73 Dunn, Galatians, p. 192.
74 The other three times Paul uses the term in Galatians, he does not include the article. Cf. Gal. 2:21; 3:6; 5:5.
purpose that the Torah was given.

22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Yeshua Messiah might be given to those who believe.

The singular use of the word “Scripture” (τὰ γράφη, he grafe) with the definite article could mean that Paul had a particular text in mind, but more likely he refers to the Scriptures as a whole, or at least the collective witness of the Scriptures. Here is yet another indication that by Paul’s time, the canon of Scripture was well enough fixed so that it could be referred to as a unified collection of books without further elaboration.

That the Scripture has “shut up everyone under sin” is very parallel to the thought of Romans 3 in which Paul, by stringing together a number of texts, proves from the Scriptures themselves that all men, both Jew and Gentile, are under the penalty of sin. “Shut up” (συγκλείω, sugkleidō, used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures) means “to confine” and also “to imprison.” It is the witness of the Scripture that all men, regardless of ethnicity or station in life, are in fact sinners, and therefore under the just penalty of their sin (“under sin”). They are “imprisoned” because left to themselves, they have no means by which to be made free. And the Torah itself offered no solution to this dilemma, for it gave no solution to overcome the power of sin. As Paul would teach in Romans (cf. 7:9-12), the Torah, rather than offering a solution for the power of sin, apart from the Spirit only was used by man to sin even further.

Thus, if anyone is to be free from the penalty of his sin, it is only because God has graciously stepped into his life and made a way for forgiveness. This is the “blessing” promised to the Gentiles as well, that “in your seed all the nations/families of the earth will be blessed.” That blessing is nothing short of the forgiveness of sins, and the impartation of life (=righteousness). But the means of this blessing, the avenue through which it flows, is faith: “by faith in Yeshua Messiah.” Paul has already shown that the promise is finally and ultimately fulfilled in Yeshua, and thus the blessings of the promise are to be found only in Him.

Some have suggested that the phrase “faith in Yeshua” should be translated “faithfulness of Yeshua.” In fact, the preposition “in” is not represented in the Greek (note the CJB: “on the basis of Yeshua the Messiah’s trusting faithfulness”). However, quite often “faith of Yeshua” means “faith in Yeshua.” And this is most likely how we should understand the phrase here. This whole section is essentially Paul’s exposition on 3:6 and Abraham’s faith which was reckoned as righteousness. There (Gen 15:6), the language is clearly “faith in,” and so we should understand it in this verse as well, it being no doubt a further explanation of that faith. Thus, “faith in Yeshua . . . to those who believe,” while being a tautology, is understandable in light of Paul’s argument and emphasis here.

Here the term “promise” is used in its broadest sense, i.e., of the salvation promised by God to all He would save. Since the promise given to Abraham included this ultimate blessing of salvation, to receive the “promise” in this context is to receive salvation from God’s hand. Since the Scriptures themselves showed conclusively that all people, without respect to ethnicity, are under the penalty of sin, the Scriptures likewise pointed the way to Messiah, the only means of acceptable atonement.

Thus, for Paul’s immediate argument, he has shown that the Torah was working in concert with the Abrahamic promise in order to bring it to fruition.
23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Torah, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

In the previous verse Paul has personified the Scriptures: it was the Scriptures that imprisoned man by declaring all mankind under the guilt of sin, being imprisoned by his inability to do anything about that condemning situation. Here, faith is personified as “coming.”

Many, not recognizing this metaphoric language (the personification of faith), have misunderstood the verse to be saying that there was a time when faith was non-existent, and that at a given point in time, “faith came.” But if we think about this for just a moment, it is clearly not what Paul means, for already in this epistle he has quoted Genesis 15:6 (in 3:6) in which it is stated that “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.” Remember that both in the Hebrew and Greek, the verb “believe” and the noun “faith” share (respectively) the same basic root word.75 To say that Abraham “believed” God is the same as saying “Abraham had faith in God.” So Paul cannot be teaching here that before the coming of Yeshua, there was no saving faith! Such an interpretation of our verse should obviously be dismissed out of hand.

So then what does Paul mean by using the phrase “But before faith came…”? First, we should note that the word “faith” (πίστις, pistis) here has the article, τὴν πίστιν, and thus perhaps more woodenly “Before the faith came ….” Secondly, in the context, Paul is speaking of the manner in which those without faith, come to faith. In his emphasis here, the question is how the Torah functions (“why then the Torah?” v. 19) in this process of bringing those who are imprisoned under sin to the place of forgiveness before God as His covenant people. Thirdly, then, it seems most natural to understand the phrase “before the faith came” to mean “before personal faith is exercised by those God saves.”

Paul includes himself in the scenario: “we were kept….” His own testimony no doubt figures into his explanation here and as such, his 1st person plural (“we”) may be understood as “we Jews.” There was a time when Paul, zealous for the Torah, was still without saving faith. In this state of unbelief (having rejected Yeshua as the Messiah), the Torah continued to function in the role of a custodian—it continued to point to Yeshua even though Paul’s eyes were blind to His glory contained in the Torah. The Torah “shut up” mankind, including the descendants of Jacob (the Jews), to Yeshua as the only answer, since the Torah both revealed the sinfulness of man’s heart, and offered no remedy for this sinfulness in and of itself. In other words, in pointing out sin but not prescribing a means by which the sin could effectively be overcome, the Torah guided the sinner to faith in Yeshua. Thus the Torah was not contrary to the righteousness granted by faith in Yeshua, but was rather a positive revelation of God’s method of declaring a person righteous. In this role of revealing God’s method of salvation, the Torah functioned precisely as God intended it to function.

The idea of “custody” (φουρέω, phoureō) can have a negative connotation, i.e., “hold in subjection,” and many commentators have taken it this way (parallelizing “under sin” in the previous verse). But the word’s principal meaning is one of a positive nature: “to guard,” “watch over,” and in fact, the only other times the word is used (Phil 4:7 and 1Pet 1:5), it bears this

75 Hebrew: הֱאֶמִׁין / אֱמֻנָה; Greek: πίστις / πιστεύω
positive meaning:

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua. (Phil 4:7)

who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Pet 1:5)

In fact, in forcing the sinner to see his sin as God sees it, the Torah functions in a positive role to reveal the means of salvation in Yeshua.

The NASB is somewhat misleading when it translates “being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.” More literally it would be: “being shut up to the faith which was about to be revealed.” The translation of μέλλω, mello, by “later” plays into the misinterpretation that faith did not exist before the coming of Yeshua, and that it was only revealed “later,” i.e., after the appearance of the Messiah. Rather, the idea here is that the Torah pushed the sinner to the Messiah and that therefore, for the one who was awakened by the Spirit through the revealed truth of the Torah, faith was “just around the corner.” The word itself simply denotes something that takes place subsequent to another event.76

In terms of the promise given to Abraham, then, the Torah functioned in a positive role to lead sinners to the Seed, that is, to Yeshua the Messiah. Paul will now give further clarification of this role of the Torah.

24–26 Therefore the Torah has become our tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua.

Paul now employs the metaphor of a pedagogue (παιδαγωγός, paidagōgos) to explain this role of the Torah. The translation “tutor” is not the best. The word paidagōgos literally means “a boy leader.” “The image is that of the slave who conducted a boy to and from school.”77 He was not a teacher, but a custodian to bring the boy to his teacher. This is the role of the Torah which Paul here wishes to emphasize. It is not the only role, mind you, but the one that best fits Paul’s current argument. Thus, the Torah was given charge over Israel, and all who would join Israel, to lead them to Yeshua in whom there is justification by faith. Like a boy in a hostile society who needed to be guarded as he journeyed to his teacher, so Israel, surrounded by the paganism and idolatry of the Ancient Near East, needed the Torah to guard them and bring them to Messiah. Here, then, is a remarkable statement of Paul: one of the roles of the Torah is to teach justification by faith!

But what does he mean by the statement in v. 25, that since faith has now come, there is no longer any need for the pedagogue? Has the Torah run its course, and therefore offers no further value in the life of the believer? Is Paul here suggesting that the Torah has depleted its usefulness? Hardly! And it is only a severely negative perspective that would suggest such a meaning here. If one already has the prejudiced view that the Torah is bad and that it is a temporary evil designed to be replaced when Yeshua came, then it is easy to

76 BDAG, “μέλλω”.
77 Dunn, Galatians, p. 198; see BDAG, παιδαγωγός. ESV has “guardian,” NIV has “put in charge,” both of which are much better than NASB, “tutor.”
read the verse in this negative light. But if one understands Paul’s overall argument here, no such reading is possible.

Paul is addressing his remarks primarily to the Influencers. They were saying that the Gentiles needed to enter the covenant by conforming to their view of the Torah, that is, the Torah as written and oral, which included the requirement for Gentiles to become proselytes. Paul’s point is that the Gentiles are already covenant members by faith in Yeshua. He knew this from personal experience, since he had witnessed their confession of faith, and the manifested presence of the Spirit as proof of their conversion. To cast the matter in the manner of the metaphor, the Gentile believers had already arrived to the Teacher (Yeshua). They did not need the Torah to function as a pedagogue to lead them there. Taken in this light, we should read the verse as meaning: “The Torah functions as a custodian to lead the sinner to Yeshua. You have already come to Yeshua through faith, and therefore the Torah no longer functions in this role for you.” That this is Paul’s primary conclusion is clear from v. 26, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua.”

But this does not negate the fact that the Torah continues to function in this custodial role for those who have not yet come to faith. Surely the revelation of God, contained in the Torah, which showed God’s method of declaring a sinner righteous, still functions to point people to Messiah. Furthermore, in the metaphor Paul uses, when one has arrived at the teacher, one does not therefore despise the pedagogue who lead him there! If anything, one is more appreciative of the custodian because he has performed his duties faithfully. In the same way, when a sinner comes to realize that he is unable to remedy himself of his guilt, and when the Torah leads the sinner to Yeshua, the only remedy for sin, he is forever grateful for the role of the Torah in leading to Yeshua. Far from considering the Torah to have been worthless, he recognizes the strategic role it has played.

Moreover, initial faith in Yeshua must be nurtured so that it might grow and increase, and the Torah aids in such growth since it is the revelation of God, His method of declaring sinners righteous, and teaches what God defines as righteous living. The Torah therefore instructs the forgiven sinner by showing how to grow in likeness to the Messiah. While the function of leading the sinner to the “Teacher” may no longer be needed (since he has already come to Him), the role of the Torah as teacher (a role Paul does not emphasize here) in revealing the full work and purpose of the Messiah continues on (cf. Rom 8:5ff).

So the conclusion of Paul’s argument here is stated straightforward in v. 26, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua.” The Gentile believers at Galatia are in no need of a ritual of proselytism, a “works of the Torah” kind of entrance into the covenant—they are already full-fledged covenant members because they have been granted faith in Messiah Yeshua.

Note the switch from 1st person plural “we” (vv. 23, 24, 25) to 2nd person plural “you” in this verse. Paul has demonstrated that the Torah functioned primarily to lead Israel to Yeshua, since Israel was the only nation to which the Torah was originally given (thus “we”). But the sudden switch to “you” (which denotes the Gentile believers) emphasizes the central theme of Paul’s argument, that the believing Gentiles have equal covenant status with the Jews who have believed. The stress is on “You are sons of God.”
Paul uses the phrase “sons of God” only two other times, Romans 8:14, 19. In all three of these instances, he is describing the covenant relationship that believers have with the one true God of Israel. This description of believers as “sons of God” given to the believing Gentiles puts them within the scope of Israel as God’s firstborn son (Ex 4:22) and thus as sharing in all of the covenant promises and responsibilities granted to God’s chosen people.

This granted covenant position is “through faith in Messiah Yeshua.” Even as Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him for righteousness, so the Gentiles have believed and they too stand righteous before God, for they have been reckoned righteous on the basis of Messiah work for them. His payment for sin, sealed in the resurrection as accepted by the Father, and His now sitting in the place of authority where He intercedes for His own—all of this accrues to the salvation of the elect, of which the Gentiles are a part.

This covenant position, obtained by faith in Messiah Yeshua, is now further explained in the following verses.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah.

Paul speaks of “all of you who were baptized.” The language may indicate that he expected visitors to be present who may not have considered themselves part of the believing community.

The word “baptize” is simply a transliteration of the Greek word βαπτίζω, baptizō and meant to immerse in water. The Hebrew word of the 1st Century that denoted such an immersion was מִקְּוָה, mikveh. Judging by the numerous ritual baths discovered in Jerusalem and throughout the Land of Israel, it is clear that in the time of Yeshua as well as His Apostles, the use of the mikveh was prevalent. The Torah requires immersion in water as the conclusion of purification for various kinds of ritual impurity (cf. Lev. 11:32,36; 14:8; 15:8,13; 17:15; Num. 8:7; 19:12,18-19; 31:23). Moreover, in the Judaisms of the 1st Century, a mikveh had become part of the ritual for the proselyte. John the Immerser called the people to repentance in view of the coming Kingdom, and ask them to manifest their preparation of soul by undergoing a mikveh.

In general, the mikveh of 1st Century Judaisms marked a change of status, primarily from the state of ritual impurity to that of ritual purity. Thus, the name “mikveh” is derived from the word meaning “hope” (tikvah), the waters of purification being that place of “hope” where one intended to acquire the status of ritually pure. This primary meaning, a change of status, worked perfectly for demonstrating metaphorically the change of status for those who placed their faith in Yeshua. The immersion marked the cleansing of one’s soul from the weight of sin, and the acceptance of Yeshua’s sacrifice as sufficient for payment of one’s debt. In this way, “baptism” in the Apostolic Scriptures combines both the ritual act (the actual immersion in water) with the metaphoric and spiritual reality, the change of status from guilty to not guilty, from unrighteous to righteous. Unfortunately, in the emerging Christian Church, the ritual act itself was infused with an efficacy which neither the Scriptures nor Yeshua had given it. Like the sacrifices in the Temple which could never atone for sin but which were metamorphosed by the priestly theology into something that supposedly could wash away sin, so immersion was turned into a

78 For further study on the mikveh in late 2nd Temple Judaisms, see the excursus in my Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (TorahResource, 2007), pp. 75–82.
saving act by man’s theology.

In Paul’s day, and in the experience of the Galatians, however, the immersion “in the name of Messiah” (cf. Matt 28:19f for a baptismal formula in “the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”) was a ritual act that manifested the inward faith of those who had believed. This confession with the mouth that revealed the belief of one’s heart (Rom 10:9-10) was considered the decisive moment at which a person placed his faith in the atoning work of the Messiah. As such, Paul could reference the mikvaot of the Galatians as proof that they had, indeed, confessed Yeshua to be their Messiah and Savior, and thus as proof that they were joined to the faithful of Israel as God’s covenant people.

The result of their confession of Yeshua as Messiah was that they had “clothed themselves with Messiah.” Literally, the Greek says simply: “have put on Messiah.” Once again, it is clear that Paul is speaking in metaphoric language. The idea is of putting on clean clothes, a metaphor used in the Tanach. For instance, in Isaiah 61:10 the prophet speaks of being clothed “with the garments of salvation,” and Zechariah talks of Joshua the priest being stripped of his filthy clothes and dressed in clean, priestly garments, all of which is symbolic of taking away iniquity (Zech 3:1ff). To be clothed with Yeshua, then, is to identify with Him in His righteousness; to have one’s clothes, filthy with sin, removed and the pure, clean garments of holiness donned in exchange.

Here is true identity—being “in Messiah Yeshua.” The life which Paul argues is the possession of the Galatian believers is one of identity, first and foremost with their Messiah. That the Influencers were denying this identity apart from “the works of the Torah” was to shift the identity from being “in Messiah” to being approved by man. This Paul could never allow.

But we should also note that for Paul, genuine faith involved “putting on the Lord Yeshua Messiah” (Rom 13:14), meaning that the righteous life of Yeshua becomes the life of His disciple as well—there can be no provision made for the flesh. Paul knows no faith that is devoid of faithfulness. If the Influencers were fearful that acceptance of the Gentiles purely on the basis of their confession would result in a diminished practical holiness of life, they were sorely mistaken. Paul understands that the change of status envisioned by the “mikveh into Messiah” is an inward reality that inevitably manifests itself in daily halachah. The Gentiles did not need to undergo a ritual of proselytism in order to assure the community that they would walk righteously and godly in the present age. They had “put on Messiah,” and His life of Torah obedience lived out in humble faith to God was the pattern for all who called themselves His disciples.

79 Some have questioned the textual integrity of Matt 28:19, supposing that the phrase “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” was a later addition. There is, however, no real textual support to exclude the phrase, and overwhelming textual evidence for its authenticity. See my essay, “Matthew 28:19–A Textual Critical Evaluation,” available at www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html.
There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua. And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

Paul now gives a ringing conclusion to his overall argument of this section, namely, that in terms of standing justified before the Almighty (note the emphasis upon justification in v. 26), neither one’s ethnic status, economic status, or gender made any difference. The only way that anyone can be justified in the eyes of the Righteous One is to be declared righteous on the basis of Yeshua’s salvific work in His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession (cf. Rom 8:34).

The three pairs which Paul lists here most certainly describe what, in his day, were groups of people whose status separated them in one way or another. That the current halachah attempted to keep Jews and Gentiles separate is clear, especially in matters akin to table fellowship. This was demonstrated by Peter and his unwillingness to eat with the Gentile believers except when it would have been kept secret from his Jewish colleagues in Jerusalem. Paul usually contrasts Jews by the terms “Greek” or “barbarian,” reflecting the Hellenistic world of his day. He does use the term “Gentile” (ethnos) as a contrast to “Jew” as well. In the end, whether he uses “Greek” or “Gentile” to contrast “Jew,” the meaning appears to be the same. Indeed, from a Jewish perspective, the world was divided into only two groups: Jews and non-Jews (Greeks or Gentiles).

Why does Paul add the second and third pairs here, however? At first glance, it does not seem to further his specific argument to the Influencers. However, the foundational axiom of the Influencers was that right standing before God was the result of one’s status, and it is this presupposition that Paul has been attacking. To add the other parallels, then, is quite understandable.

In the liturgy of the Morning Prayers, the following are found:

בָרוּךְ אָתַּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶלֹּא עָשַנִי גּוֹי
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, Who did not make me a Gentile.

בָרוּךְ אָתַּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶלֹּא עָשַנִי עָבֶד
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, Who did not make me a slave.

בָרוּךְ אָתַּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶלֹּא עָשַנִי אִׁשָה
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, Who did not make me a woman.

80 Rom 1:16; 2:9; 10:12; 1Cor 14:11; Gal 2:3; 3:28; Col 3:11.
82 There is a slight difference in the way Paul lists the three contrasting groups. The first and second are identical in their format, using “neither … nor” (οὐκ ἐνι ... οὐδὲ). In the third however, the Greek has “there is neither male and female,” οὐκ ἐνι ἄρσεν καὶ θηλή, which may be influenced by Gen 1:27. In context, however, the meaning is the same.
83 cf. m. Berchot 3.3; 7.2 in which women, slaves, and minors are exempt from participation in certain prayers. The blessings of the morning prayers cited above are not necessarily disparaging of Greeks, slaves, and women, but the explanation is given that these groups, being exempt from some of the mitzvot given to free male Jews, are less fortunate, and thus one is privileged to be a Jewish male to whom were given the greatest number of
It is not certain how old these “blessings” are, but it is remarkable that Paul puts his list in exactly the same order. The Yerushalmi (y.Berchot 7.18) has this threefold blessing ascribed to R. Y’hudah b. Elai while the Bavli credits it to R. Me’ir (cf. b.Menachot 43b). Since both of these rabbis were Tannaim of the mid-second Century, we may presume the blessing was well in place as a liturgical element by 150 CE. Given this fact, it is likely that the inferior status of non-Jews, slaves, and women was a teaching in the earlier decades, and therefore formed a convenient list for Paul as he made his theological point.

What is the point for our study? In each case, the separation of the three sets of people (Jew/Greek; slave/free; male/female) is based upon the respective status of each group. For Paul, the method by which one enters the kehilah of Messiah is completely through faith in what He has done, and in no way based upon personal status, whether ethnic, economic, or gender. This is his point: all who are “in Messiah” are justified by faith and thus all are equally justified—there are no levels of righteousness in the eyes of God for those who are in His Son. Thus, the equality Paul stresses here is one’s standing as righteous before God.

Surely he is not suggesting that ethnic distinctions were erased in Yeshua, any more than he was teaching that slaves become politically freemen when they believed, or that gender distinctions disappear for those who have confessed Yeshua! Such a reading of the text would be preposterous. That Paul taught distinct roles for various classes of people within the community of believers is clear. But he is not arguing issues of role here, but of how one “gets into” the collective people of God and is therefore counted as righteous.

Elsewhere Paul expects slaves to obey their masters and masters to treat their slaves with equity. He expects women to remain silent in specific situations and restricts them from the office of authoritative teaching. Such allocation of various roles within the body of Messiah in no way demeans one’s character or person. In the same way that the Father, Son, and Spirit are mysteriously one yet function in some distinct roles, so the body of Messiah is one yet with many members functioning in their God-given capacities.

But this is not Paul’s purpose here, i.e., to describe the various roles that people have within the community of believers. Rather, his purpose is to affirm with the utmost sincerity that, in matters of justification (being declared righteous by God), all who have exercised a genuine faith in Yeshua stand equal before the Lord.

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84 Eph 6:5-6; Col 3:22; 1Tim 6:1.
85 Col 4:1.
86 1Cor 14:34-35.
87 1Tim 2:11f. I recognize the current controversies over the meaning of this text, but it seems clear to me that while women were given high privilege in the Apostolic community, they were, nonetheless, forbidden to hold the office of Overseer to which is attached the responsibility for guarding the Apostolic message (1Tim 3:1ff). That the qualifications for Overseer are clearly given with only men in mind seems most obvious from Paul’s language.
“But,” some might ask, “what are the practical ramifications of this equality in justification? Is it entirely theoretical or does it work its way out in the everyday life of the believing community?” Most certainly it works its way out in the everyday life of the community! First, it is on the basis of our equal righteousness in Yeshua that we view each other as having equal value. All are endowed with the Spirit, and therefore all are necessary for the proper functioning of the body (cf. Eph 4). Because of this, we are eager to listen to all and to appreciate the part they bring to the collective whole. Secondly, we care for each other equally. We bear each other’s burdens, not on the basis of ethnic, economic, or gender status, but because together we are sheep of the same pasture, cared for by the same Shepherd. Thirdly, we appreciate each other as each ministers to the other, and encourage one another in the multi-faceted roles assigned to each. We do not despise any service for the Lord, because we have come to recognize that every part is necessary for the body to function as God intends. Finally, we affirm the fact that all of God’s blessings are equally the possession of all of God’s children. He does not withhold blessing from one group (Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female) or relegate any one to an inferior status within His household. All are privileged to eat at His table, and all are therefore enjoined to receive each other in the spirit of equality. That various groups of people within the body of Messiah may serve in differing roles in no way negates this equality. In fact, it is in the proper functioning of each in his or her Spirit-led role that develops and maintains the unity of the body in the bonds of peace.

In our times, this verse (3:28) is disputed primarily in regard to two of the contrasts mentioned: Jew/Greek and male/female. Taken out of context, it is argued that Paul’s statement here has in all ways discarded the distinctions and there is therefore no difference in roles either. On the basis of this misunderstanding of Paul’s point here, it is taught that all ethnic distinctions have been abolished, as have gender roles within the body of Messiah. I have elsewhere written on the role of women in the body of Messiah,89 in which I give the biblical case for the office of Overseer being restricted to males. In this same study, however, I show that the women within the community have a vital role, a role which has regrettably been diminished in the history of the Church. What, however, should we make of the claim that there is a distinct “calling” and “role” for the Jewish believer within the body of Messiah? Is this warranted? Do Jewish believers have a unique calling within the body of Messiah?

In a limited sense, I would answer in the affirmative. By this I mean that Jewish believers have an obligation to maintain their Jewish identity as long as this does not compromise their open and unabashed confession of Yeshua as the Messiah, and does not set up walls of separation from their non-Jewish brothers and sisters. For a believer in Yeshua to affirm that he has Jewish heritage is to affirm the faithfulness of God to His promise that He would never forsake Israel. This was Paul’s argument in Romans 9:23ff. That God has maintained a faithful remnant among the descendants of Jacob is proof that He is faithful to His word.

But then the same is true of non-Jews. That Gentiles would affirm their having been called out from the nations to join the kehilah of believers is likewise to extol the faithfulness of God, for He promised to bless the nations in Abraham’s Seed. So while it is important for believing Jews to maintain their

Jewish identity, it is equally important for non-Jews to affirm their membership within God’s family as those chosen from the nations. It is in this way that God’s faithfulness to both is seen, and one reason why Paul forbade Gentiles from attempting to gain Jewish status. If all in the body of Messiah are reckoned as Jews, then God is the God of the Jews only, which is a falsehood (Rom 3:29f). God’s purpose for the body of Messiah is that Jew and non-Jew confess a single faith, living out that life of faith according to a single standard (the Torah), and that therefore Yeshua is seen to be the Shepherd of one flock. In this way, the promise to Abraham is witnessed as being fulfilled in our world.

But the teaching that there is a calling for the believing Jew beyond this I do not affirm. First, the word “calling” is used by Paul, not of some special role or ministry, but of the life of holiness which all the saved community should exemplify.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. (1Cor 1:26–29)

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Gal 5:13)

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints… (Eph 1:18)

Let the peace of Messiah rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:15)

The “calling” of God in Pauline literature speaks of salvation in general (cf. Rom 8:28f) and holy living in particular. This is the calling of all, regardless of lineage or ethnic association. To use Paul’s Olive Tree metaphor, all of the branches, whether natural or grafted in, bear the same fruit because all are attached to the riches of the same root. This is our calling, whether Jew or non-Jew. It is wrong, therefore, to teach that Jews have certain privileges in the body of Messiah which the non-Jew must forfeit (such as affirming one’s vital connection to Abraham as one’s father, cf. Rom 4; participating in the covenant signs; living out a complete and full Torah lifestyle; rejoicing in the Sabbath and Festivals, etc.). Those who have joined themselves to the Lord by being grafted into the covenant of Israel have the same privileges and responsibilities as the Jewish believer. Together they are a light to the nations; together they serve the Almighty; together they rejoice in the blessings of the covenant and the hope that they may pass to the next generation the glory of witnessing to a watching world that God is faithful to His ancient promises. To argue differently is to fly in the face of Paul’s clear teaching, and to go contrary to the promises in Messiah foretold by the prophets.

It is this very point Paul makes in the conclusion of v. 28: “for you are all
one in Messiah Yeshua.” It is in the face of diversity (Jew/Gentile; slave/free; male/female) that unity is possible. While maintaining our distinct ethnicity, economic status, and gender, we nonetheless affirm our full and complete equality in the Messiah: One Master (and thus one set of halachot); One faith (and thus one Divine revelation [Bible] for all); One mikveh (and thus one primary and overarching identity for all). This is our calling, and together we serve each other to fulfill it.

29 And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

Like the former verse, in which the word order emphasized the sense of “all” (nás, pas being put first in the sentence), so here Paul brings the larger argument (that one’s status in the world does not afford him a place in God’s grace) to bear upon the specific case at hand by emphasizing “you” (uμeís, humeis), putting it at the beginning of the clause. If status in this world has no affect upon one’s standing in grace, then this applies specifically to the Gentile believers in Galatia: they stand in the blessings of God, the blessings promised to Abraham’s seed, because they participate in exactly the same faith that Abraham had. They do not come by this blessing through physical lineage, but through promise, the promise of God that He would bless the nations in Abraham’s Seed, that is, in Messiah. To be able to affirm that “Abraham is my father” (cf. Rom 4:16) is also to affirm that one is a bona fide covenant member with all of the privileges and responsibilities enjoined by the covenant.

But the key is in the “belonging: “if you belong to Messiah” (εἰ δὲ uμeís Χριστοῦ, literally “and if you are Messiah’s”). Here is the primary identity. Not that one is first a descendant of Abraham and as a result belongs to Messiah, but rather that he is first “in Messiah” and as a result, a descendant of Abraham. This is Paul’s argument through and through. This is not to suggest that those who are physically descended from Abraham are not his descendants until they exercise faith in Yeshua, but it is to affirm that all true descendants of Abraham will participate in his faith, and this participation is the best proof of their connection to the patriarch. While Paul does not spend any time explaining this here like he does later in Romans 9-11, it may be affirmed that for Paul, the true descendants of Abraham are known for participation in Abraham’s faith (3:7).

That the issue of calling Abraham one’s father was extant in the Mishnaic times is clear, and we may presume that at least the issue had been raised in Paul’s day. Note the following rabbinic halachah for proselytes:

These [people] bring [firstfruits] but do not recite: a proselyte brings but does not recite, because he is not able to say, “[I have come into the land] which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us,” (Deut 26:3). But if his mother was an Israelite, he brings and recites. And when he [the proselyte] prays in private, he says, “God of the fathers [instead of “God of our fathers”]. And when he prays in the synagogue, he says, “God of

90 It is a great misfortune that some within the Messianic movement have begun teaching what they call the “Divine Invitation” doctrine. In this errant theology, it is taught that Jews are obligated to the whole Torah, while Gentiles are divinely “invited” to keep the Torah. For an assessment of this teaching and refutation of it, see my essay, “An Assessment of the ‘Divine Invitation’ Teaching,” available at www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html.
your fathers.” [But] if his mother was an Israelite, he says, “God of our fathers.”

If indeed this issue was surfacing in Paul’s day, we know what side he took. From Paul’s perspective, to tell Gentile believers within the body of Messiah that they cannot claim Abraham as their father, is to deny their status within the covenant, and thus to deny the viability of their faith.

Note carefully that Paul does not say that they are physical descendants from Abraham, but that they are “heirs according to promise.” For Paul, the word “promise” encapsulates the idea of faith, for it was in regard to the promise that Abraham believed and it was counted to him for righteousness. The concept of “promise” in Paul is centered upon the Promised One, and faith in His work of salvation. Thus, “heirs according to promise” means “heirs by faith in the Promised One.” Even as Isaac was the promised son who came by divine fiat, so the sonship of the Gentile believers came about, not by means of the “flesh” (i.e., by ethnic status) but through the sovereign work of grace infused within them by the Spirit, granting repentance and faith.

So Paul is not teaching a “replacement theology” here, whereby those of faith are the true descendants of Abraham to the exclusion of the physical descendants of the patriarchs. That whole issue, of how God will sovereignly bring the physical descendants to faith, is not dealt with here (Paul explains this in Romans). Rather, Paul is dealing with how the Gentiles figure into the covenant and the promise of God—by being the recipients of the promise given to Abraham. He concludes that their faith has made them heirs of Abraham and thus partakers in the covenant made with him.

But as Abraham’s heirs, what has been bequeathed to the Gentile believers? If we can be allowed to include Paul’s teaching to the Romans, then we know that the answer is this: the Gentile believers have become heirs of all of the richness of the root that nourishes the tree into which they have been grafted! The Torah, with its wisdom and safeguards for life and community; the Sabbath, with its joy and focused perspective on God’s faithfulness and love; the Festivals, with their revelation of God’s salvation, and the promise of His dwelling among His people; the Prophets, and their call to a humble life of faith; and finally and ultimately, Yeshua, our Messiah, Who loved us and gave Himself for us. This is the heritage of all who call Abraham their father.

In a time when the Christian Church appears to have lost her way, often being hardly distinguishable from the world, nothing is more vital than to reclaim our heritage as Abraham’s descendants, and to retrieve the covenant blessings that have been lost. For Paul, a vital connection to Abraham was far greater than theoretical theology: it grounded the believer in a firm identity that is seen in the everyday life of faith. What is more, if we are able to recognize who we are in Messiah, and then to see ourselves as sons and

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92 Interestingly, Rambam sides with Paul on this one, teaching that anyone who does the commandments is a part of Israel and may refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as “our fathers.” See the comments of Blackwell, Mishnaot 6 vols (Judaica Press, 1983), 1.469. Rambam’s teaching, that proselytes are one and the same with the native born Jew, may be found in Letter to Obadiah the Proselyte. See Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader (Behrman House, 1972), pp. 475–76.
daughters of Abraham, we will have the ability to pass on to the next generation a sense of belonging that our generation has essentially missed.

This is not an easy task! We have centuries and even millennia of contrary and errant theology from which we must “unwrap” ourselves. We must retool our thinking, and work diligently to realign our outlook: our true identity will require shedding the false one we may have carried. Even as the Galatian believers were being called upon by Paul to forego the prevailing view (that becoming a proselyte was necessary for them to be full-fledge covenant members), so we must be willing to scrutinize what we have been taught, judging it against the straight-edge of the Scriptures. When we do, we will recognize our identity as “heirs according to promise” and live accordingly.
Chapter Four

Commentary

1–2 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

The conclusion of chapter three brought Paul’s point-of-view into full clarity: the Gentile believers are genuine heirs of Abraham, and as such, fully participate in the blessings and responsibilities of being heirs. They are not second-class citizens of the people of God but are full heirs of the promise. This is because no one obtains the status of heir merely through physical lineage. The heirs of Abraham are participants in his faith. What is more, even the physical offspring of Abraham were chosen (adopted) by God, and so His sovereign choice of individuals from the nations (Gentiles) accords them equal status as adopted children in God’s family.

Now, like all good teachers, Paul moves to a fitting analogy in order to bring his point home to the minds of his readers. He selects for his analogy something from the Hellenistic culture of which his readers were well acquainted. It thus would ring true for them, and would illustrate his point. We can see how closely his current illustration maps his previous argument, and how he even sees the illustration as relevant for both Jewish and Gentile believers.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Three - the Pedagogue</th>
<th>Chapter Four - Guardians &amp; Stewards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The son is under the charge of the Pedagogue in order to assure that he is taken to the teacher.</td>
<td>The son is under the charge of Guardians and Stewards in order to keep him until he is declared an heir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Torah is the Pedagogue.</td>
<td>The Torah acts like the Guardian or Steward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The coming of faith (=exercise of faith) completes the task of the Pedagogue.</td>
<td>The coming of Yeshua was the decisive event that sealed the chosen son as an heir.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The trained (graduated) student no longer needs to be led to the teacher.</td>
<td>The son is fully adopted and thus becomes the rightful heir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The trained (graduated) student is given the privileges and responsibilities of his new position (=heir according to promise).</td>
<td>The son is no longer in the legal status of a slave, but enjoys all the privileges and responsibilities of a true heir.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Roman law, the head of the family exercised complete authority over all family members and all property of the family. The *Patria potestas* sets up the

¹ Dunn offers a different parallel between chapter three and four. He suggests Paul’s conclusion is that the Torah has been done away with, *Galatians*, p. 210. In the sense of the Oral Torah being done away with, i.e., the need for Gentiles to undergo the ritual of a proselyte in order to be received into the believing community, his remarks may offer good insights. But like many Christian commentators, he simply fails to see that the Torah is God’s eternal standard of righteousness for all of His chosen ones.
scenario that until such time as the head of the family enacted a formal *emancipatio* (emancipation) and *adoptio* (adoption), members of the family had no greater legal status than that of slaves. This meant that a natural son could own nothing until such time as his father declared him emancipated and adopted as his genuine heir. Physical lineage alone could offer no legal status. This time of emancipation and adoption was set at the age of 14, but even then the father had some discretion as to whether the son would be named an heir.²

This illustration from Roman law fits Paul’s argument well, for it was the decree of the father regarding the son that gave him legal status, not merely his physical lineage.³ Thus, whether Jew or Gentile, the declaration of righteousness, based upon one’s faith (just as in the case of Abraham), was the foundation of one’s legal status as heir of the covenant.

—as long as the heir is a child—The Greek word for “child” here is ἅπατος, *nepios*, which literally means “an infant,” but is used to denote the legal status of the son before coming to the age of 14. Even though it is presupposed that when he comes of age, he will in fact be the heir to his father’s possessions, until that time he has no different legal status in terms of ownership than does a slave. Furthermore, in terms of status within the family, while everyone recognizes that he will inevitably become the heir, legally he is under the same restrictions as a slave (even if, in practical measures, he was no doubt treated differently). Paul’s emphasis is upon the legal status, because this fits his current argument.

—but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father—In Roman law, the father could appoint a tutor to teach the son until he turned 14. He could also appoint a curator to take charge of the son from age 14 to 25. If this is what Paul hints at by his use of Guardian (ἐπίτροπος, *epitropos*) and Steward (οἰκονόμος, *oikonomos*), then the distinction would be that the Guardian concerns himself with the heir himself, while the Steward protects his property. Regardless, Paul’s point is that the minor does not himself have charge, either of his own life nor of the property which he stands to inherit. He still remains in the status of a minor which legally was no different than a slave.

—until the date set by the father—Even though in Roman law the time at which a son comes of age was set by statute (being 14 years old), the father still had some discretion in the matter, and could (apparently) wait until the lad was older. Bruce notes that a will found in the Oxyrhynchus papyri fragments (491.8-10), contains one section where the father delineates 20 years of age to be the time at which his sons would enjoy ownership of his property. Thus, while the normal age was 14, apparently the father could appoint the time when a son would become heir. Once again, this fits Paul’s argument perfectly, for the decisive event of “liberation” was the coming of Yeshua, an event appointed by the Father.

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3 That a son who had come to the age of 14 could appeal to the courts in the event that his father neglected to complete his emancipation and adoption seems to be a possibility but this was the exception, not the rule. In broad strokes, however, the illustration fits Paul’s argument.
So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

Paul now switches to the first person plural “we,” by which we should most likely understand him to be applying the illustration to Jews as well as to Gentiles. While the Jewish people considered themselves to be teachers of others (cf. Rom 2:20) because they possessed the Torah, in reality, the Torah (as Paul is here emphasizing) was given to lead to Messiah. As such, like the young boy in the Roman household who was under the guardianship of tutors and stewards, apart from matriculating to faith in Messiah, the Jewish people as well are viewed as minors without proper legal status. That is, in terms of the analogy, apart from faith in Messiah Yeshua, there was no genuine claim to being heirs of Abraham’s promise (covenant). This is emphasized by the fact he uses the same Greek word (νεπίος, nepios) here as well: apart from faith in Yeshua, the physical descendants of Jacob are still minors in the household of God.

While this could sound like Paul is verging on replacement theology, we know he is not. For in Romans he explains himself further, that God’s plan for the natural offspring of Abraham (Israel) is that they should be saved (Rom 11:25), and thus that they will, in the course of God’s sovereign providence, be declared as rightful heirs as well. But for Paul, faith in Yeshua, the same faith that Abraham had, is the key to gaining legal status as an heir. For him, the covenant is entirely Christocentric, and apart from Messiah, eternal membership in the covenant is an impossibility.

… were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. – This phrase, “the elemental things of the world” (τὰ στοιχεία τοῦ κόσμου, ta stoicheia tou kosmos) has evoked much debate. It is found also in 4:3, 9, as well as in Col 2:8, 20. The word stoicheia means literally “things placed side by side,” and was used of the ABCs in early education. Thus, the word gained the meaning “rudiments,” and came to be used of the basic building blocks of the universe. The possible meanings include: (1) the basic building blocks of the universe as envisioned by the Greek philosophers, namely, earth, water, air, and fire, which were given names of divinities, Demeter, Poseidon, Hera, and Hephaestus, respectively; (2) the elementary forms of religion (cf. Heb 5:12); (3) the heavenly bodies, the stars, understood as divine powers which influence or determine human destiny, and from a biblical perspective, dealing with demonic deception.

We know that for the Gentile believers, their former life was entirely characterized by idolatry (4:8) and that in the Hellenistic world, this was a worship of the gods (demons) who were thought to control the stoicheia. But Paul uses the phrase here of the Jewish people: “we were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.” It is easy to understand how this phrase could be used to characterize the pre-faith lives of the Gentiles, but how could it be applied to the Jewish people?

We may receive some insights from Philo’s use of the term stoicheia. While he is clear that the Greeks deify the stoicheia and worship them (Decal. 53), he also seems to recognize that the stoicheia are real, and that they play a vital role in the universe. In The Life of Moses we read (describing the High Priest):

[the breast plate is] rightly called the place of reason, for a rational prin-

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4 For a complete study and description of the phrase “elemental things of the world,” see Burton, Galatians in the ICC (T & T Clark, 1921), pp. 510ff.
ciple (logos), ordered and firmly established, creates the transitions and seasons of the year. When the high priest enters to offer the ancestral prayers and sacrifices there may enter with him the whole universe, the long robe a copy of the air, the pomegranate of water, the flower trimming of earth, the scarlet of fire ..., the twelve stones on the breast in four rows (stoichoi) which holds together and administers all things.\(^5\)

This is only an example. Philo is rather taken up with the vital role of the “four elements” in the universe, and even how the four seasons parallel the stoicheia. For Philo, since the universe was created out of the “four elements,” (he did not believe that God created into nothing, but that the four elements were eternal), the number four reigned supreme in mathematics and in the basic structure of the universe. That is why, for instance, there are four seasons. It is no wonder then, that he also considered the stoicheia to be integral for the right understanding of man and God, and the relationship between them.

What might we make of this? We know that by the 2nd Century CE, Gnosticism had risen to a place of prominence, both in emerging Christian groups, as well as among some Jewish mystics. It seems quite probable that Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians was written, in measure, to address the Gnostic heresy. In short, Gnosticism combined the mysticism of the Hellenistic world with the worship of Israel’s God. Postulating circles of knowledge gained through mystical experience, the Gnostic believed that through intellectual pursuit, one could lift himself from the physical world in which he was trapped, to the purely spiritual (non-physical) world of the divine. Of course, in order to do this, one must be in possession of the mysteries which only the Gnostic teachers knew. It was the apprehension of the mystery that enabled a person to climb the spiral of gnosis, true knowledge, by which one could escape the evil, material world.

It seems clear that some of the Judaisms of Paul’s day believed in a kind of “fate,” whether personal or impersonal. For instance, Josephus writes:

> The sect of the Essenes declares that Fate is the mistress of all things, and that nothing befalls men unless it be in accordance with her decree.\(^6\)

This whole notion that the universe is somehow bound up with the “four elements,” and that these deified entities control that fate of mankind was not something restricted to the pagan religions of Greece and Rome. This demonic “worldview” had also influenced the Judaisms of the day, and had, to one extent or another, may have become the thinking of many a common man, whether Jew or Gentile.

If indeed a pre-Gnosticism was already extant in the Judaisms of Paul’s day, he could well speak of being under the “elemental principles of the world” when he considered the manner in which the rabbinic interpretations of his day had combined Hellenistic thought with the study of Torah. But for Paul, the Hellenistic concept of the stoicheia was not merely an errant form of philosophy—it was pagan and the realm of demons. Not unlike the kabbalism that would captivate Judaism in the middle-ages, the nascent

\(^5\) Vit. Mos. 2.121, 125.
\(^6\) Ant xiii.172.
Jewish Gnosticism in Paul’s day was a mixing of things that essentially differ. Before coming to faith in Yeshua, Paul had fully espoused the rabbinic theology of his day, with its increasing anti-Gentile bias, and its security in man-made rituals. But after faith, he recognized that the promises of his former Pharisaism were akin to the shepherds of Jeremiah’s day who proclaimed “peace, peace” when there was no peace. The idea that one’s ethnic connections could secure a place in God’s eternal covenant was, in one sense, no different than the deception taught by the philosophers, that the universe was made up of, and in some measure controlled by, the “four elements.” In this way, both the Greek and the Jew were in bondage before they came to faith. And the greatest strength of this bondage was that neither knew about it. The true concept of liberty could only be known in Yeshua.

This is not to negate the great body of truth which the Judaisms of the 1st Century (including Pharisaism) held. Nor to negate the revealed truth of the Torah which in many ways guided the Jewish communities of Paul’s day. But apart from seeing Yeshua in the Torah, its ultimate truth was veiled, and all attempts to live out its lofty precepts were destined to failure.

One cannot help but think that this viewpoint of Paul was gathered from the words of Yeshua (John 8:32ff), when He claimed that the Pharisees who had rejected Him were themselves enslaved, and that only through Him could they be free indeed. He further questioned their rightful claim to Abraham as their father, for they rather did the works of Satan and were not following in the footsteps of Abraham, the father of the faithful. In similar ways, Paul is claiming that before faith, both the Jew and the Gentile were enslaved to the deceptions of the world, and were held in bondage until the time of their liberation.

4–5 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Torah, so that He might redeem those who were under the Torah, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Paul now takes his illustration and applies it to the theological lesson he wishes to teach. Just as the father could appoint a time at which the son would be emancipated and legally adopted, so God ordained, in the course of this world’s history, that the Messiah, His Son, would be born of a woman (the incarnation), and would come to redeem those who were otherwise no different than slaves. It is this “Christ-event” that marks the decisive moment in earth’s history, and in the plan of salvation for mankind. It was this event which Abraham longed to witness, and through the prophetic revelation of God, he saw (John 8:56).

In the phrase “when the fullness of time had come,” Paul gives to us his understanding of the course of time. The world is not governed by the “four elements,” nor is it the collective whole of random events. The universe is governed in its entirety by the sovereign Creator Who brings about all things according to the council of His will. Here Paul gathers together the prophetic vision of Israel’s prophets, and pinpoints the fulfillment of their words in the incarnation of the Messiah.

The phrase is cast in the past tense: “had come” (ἐλήλθον, eilthen, aorist of ἔρχομαι, erxomai, “to come”). This envisions, as it were, a container being

7 He does not question that they are, in fact, the physical offspring of Abraham, for in v. 56 He says, “Abraham your father longed to see My day ....”
steadily filled (the passage of time) until it is full (this is the meaning of the Greek πληρώμα, plerōma, “fulfilled,” “fill up”).

The implication is of a set purpose of God having been brought to fruition over a period and its eschatological climax enacted at the time appointed by him…. This conviction that the eschatological climax had already arrived set up the ‘eschatological tension’ between the already and the not-yet which was so characteristic of earliest Christian theology.  

Surely, the “times” were not entirely “fulfilled” in Paul’s perspective. He recognized that much was yet to be fulfilled which the prophets foretold. Yet the coming of Yeshua so sealed as inevitable the completion of God’s plan of salvation, that the fulfillment was a surety. In this way, the believing community, existing in this time of fulfillment, enjoys a foretaste of the ultimate victory to be realized in the complete redemption won by the Son. It is the hope of this final and ultimate fulfillment upon which faith lays hold, and the hope of eternal life thus allows the believer to experience its reality now. It is this “already/not-yet” that allows the believer to rejoice with joy unspeakable while at the same time groaning within oneself for the full redemption (Rom 8:23). It is in this “already/not-yet” that the believer both recognizes his position as an adopted son within the family of God, and awaits his final adoption.

Here, then, we see a foundational pillar of the Apostolic Judaism which Paul represented. Yeshua is the fulfillment of the prophetic vision of the Messiah, and He is so because He is the predetermined Messiah Who comes precisely as the determined will of God prescribed. His appearance in the course of history was not a random event, but was the culmination of God’s sovereign plan for effecting eternal salvation.

This pivotal truth may be seen in Paul’s statement of 1Cor 15:3-4:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . . .

It was in the manner in which the Scriptures (the Tanach) were interpreted as telling the story of Yeshua’s death, burial, and resurrection for sinners that Apostolic Judaism made its unique contribution to the community of the faithful.

born of a woman – This phrase was a common circumlocution for the human person. Dunn and others deny that the phrase has any reference to the virgin birth, but this is predicated upon their idea that the doctrine of the virgin birth was not extant in Paul’s day, but was a later insertion to Christian dogma in the post-destruction era. While the phrase may have no direct reference to the virgin birth, it seems obvious to me that it does connect to the promise of Genesis 3:15 and the “seed of the woman.” Thus, in its common usage, the phrase first emphasizes the human quality of the incarnation. Yeshua came as a man like all men, “born of a woman.” He was not some unique blend of human and divine—a kind of “once-in-histo-
ry” oddity. He was fully human, and therefore exhibited His humanity as He walked upon this earth. As a man, therefore, Yeshua stands as the zenith of mankind, that is, as the very reality of what God intended man to be. He is therefore the last Adam (Rom 8:3) in that he fulfills the role which Adam failed to fulfill.

But Paul’s use of the phrase, especially in the context of the Abrahamic covenant (chapter 3) and the promise of blessing upon the Gentiles, must theologically connect to the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15. The Promised One, Who would remedy the schism between the Creator and mankind, was to come through the woman. He is therefore the Promised Seed and it is by Him that the serpent would be crushed.

born under the Torah – There are several possibilities for what Paul means by this phrase. He uses “under the Torah” a number of times in his epistles, and twice already in Galatians. At times it is clear that all mankind falls under the condemnation of the Torah:

Now we know that whatever the Torah says, it speaks to those who are under the Torah, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; (Rom 3:19)

Yet in some respects, “under the Torah” designates the Jewish people in particular:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Torah, as under the Torah though not being myself under the Torah, so that I might win those who are under the Torah; to those who are without Torah, as without Torah, though not being without the Torah of God but under the Torah of Messiah, so that I might win those who are without Torah. (1Cor 9:20–21)

We might be inclined to see the use of “under the Torah” in our verse to likewise be speaking of the descendants of Jacob, so that Paul’s meaning is that Yeshua came as a Jew who was raised and taught within the boundaries of Torah. This of course is true. But the parallel of this passage with what Paul has just written in chapter three shows that the idea of the condemnation which the Torah brings against sinners is well in view:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3:13–14</th>
<th>4:4–6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>having become a curse for us</td>
<td>born under the Torah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Torah</td>
<td>in order that He might redeem those under the Torah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit</td>
<td>in order that we might receive the Spirit of adoption</td>
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The parallels are close enough that we should understand Paul to be reiterating his former point. In this case, “born under the Torah” also carries with it the sense that as sinners, mankind finds himself under the curse of the Torah, a curse from which only the redemption proffered by Yeshua could bring a remedy.

11 Gal 3:10, 23.
But was Yeshua born “under the condemnation of the Torah?” In one sense, He was not. As the perfect and holy Son of God, He did not partake of Adam’s sin, and as such, was not born a sinner (cf. Rom 5:12f). But in another sense, He was born for the purpose of carrying the condemnation of His people, and in this sense He was born “under the condemnation of the Torah” as it pertains to their sins.

In this passage, Paul presents the ministry of Yeshua as primarily soteriological. The emphasis is not so much on Yeshua as a teacher of Torah or of wisdom but as identifying with the human condition (“born of a woman”) “in order that, by His identification with the human condition …, His death might be the price necessary to free them from the slavery endemic to that human condition ….”12 In this regard then, we should most likely see Paul’s phrase “born under the Torah, so that He might redeem those under the Torah” to be a reference to Jew and Gentile alike. Even though the Gentile has no sense that he is condemned by the Torah until such time as he hears the message of the Gospel, he is nonetheless in a state of condemnation. He is “under the Torah” in the sense of being under its condemning power. Likewise, the Jew, who may have never considered that the Torah would condemn him, is under the condemnation of the Torah until such time as he places his faith in the redemptive work of Yeshua.

so that He might redeem those who were under the Torah – The word Paul uses for “redeemed” is ἐξαγαροῦσα, ἐξαγαροῦσα, used only in 3:13 and here in terms of human salvation.13 Its basic meaning is that of paying the necessary price to secure the deliverance or freedom of a person, particularly in the price to redeem a slave. While the common word for redemption (λυτρῶ, λυτρῶ and forms built upon this root) emphasizes “deliverance” or “salvation,” this word focuses upon the price necessary for one’s “freedom.” Paul thus casts the redemption of the sinner into the world of commerce by way of metaphor. The holiness of God demands payment for sin, because sin by its very nature is a detraction from His holiness. In order for the sinner to be declared righteous, there must be payment equal to the negative value of his sin. This payment must therefore be of an infinite sum, for any detraction of God’s infinite holiness requires an equally infinite payment. Mankind, therefore, is without means to make such a payment, and unless another offers the sum necessary, man remains condemned in the slavery of his sin.

This is not a Pauline invention. Isaiah, in the context of the promises of the Davidic covenant, proclaims:

Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. (Is 55:1)

This prophetic vision, cast in the metaphoric language of commerce at the market, implores Israel to accept the bounty of life freely, because the purchase price has been paid by the Almighty. The satisfaction of the Father in terms of the Son’s sacrifice (Isaiah 53:11) means that the price has been paid—the debt has been satisfied. And thus the justice of God is also satisfied. In this way He is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in

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12 Dunn, Galatians, p. 217.
13 It is used in Eph 5:16 and Col 4:5 of “redeeming the time.” It is found no where else in the Apostolic Scriptures, nor is it found in the Lxx.
Yeshua (Rom 3:26). It is on this basis that Paul can affirm: “There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Messiah Yeshua” (Rom 8:1).

*that we might receive the adoption of sons,* – The redemption that Yeshua has made for all who are His is not only a payment of the price owed because of sin, but also secures membership in the family of God for the redeemed slave.

The metaphor of adoption has been hinted at already at the beginning of the chapter, in the Roman custom of the father adopting the son as a legal heir when he reached the age of 14. But adoption as a picture of God’s sovereign election and salvation is a theme drawn originally from the Tanach.

---------- Excursus on Adoption ----------

Adoption was not uncommon in the ancient Semitic world.

Adoption differs from fosterage in that the latter is a temporary arrangement which is not legally binding. The foster child receives support but not the status of son or daughter.¹⁴

Adoption in the Ancient Near East was primarily for the purpose of giving legal status. Thus, adoption could result in giving someone the status of “son” or “daughter,” but also “brother,” “sister,” or even “father.” From Nuzi we discover that a husband could adopt his wife, giving her the status of “sister” or “sister-in-law” which would secure the transfer of family inheritance to her in the event of his death.¹⁵ Likewise, in a Babylonian text, slaves are adopted in order to give them their freedom.¹⁶ It was not uncommon for a Suzerain to adopt his Vassal king in order to give him royal, family status.¹⁷ This is the meaning of Psalm 2:

You are my son, today I have begotten you. (Ps 2:7)

The choosing of Abraham is for the purpose of covenant, that is, to give him legal status in God’s world.¹⁸ That the giving of land is an integral part of the covenant (Genesis 15) shows that God has chosen Abraham to give him

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¹⁷ See the comments of Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90.2(1970), 191 where Hittite treaty texts include the statement by the Suzerain to the Vassal: “I will make you my son.”

¹⁸ Gen 18:19 uses the Hebrew word ידָע (yada’) “to know” in the sense of “covenant relationship:” “For I have chosen him” is literally, “for I have known him.” Cf. Amos 3:2, “you only have I known (chosen) among all the families of the earth.”
legal ownership of a territory which, though occupied by other peoples, was His rightful possession to give to His chosen, covenant fellow. “Choosing” is connected to the act of adoption.

God also chooses the offspring of Jacob:

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you [בְּךָ בָחַר b’cha bachar] to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deut 7:6)

The normal language used for adoption in the Akkadian was “to take for son/daughtership.” The use of “take” (Hebrew הָנֵלֶק, lakach) in the sense of acquire legal status is also found in the normal language of the Tanach for marriage: a man “takes” a wife. We should not be surprised, then, when God is said to “take” Israel to be His people:

Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Ex 6:7)

This is likewise adoption language.

Yet even this should not come as a surprise. The metaphor of adoption has already been encountered in Jacob’s adoption of Joseph’s sons:

Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance. (Gen 48:5-6)

What is more, the fact that Jacob had Ephraim and Manasseh sit upon his knees may also signal the formal act of adoption.

Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. (Gen 48:12)

That Ephraim and Manasseh are specifically placed between (or on?) the knees of Jacob is most likely symbolic of adoption, since the children born by a concubine were the legal possession of the wife, for the concubine was said to bear the children “on the knees” of the wife (meaning the children were considered as legal heirs of the husband and his wife). Note Genesis 30:3:

She said, “Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children.” (Gen 30:3)

The key to this phrase lies in the symbolic gesture of placing the adopted person on one’s knees, widely attested in Near Eastern sources, especially Hittite, as well as in the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. The place or reception of a child on or by the knees of another signifies legitimation,
whether in acknowledgment of physical parenthood or by adoption.\textsuperscript{21}

Thus, Jacob adopts the sons of Joseph. From that point on, they were legally his brothers, and coheirs in the inheritance of his father, Jacob. In like manner, God adopted Israel as His first born son—Israel, and none other.

The exodus is portrayed by Ezekiel as an act of adoption:

> Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem, “Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. “As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. “No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. (Ezek 16:1-5)

Israel’s origin is construed as from foreign parents, Canaanite and Amorite, the most pagan of nations in Israel’s history. Likewise, the ceremony of the first fruits after entering the Land included the mandatory phrase, “My father was a wandering Aramean,”\textsuperscript{22} reminding them of the fact that Jacob had sojourned in Aramaea and from which region he had also acquired wives and children.

Thus Israel is viewed as the adopted child of God. Indeed, the Land belongs to Him, and He simply bequeaths it to Israel, though, like the ger, she has possession of the Land only because it ultimately belongs to her Father:

> The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me [כִׁי־לִׁי הָאָרֶץ כִׁי־גֵרִׁים וְּתוֹשָבִים אַתֶּם עִׁמָדִי]. (Lev 25:23)

Israel, therefore, could never be confident in herself—in her own ancestry. She was forever dependent upon God Who had adopted her from her paganism and made her His child forever. Her right to the Land was only maintained in her relationship with her Father through adoption.

This idea of the adoption of Israel must be what underlies Paul’s use of the term “adoption of sons.” He lists adoption as one of the privileges of Israel:

> who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Torah and the temple service and the promises .... (Rom 9:4)

Paul includes himself in this adoption when he writes:

> so that He might redeem those who were under the Torah, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal 4:5)

The English “adoption as sons” translates ἡ ὑποθεσία he ὑποθεσία, “a legal, technical term for the adoption of children.”\textsuperscript{23} This Greek word is not found in the Lxx, and thus must be used by Paul to develop the theme of adoption in terms familiar to his readers.

\textsuperscript{22} Deut 26:5.
\textsuperscript{23} BDAG, “ὑποθεσία”.
Here is emphasized the corporate election of Israel as God’s first-born son. God as “Father” is revealed to Israel in the context of his “sonship.” However, Israel’s sonship is a matter of God’s grace, and not the mere outworking of the natural course of events, for Israel is “adopted,” that is, chosen by God to be His son. Thus, for Paul, even though the nation is currently in a state of unbelief, Israel is still the adopted (and thus rightful) son of God, for he uses the present tense: “to whom belongs the adoption as sons.”

But for Paul, God’s adoption process is not restricted to the physical offspring of Jacob. All of God’s chosen ones, whether descended from Jacob or brought near from the nations, comprise the people called God’s adopted son:

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15, cf. v. 23)

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will. (Eph 1:5)

This metaphor of adoption emphasizes the “already/not yet” in Paul’s theology. On one level, Israel as the physical descendants of Jacob have not yet received Yeshua on a national scale. Yet she retains the “adoption as sons” because the promise of the covenant has been made to her. Her adoption is secure only because God intends, in the kindness of His grace and faithfulness to His word, to bring her as a corporate entity to faith in the Messiah. However, the remnant, consisting of both Jew and non-Jew, has already received her Messiah and are witnesses of God’s adoptive grace, for the remnant already behaves as His true son, embracing the Messiah through Whom the adoption has been secured.

-------- End of the Excursus -------

Thus, to receive the adoption as sons pertains to all who are saved by grace, whether Jew or non-Jew. All in the family of God have equal status because all are adopted sons and daughters. There can be no confidence “in the flesh.” Our identity is based upon the grace of God Who has adopted us into His family. We are all called by His name, and are identified as children in His family.

This speaks directly to Paul’s primary argument in Galatians: the Gentiles are bone fide members of the covenant, not on the basis of a declared ethnicity (becoming proselytes), but by the gracious, sovereign election of God by which they were adopted into His family through the redemption made by Yeshua. This extends the point he has already made in 3:28, that

24 Ex 4:22f; Jer 31:9; Hosea 11:1.
25 The notion that Paul uses first-person pronouns in Eph 1 to refer to Jews, and second-person pronouns to refer to Gentiles, is an eisegesis that fails to consider the epistle as a whole. Paul’s emphasis throughout the next two chapters is that Gentile believers occupy the same legal status within the body of Messiah as do Jewish believers. Moreover, in the opening verses, Paul extols the elective decree of God whereby He chose those who would be blessed in Yeshua (cf. v. 4), which surely includes Gentile as well as Jewish believers in Yeshua.
there is neither Jew nor Greek, for the Jewish believer could not consider himself above his Gentile brother, as though he was a “natural son” and the Gentile an “adopted son.” Indeed, the only “natural son” is Yeshua, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 26 All other children in God’s family are adopted, whether Jew or Gentile. And as noted above, the adopted children were given the full status of “sonship,” nothing more nor less. It is in this way, then, that everyone within the body of Messiah finds his or her ultimate identity, not in one’s lineage (or lack thereof), but in Messiah. It is by His redemption that we have all received our family heritage, and in Him we are able to call Abraham our father, and the Almighty, “Abba.”

6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

The way in which this sentence begins in the English translations might lead some to the conclusion that the giving of the Spirit is subsequent to becoming a son. That is, “because you are sons” means “as a result of being a son,” and that therefore the giving of the Spirit is the result of being sons, not the cause of sonship. But the Greek construction does not necessarily bear this connotation. The word translated “because” is the Greek ὅτι, hoti, which can mean “because” or “on account of” but can also have the meaning “to show that” or “to prove that.”27

A classic example of this usage is to be found in the story of the woman who anointed Yeshua’s feet with oil. Yeshua compares the owner of the house with the woman: when He arrived, the host did not greet Him or wash His feet, yet the woman bathed his feet in oil and did not stop kissing His feet. The conclusion the Master draws is found in Luke 7:47, “For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for (hoti) she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Why were her sins forgiven? Because she loved much? In other words, is one required to love God in order to have his or her sins forgiven? Clearly not: while we were still His enemies, He loved us! (Rom 5:6-10). Rather, in this phrase we have the same construction using hoti. If we understand it as meaning “proof of,” then the words of Yeshua ring true: “... her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, and the proof is that she loves much.” One who is truly forgiven demonstrates this reality by loving the One Who has extended His forgiveness.

We may offer the same interpretation of hoti here. “As proof that you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Thus, the identity of sons is that they have the indwelling Spirit of God. This accords with Paul’s previous statement that “be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham” (3:7). It is the life of faith that demonstrates genuine sonship.

The giving of the Spirit is here attributed to God the Father, Who sends the “Spirit of His Son.” In the history of the Christian Church, the issue of the “procession of the Spirit” became a hotly debated topic, sufficient to produce severe and lasting division between the Greek and Latin Church of the 9th Century. The Eastern Church regards the doctrine of the single procession of the Spirit (that the Spirit was given by the Father alone) as the cornerstone of

26 Matt 1:20.
orthodoxy. The Western Church held that the Spirit proceeds both from the Father and from the Son. This debate came to be known as the *filioque* controversy, the Latin term meaning “of the Son.” In 589 CE, the Nicene Creed was expanded to include the *filioque* clause, so that the confession read: “And we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life; Who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son],” and the division over the issue ensued. The whole matter was primarily an argument of metaphysical theology, and an extension of the Trinity doctrines against the Arian heresies of the day. The primary texts upon which the controversy raged were John 14-16.

Obviously, Paul had no such debate in mind when he wrote Galatians! Paul writes that God “sent forth” (ἐξαποστέλλω, *exapostellõ*, “to send out from”) the Spirit. The verb is used only here and in 4:4, where it is used in connection with God “sending forth” His Son. In this regard, the sending of the Spirit by the Father references the Shavuot experience of Acts 2, in which the Spirit is sent to accomplish a specific task, namely, the ingathering of the nations. Paul is linking that reality with the evidence of the Spirit in the lives of the believers in his day. For the fact that the Galatian community is comprised both of Jew and Gentile, and that both evidenced the presence of the indwelling Spirit, showed that the mission of the Spirit was being accomplished—the witness of Yeshua, carried by His apostles, was bringing about the ingathering of the Gentiles.

*into our hearts* – The locus of the Spirit’s work is in the heart. For Paul, as for all the writers of Scripture, the heart is the place of moral decision as well as the fountain of emotions and desires. Thus, the Spirit affects and governs “the motivating and emotive center of the person.” This marks the person as a true “son” in that the inner work of the Spirit brings about a conformity of life to the thoughts and ways of God, as perfectly demonstrated in His Son, Yeshua. This is a constant theme throughout the Pauline epistles.

While Paul’s primary emphasis here was the manner in which the Gentiles had been gathered into the people of God, he still uses the inclusive “our hearts,” for the work of the Spirit knows no division among the people of God.

The lynch pin of Paul’s theological statement here, however, is his claim that the Spirit is “the Spirit of God’s Son.” Since the Gentiles have evidenced the abiding Spirit in their hearts, and since He is the Spirit of the Son of God, they too share in the adoption as sons. Their status of sonship is both in regard to Abraham (since Yeshua is Abraham’s son) and to God (since Yeshua is God’s Son). Here, in one brief clause, Paul expounds the mystery of the transcendence of God as well as His nearness. How could God be “wholly other” while at the same time be personally involved in the lives of each of His children? How could the Spirit of God, the very Spirit of Yeshua, take up residence in the hearts of believers? This is the mystery of God’s salvation, and one which betrays a full explanation. Yet the reality of it is true: God, manifest in His Son, and brought near by His Spirit, dwells among mortals. This is the goal of salvation, that God should dwell with His people, and they with Him. And though the fullness of this reality

29 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 220.
30 Rom 2:29; 5:5; 6:17; 10:8-10; 2Cor 1:22; 3:2-3; 4:6; Phil 4:7; 1Thess 3:13.
awaits the future, it is already being experienced in the lives of His children. Thus, the proof of our adoption as sons is the presence of the Spirit in our lives whereby we are being conformed more and more to the image of His Son. The “Spirit of His Son” has become our Guide in life, and is applying the eternal truths of the Scriptures to our everyday decisions and actions.

**crying “Abba!” Father** – The activity of the Spirit in the heart of the believer is here characterized as a crying out to God. The verb for “crying” (κραζω, krazō) has the sense of urgency or intensity, as from one’s inner being (heart) and with emotion. It pictures the cry of a child to his father, whether in times of need or joy. Is Paul describing a form of prayer here, or is it a wider description of the general heart-cry of the believer? It is difficult to say, but it could be both. We know that Yeshua used the Aramaic term abba to address the Father (Mark 14:36), and it is interesting that in both of Paul’s references (here and Rom 8:15f), the use of the term abba is in the context of the Spirit of His Son or the Spirit of Messiah. It would appear that scholars such as Jeremias and Dunn are correct in concluding that the abba tradition in the prayers of Yeshua’s followers was patterned after Yeshua’s own prayer style.31

But why would the Aramaic abba be used, especially among Hellenistic Greeks who populated the ever-widening community of The Way? While the rabbinic view of prayer was moving more and more away from a personal approach to God, and was being cast in corporate terms, the prayer of Yeshua, and thus of His disciples, was centered in a personal, “son” relationship to the Father.32 Dunn goes so far as to conclude:

> The clear implication of Rom 8:15f. and Gal 4:6f. is that Paul regarded the abba prayer as something distinctive to those who had received the eschatological Spirit. Had it been in common usage within any other large group or class within Palestine or Judaism Paul could hardly have thought of it this way, as a distinguishing mark of those who shared the Spirit of Jesus’ sonship, of an inheritance shared with Christ. In short, the evidence points consistently and clearly to the conclusion that Jesus’ regular use of ‘abba’ in addressing God distinguished Jesus in a significant degree from his contemporaries.33

Indeed, if Dunn has captured the truth of the issue, then this distinction of Yeshua in the manner in which He prayed is nothing more or less than the similar distinction He made in regard to the Torah as essentially a function of the circumcised heart. For Yeshua called His disciples to the realization that their covenant relationship with God was one of close intimacy with the Father, the kind demonstrated in His own life. It was the hypocrisy of “going

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31 See Dunn, Christology in the Making (Westminster, 1980), pp. 26ff. Barr “‘Abba Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech” Theology 91(1988), 173-79 takes exception to the findings of Jeremias and Dunn, arguing that the term was common, and would have been used as responsible adult speech.

32 For a full study on the issue of prayer in rabbinic theology and writings, see Seth Kadish, Kavvana: Directing the Heart in Jewish Prayer (Aronson, 1997). He shows that the majority of rabbinic authorities, while not discounting the use of personal requests in prayer, urged the pray-er to seek God’s good for the community rather than for personal issues, and that in some traditions, one’s personal prayers (those composed by oneself) were discouraged and even forbidden.

33 Dunn, Christology, p. 27.
through the motions” that brought Yeshua’s condemning words toward His contemporaries, a hypocrisy that was the result of a lack of genuine communion with the Father as fostered by the Spirit. For though the outside of the cup could be polished, inside there was filth. In contrast, it is the heart of the genuine believer, upon which the Torah has been written by the Spirit, that calls out in familial terms to the Father. The life of faith, then, is a life of communion; of relationship and growing awareness of one’s true identity within the family of God. It is a life lived in the Spirit in which the common cry is “Abba.”

Abba (אָבָא, ‘abba’) has been historically understood as a diminutive form of אָב, av, “Father,” thus “Daddy.” So the Talmud states: “an infant cannot say ‘father’ (abba) and ‘mother’ (imma) until it has tasted of wheat” (i.e., until it is weaned). An interesting notice is found in b. Taanit 23b:

Hanan ha-Nehba was the son of the daughter of Honi the Circle-Drawer. When the world was in need of rain the Rabbis would send to him school children and they would take hold of the hem of his garment and say to him, Father (abba), Father (abba), give us rain. Thereupon he would plead with the Holy One, Blessed be He, [thus], Master of the Universe, do it for the sake of these who are unable to distinguish between the Father (abba) who gives rain and the father (abba) who does not.

One should note, of course, the contrast between the pleas of the children and the manner in which the Sage addresses God. He does not use abba but “Master of the Universe,” yet he still refers to God as abba in the following line.

A study of the word abba, however, shows that it was not so much a diminutive form as it was the common manner in which a child would address his or her father. In fact, it was not only used by children, but by adults when they addressed their father as well. However, even though it is not equivalent to our common English “Daddy,” it was, nonetheless, a familial term, and one which captured the relationship of father and child. As such, it did take on a special meaning among The Way as they emulated the words of their Master, Yeshua.

For Paul, in our immediate context, the use of abba as a cry from the child to his father likewise emphasizes the status of sonship enjoyed by all who are God’s children. And this is his point: the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, who have come into God’s family via faith in Messiah Yeshua, are equally privileged to address the Almighty as Father—as Abba. The point of it all is that we are children in the same family, with the same Father.

7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Paul’s conclusion is simple and to the point: since the Spirit of Messiah has been given to all who believe, they are no longer counted as slaves (using the Roman analogy) but they have been fully adopted as sons. The sentence is cast in the singular: “Therefore you (singular) are no longer a slave ….” Thus, Paul expects each one, whether Jew or Gentile, to recognize

35 b. Berachot 40a; b. Sanhedrin 70b.
his or her status as a _bona fide_ child within the family of God, and thus with equal privileges to call upon the Father as _Abba_. While the slave had no potential for inheritance, the son was a full heir, and thus the rightful recipient of the Father’s wealth. This inheritance principle brings us back to the issue of the promise made to Abraham and to his descendants. As full-fledged members of the family of God, the believer (both Jew and Gentile) may anticipate receiving the inheritance of the covenant, that is, the blessings which come through the work of God in Messiah Yeshua.

8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

Having confirmed the freedom that the Gentile believers had through their faith in Yeshua, Paul goes on to contrast it with the bondage of slavery which was theirs before they believed. His overall argument at this point is clear: “you should certainly know what slavery is, since you were slaves to your pagan beliefs before coming to Yeshua. How could you be enticed, then, to return to a position of slavery after you have experienced the liberty in Yeshua?”

The phrase “at that time” translates the simple Greek ἄλλα τοτε, _alla tote_, “But then ….” Obviously Paul is referring to their former life in paganism. This former life is characterized by two things: (1) you did not know God, and (2) you were slaves. The idea of “knowing God” is a thoroughly Hebrew one, taking “know” in the sense of covenant relationship. The “knowledge of God” (cf. Num. 24:16; Job 18:21; Prov. 2:5; Hos. 4:1; 6:6) as well as “knowing God” was the privilege of Israel (Deut 4:39; Is 43:10) to whom God had revealed Himself and His Torah (cf. Ps 147:19-20). But it was also Israel’s responsibility to receive and accept the revelation God had given. Failure to do so resulted in God’s rebuke (Jud 2:10; Is 1:3; Jer 22:16; Hos 4:6; 5:4; 6:6).

In contrast, the nations do not know God (Ps 79:6; Jer 10:25) and have no covenant relationship with Him (Amos 3:2). They worship what they think are gods, but what, in reality, are not gods but demons (2Chron 13:9; Is 37:19; Jer 2:7-11; 16:20). As such, their worship is actually a morbid enslavement to demonic forces that desire to destroy them.

Paul enters into the metaphysical realm of the Hellenistic world when he writes “which by nature are no gods.” There is nothing in the Hebrew that corresponds to the Greek word “nature” (φύσις, _phasis_). This Greek term is not found in the canonical books of the Lxx, but only in the apocryphal works (3Mac. 3:29; 4Mac. 1:20; 5:8-9,25; 13:27; 15:13,25; 16:3; Wis. 7:20; 13:1; 19:20). But recognizing the Hellenistic background of the Gentiles at Galatia, Paul utilizes their thinking process, and simply says that the essential nature of the gods they formerly worshiped was, in fact, not divinity at all. At the heart of all idolatry is the presence of demons who deceive and portray themselves as divine beings. In reality, there is only one God—there is none else (Is 45:14, 18).

9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

As noted in the previous verse, the Gentiles whom Paul is addressing had come to “know God,” that is, they had come into a covenant relationship with God. But Paul makes a very important corrective here, lest the means by which
they had come into this covenant relationship should be misunderstood. He adds, “or rather to be known by God” (μᾶλλον δὲ γινωσκέτες ὑπὸ θεοῦ). This is because any relationship with God begins with God, not man. Apart from God’s initiation in salvation, it simply does not come about. Man is not able to find God, much less to draw Him to act on his behalf. God’s salvation is a matter of His pure and sovereign grace, meaning that He dispenses it as a matter of His own free will, without being acted upon by any outside force.

Thus, since the Galatians had come to genuine faith in Messiah, evidenced by their changed lives and the presence of the Spirit in them, Paul affirms that they have “been known by God.” Having this covenant relationship means that they have entered into liberty, that is, the freedom and ability to obey God—to fulfill the very purpose for which they were created.

Given the fact that the Gentile believers had undergone a genuine conversion, experiencing the presence and works of the Spirit, what would have been sufficient to turn them toward the message of the Influencers? Nanos, along with others, suggests that the influence may well have been a growing persecution. We know that under Roman law in Paul’s day, the Jewish community had received a religio licita, that is, the right to congregate, to carry on Jewish worship, and to collect money. However, this privilege was granted to Jews only, not to Gentiles. It is further clear that Gentiles who neglected to perform the necessary acts of allegiance to the emperor were punished, and that in the years preceding the 1st Jewish revolt, the enforcement of the requirements to participate in the Imperial cult were heightened. This meant that Gentiles who had not officially converted to Judaism, (i.e., were not proselytes) were at the mercy of the Jewish community. If the Jewish community continued to shelter them and treat them as one of their own, all was well. But if the Jewish community refused to maintain their relation with Gentiles, but rather marked them out publicly as non-Jews, they were obligated to participate in the Imperial cult.

This, of course, created a great dilemma for the believing Gentiles. On the one hand, Paul had forbidden them to become proselytes, since by doing so they would be acquiescing to the idea that covenant status was based upon being Jewish. Yet on the other hand, they could not participate in the Imperial cult, which included offering sacrifices to the gods and to the Emperor himself, and still maintain their true confession of Yeshua. They were faced with only one option: suffer for the name of Yeshua.

In light of these data, it seems very probable that the Gentile believers at Galatia to whom Paul was writing were seeking to “straddle the fence,” maintaining their connection with the synagogue while at the same time returning to the required participation in the Imperial cult. This made the Influencers’ message all that much more appealing: if they were to undergo the ritual of a proselyte, they would be declared Jews, and would be exempt from involvement in the rituals of Emperor worship. Though they would suffer some persecution and estrangement from their Roman community and families, they would be free from the persecution of Rome. Thus the Influencers’ message appeared as “good news” after all!

For Paul, however, to be involved with the Imperial cult, even if one’s heart was not in it, was to become enslaved again in the paganism from which they had been delivered. Paul uses the phrase “turn back again” (πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν). The word for “turn back,” ἐπιστρέφω, ἐπιστρέφει, ἐπιστρέφο, is

37 See the data in Mark Nanos, The Irony of Galatians (Fortress, 2002), pp. 260f.
regularly used in the Lxx to translate the Hebrew word שׁוּב, shuv, use in a positive way to indicate turning to God in repentance, but in a negative way for turning away from God (Num 14:43; 1Sam 15:11; 1Ki 9:6; Ps 78:41; Jer 3:19). However, in these cases where the negative aspect of שׁוּב is in place, the Lxx uses a different word, ἀποστρέφω, apostrephō. It could be that the Lxx translators are influenced by the rabbinic use of shuv to mean “repentance toward God.”

Elsewhere, Paul uses this word both in 2Cor 3:16 and 1Thess 1:9 in the positive sense of turning to God in repentance. Here, however, the sense of turning back is to return to the domination (enslavement) of the “weak and worthless elements” (ἐπὶ τὰ ἁπλὰ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα). He uses the same term, stoicheia, that he used in v. 3. Indeed, the Roman Imperial cult was the very center of the paganism which believed that the “elements,” including the stars, moon, and sun controlled the destiny of mankind. Such superstitions were part and parcel of the cult itself.

Paul says that they “desired to be enslaved all over again” to these “weak and worthless elements.” This emphasizes a true but difficult reality: the choices offered them were, in one sense, all bad. The were forced to choose between a denial of Yeshua by participation in the Imperial cult, or a denial of Yeshua by submitting to the rabbinic ritual of a proselyte. The only other choice was to suffer from all sides, Rome and synagogue alike. But Paul clearly urges them to this choice. Their willingness to begin again to participate in the Imperial cult is viewed by Paul as their choice to seek enslavement rather than endure suffering for their confession of Yeshua.

It is not surprising, however, that the history of Christian interpretation has taken this passage to teach that the Torah is itself connected with the “weak and worthless elements” of the world, and that believers should therefore rightly reject it in favor of faith in Yeshua. One hardly needs to comment on such an interpretation, since it is impossible when one considers Paul’s consistent praise of the Torah, his own willingness to submit to it, and his message as Yeshua’s Apostle that would necessarily need to uphold Yeshua’s own view of the Torah (Matt 5:17-20). Moreover, to posit, as many commentators do, that this passage proves the Torah to be for the Jews but not for the Gentiles, is equally fallacious. For if the Torah is that which partakes of the “weak and worthless elements,” then it is good for no one! Yet Paul considers the Torah to be holy, just, and of a genuinely spiritual nature (Rom 7:12, 14). If one is able to appreciate Paul’s view of the Torah as the divine revelation of God to His people, then one simply cannot interpret this passage as forbidding the Gentiles to espouse Torah. Rather, if we interpret the passage in light of the social and religious events of the day, we understand a scenario where Gentile believers found themselves with only one valid choice: suffer for the name of Yeshua. It is easy to understand how some, perhaps many, would strongly consider either returning to a participation in the Imperial cult or becoming a proselyte to avoid this persecution.

10–11 You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Most commentators consider this entire section to be a polemic against the Torah, in which Paul puts faith in Yeshua as over against life in Torah, and considers the one valid, while the other to be an enslavement to the “weak and worthless elements” of the world. Those who take this view consistently
understand v. 10 to be speaking of the Sabbath, Rosh Chodesh (New Moon), moedim (Appointed Times = seasons) and perhaps the Sh'mittah and Yovel (Sabbatical and Jubilee years). Their take on this verse usually goes like this: “You are beginning to observe the Sabbath, the New Moon, the other festivals and even the Sabbatical and Jubilee years! What’s happened to you?! I’m beginning to think my labors have been in vain, that you’ve entirely left the faith!”

However, if we understand the social background that was causing the Gentile believers to flirt with some involvement in the Imperial cult in order to escape persecution, we may continue to interpret Paul’s words as applying to pagan rituals, not Torah observance.

The Imperial cult had its own days, months, seasons, and years.

Troy Martin has argued, against the consensus, that what the addressees are turning back to are not Jewish practices but pagan ones. I find his case convincing, and it is useful for evaluating the matter at hand. Stephen Mitchell makes an observation that sharpens the point … “the force which would have drawn new adherents back to conformity with the prevailing paganism, was the public worship of the emperor. The packed calendar of the ruler cult dragooned the citizens of Antioch into observing days, months, seasons, and years which it laid down for special recognition and celebration.”

One author goes so far as to say that “time itself was changed by the imperial cult.”

This interpretation, that Paul is referring to pagan days, months, seasons, and years fits best with the language he uses in which he speaks of the Gentiles as “turning back again” (ἐπιστρέφετε, epistrefete) to the weak and worthless elements. He has already identified their past as that of idolatry (v. 8). To use the term “turn back again” for those whose former life was one of idolatry helps us identify that to which they were tempted to turn.

This should not be construed as suggesting that the Gentile believers were considering a denial of their faith. Nor is it to suggest that immediate persecution was upon them if they did not become proselytes. It is more likely that they were weighing all of the options: if they became proselytes, their “father in the faith” (Paul) would consider that they had compromised the Gospel he had delivered to them. If they refused to become proselytes,

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40 Some have argued that the similar notice in Col 2:16ff cannot be interpreted as referring to pagan worship, and since these texts are parallel, this would suggest that our text cannot be so interpreted. However, in the Colossian text, Paul does not include the element of “years” which he does include here. Furthermore, the context of Col 2 is that of a gnosticism that has been mixed into the worship of the community, and it is probable that the early Gnostic heresies also included sectarian “rules” regarding the Sabbath, Festivals, and Rosh Chodesh (New Moon). So while Paul uses similar language in both instances, it is quite feasible that the situations he addressed were very different.
they might face the indignation of Rome. Perhaps in working out the various scenarios, they were contemplating the possibility that they could participate in the Imperial cult in part (even against their conscience) in order to save their skin.

But there is a further dynamic in the argument of Paul. In showing his disgust at even the thought of their returning to participate in the Imperial cult, Paul has also shown them exactly where they stand with the Influencers. These teachers who were urging them to become proselytes really did not have their interests at heart, but only their own desire to control and rule them. If they would force them to engage in the Imperial cult in order to avoid persecution, then they were surely not treating them as brothers or as honest members of the community. Forcing the issue of the Imperial cult helped to shine the light of reality upon the Influencers and uncover their true motivations (cf. v. 17).

Thus, in the context immediately following, Paul will rehearse the brotherly camaraderie that existed between himself and the Galatians, and he will appeal to this *chavrut* (fellowship) as a basis for the sincerity of his message. In contrast, the Influencers only have themselves in mind.

For Paul, leaving the pure message of the gospel on either side of the issue was a disaster. If the Gentiles succumbed to the pressure of the Influencers and became proselytes, they were giving in to the belief that, in some measure, salvation rested upon ethnic status. If they refused the Influencers, and, under pressure from Rome began again to participate in the Imperial cult, they would return to the enslavement of idolatry from which they had been freed. Either choice was a bad one. And for Paul, to see them make either choice was to bring into question the validity of their faith and ultimately the value of Paul’s own work in their midst. They must “stay the course” and be willing to stand firm on the truth of the Gospel as it had been delivered to them.

In summary, then, the

“yoke of slavery” (cf. 5:1) for these Gentiles believers was not the Jewish Law observance but observance of pagan practices such as are expressed by participation in the Imperial cult and other idolatrous festivities that are part of pagan civic life, which these Influencers themselves are free from, yet ironically, support as appropriate for the addressees in their present pagan state.  

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12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong:

Paul interrupts his argument from Scripture (he will return to it in 4:21ff) to offer a genuine, personal appeal. The style of the Greek at this point is abbreviated which fits a more personal, passionate appeal (note the italicized words in the NASB, which are needed to “fill in” the gaps left by the Greek).

Some commentators take Paul’s words here to mean: “I gave up Torah observance to come to you and bring you the Gospel, now it’s time for you to do the same.” But as I have noted repeatedly, there is no evidence that Paul gave up any clear Torah commands of the Scriptures, though he surely discarded some of the rabbinic Oral Torah, especially the growing number of restrictions regarding fellowship with Gentiles. And it may be that Paul is speaking to them on this level, regarding Oral Torah. Even as he was willing to

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let the man-made rulings drop by the wayside in order to be obedient to the Written Torah and to Yeshua, it seems to me very probable he is also calling the Gentile believers to be willing to suffer for the truth, even as he had suffered.

Increasingly Paul was being rejected by those who considered that he had abandoned Torah (because he had dare “transgress” some of the rulings of the Sanhedrin). Indeed, this rejection would grow to such a point that some would eventually plot to kill him. By the time he had written his third epistle to the Corinthians (our 2Corinthians), we hear him relating that he had received lashes five times by the synagogue authorities. It is not as though Paul was uncaring or unfeeling for the situation in which the Gentile believers found themselves. It no doubt caused him inner turmoil to think that his Gospel would bring about the persecution of the Gentile believers. But Paul had learned for himself that persecution was not something to fear, or to cause one to compromise his faith. Rather, Paul had learned that to be persecuted as a follower of Yeshua brought a deepening of his faith in and love for the Messiah. To the Colossians he would write:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the ekklesia, in filling up what is lacking in Messiah’s afflictions. (Col 1:24)

He had learned that suffering for the truth worked its own measure of grace and maturity through the ever-indwelling Spirit, and had allowed him to appreciate in ways otherwise unknown of the sufferings of Messiah. He had experienced that standing for the truth, even in the face of persecution, wrought deep benefits for the soul.

If the Gentile believers in Galatia were to be faced with no other option than to be persecuted at the hands of Rome, then they, like him, would deepen in their faith through that persecution. It is in this way, I believe, that he calls them to become like him.

But how is it that Paul became like them? In jettisoning the rabbinic halachah which would have separated Paul from the Gentiles, and in openly fellowshipping with the Gentiles, eating with them and congregating with them in their homes, Paul had identified with the Gentiles and as such, had no doubt been shunned by many in the Jewish community. He had followed in the footsteps of Messiah, Who left the glory of His heavenly dwelling with the Father in order to become a man and to fellowship with men. Paul had become like them because he was treated as one of them by his Jewish colleagues, especially in Jerusalem. It was this very issue which brought the confrontation of Peter to the fore.

Paul’s words in 1Cor 9:19–22 may support this viewpoint. In reference to the traditional synagogue community, Paul can say: “To the Jew I became as a Jew” and “to those under the Torah, as under the Torah” (v. 20). Likewise Paul identifies with those Gentile believers who were labeled as “without the Torah” by the Jewish community by stating: “to those who are without the Torah, as without Torah, though not being myself without the Torah but under the Torah of Messiah” (v. 21). But notice the different language in the next comparison (v. 22): “To the weak I became weak.” He leaves out the little word “as.” He did not become as weak, but actually claims to be weak. In short, the Jewish community judged the Gentile as unable to gain covenant membership, as having an inherent weakness that made covenant
membership an impossibility. And Paul identifies personally with that same weakness. For the ability to be a member of the covenant was not something automatically possessed by those who were born Jewish. All people, regardless of their ethnic status, are unable (weak) to be covenant members in God’s family apart from His grace and saving work in Yeshua. Thus, if the Gentiles were judged as “weak” because they lacked Jewish legal status, then Paul willingly claimed that same weakness for himself. The ability or right to be a covenant member in God’s family was possessed by no man, because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

Here, to the Galatians, Paul is begging them to become as he was, that is, to acknowledge their utter inability to garner God’s favor. He was imploring them to admit their “weakness” as he had, and in doing so, to trust fully and only in the grace of God as manifest in the Messiah, Yeshua.42

Once again, we have no indication that Paul is suggesting he abandoned the word of God (the Torah) in order to fellowship with the Gentiles. On the contrary, there is every evidence to suggest that as he was among the Gentile communities, he taught them the “obedience of the faith,” that is, a conformity of life to the teaching of God in the Torah. What he did abandon, in part, was the rabbinic halachah which had erected walls of separation based upon ethnic criteria and had taught that Gentiles could not be covenant members apart from acquiring legal Jewish status through the act of becoming a proselyte.

>You have done me no wrong – Paul makes it clear, now, that though his words have been harsh, they were so because of his perception that the Gentile believers were hanging on a spiritual precipice and were about to fall. But his anger is not actually directed toward them—rather his surprise (in ironic fashion) is that they could so easily be “duped” by the false “message of good” brought by the Influencers. Paul still feels a deep friendship with his converts, and wants them to know that they have done him no wrong. They are not like others (the Influencers, for instance) who had waged war against him personally, and against his Gospel which announced the equal inclusion of the Gentiles as bona fide sons of Abraham. In his final epistles to Timothy, Paul even names some of those who had wronged him (cf. 2Tim 4:9ff).

13–14 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Messiah Yeshua Himself.

The account of Paul’s journeys in Acts and other brief historical notes in his epistles give us no information regarding the physical sickness to which Paul here refers. It seems reasonable to presume that this “bodily illness” (literally “weakness of the flesh”) is similar to or even the same as his “thorn in the flesh” mentioned in 2Cor 12:7. Whatever it was, the illness was apparently of such a nature that it prohibited him from journeying on past Galatia, and required that he stop to recuperate there. That he speaks of preaching the gospel to them “the first time” does not necessarily mean that he went a second time. The Greek word πρῶτος, proteros can mean either “first of several” or simply “once.” Since the word is used both ways, its presence

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42 For a fuller exposition of 1Cor 9:19–23, see my paper “‘All Things to All Men’ – Paul and the Torah in 1Cor 9:19–23,” available at www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html.

43 Cf. BDAG, “πρῶτος” for the various uses.
here cannot be used to determine whether Paul visited Galatia once or twice. Regardless, the point he makes is that it was a sickness that provided the opportunity to stop in Galatia, an opportunity that resulted in his preaching the Gospel and the ingathering of the Gentiles to the faith. Here we see Paul’s theology in action. He would make this explicit when he wrote to the Romans that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). In this he stands as an example for us all. We must find in the events of life, even in those that are uncomfortable, the hand of God working for His glory and our good.

*and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition* (literally, “in my flesh”) you did *not* despise or loathe – Perhaps the REB gives the sense of this compacted sentence: “you resisted the temptation to show scorn or disgust at the state of my poor body.” The language translated “you did not despise or loathe” is literally “you did not despise or spit out.” This second verb, “spit out” (ἐκπίπτων, ekptuŏ) may hint at the ancient custom of spitting when coming into contact with that which appeared demonic or as a defense against sickness. Schlier has suggested: “the Galatians resisted the temptation to see in Paul someone demonically possessed because of his sickness.”

This may help us appreciate the superstitious world in which the Galatians lived. One Greek author (Theocritus, vi.39) writes that one could ward off the evil eye by spitting three times. The “elemental things of the world” were clearly part of their culture.

Regardless, the Galatians did not succumb to the pagan superstitions of their culture, but received Paul with his disgusting sickness, treating him as an “angel (or messenger) of God.” From a Hebraic standpoint, the offering of hospitality, on the analogy of Abraham in Genesis 18, always held out the possibility that one would entertain angels without knowing it. We should understand here, however, that they received Paul because they recognized that he was, in fact, God’s messenger—one who was coming with the truth of God. But Paul’s message was very specific: it was the message of the Gospel which centered in the person of Messiah Yeshua. Even as the Master Himself taught that when we do kindness to any of His brethren, it is as though we were serving Him directly, so the Galatians received Paul as though they were receiving Yeshua Himself. Here again we find good teaching for our own lives: we are to serve one another with the same heart we would serve Yeshua Himself. When we minister, even to the least of His brethren, we minister to Him.

Paul has therefore emphasized the kind and loving kinship that resulted between himself and the Galatians. This relationship resulted in a caring for each other that went well beyond the common, cultural expectations. There was a willingness to sacrifice one’s own comforts for the sake of the other.

15–16 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

The common greeting among the Jewish communities for a visitor was בָּרוּךְ הַבָּא, baruch haba, “blessed is the one who comes.” This was not merely a formality (though it could surely devolve to that) but a hope that when a
visitor entered one’s home or community, they would receive a blessing and be a blessing. In Paul’s visit to the Galatians, doubtlessly both were true. He was blessed by their generous care for him, and they were blessed by the message of the Gospel which he brought. This idea of berachah, “blessing” characterized his time with them. So his question comes with a bit of a sting (once again the words and phrases are compressed): Where is that same sense of berachah which we shared together previously?

The reference to “plucking out eyes” could be taken two ways: (1) it could simply be metaphorical for that which is most precious, and thus most valuable. This would mean that the Galatians would have stopped at nothing to minister to Paul; (2) it could mean that Paul’s ailment was in his eyes, and that for some reason he was unable to continue his trip because of temporary blindness or some sort of eye failure. Some have suggested that it was poor eyesight that required Paul to write in such large letters (6:11).

Most commentators take the first option, and make “plucking out the eyes” as an idiom, much like our saying “I’d give my right arm for ....” Dunn, against the majority, opts for the second idea, and suggests that Paul’s ailment had to do with his eyes. In the end, both options have the same emphasis: the Galatians would have done whatever possible to serve and minister to Paul. It was this relationship (one of “blessing,” a typical Hebrew concept of “shalom”) with which Paul left Galatia, one which he presumed was still in place. To have received the news that the Galatians were now contemplating disregarding his message was to wonder what had happened. Thus, in reminding them of the friendship they had once enjoyed, Paul calls them back to an acceptance of his message even as they had done when he was with them.

So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? – Once again, Paul uses strong irony (or even hyperbole) to get his point across. The former camaraderie enjoyed with the Galatian Gentiles has appeared to disintegrate into thin air. Instead of friends they are acting as “enemies.” And why? Simply because Paul has been bold to speak the truth. While this is surely an overstatement in regard to the Gentile believers (they have not yet succumbed to the false teaching), it may hint at how the Influencers might have viewed Paul. From their vantage point, he may have been considered an apostate and traitor to the truth. Since Paul had charged Peter as “living like the Gentiles,” the Influencers could have considered that Paul had abandoned the true, historic faith (encapsulated in the rabbinic traditions and theology) for a teaching that was, in their opinion, errant in the extreme. For in their way of looking at things, Paul had turned his back on God’s way of entering the covenant in favor of something which actually undermined the covenant, i.e., allowing Gentiles into the covenant as Gentiles.

But the truth that Paul has offered is nothing less than the “truth of the Gospel” (2:5, 14), centered as it was in Yeshua as the true Messiah, and the One through Whom the eschatological promise of the covenant would be realized. Paul’s gospel seemed to dismiss “Israel’s ‘most favored nation status … and the Torah praxis which protected it.’” It was this that had brought the wrath of his fellow Jews upon him, including the believing Jews of Galatia.

45 Dunn, Galatians, p. 236.
46 Ibid., p. 237.
17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.

Paul does need to specifically identify who he refers to by the pronoun “they.” The Galatians know he is referring to the Influencers. But here he speaks to their motivations, made apparent by their actions. They “eagerly seek you.” The verb (ζηλοῦω, zelō) can have either a positive or negative connotation. Positively, it means “to strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly, court someone’s favor,” or negatively, “to be filled with jealousy or envy toward someone.” Paul uses the same word in the next verse, and it may be important to see that he also uses this verb in Rom 10:2, “For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.” Thus, the idea that the word here in our text should be understood as “flattery” may not capture Paul’s meaning. He may simply be referring to the common zeal of the Jewish community to maintain their self-identification, a zeal which in and of itself was not wrong.

But the zeal of the Influencers in attempting to persuade the Gentile believers to adopt their theology of covenant inclusion must have been done in such a way so as expose their zeal to be self-serving. Their method of persuasion is one of “shutting out” (ἐκκλείω, ekkleiō) in order to change the minds of the Gentiles. The willingness to allow Gentiles as “God-fearers” to remain within the community was being abandoned in the hopes that presenting an “either-or” scenario would prompt the Gentiles to accept rabbinic conversion. As noted above, this scenario would have offered a good deal of fear to the Gentile believers. Being excluded from the Jewish community would also mean that they no longer enjoyed the covering offered by the Roman government for Judaism as a legitimate religion (religio licita). That, in turn, would leave them unprotected in the matter of the Imperial cult, and meant that they would face the decision to participate in paganism or face severe persecution. The “offer” of the Influencers, therefore, came with tremendous incentive to receive it.

The obvious hope of the Influencers was, that given such a scenario, the Gentile believers would “seek them” (ζηλοῦω, zelō), that is, would be zealous for their way of “salvation,” (covenant membership). We could just as well translate “in order that you might be zealous over them” (note the NIV). The method of the Influencers, then, was not one of acceptance on the basis of the Gospel (i.e., faith in Yeshua), but on the basis of conformity to the accepted halachah. Given the fact that they were convinced their perspective was God’s perspective, they no doubt hoped that such a “strong-arm” tactic would bring about submission to the “truth” and the full “salvation” of the Gentiles.

However, Paul questions their true motivation: was it for the salvation of the Gentiles, or the maintenance of Israel as they had defined her? Paul is convinced that they really do not have the best interest of the Gentiles in mind, but the continued establishment of their own self-definition. Their motivation is thus primarily selfish. In contrast, Paul’s motivation was evident by the fact that he was willing to suffer on behalf of the Gentiles, even experiencing being “shut out” by his own Jewish community.

47 BDAG, “ζηλοῦω”.
18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.

Paul is fully aware of the two-edged sword called “zeal.” He recognizes that zeal has a very valuable component, when it is established on the truth. But it can also have its devastating effects when it fails to act on the truth and rather is the outpouring of selfish goals. Literally Paul says, “It is good always to be zealous for the good,” in which “zealous for the good” must mean “zealous for the truth,” i.e., that which produces “good.” Most surely Paul witnessed the zeal of the Gentiles when they first received the Gospel, and he does not want in any way to diminish the value of this zeal. But such initial zeal, demonstrated when he first ministered to them (“when I am present with you”) must continue on in his absence. Their zeal must be for the truth, not for simply being his disciples. Or to put it another way, their zeal must be in connection with their faith in Yeshua, not for Paul himself.

19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Messiah is formed in you—

Paul’s own feelings break through as he interjects this line of passionate zeal himself. He uses the metaphor of birth, after all, salvation of the soul is itself so described by the Master Himself (John 3). This image of parent/child is a familiar one in the Pauline epistles (1Cor 4:14; 17; 2Cor 6:13; 12:14; Phil 2:22; 1Thess 2:11). The fact that Paul takes to himself a female image (birthing a child) may seem strange in our ears, but would not have concerned his original audience who were well versed in midrashic thought. For Paul, all the “labor” he underwent in his first visit to them should have secured their safe “delivery.” Yet it appeared that in fact they had not been fully delivered—that their birth was still in process. The current struggle of soul and mind of the Apostle appears to be nothing less than the extension of his original “labor pains.”

until Messiah is formed in you (μετὰ χριστοῦ ὁμορφαις Χριστοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ) — Here Paul teaches us that salvation as a whole is a process, not merely a “moment in time decision.” This is not to deny the importance of a moment in time when the soul first yields to the message of the Gospel and falls repentant before God and His Messiah. But like conception which is the beginning of a birthing process, so initial confession of faith is but the first step in a process of salvation. For Paul, “justification” is that initial point of conception when the soul is born anew. But “sanctification” is the on-going process of this birth imagery, and is as essential as was the initial conception. Thus, “being saved” is a life-long process of transformation, because salvation is not just a “fire escape” but it is a change of life with the final destination being conformity to Messiah.

Paul often speaks this way. In Phil 1:6 he speaks of the work that God has begun in the believer, a work that He will inevitably finish. But the finish-line is eschatological in nature: “until the day of Messiah Yeshua.” Likewise, in Eph 2:19f, Paul utilizes the metaphor of a building, a holy Temple, in which each believer is a part and which is still in the process of being fully built. And in Rom 8:22, our “redemption” awaits the final appearance of Yeshua, and thus our redemption is in the process of being procured.

The idea of the Messiah “being formed in you” is a healthy corrective to the modern easy believe-ism of our day. With the notion that salvation is like a cake mix, one is told that everything necessary is “in the box.” All one needs to do is “mix and bake.” The finished product is available at the front of the
auditorium each and every service! But this message is actually “half-baked!” Or to use Paul’s birthing metaphor, it produces still-borns. People, assured that they are saved by the decision of the moment, go back to their unrighteous way of living at worst, or fail to move on in maturity to the full reality of salvation. One can only postulate such a scenario in light of the fact that Yeshua Himself prophesied regarding the many who, though believing themselves to be “in,” are rebuked as workers of lawlessness and turned away (Matt 7:22f). For Paul, the proof of genuine salvation is the formation of Messiah within the very person who confesses Him.

Thus, conformity to Messiah is the characteristic of one who is being saved. Here again, in our modern world, the problem lies not so much in agreeing with this calling to conformity, but in the definition of Messiah. Our modern “Jesus” hardly matches the promised Messiah of the Tanach nor the Yeshua of the Gospels. Rather than striving to follow in the footsteps of One Who was obedient to Torah as a matter of true righteousness, the modern Jesus has become a “cosmic” remedy for every human discomfort—a means to reaching our selfish ends. In the affluent countries of our world, Jesus is the means to wealth and happiness, while in many third-world countries, Jesus is an icon of the Roman Catholic church, a kind of talisman to ward off the demons of fallen societies. Rarely is He portrayed as the Jewish Messiah, calling both Israel and all who would join themselves to her, to worship God as He has directed. And so the spread of Christianity, while accomplishing many good and noble things, has seemed often to fail miserably in establishing a true conformity to the risen Messiah.

But this message of Paul may also be a needful corrective to some of the lacks in our own Torah movement. Enamored by the beauty of Judaism and the depth of traditions available to the Torah community, some have lost sight of the centrality of Yeshua. Any of our efforts to recover the water of Torah that springs from the ancient truths of the Scriptures are short-sighted if in these efforts we are not constantly calling ourselves to conformity to the Messiah and the manner in which He obeyed the Father. As Paul wrote to the Romans,

\[
\text{For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:29)}
\]

Paul’s concern was that the Spirit of Christ might have such full sway in their lives, and they should become so like Christ in character, that they would be able to share in the fullness and freedom of life ‘in the flesh’ (2:20) which Christ himself had enjoyed—not least in regard to the law.\(^9\)

20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul’s personal appeal concludes with this open-hearted expression of friendship to his brothers and sisters in the Lord. He is sure that his words, pointed as they are, have been misunderstood or wrongly received. Surely his “tone of voice” in the letter is different than if he were able to sit, face to face, and make his appeal. He is no doubt fearful his words will be misrep-

resented by the Influencers without any recourse on his part to make explanation, or for the believers there to see his sincere spirit through facial and body gestures.

The fact that Paul ends by admitting his perplexity is almost a kind of apology. He still can’t figure it out, why they could have so easily been turned against him and his teaching. But in admitting that he was perplexed, Paul also shows that he holds out hope that he might be wrong, and that even before they received his letter, they may have come to their senses.

21 Tell me, you who want to be under Torah, do you not listen to the Torah?

Paul returns now to the more formal presentation of his polemic. Having made an impassioned appeal based upon his personal relationship with the Galatians, he comes back to the issue of the two covenants which formed the beginning of this section in chapter three. Employing a midrash based upon the Abraham narrative, Paul illustrates the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants as modeled by Sarah and Hagar respectively. This allows a contrast of “promise” with “flesh,” and fits his overall argument which pits faith against proselyte conversion (“works of the Torah”) as the means of obtaining righteousness before God.

In this opening verse of the section, Paul uses a bit of sarcasm: those who want to be “under Torah” have apparently failed to listen to the very teaching of the Torah50 (or at least failed to listen to the Torah as Paul thinks they should have). Here, “under the Torah” (ὑπὸ νομοῦ) must be equivalent to “undergoing rabbinic conversion.” He speaks, therefore, to those who have indicated that they are ready to become proselytes according to the message of the Influencers. It would seem that in this verse, “under the Torah” is used not of the Torah generally, nor of the condemnation of the Torah specifically, but of the notion that observance of Torah (in this case, Oral Torah) is the required entrance into the covenant. Paul, however, is convinced that the Torah actually does not support the perspective of the Influencers. If they rely upon proselyte conversion as giving them right standing before God, however, they will indeed come “under the (condemnation of) of the Torah.

In typical fashion for Paul, he goes back to an exegesis of the Torah to discover its intended meaning and the proper application to the current issue. Using the idea of “listen to the Torah” recalls the Hebrew concept of “hearing” as “obeying.”

22–23 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

It is written – a typical way of introducing a quote from the Tanach (even though this is not a direct quote but a Pauline explanation based upon the text). But it more than just a conventional quote formula. Paul emphasizes the written text over against the halachah being taught by the Influencers, based as it was on Oral Torah.

Paul sets up the midrash by focusing attention on Abraham’s two sons,

50 Some Greek manuscripts have “read” rather than “listened,” but this most likely reflects a scribal change to accommodate the current practice of reading Torah in the Synagogue. In the Torah’s initial giving, it was read to the people.
Ishmael and Isaac, and their respective mothers, Hagar and Sarah. Sarah is described as a “free woman,” while Hagar is characterized as a “bondwoman.” In addition to the contrast of bond and free, the son of Hagar is produced by the “flesh” (Abraham’s own efforts) while Isaac comes through the promise (cf. Gen 15:16; 21:2). In this way, “flesh” corresponds to “works of the Torah” (i.e., that covenant status is based upon one’s flesh = ethnicity, and in particular, the cutting of the flesh in circumcision) while “promise” corresponds to “faith” (i.e., that covenant status is through faith in Yeshua).

It is probable that the Influencers used the Abrahamic narrative as substantiation for their own position. After all, one of the primary issues of the narrative is that of Abraham’s son. Who is the promised son through whom the covenant will be established? At one point (Gen 17) Abraham requests of God that Ishmael fulfill that special role, but God refuses Ishmael and gives the promise of Isaac. It would not have been lost on the Influencers that the covenant sign of circumcision is given at this precise point in the narrative. It would have been easy, then, to link circumcision with being a covenant son. If the Gentiles want to be sons of Abraham, they, like Isaac, must be circumcised. Thus, the Influencers are casting the Gentiles as playing the part of Ishmael, while they are fulfilling the role of Isaac. In such a scenario, who wouldn’t want to become like Isaac?!

It is therefore also probable that Paul attempts here to turn the Influencers’ argument on its head. Ishmael was the product of the fleshly conniving of Abraham and Sarah, while Isaac came by above-human means. Ishmael can therefore represent those who attempt to accomplish the covenant promises in their own strength, while Isaac portrays the sovereign act of God according to His promise which Abraham and Sarah had to trust. In this way, the Influencers turn out to be like Ishmael, and the Gentiles (if they will remain firm in their faith) are like Isaac—sons according to the promise.

24–25 This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

This is the only time in the Apostolic Scriptures where the Greek term ἀλληγορεῖν, allegoreō is used, though it is used time and again by Paul’s contemporary, Philo. The Greek word literally means “to speak another (way).” That is, you speak one word but intend another. Allegory is a kind of extended simile. Whereas in a simile one notes that one thing shares qualities with another thing (“a” is like “b”), in allegory, one thing represents another thing (“a” represents “b”).

But it is equally possible, in my opinion, that Paul uses the term “allegory” to represent a midrashic approach to this particular section of the Abrahamic narrative. Midrash seeks to find in the text an illustration of a given teaching which the plain reading of the words might not readily

51 The reason for Paul’s addition “which is in Arabia” has drawn a lot of attention from the commentators, but in the end, there is no satisfying reason given as to why Paul would have added this descriptor. See the various views listed by Dunn, Galatians, p. 251-52. Actually, the additional “in Arabia” does not seem to add anything specifically to the overall thrust of the allegory.
suggest. What is more, midrash has a tendency to build itself on the basis of key words, especially those not commonly used. In this instance, the key terms for Paul are “flesh” and “promise.” It is not so much that Paul believes this allegory to be the primary or even “hidden” meaning of the text, but that the text gives a good, theological illustration of his own main point. In other words, Paul is using the Abraham narrative to illustrate his current argument.

He uses for his illustration the two women of the narrative: Sarah and Hagar, though Sarah is never named. These two women, in Paul’s midrash, represent the two covenants already mentioned, namely, the Abrahamic and the Mosaic. The Mosaic covenant proceeds from Mt. Sinai and is represented by Hagar. By implication (and made more specific in vv. 26–28), the covenant made with Abraham is represented by Sarah.

Now it is obvious that in Paul’s midrash, he is making a very pointed remark regarding issues of identity. No one of Jewish heritage would appreciate being called the offspring of Hagar! And in fact, while a promise is given to Ishmael (Gen 16:9ff, which can hardly be described in terms of “blessing”), there is no covenant made with Hagar or with her son Ishmael. Thus, from the outset of the midrash, while Paul specifically mentions two covenants, he actually still has only one covenant primarily in mind, the Abrahamic covenant. His purpose is to show how the true descendants of Abraham are to be reckoned, not to contrast the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. He has already shown that the Mosaic covenant in no way sets aside the Abrahamic, nor does it add conditions to it which render it changed or nullified (3:15). In his using the two women (Sarah and Hagar), Paul wishes to focus attention on the manner in which the descendants of Abraham are reckoned. Isaac, the son of promise, is reckoned as the true heir, while Ishmael, the son of the flesh has no inheritance from Abraham and is therefore not reckoned as a true heir.

Thus, the Sarah/Hagar, Isaac/Ishmael scenario is a perfect illustration of Paul’s point. Those who base their covenant membership (“genuine descendants of Abraham”) upon their “flesh” are like Ishmael; those who base their covenant membership upon the promise (“faith”) are like Isaac. One has no claim to inheritance while the other is the true heir. One is eventually expelled from the family, while to the other one the covenant is renewed.

Paul therefore equates the “present Jerusalem” with Hagar, herself a “bondwoman,” (=slave) who produced a son, Ishmael, who was born therefore into this same status of slavery. The “present Jerusalem” identifies the current or prevailing theology of the primary Judaisms of Paul’s day, namely, that covenant membership was based upon “the flesh,” that is, upon membership in the covenant people of Israel through birth or proselyte ritual. But such a theology did not produce “free children” (perhaps Paul has Gentiles proselytes specifically in mind here) but children in slavery. Once again it should be emphasized that freedom in Paul’s mind is always bound up with faith in the Messiah. Freedom means that one is both able and willing to obey Torah as God has given it, and this is possible only by those who have the indwelling Spirit (who have the Torah written on the heart). Those who attempt to gain covenant relationship with God through ethnic markers (=the flesh) are actually in bondage, for though they purpose to obey Torah, they have neglected the very goal of the Torah (Rom 10:4), that is, Yeshua.

In distinction to the son (Ishmael) of the bondwoman (Hagar), the son (Isaac) of the free woman (Sarah) comes by divine appointment—through the miraculous means secured by God’s promise. The son of the free woman, then, is born free, that is, born as the true covenant member and recipient of the
covenant promises.

As one would expect, the typical interpretation of this section by the historic Christian Church has been to find a contrast between the “old covenant” and the “new covenant,” between law and grace. But Paul is not teaching us that the Torah given as covenant at Sinai produces slaves. What he is teaching us is that the Torah, utilized as a means to obtain covenant status, produces slaves, even as the attempts of Abraham and Sarah to produce the promised offspring through Hagar produces Ishmael. But the Torah was never given to Israel as a means to make covenant members. It was given to those who were already covenant members through redemption from Egypt, and as a revelation of the safeguards and standards given to covenant members in terms of their relationship with the covenant Maker, God Himself. It is when the Torah is misused that it produces slaves.

In the allegory put forward by Paul, there is no indication that the desire of Abraham and Sarah for a covenant son was wrong—they were looking for the manner in which the covenant promises would be passed to the next generation. Where they failed was the method they utilized as a means to obtain the promised son—they took matters into their own hands rather than trusting in the divine promise to produce the appointed son. In the same way, Paul does not disparage the Torah, but he speaks against the improper use of the Torah by the Influencers, as a means for Gentiles to enter the covenant.

Why is Sinai singled out as illustrative of the current error of the Influencers? The obvious answer is that the Influencers interpreted the Sinai narrative to teach that all who stood at Sinai automatically became covenant members (Ex. 23:32; 24:7-8; 34:10, 27-28). For them, acceptance of the Torah at Sinai was equal to covenant membership, and the same would obtain for the Gentiles: if they were to become covenant members, they too would have to “stand at Sinai” and receive the yoke of the commandments as defined and administrated by the Oral Torah of the Sages.

But such theology (as Paul has already shown in chapter 3) neglects the covenant made with Abraham! Surely the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had already called the descendants of Abraham His chosen, covenant people. Sinai was not the beginning of the covenant relationship with God for Israel. It was the continuation of a covenant already established. If one comes to Sinai without first participating in the faith of Abraham, the Sinai experience inevitably produces spiritual slavery. Paul knew this from his personal experience, for the Torah was well-known to him before coming to faith in Yeshua. Yet in his pre-faith reading of Torah the Messiah was veiled. As such, the Torah did not produce true freedom of soul and heart to obey God, for the Torah remained as letters on stone rather than as that which is written on the heart (2Cor 3).

26–27 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, “rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.”

In contrast to the “present Jerusalem” is “the Jerusalem above.” Paul borrows from the Apocalyptic literature of his day when he speaks of “the Jerusalem above.” Note 2Baruch 4:2-5:
This building now built in your midst is not that which is revealed with Me, that which was prepared beforehand here from the time when I took counsel to make Paradise, and showed it to Adam before he sinned, but when he transgressed the commandment it was removed from him, as also Paradise. And after these things I showed it to My servant Abraham by night among the portions of the victims. And again also I showed it to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed to him the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels. And now, behold, it is preserved with Me, as also Paradise.

4Ezra promises that “the city which now is not seen shall appear” (7:26) and that “Zion will come and be made manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands” (13:36; cf. 8:52; 10:25-59). Enoch speaks of going up into the highest heaven, “into the highest Jerusalem” (2Enoch 55:2). This “heavenly Jerusalem” is alluded to in Hebrews (chapters 8-10) and specifically by John in the Revelation (3:12; 21:1-3, 10-11, 22f).

In the apocalyptic literature, the “heavenly Jerusalem” is the perfect reality of which the present Jerusalem is only an incomplete and inadequate picture. For Paul, the “present Jerusalem” represents the basic Pharisaic soteriology of his day, which had overlooked or rejected Yeshua. The “heavenly Jerusalem,” thus represents the covenant city as God intends it. It is not enslaved through attempts to gain righteous standing in the covenant through fleshly means (Hagar), but is free because it pictures the faithful ones serving God through faith in His Messiah, obeying the Torah from the heart as moved and fashioned by the Spirit.

Here Sarah (though not named) is “our mother.” Those who are the product of faith rather than the flesh correspond to Isaac rather than Ishmael. Once again, Paul employs the “already–not yet” aspects of his theology. The “present Jerusalem” defines the theology of the Influencers, while the “heavenly Jerusalem” pictures those of faith. Yet the “heavenly Jerusalem” awaits its appearance until the end of days. Nonetheless, those of faith constitute a foreshadow of the future “heavenly Jerusalem” in the here and now. What is ultimately “not yet” is already experienced and enjoyed by those who have faith in Yeshua.

Thus, the midrash leaves Paul’s readers with a most basic question, and one which would have a ready answer in the minds of all: “do you want to be the offspring of Hagar or of Sarah?” To the Gentiles this meant that succumbing to the pressures of the Influencers would, in the end, render them non-covenant members (offspring of Hagar) while remaining faithful to the Gospel as Paul had presented it would establish them as the true descendants of Abraham through faith.

In typical fashion, Paul bolsters his argument by appealing to the Scriptures. He quotes (using the familiar “it is written”) Isaiah 54:1 directly from the Lxx (itself a faithful translation of the MT at this point). The theme of the verse fits the context of Paul’s argument perfectly, by emphasizing that Sarah was barren, and that the answer to her barrenness was not to rely upon the flesh but to trust in God. To the exiled Judeans, God’s word of comfort comes from the prophet Isaiah. There would be a new beginning, like that which followed the flood (54:9-10), a new age in which Adonai would once again take Israel as His wife and would rebuild Jerusalem with precious stones (54:11-12), which would suggest a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem (John uses the same imagery, Rev 21:10-11, 18-21). Even as barren Sarah was promised that she would be a
mother of nations and that kings would come from her (Gen 17:16), so God is Isaiah promises the exiled peoples of Judah that her reestablishment would bring about the blessing upon the nations promised to Abraham. For Paul, this had direct application to his own work and mission, as well as to the identity of the Gentiles who had come to faith under the preaching of his Gospel. Here, as always, Paul envisions that his mission and calling were completely in line with the words of the prophets, and that the ingathering of the Gentiles into the people of Israel is nothing more or less than the fulfillment of the divine purpose as revealed by His prophets of old. Far from seeing a replacement of Israel, Paul understands the ingathering of the Gentiles as proof that God is once again reestablishing Israel as He had promised (cf. the “fallen sukkah” prophecy of Amos 9:11 quoted by James in Acts 15:16). For it is when God restores Israel that the nations stream into her, that the Torah will go forth from Zion, and the word of Adonai from Jerusalem (Is 2:3; Mic 4:2).

Paul was not alone in understanding Isaiah 54:1 in this fashion. Qumran (4Q164) uses Isaiah 54 as an illustration of wayward Jerusalem on the one hand, and restored Jerusalem on the other. Likewise the Targum identifies the “deserted wife” with “desolate Jerusalem.” The connection of Jerusalem to a “barren woman” is also seen in some of the apocalyptic literature:

And it came to pass after three thousand years that (David) built the City, and offered offerings: then it was that the barren bare a son. And whereas she told thee that she reared him with travail: that was the (divine) dwelling in Jerusalem. (4Ezra 10:45–46)

So Paul’s use of the text is well in line with its interpretive understanding of his day. But more to the point is that the quote from Isaiah 54 promises that the barren one would give birth to many children (like Sarah who would be a mother of nations). For Paul, this could be mean nothing else but the ingathering of the Gentiles. Thus, the ingathering of the Gentiles is linked to the promise of offspring given to Abraham and Sarah, a promise that is fulfilled by God’s power, not by man’s efforts.

28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Here Paul speaks boldly what he has only made implicit in the preceding verses. Paul is speaking directly to the Gentile believers, made clear by the emphatic “you” thrown forward in the clause. We might suggest “And you too, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.” This is not to exclude the Jewish people by any means, but the Gentile believers are Paul’s particular focus here and the subject of his appeal. The Gentiles had come to faith in Messiah, proven by their changed lives and the evidence of the Spirit’s presence. As such, they could rest upon the fact that they were children of Abraham according to promise (3:29) in exactly the same way that Isaac was his promised son and legitimate heir to the covenant blessings.

This statement, therefore, encapsulates Paul’s perspective: for the Gentiles, “getting into the covenant” is a matter of God’s promise to Abraham, and therefore rests upon God’s work, not man’s. The same is true, of course, for the physical descendants of Jacob, with the difference being that the physical offspring enter into the physical aspects of the covenant (temporal
blessing, the land, protection [bless those who bless / curse those who curse], etc.) simply on the basis of their being the offspring of Jacob. However, even the Jewish person remains in the covenant only by faith (relating to the “promise”), since all true covenant members are those with saving faith. Those without faith are eventually broken off from the covenant (though by God’s sovereign hand, they may be regrafted back in, Rom 11).

29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

Paul moves from the narrative events of Genesis to a midrashic application to his own times. How was it that he derived the fact that Isaac was “persecuted” by Ishmael? This comes, no doubt, through an interpretation of the narrative notice in Gen 21:9: “Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking.” At a surface level, the word “mocking” could be understood simply as harmless jesting. After all, Ishmael was some 14 years older than Isaac, and so it might be understood as innocent sibling rivalry. But the Hebrew word translated “mocking” (מְצַחֵק, m’tzacheik, from צחק) may also have other connotations. The word is used to denote errant sexual behavior in the context of pagan worship. Note Exodus 32:6, “So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (לְּצַחֵק).” Likewise, in Genesis 39:14, 17, the wife of Potiphar accuses Joseph of attempting to “make sport” of her, which is described as “he came to lie with me.”

With these facts in mind, one may have been that Ishmael was doing far more than merely engaging in innocent sibling rivalry. His actions toward Isaac may have involved sexual overtones, or he may have been bullying him into some kind of fight that was more than just a wrestling match. Whatever the case, the situation warranted Sarah’s reaction, voiced to Abraham: “Therefore she said to Abraham, ‘Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.’”

One Midrash considers the sin of Ishmael to be idolatry:

NOW THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL, WHO CAME INTO EGYPT WITH JACOB; EVERY MAN CAME WITH HIS HOUSEHOLD (Ex 1:1): Thus we read: He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes (Prov 13:24). Ordinarily, if a man’s friend says to him: ‘So-and-so, smite your son,’ he is ready even to deprive him of his livelihood. Then why ‘He that spareth his rod hateth his son’? To teach you that anyone who refrains from chastising his son causes him to fall into evil ways and thus comes to hate him. This is what we find in the case of Ishmael who behaved wickedly before Abraham his father, but he did not chastise him, with the result that he fell into evil ways, so that he despised him and cast him forth empty-handed from his house. What did Ishmael do? When he was fifteen years old, he commenced to bring idols from the street, toyed with them and worshipped them as he had seen others do. So when Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto Abraham, making sport (Gen 21:9) – (the word mezahek being always used of idolatry as in “And they rose up to make merry” (Ex 32:6) – she immediately said unto Abraham: Cast out

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this bondwoman and her son (Gen 21:10) lest my son learn of his ways. Hence And the thing was very grievous in Abraham’s sight on account of his son (ibid. 11), because he had become depraved. (Mid. Rab. Exodus 1.1)

The Midrash on Gen 21:9 also incorporates the parallel texts mentioned above:

Thus R. Akiba lectured: AND SARAH SAW THE SON OF HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN, WHOM SHE HAD BORNE UNTO ABRAHAM, MAKING SPORT. NOW MAKING SPORT refers to nought else but immorality, as in the verse, The Hebrew servant, whom thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to make sport of me (Gen 39:17). Thus this teaches that Sarah saw Ishmael ravish maidens, seduce married women and dishonor them. R. Ishmael taught: This term S P O R T refers to idolatry, as in the verse, And rose up to make sport (Ex 32:6). This teaches that Sarah saw Ishmael build altars, catch locusts, and sacrifice them. R. Eleazar said: The term sport refers to bloodshed, as in the verse, Let the young men, I pray thee, arise and sport before us (2Sam 2:14). R. ‘Azariah said in R. Levi’s name: Ishmael said to Isaac, ‘Let us go and see our portions in the field’; then Ishmael would take a bow and arrows and shoot them in Isaac’s direction, whilst pretending to be playing. Thus it is written, As a madman who casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death; so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith: Am not I in sport (Prov 22:18f.)? But I say: This term sport [mockery] refers to inheritance. ‘For when our father Isaac was born all rejoiced, whereupon Ishmael said to them, ‘You are fools, for I am the firstborn and I receive a double portion.’ You may infer this from Sarah’s protest to Abraham: FOR THE SON OF THIS BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE HEIR WITH MY SON, WITH ISAAC (21:10). WITH MY SON, even if he were not Isaac; or WITH ISAAC, even if he were not my son; how much the more, WITH MY SON WITH ISAAC! (Mid. Rab. Genesis 53.11)

We may conclude, therefore, that there existed in Paul’s day a popular teaching which described Isaac being persecuted in one fashion or another by Ishmael. It is this understanding which Paul brings into his midrash at this point. And it is this interpretation that forms the basis for his application of the Genesis narrative to his own times: the “children born according to the flesh” are the children of the earthly Jerusalem; the “children born according to the Spirit” are the children of the heavenly Jerusalem. And the former are persecuting the later. Indeed, Paul played a major role in exacting such persecution before he came to faith in the Messiah. And while this was surely an intra-Jewish issue (and not the persecutions that came in the era of the emerging Christian Church), it was nonetheless a genuine persecution (cf. 1Thess 2:14-15; 2Cor 11:24).

We should not pass by the change from “promise” to “Spirit” in this verse. Whereas before Paul refers to “son of promise,” here Isaac is referred to as “the one of the Spirit,” pointing, no doubt, to the work of the Spirit in the miraculous birth of Isaac. This fits perfectly with Paul’s midrash. The Gentile believers have been “born by the Spirit,” whereas the Influencers are telling them they need to be born “of the flesh” (i.e., circumcision). Isaac therefore represents a different kind of “lineage,” one based upon God’s promise rather than upon “the flesh.”

Isaac, in other words, represents a different kind or line of descent,
This contrast between Isaac and Ishmael fits Paul’s polemic perfectly.

30 But what does the Scripture say? “CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.”

Having used Gen 21:9 to support the idea of the “children of the flesh” persecuting the “children of the Spirit (promise),” Paul is ready to make his next point by quoting Gen 21:10. He quotes the Lxx (which follows the Hebrew text closely) with only a minor change: he puts a double negative in to emphasize that “never” (cf. NIV) will the son of the bondwoman be an heir with the son of the free woman. The two are mutually exclusive in terms of inheriting the covenant promises.

We should see here a direct contrast or rebuttal to the perspective of the Influencers who want to “shut out” the Gentiles (v. 17) but who, according to Paul’s analogy, are themselves to be “thrown out” of the covenant blessings. This is not to suggest that Paul is applying such a fierce tone to Judaism in general! He is rather making such an impassioned statement in regard to the Influencers (and any who stood with them), that their perspective of covenant status, based as it was upon the “flesh” (ethnic status), could not stand together with the truth of the Gospel, which proclaimed sonship in the family of God through faith alone. Even as Ishmael and Isaac could not remain in the same family, so “covenant membership by the flesh” could not remain together with “covenant membership by the Spirit.” The two are mutually exclusive.

Obviously, this is not a rejection of his Jewish brothers in general, nor even of those who opposed him and his Gospel. But it is a rejection of the teaching that covenant membership can be based on anything except the work of the Messiah Yeshua, received by faith. That Paul would later explain this in detail in Romans (9-11) may indicate that his fiery language here caused a significant reaction, as we might expect it would.

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

Paul softens his tone with the word “brethren,” clearly emphasizing the family relationship that comes as a result of covenant membership. Here he restates his former conclusions (3:29; 4:28), but uses the midrash of Ishmael and Isaac, stressing the antithesis of slave/free, parallel to “flesh/Spirit.” Note carefully that Paul moves from the 2nd person of the previous verses to the 1st person “we” — “we are not children of a bondwoman ....” In doing so, Paul disregards ethnicity altogether in terms of covenant membership. This builds upon his former “neither Jew nor Greek” of 3:28. Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, bespeaks his unity with the Gentile believers by including himself in

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53 Dunn, Galatians, p. 257.
54 So Lightfoot, who writes that Paul “confidently sounds the death-knell of Judaism” (Galatians, p. 282).
55 Paul puts “flesh” and “Spirit” in antithesis only in this passage and in Romans (1:3-4; 8:4, 5, 12-13).
that group identified as children of the “free woman,” that is, children of the promise, born by the Spirit. And it further emphasizes that since all believers have true and abiding covenant status based upon the same criteria of faith in the Messiah, all are equal members of the covenant, with the same privileges and responsibilities within the context of the freedom won for His people by the Messiah.
1 It was for freedom that Messiah set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

The passion of Paul comes through in this verse which functions both as a conclusion of his previous polemic as well as the bridge to the next section of the epistle. The bold, opening statement that Messiah has set us free stands as the primary reason why the Gentile believers in Galatia should not yield to the pressure of the Influencers. Far more is at stake than they may realize. For if they were to yield by agreeing that only proselytes had a firm standing in the covenant, they would, at the same time, be undermining or even dismissing the crucial place of Messiah in terms of covenant membership. It may well have been that Paul senses the finality of his plea: if they reject what he has said at this point, there may be no way to convince them otherwise in the future. The Apostle has come to the keystone in the arch of his argument.

“Freedom” is a general theme throughout the epistle, even if it is not directly mentioned throughout (the term is only found here and in v. 13, and in 2:4 translated “liberty”). The Greek noun is ἐλευθερία, eleutheria, with the verb being ἐλευθεροῦν, eleutheroûn. Paul uses the noun “freedom/liberty” in Rom. 8:21; 1Cor. 10:29; 2Cor. 3:17, and the verb only here. The word itself speaks of “set free from restraint,” or “liberty” as opposed to “slavery.” The Lxx uses the verb at Prov 25:10 (in an expanded translation of the MT): “Favor and friendship set a man free,” which is in the context of quarreling and disputes. Elsewhere, the Lxx uses the verb in 2Macc 1:27 and 2:22 in the context of Israel’s freedom from the slavery of the nations. The noun is found in the Lxx at Lev 19:20, of a slave woman who has not been set free, and in the apocryphal literature at 1Mac. 14:26; 1Esdr. 4:49,53; 3Mac. 3:28. In these latter references, once again the word denotes “freedom” as opposed to slavery in terms of the people of Israel and their oppression from foreign powers.

As we might expect, the history of interpretation within the Christian commentators has taken Paul to be speaking of “freedom from the law”. His words are construed as saying that Messiah has forever liberated His people from the slavery of Torah, and thus the Gentile believers are foolish to consider going back under its tyrannical rule. But such an interpretation cannot be reconciled with Paul’s statements elsewhere regarding the Torah, nor does it fit the overall message of Galatians. For instance, in Romans 3:31 Paul writes, “Do we then nullify the Torah through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Torah.” One is at a loss to understand how he could make such a statement there, but be teaching the Galatians here that Messiah has liberated them from the “yoke of slavery” defined as the Torah. The words of Betz are a fitting example of this kind of interpretation:

For the Apostle there is no longer any Law, and therefore there are no transgressions: Christ is “the end of the Law.”¹

Such a misinterpretation of Paul at this point flows from a perception of the Gospel as something antithetical or contrary to Torah, and from a view of

¹ Betz, Galatians, p. 257.
Torah that it is a list of rules ("law," νόμος, nomos) which cannot be obeyed and thus is a millstone around one’s neck. But neither Paul nor the Juda-isms of his day ever viewed the Torah this way, though some did consider the additional laws of the Sages to be a burden (Matt 23:4; Acts 15:10).

Yet the real issue is what Paul understands as the “freedom” won for believers by Yeshua. From what, exactly, did He free us? And what is the liberty, therefore, that we enjoy as the result of His sacrificial death on our behalf? The obvious answer is that Yeshua redeemed us from the slavery of sin, and the wrath of God Who, on the basis of the Torah, condemns those who bear their iniquities. Once again, Paul is making a clear demarcation between the Gospel and the freedom it offers, and the “message of good” (“another gospel”) that the Influencers were teaching. For Paul, the decisive moment in the lives of the Galatians comes in their willingness to confess their faith in Yeshua as over against succumbing to the teaching of covenant membership based upon the “flesh,” that is, the idea that covenant membership could be obtained by acquiring “legal Jewish status.” As he has consistently taught in this epistle, those who rely upon their Jewish status will be sorely disappointed when they stand in the day of judgment, for they are trusting in something that is unable to render them genuine members of God’s gracious promise. The issue at hand for Paul is not the ongoing relevance of the Torah in terms of the life of those who have been declared righteous, but on what constitutes the means by which a person becomes a covenant member in the first place.

This is what Paul introduced in 2:4 with the concept of “freedom.” “Our freedom in Messiah” is our having been liberated from the condemnation of sin and brought into a place of righteousness before the Almighty. Those who opposed the message of the Gospel were teaching a different way of covenant membership—a different “gospel.” Here, then, is the issue: will the Galatian believers stand firm in their acceptance of the Gospel or not? Will they evidence a genuine faith (something Paul is convinced they had) or will they abandon their faith in favor of seeking covenant membership on the basis of the “flesh?” Thus, “slavery” is a bondage to sin—the status of still being under the penalty of one’s transgressions, while “freedom” is the position of having been declared righteous by the Father on the basis of the Messiah’s atoning sacrifice. For Paul, the choice presented to the Galatians was not one of “faith with the Torah” versus “faith without the To-rah,” but between salvation and condemnation, between genuine faith and no faith.

Such an interpretation of “freedom” in our text is consistent with Paul’s use of the term elsewhere:

that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Rom 8:21)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (2Cor 3:17)

The freedom spoken of in Romans 8:21 is the final and complete redemption in the eschaton, a freedom from the corruption of the fallen world, including the sin nature. In 2Cor 3, the bondage under which Paul’s countrymen labor is that the Messiah is veiled in the very Torah they read every Shabbat. But when this veil is taken away by the Spirit of God, the Messiah is seen for who He truly is, and He becomes therefore the object of
genuine faith, which in turn brings liberty—liberty from the “ministry of condemnation.”

Paul does use the word “freedom” in 1Cor 10:29 in dealing with the issues of halachah. Here, however, the context makes it clear that he is talking about halachah not specifically detailed in the Scriptures themselves, but what can only be construed as individual preference. In the matter of eating meat purchased at the common market, of which some might consider it halachically unfit, one is to prefer the conscience of the other, though this does not mean that one’s “freedom” is taken away by the personal decision of another person. In the context Paul is stressing that various decisions on halachic issues must hold the unity of the body as a primary consideration, as well as the need for each to edify the other, that is, not to wound the conscience of another member of the community.

In all of these instances, Paul’s understanding of freedom is not a lack of restraint, as though boundaries have been abolished and one is free to do whatever one wants. Nor is his understanding of freedom that the boundaries have become entirely “personal,” so that each one lives according to what each one decides is right for himself. Paul makes it clear in Rom 6-7 that freedom in Messiah is nothing more or less than becoming His bond slave, so that the each believer is a “slave of righteousness.” For Paul, freedom in Messiah is the contented reality that one has been accepted in the Beloved One as righteous, and that he therefore need never fear condemnation (Rom 8:1). This freedom, however, naturally results in a willing submission to the rule of the Spirit and therefore the ways of God. As Paul teaches in Roman 6, the reason that this “liberty” does not produce an Epicurean perspective on ethics is because in the salvation of the soul, the soul has been changed. The “old man” has been crucified, and in its place has been resurrected a “new man” who exists “in Messiah.” Freedom in this regard, then, is having been freed from the bondage of the fallen nature, and given a new heart to follow God.

This concept of the “new man” is parallel to the prophetic promise of a “new heart” given to Israel:

And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God. (Ezek 11:19–20)

As in the prophetic vision of Ezekiel which pictures the regathering and salvation of national Israel, so Paul recognized that the salvation of the individual within the remnant is a foretaste of that final victory—a kind of “first fruits” of the final harvest. In the same manner in which the nation will be given a new heart in the place of her heart of stone, so that individual believer is freed from the “old man” and given a new heart. But in both cases, the result of the Spirit’s activity is that those He regenerates walk in righteousness. Paul’s use of the term “slaves of righteousness” is actually another way of expressing what he means by “freedom.” Walking in God’s ways of righteousness is freedom indeed!

It was this freedom that the Galatians were considering abandoning. For if they were to believe the lie that covenant status (and thus a position of righteousness before God) could be achieved through becoming proselytes, they would have denied the Gospel and Yeshua. This in turn would mark them out as in bondage rather than as free. Only in Messiah, and in Messiah alone, is
freedom to be achieved.

Therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Like a military commander rallying his wavering troops, Paul gives forth the command to “keep standing firm.” In the face of battle, when it may appear as though defeat is imminent, “standing firm” is the necessary command. The Galatian believers had doubtlessly been overwhelmed by the message of the Influencers, with its appeal to long-standing tradition and its voice of authority to give it substance. But Paul requires them to stand firm in the truth of the Gospel he had delivered, a Gospel based upon the very words of Messiah: “I am the way, the truth, and the life…” (John 14:6).

He implores them: “do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” He has well demonstrated the idea of slavery in chapter 4, with the Hagar/Sarah midrash. The “yoke of slavery” no doubt refers to the prevailing rabbinic theology that accorded covenant status to “all of Israel,” meaning, those who could claim Jewish lineage and those who had been declared Jewish as proselytes.2 But such a doctrine could never bring genuine freedom, because such a teaching was not the true Gospel. The man-made ritual of proselytism was never accompanied by the giving of the Spirit, and did nothing to change the heart. A status based upon the “flesh” could never bring about a life of righteousness as was the case with those who had been genuinely born from above. Like the superstitious beliefs of their pagan past, when they believed that the “elemental things of the world” were their masters, so to believe that the declaration of becoming a Jew could actually accord them righteous standing before God was nothing less than a return to slavery. The freedom they had gained through simple faith in the Messiah was freedom indeed. They needed nothing more.

Paul’s use of the term “yoke” (יְגוֹך, zugos) may have been strategic in the ears of the Galatians including the Influencers. The term is a favorite one of the Sages, being used in a positive way of taking upon oneself the “yoke of the commandments.”

R. Nehunya b. Haqqaneh says, “From whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah do they remove the yoke of the state and the yoke of hard labor. And upon whoever removes from himself the yoke of the Torah do they lay the yoke of the state and the yoke of hard labor.” (m.Avot 3:5)

It may well be that the Influencers were using this terminology to persuade the Galatians to take upon themselves the “yoke of the commandments” (by which they meant submission to the Oral Torah as well). Paul’s use of the term coupled with “yoke of slavery” is therefore in stark contrast to the Influencers’ message. Exchanging the clear message of the Scriptures for the message of the Influencers would not render the Galatian Gentiles free, but would place them under the yoke of man made laws which were, in this case, contrary to the very message of God Himself.

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2 Note the use of Is 60:21, “all you people are righteous” in m.Sanhedrin 10.1 as the basis for the rabbinic dictum: “All Israel have a place in the world to come.”
2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you.

The passion continues to ring forth: Paul asks for their undivided attention in regard to what he is saying here. His appeal is very personal (and thus the inclusion of his name). The very one who came and first gave them the Gospel is the one who once again appeals for their hearing.

“To receive circumcision” (περιτεμνω, peritemno, which could be active or middle in this case, and could be rendered “get yourselves circumcised”) means to submit to the ritual of a proselyte. It did not mean merely to undergo circumcision (the cutting of the foreskin), but to accept the ritual of a proselyte as the necessary step for becoming a bona fide covenant member. The crossroads had been reached: covenant membership by faith in the Messiah for Jew and Gentile, or covenant membership as envisioned by the Influencers, based upon the status of being Jewish—which one would they accept? If they did accept proselytism as the means of genuine covenant membership, then this would mean that they had forsaken the Gospel delivered by Paul, and it would also mean that they had forsaken Yeshua as the only means of salvation.

Here it is made plain to us: the Gentile believers to whom Paul writes have not yet been circumcised. They were still at the point of decision. But what for them may have been a kind of “both-and” decision (confess Yeshua and accept the Influencers’ message as well) Paul has turned into an “either-or” matter. If they trust in their status as proselytes, they would, at the same time, diminish the central place of Messiah. To disregard His complete and final work is to render Him as without value (ωφελεω, ῥήπελω).

And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah.

Here the language is changed just a bit from the previous sentence: “every man (παντι ἄνθρωπω, panti anthropo) who receives circumcision ....” Casting the sentence in this way makes his words applicable to the individual. “Each one of you ...” means that all who would submit to the ritual of a proselyte would be under obligation to “keep the whole Torah.” Interestingly, Paul uses the Greek ἄνθρωπος, anthropos, which generally means “people” rather than strictly “male” (for which we would expect ἄνδρος, aner, though anthropos can mean “male” at times). It might sound strange to our ears to hear him say “anyone who gets circumcised” and include in this females, but the possibility exists that this is what he does mean. For “receive circumcision” had become a technical phrase meaning “become a proselyte,” and we know that women as well as men underwent the ritual of proselytism. The idea of physical circumcision had given way to the general meaning “become a proselyte.” The following “he is under obligation” does not mandate that Paul is talking only about males. If the word anthropos is understood to mean “anyone” (regardless of gender), then it would be natural to follow with a 3rd person masculine singular verb.

under obligation to keep the whole Torah – At first this also sounds very strange! Are we not all under obligation to obey God, to keep His whole Torah? Is this not what is reiterated time and time again in the Torah itself? Note just one example:

He said to them, “Take to your heart all the words with which I am
warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this Torah.

So what does Paul mean to convey by saying that one who becomes a proselyte is obligated to keep the whole Torah? We must remember that in Paul’s day (as well as in ours), the Jewish community considered the Written and Oral to be one whole. Granted, in Paul’s day the Oral Torah was still evolving (and to some extent it continued and continues to evolve), yet the rulings of the Sages, and particularly the rulings of the Sanhedrin, were practically received as on par with the written Torah. In practice, the Oral Torah at times even took precedence over the Written Torah, so much so that Yeshua Himself could charge the leaders of His day with setting aside the Torah for the sake of their traditions (Mark 7:8). \(^3\)

It is clear that the proselyte was required to submit to both the Written and the Oral Torah:

Our Rabbis taught: A certain heathen once came before Shammai and asked him, ‘How many Torot have you?’ ‘Two,’ he replied: ‘the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.’ ‘I believe you with respect to the Written, but not with respect to the Oral Torah; make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the Written Torah [only].’ [But] he scolded and repulsed him in anger. When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day, he taught him, Alef, bet, gimmel, daleth; the following day he reversed [them] to him. ‘But yesterday you did not teach them to me thus,’ he protested. ‘Must you then not rely upon me? Then rely upon me with respect to the Oral [Torah] too. (b. Shabbat 31a)

Furthermore, the proselyte was clearly under obligation to observe all of the Oral Torah:

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: ‘What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?’ If he replies, ‘I know and yet am unworthy’, he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments. He is informed of the sin [of the neglect of the commandments of] Gleanings, the Forgotten Sheaf, the Corner and the Poor Man’s Tithe. He is also told of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments. Furthermore, he is addressed thus: ‘Be it known to you that before you came to this condition, if you had eaten suet you would not have been punishable with \textit{karet}, if you had profaned the Sabbath you would not have been punishable with stoning; but now were you to eat suet you would be punishable with \textit{karet}; were you to profane the Sabbath you would be punished with stoning’. And as he is informed of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments, so is he informed of the reward granted for their fulfillment. He is told, ‘Be it known to you that the world to come was made only for the righteous, and that Israel at the present time are unable to bear either too much prosperity, or too much suffering’. He is not,  

however, to be persuaded or dissuaded too much. If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith. Should any shreds which render the circumcision invalid remain, he is to be circumcised a second time. As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects. (b. Yevamot 47a-b)

Now this situation would cause a true dilemma for the Gentile believer in Galatia. Since the Oral Torah at this time was more and more requiring a separation of Jew and Gentile, and marking the Gentile and his house out as unclean, how would the proselyte function within the body of Messiah if he had obligated himself under oath to observe the entire Oral Torah? He could not rightfully eat with the Gentile! Such a separation in the body of Messiah would undermine the very unity for which Messiah had suffered. Rather than creating a situation where the Gentile believed he would finally be accepted by his Jewish brother, becoming a proselyte would simply cause further divisions.

But what is more, the act of eating together was a confession of being members of the same covenant. Paul’s rebuke of Peter had come over this very issue. To tell a Gentile that he was not welcomed at your table (as the Oral Torah might require in some cases), or to decline the invitation of a Gentile believer to eat in his home (note Peter’s initial response to the idea that he should go to the home of Cornelius, Acts 10:28), was equally to deny that the Gentile was a member of God’s family—a fellow covenant member. Becoming a proselyte would require a separation based upon the fact that the non-proselyte was not actually in the covenant.

Here, once again, the issue boiled down to “who was in and who was out.” For Paul, being “in” meant being “in Messiah.” As the quintessential Israelite, to be in Messiah meant to be “in Israel” in the most obvious of ways. To deny such a one the full rights of covenant membership was ultimately to deny Yeshua.

4 You have been severed from Messiah, you who are seeking to be justified by Torah; you have fallen from grace.

Paul now essentially repeats what he has already said in v. 2: the Messiah is of no benefit for those who receive the message of the Influencers. For if one believes that something must be added to the work of Messiah in terms of being reckoned righteous before God, then one has entirely missed both the infinite debt owed on account of one’s sin, and the necessary infinite price paid by the Yeshua. Such a position means that those who had formerly confessed Yeshua as the Messiah would, in fact, render the work of Messiah without effect (καταργέω, katargeō, “to destroy,” “render of no effect,” translated “severed” by the NASB) in terms of their own salvation. The fact that Paul puts this in the past (aorist) tense should be understood to mean that those who were receiving the message of the Influencers were already heading down the path of destruction. One could presume that Paul uses such forceful language in hopes of turning some back, and guarding others from following their waywardness.

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4 For further exegesis on 5:3 and its parallel structure within the opening paragraph of chapter 5, see the excursus below, beginning on page 215.
seeking to be justified by Torah – Once again, this is not to be understood as so many since the time of the reformation have understood it. No one, including the Influencers, were teaching a message that if one kept the Torah perfectly, one would be declared righteous (justified) by God. Nor was anyone teaching that if one strove to do his best in obeying the Torah, he would be justified. As noted before in our study, the prevailing theology of Paul’s day was that Israel was considered righteous in God’s eyes because He had chosen her and had promised her blessing. Based upon verses such as Isaiah 60:21 (וְּעַמֵךְ כֻכָּלָם צָדִיקִים, “and your people, all of them, are righteous”), the rabbis derived the teaching that Israel (God’s people) are declared righteous by God. This left only one option for the Sages when it came to Gentiles: they must become Jews in order to be declared righteous (justified). “Seeking to be justified by the Torah,” then, was seeking to find right standing with God through following the rabbinic ritual of proselytism, a ritual which they taught as Torah. For Gentiles who had confessed Yeshua to be the only way to stand right before God, “seeking” righteousness through acquiring “legal Jewish status” was, at the same time, to confess that one was not yet righteous in God’s eyes, and was therefore likewise a denial of the completed and perfect work of Messiah.

you have fallen from grace – Dunn writes:

“… like a withered flower falling off from its stem to the ground (James 1:11; 1Pet 1:24 [cf. Is 40:6]), or like a ship failing to hold the course which leads to safety and falling away into disaster (cf. Acts 27:26, 29). God’s grace in Christ … is like the stem which supports the flower and through which the life-sustaining sustenance flows. Or like the channel which leads to safety between the rocks of disaster, a course from which they were in danger of being driven by dangerous currents and cross winds.”

To “fall from grace” means to leave the truth of God’s grace, that right standing before Him is a matter of His gracious gift, not something attached to one’s group identity.

At first this language could sound as though Paul is teaching that one who is genuinely saved could lose their salvation. But we must remember that God gives His grace to more than His redeemed ones. For these Gentiles in Galatia, they had experienced God’s grace by the very fact that they had been privileged to listen to the reading of the Scriptures, and to be taught the truth about God. Even Paul’s visit there, and his bringing them the Gospel, was a matter of God’s grace. Paul’s point in using the phrase “fallen from grace” was to emphasize that if the Gentiles, who claimed at one time to be believers in Yeshua, turned from the Gospel and followed the teaching of the Influencers, they would be despising the very acts of grace which God had already demonstrated on their behalf.
Excursus: Gal 5:3 and “Divine Invitation” Teaching

Recently, some within the Messianic movement have espoused what they call the “Divine Invitation” teaching. In a nutshell, this teaching maintains that Jews and those with “legal Jewish status” (=proselytes) are obligated to keep the whole Torah, while Gentile believers in Yeshua are under no such obligation. While all must abide by the enduring moral commandments of the Torah, Gentile believers are given a “divine invitation” to keep those parts of the Torah that are generally considered to pertain particularly to Jews and proselytes (Sabbath, Festivals, kosher foods, wearing of tzitzit, etc.). If Gentiles accept the invitation which God extends to them, they will be blessed. But if they do not accept, they are not living in disobedience since Gentiles are not obligated to the whole Torah.

In explicating their view of “Divine Invitation” for Gentiles, Galatians 5:3 has been set forth as the coup de grâce for the “One Law” position, which holds that all of God’s family, regardless of their ethnic status, are equally obligated to the whole Torah because they are equally covenant members.

The following excursus is an excerpt from my “An Assessment of the ‘Divine Invitation’ Teaching,” showing that a reading of Gal 5:3 within its context does not support the “Divine Invitation” teaching as its proponents suggest.

The structure of vv. 2–4 will help us understand Paul’s message. Note the parallel arrangement:

A1  Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision,
B1   Messiah will be of no benefit to you.
A2  And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision,
B2   that he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah.
B3   You have been severed from Messiah,
A3  you who are seeking to be justified by Torah;

What do we learn from the parallel arrangement of these three verses? First, it is clear that Paul is referring to the same subject throughout all three stanzas. This is made clear by the repeated phrase “receive circumcision” in the first two sentences (A1 & A2), which is parallel to “seeking to be justified

7 Parallel structures, especially within a Semitic culture, are identified by the repetition of a single theme. The repeated “receive circumcision” in the first and second sentence signals that Paul is using a parallel structure. Even though Paul undoubtedly wrote Galatians in Greek, his Hebraic thought and style could easily find its way into the body of the Epistle. In the graphical representation, the A and B labels relate to the first and second clauses of each sentence. In the last verse, the order changes. That is, in the first two sentences the order is A–B, while in the last sentence, the order is B–A. This is not uncommon in Hebrew parallelism, where clauses are reversed in order to emphasize the two that are then put next to each other. In each case, the A clause describes the action (becoming a proselyte) and the B clause describes the resultant condition (estrangement from Messiah). The final sentence contains a third clause, which is taken as a conclusion to the whole.
by Torah” (A3) in the last sentence. Thus, “seeking to be justified by Torah” defines what Paul means by “receive circumcision.” He is clearly talking to those who are being persuaded that ritual conversion to Judaism (receive circumcision) is the means of being righteous (justified) before God.

Second, the dire consequences for those who rely upon the flesh are noted in three parallel phrases marked B1, B2, and B3:

B1) Messiah will be of no benefit to you,
B2) he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah
B3) you have been severed from Messiah.

Each of these three phrases is saying the same thing, with different words. The point is that those who are seeking to be justified by a Torah ritual will ultimately be lost, which is what the summary phrase (C), “you have fallen from grace,” expresses.

Third, the phrase “justified by Torah” (ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε) gives us insight into how Paul is using the word “Torah” (νόμος, nomos). We know that he is talking about the rabbinic proselyte ritual (receiving circumcision), and that “seeking to be justified by Torah” is another way of describing this. But where in the Written Torah is there any indication that a Gentile could gain righteousness before God by gaining a “legal Jewish status” through conversion? Obviously the Written Torah never teaches such a thing. This offers a strong case for understanding Paul’s use of nomos (Law/Torah) here to refer to the Oral Torah in which the procedure by which a Gentile could gain legal Jewish status originated.

Given the fact that nomos (Torah) in verse four refers to Oral Torah, it is reasonable to understand the same term in verse three in the same way. Note the parallel structure once more. Each of the sentences has an A and a B phrase. The A phrases all reference the rabbinic proselyte ritual. The B phrases all give the consequences from Paul’s perspective. Thus, the B phrase in v. 3, “he is under obligation to keep the whole Torah (as defined by the Oral Torah)” is the negative consequence of receiving circumcision. We can graphically display it this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A1) if you receive circumcision</th>
<th>(B1) Messiah will be of no benefit to you</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A2) the one who is receiving</td>
<td>(B2) is obligated to keep (do) the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circumcision</td>
<td>Torah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A3) you who are seeking to</td>
<td>(B3) you have been severed from Messiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be justified by Torah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Conclusion: you have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fallen from grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is made clear by the structure of these verses is that being obligated to

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8 In the 1st Century, the word “Torah” (Greek nomos) could refer to the written Scriptures as well as to the Oral traditions of the Sages. It could also refer to both as a single body of legislation, because in praxis, the halachah of the Sages was often the filter through which the Written Torah was read. For more information on the relationship of the written and Oral Torahs in the early centuries, see my paper, “Can We Speak of ‘Law’ in the New Testament in Monolithic Terms?”, delivered at the 2000 NW Regional ETS Meeting and available at www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html

9 See t. Demai 2.5; m. Pesachim 8.8; m. Eduyyot 5.2; b. Yevamot 46b–47b; b. Shabbat 31a.
keep the whole Torah is considered by Paul to be the negative consequence of receiving circumcision. But why would Paul consider keeping the whole Torah to be a negative? In Romans he declares that the Torah is righteous, holy, and good—and that it is spiritual (Rom 7:12, 14). Moreover, in Rom 3:31 Paul affirms that by faith the Torah is established, and in 8:4 he teaches that those who walk by the Spirit actually fulfill the requirements of the Torah.

Yet here, in Gal 5, Paul lists “obligated to keep the whole Torah” as parallel to “Messiah will be of no benefit to you” and “you have been severed from Messiah.” Why? The answer is twofold.

First, we must understand that when Paul says “obligated to keep the whole Torah,” he is referring to the Torah that would be incumbent upon a Gentile convert. This means he is emphasizing that the “whole Torah” would include the many additions to the Written Torah found in the traditions of the rabbis, known as the Oral Torah. This in turn helps to define what Paul means by “obligated,” for the Gentile convert would, in the conversion process, be submitting to the established rabbinic authorities rather than to the authorities in his or her own messianic community. What would happen, for instance, when the authorities who oversaw the conversion process told the new convert that he or she could no longer freely eat at the table of Gentiles?

Second, since the “whole Torah” in this context would include the rabbinic additions to the Written Torah, the convert would be promising to obey “traditions of the elders,” some of which actually set aside the very commandments of God according to Yeshua (Mark 7:8–9, 13) and were a burden rather than a joy (Matt 23:4). Paul knew this from his own experience before coming to faith in Yeshua, when he sought to establish his own righteousness based upon his Jewishness, a status maintained by adherence to the Torah as defined by the rabbinic authorities of the day. Paul is telling the would-be convert about the burden the rabbinic additions would bring, emphasizing the same point that James would later make at the Jerusalem Council when describing the rabbinically defined halachah of the Torah as a “yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

For though the prevailing rabbinic perspective was that “all Israel have a place in the world to come,” according to some of the rabbinic rulings, maintaining one’s status in Israel required a scrupulous adherence to the Torah as rabbinically defined. The penalty of karat, “being cut off from one’s people” was always present. What if one entered the Temple precincts in an unclean state as defined by the growing rabbinic halachah on purities? What if one desecrated the Sabbath by transgressing one of the many rabbinic restrictions?

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10 The Pharisees and Essenes (Dead Sea Community) added a good many extensions to the purity laws set down in the Books of Moses. These additions included impurity from: [1] the non-Jew (cf. m.Pesachim 8.8; m.Shekalim 8.1; t.Yom HaKippurim 4.20; Josephus, Ant 18.90), [2] main residence of a non-Jew (m.Oholot 18.7, 9), [3] land outside the Land of Israel (b.Shabbat 14b; t.Parah 3.10), and [4] contact with idolatry (m.Shabbat 9.1; m.Avodah Zera 3.6). In addition to these, impurity of the hands was also an extension, meaning that a person in a state of purity could not touch food or anything else for which purity was required until he had first washed his hands. The entire Mishnah tractate Yadaim is given to the subject of ritual cleanness and uncleanness of the hands.

11 The rabbinic eruv is but one example of the rabbinic extensions placed upon the Sabbath laws of the Written Torah.
or uttered the Sacred Name according to its letters? What if one ate meat from an animal that had been improperly slaughtered and therefore ingested its blood? These were all severe offenses that could attract the penalty of karat, “being cut off.”

Surely rabbinic Judaism as it was being formulated in the pre-destruction era did not expect perfect obedience to the Torah in order to maintain one’s legal status as a Jew. The rabbis emphasize the compassion and forgiveness of God for the repentant sinner who complied with the Torah’s instructions for restoration after committing transgressions. But the language of some of the early Rabbis seems to suggest that one could, through one’s own transgressions, forfeit one’s place in the world to come:

All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as it is said, Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified (Is. 60:21). And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come: (1) He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, (2) and the Torah does not come from Heaven; and (3) an Epicurean. R. Aqiba says, Also: He who reads in heretical books, and he who whispers over a wound and says, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I have put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you (Ex. 15:26).

One time R. Reuben spent the Sabbath in Tiberias, and a certain philosopher came across him. He said to him, “What is the most hateful in the world?” He said to him, “This is one who denies the One who created it.” He said to him, “How is it possible that [God] then said to [to Moses], Honor your father and mother..., You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet (Ex 20:12–17)?” He said to him, “Lo, a person does not deny a matter of detail before he already has denied the main Principle, and a person does not turn to a matter of transgression unless he already has denied the One who gave a commandment concerning it.”

R. Eleazar of Modin said: He who profanes the sacred things, and he who despises the festivals, and he who shames his fellow in public, and he who violates the covenant of our father Abraham (peace be

12 m. Sanhedrin 10.1.
13 Cf. Lev 7:27. For the many rabbinic extensions regarding ritual slaughter, see Mishnah Chullin.
14 The fact that Paul was willing to give his back to the whip no less than five times (2Cor 11:24) shows that disregarding the rabbinic halachah could result in severe measures. Someone unwilling or unable to endure such punishment would have found himself cut off from the very community he hoped to join through his conversion. Paul’s willingness to endure the punishments meted out by the synagogue authorities was to retain his membership in the unbelieving Jewish community in hopes that he could “by all means win some” (1Cor 11:22). For the rabbinic procedure of administering lashes, cf. m. Makkot 3.
15 m. Sanhedrin 10.1 (Neusner’s translation).
16 t. Shevuot 3.6. (Neusner’s translation). Denying God was tantamount to blasphemy.
upon him), and he who interprets the Torah not according to the Halakhah, even though he may boast of Torah knowledge and good deeds, he has no portion in the world-to-come.17

When Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai fell ill, his disciples went in to visit him. When he saw them he began to weep. His disciples said to him: Lamp of Israel, pillar of the right hand, mighty hammer! Wherefore weepest thou? He replied: If I were being taken today before a human king who is here today and tomorrow in the grave, whose anger if he is angry with me does not last for ever, who if he imprisons me does not imprison me for ever and who if he puts me to death does not put me to everlasting death, and whom I can persuade with words and bribe with money, even so I would weep. Now that I am being taken before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who lives and endures for ever and ever, whose anger, if He is angry with me, is an everlasting anger, who if He imprisons me imprisons me for ever, who if He puts me to death puts me to death for ever, and whom I cannot persuade with words or bribe with money — nay more, when there are two ways before me, one leading to Paradise and the other to Gehinnom, and I do not know by which I shall be taken, shall I not weep?18

These few examples show that in the teaching of some of the early Sages, one could not trust that one’s legal status as a Jew was enough. Transgressions could negate one’s righteous standing before God by altering one’s legal status.

In the above quote from the Bavli (Berakot 28b), the Gemara begins with a baraita, introduced by “Our Rabbis say,” indicating an old and well received tradition. This baraita indicates that some who “labor” do so in a way that leads to destruction because they do not sufficiently labor in accordance with the established halakhah. And the deathbed words of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai (40–80 CE), who was considered to be one of the most pious of his time, indicate that he had no confidence that he would be received as righteous by the Almighty and given a place in the world to come. This was obviously quite unsettling for his disciples.

It was this uncertainty—this element of striving to “remain” within the circle of acceptance before God through doing “the whole Torah”—that Paul describes as slavery, as opposite of the freedom possessed by one who is “in Messiah Yeshua.”

In this regard, it is worth mentioning James 2:10, the only other time that the phrase “the whole Torah” is found in the epistles.19

For whoever keeps the whole Torah (δόλον τῶν νόμων) and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

17 m.Avot 3.11. (Kehati’s translation); cp. b.Sanhedrin 90a. The Gemara on the phrase “whoever interprets the Torah not according to the halakhah” will be found in b.Sanhedrin 99a.
18 b.Berakot 28b (Soncino).
19 In Matt 22:40, Yeshua teaches that the “whole Torah and the Prophets” depend upon the two commandments, to love God and love one’s neighbor. The Greek text utilizes the same words as in Gal 5:3 – δόλος ὁ νόμος κρέμαται καὶ ὁ προφήται, but the addition of προφήται, prophetai, “Prophets” makes it clear that Yeshua is talking about the Written Torah, not the Oral Torah.
James may have in mind those who considered themselves righteous on the basis of their own piety but who showed partiality to various classes of people in the synagogue. Were they degrading the “common folk” (Am HaAretz, literally, “people of the land,” meaning “uneducated”) in the community? The treatment of the Am HaAretz in the rulings of the Sages comes to mind. Those who saw themselves like the Pharisee in Lk 18:11, “I’m glad I’m not like other people,” who assessed themselves as keeping “the whole Torah,” were actually stumbling by their own pride and were guilty of transgressing the whole Torah in James’ estimation.

**Conclusion on Gal 5:3**

We have seen that the phrase “obligated to keep the whole Torah” is used by Paul as a negative assessment, parallel to “the Messiah will be of no benefit to you” and “you have been severed from the Messiah” (the B phrases on pp. 215-16). The reason Paul uses the phrase “obligated to keep the whole Torah” as a negative assessment is because he is talking about those who would submit to the rabbinic proselyte ritual, and would thus believe that their “legal Jewish status” provided them a right-standing before God (justified by the Torah). Paul is reminding them that their newly acquired “legal Jewish status” could only be maintained by “keeping the whole Torah,” so their “righteousness before God” would remain contingent upon their performance of the Torah, both written and oral. This, Paul maintains, is slavery, not freedom. For God never promised righteousness on the basis of “Jewish status.” Moreover, a commitment to maintaining the traditions of the rabbis would require them to neglect or even disregard commandments specifically given in the Written Torah. For Yeshua Himself taught that one who lives in strict adherence to the traditions (Oral Torah) could, in some cases, be required to set aside the commandments of God (Mk 7:9). The oath that a convert would make to “keep the whole Torah” was understood to be the Torah as defined and expanded by rabbinic halachah. Understood in this way, the “whole Torah” would be a burden that would bring slavery, i.e., working hard to retain one’s legal Jewish status with the hope that this would be received by God as righteousness.

Those who are teaching the “Divine Invitation” model, however, have taken Gal 5:3 out of its context and interpreted it to be a positive statement, that someone with a “legal Jewish status” is obligated to keep the whole Torah. They then posit that the inverse must therefore be true: one who does not have “legal Jewish status” is not obligated to keep the whole Torah. They have interpreted this verse against its context and have taken

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20 Cf. m. Demai 2.2–3; m. Eduyot 1.14; m. Avot 2.5, “He [Hillel] would say, “A coarse person will never fear sin, nor will an Am ha-Aretz ever be pious…”; m. Toharot 4:5; 7:5.
21 See the remarks of Joseph B. Mayor, The Epistle of St. James (Baker (reprint), 1978), pp. 88–89.
22 Note b. Shabbat 31a, which contains a baraita and describes the response of Shammi and Hillel to a Gentile seeking to convert. The text makes it clear that a candidate for the proselytizing ceremony had to agree to take upon himself the requirements of both the written and Oral Torahs. Cp. also t. Demai 2.5, “A proselyte who took upon himself all the obligations of the Torah except for one item, they do not accept him.” See also Lawrence Schiffman, Who Was a Jew? (KTAV, 1985), p. 23.
the word “Torah” (νόμος, nomos) in v. 3 to mean the Written Torah even though in the very next verse, the phrase “you who are seeking to be justified by Torah” makes it clear that “Torah” in this context includes the traditions of the elders, or the Oral Torah. Paul is addressing those seeking to be justified by acquiring “legal Jewish status” through conversion. This is something formulated in the “traditions of the elders” or Oral Torah, not anything found in the Written Torah. Paul is not saying to the Gentile believers “you can but you probably shouldn’t.” He is prohibiting them from submitting to the rabbinic conversion ritual because to do so is tantamount to denying Yeshua.

Nor is the obligation to “keep the whole Torah,” referred to by Paul in this verse, one that is fulfilled before God. The obligation Paul refers to here is an obligation to those who would administer the conversion ritual, that is, the rabbinic authorities. They would obligate the convert to obey the “whole Torah,” meaning the Written Torah as defined by their legally binding halachah. Therefore, Gal 5:3, properly interpreted within its context, offers no basis whatsoever for the “Divine Invitation” doctrine being taught some within the larger Messianic community. It simply affirms what the rabbinic authorities would require of a Gentile convert, not what Paul or the other Apostles believed was approved by God or His Messiah, Yeshua. Indeed, Paul makes it clear to the Galatians that Gentile conversion under the rabbinic proselyte ritual was not an option. He rather gives an ultimatum in this text: those who would “receive circumcision” were severed from the Messiah. We see, then, that instead of being a solid fulcrum to leverage the “Divine Invitation” doctrine, Gal 5:3 turns out to offer no support for this teaching whatsoever.

--- End of the Excursus ---

5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

In contrast to the message of the Influencers, Paul’s gospel proclaimed a righteousness by faith, itself the inner work of the Spirit. Even though the word “Spirit” (πνεῦμα, pneuma) in this verse is anarthrous in the Greek (i.e., no definite article), it is clear that Paul is speaking of the work of the Spirit that eventuates in saving faith. Apart from the genuine work of the Spirit, by which the heart is changed (=circumcised), there is no acceptance before the Father as one who is righteous.

But what is the work of the Spirit within the lives of the elect? The work of the Spirit is primarily bound up with the whole matter of faith. Thus Paul says,
through the Spirit, by faith.” Faith itself is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9) through the inner working of the Spirit—it is not something mustered up by one’s own strength. Yet once the elect child is redeemed and given a new heart—once regeneration occurs and the initial faith to lay hold of God’s promises in Messiah has been given—the reborn and recreated person becomes a coworker with the Spirit by which he or she grows in faith. That is, one’s faith is enlarged and strengthened as one walks by the Spirit (cf. Rom 4:20 of Abraham’s faith).

And what exactly is the object of such faith? What is the anchor of the soul to which it is tethered and thus enabled to weather the storms of life? The object of true saving faith is the Messiah Himself, believing that His righteousness is credited to the believer, a righteousness which forms the very model to which he or she is being conformed. Thus, God credits the righteousness of Messiah to all who are in Him, for He knows His purpose to bring everyone who believes into complete conformity to the Son. And this is what Paul means by the next phrase, “waiting for the hope of righteousness.”

waiting for the hope of righteousness. – Here Paul alerts us to the fact that by “righteousness” he means the state of acceptability before God; to stand before the Judge of all the earth and be accepted before Him. When he speaks of this as our “hope,” (ἐλπίς), he uses the Greek word (but from a Hebrew perspective) in the sense of what we know to be true, but what we have not yet fully attained or realized. “Hope” is therefore our “eager anticipation” of what we already know to be true. Our faith takes hold of the promises of God, believing that what He has said is true. As such, we know that when we stand before Him, we will be accepted, for we are “in the Messiah,” and the Messiah is beloved before Him. We do not strive to attain a place of righteousness before Him, because this place of acceptability has already been granted to us by His promise. “Therefore, being declared righteous by faith, we have shalom with God through our Lord, Yeshua Messiah” (Rom 5:1). “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua” (Rom 8:1). This is not something we wring our hands over, nor something for which we wait in fear that it might not come to pass. Rather, our waiting is with the full expectation and anticipation that God’s word is true, and that therefore we have been accepted already as those whom the Father loves. We hope for that which, by faith, we already are assured is true and inevitable.

6 For in Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

The verse begins with “For” (ἀλλά, allá) indicating that this is the conclusion to Paul’s immediate point: the Gentile believers need not succumb to the pressures of the Influencers, because becoming a proselyte would benefit them nothing. God’s covenant is not based upon group identification. Rather, God’s eternal covenant blessings are the possession of all who are “in Messiah Yeshua.” This characteristic phrase of Paul is found 11 times in Galatians (1:22; 2:4, 16-17; 3:14, 22, 26, 28; 5:6),26 a phrase which sums up the Apostle’s teaching regarding the covenant God has made with

26 Paul uses several different combinations: “in Messiah,” “in Messiah Yeshua,” and “in Yeshua (the) Messiah.”
His chosen ones. For all of the blessings of God are ultimately dependent upon the salvation which comes through the work of His Messiah, Yeshua (2Cor 1:20). Moreover, as the ultimate expression of the Servant of the Lord, Yeshua is the zenith of Israel—the final and perfect expression of God’s chosen One. Thus, to be “in Messiah” is to be in Israel, to be sons of Abraham according to the promise (3:29). The real question, then, is not how one “gets into” Israel, but how one “gets into” the Messiah. How does one have such an association with the Messiah that what He has done and is presently doing is reckoned to one’s own account? While the Influencers were considering “being in Israel” the all important issue, Paul was teaching that “being in Messiah” was primary, because “being in Messiah” not only secured a righteous standing before the Father, it also gave the believer membership in the covenant people of God.

This is why “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything.” Once again, we must understand this terminology as meaning “neither Jewish status nor non-Jewish status means anything.” And we must likewise understand this statement of the Apostle within the context in which he gives it. He is not saying that Jewish identity is meaningless, nor is he saying that non-Jewish identity is unimportant. Our station in life is the direct result of God’s divine providence. But the point Paul is making is that one’s entrance into Messiah is not predicated upon one’s lineage or membership in a given people group. God’s salvation is not automatically given to those who trace their lineage to Jacob, nor is it automatically withheld from those who trace their heredity to the nations. God’s salvation is given to those who are “in Messiah Yeshua.”

Paul uses the same terminology in 1Cor 7:18 – 20:

Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.

Once again, Paul is not talking about the physical act of circumcision, but of circumcision as the core element in the ritual of proselytism. The point is that a Jewish person is to retain his Jewish identity after coming to faith in Messiah, and a non-Jewish person is to retain his non-Jewish status after coming to faith. The body of Messiah is only complete when both Jews and non-Jews are united together in their both being “in Messiah.” Both Jewish and non-Jewish believers are to jettison those things of their former life which characterized the “old man,” and to cling to that life which God has ordained for His chosen people. Both are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1), meaning that the commands of the Torah (God’s teaching regarding righteousness) become the life-style of all who are in Messiah—“what matters is keeping the commandments of God.”

While circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing in terms of how one “gets into” the Messiah, what does matter is “faith working through love” (πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργοῦμένη). What Paul expresses in 1Cor 7 by “what matters is keeping the commandments of God” is here expressed by “faith working through love.” Here we note that “faith” is expressed as “active trust,” a particular halachah of life, not simply mental assent or agreement with a body of doctrines. This life of actively trusting God is “energized” (ἐνεργεῖν,  enslaved) through love. That is to say, the inner motivation for life lived out in
faithfulness is one of love—love for God and love for one’s neighbor. Here is the marked difference between mere religion of man and true devotion to God. Anyone can attempt to keep the mitzvot as a matter of external religion. Indeed, the Judaisms of Paul’s day were famous for this, even though the teachings of the Sages warned against it. The rabbis stressed the need to obey God from one’s heart (proper intention), an obedience that would be demonstrated by one’s selfless service to others. But to teach something and to actually see one’s teaching worked out in the life of one’s students are two different things. The ability to live a life of faithfulness both to God and to one’s fellowman is given by the work of the Spirit, Who writes the Torah upon the heart. Faithfulness energized through love is not something the unregenerate heart can manufacture—the flesh ultimately gets in the way. The unregenerate can, however, often manufacture the outward appearance of faithfulness. We are reminded of Yeshua’s illustration of the cup that is polished on the outside, but full of refuse on the inside (Mat 23:25-26). True faithfulness is first tested, not in the outward signs of piety, but in the inward purity of heart. Thus, for example, the ability to forgive those who have sinned against you, or to love those who have mistreated you, is the inner reality that will manifest itself in genuine purity of life.

Thus Paul gives a criterion of demarcation between the believers on the one hand, and the Influencers on the other. As Dunn notes:

What are set in contrast are two conflicting sources of power – rite and status, which are not merely rite and status, but which give significance to everything else, which provide a basis for the whole life before God, which determine and characterize mind-set and community. On the one hand a community and mind-set determined by a rite which divided humanity into two thus sharply distinct classes (‘the circumcision’ and ‘the uncircumcision’). On the other a mind-set and community characterized by the openness of faith and the spontaneity of love. Paul affirms that the coming of Christ and of being “in Christ” has radically reduced the power of the first and has shown that the effective power to change life and community to the righteousness for which God looks lies in the latter.27

For Paul, the primary characteristic of the Torah community is faithfulness (obedience to God and His commandments) energized by love (ἀγάπη, agape). This is the first time Paul has used the word agape in Galatians, but it will show up two more times in this chapter (vv. 13, 22). The Greek word agape is relatively rare in Classical Greek, and used only a few times in the Lxx (19x, 10x in Song of Songs). In contrast, it is used 116 times in the Apostolic Scriptures, 75 of which are Pauline. The people of The Way seized upon this word as representative of the love of God in Messiah, the paradigm for the manner of love which His followers were to show to each other. Thus, agape exists only where there is genuine humility. “He who is forgiven little, loves little” (Lk 7:47). The mark of those who are born from above is that they have seen their sin as God defines it, and have sought mercy through the selfless offering of the Messiah. Having experienced the overwhelming reality of forgiveness through God’s grace, they are enabled to love others with a similar, selfless love. But all of this is the result of an inward work of the Spirit, writing the Torah upon the heart. The inside of

27 Dunn, Galatians, p. 271.
the cup has been made clean.

Here we may note that Paul and James are preaching the same message. While it may appear at times as though Paul has developed “faith” differently than James, in reality Paul does not see faith as unconnected with love (the outward expression of an inward reality). Both are saying the same thing, though one may emphasize a dimension of faith differently than the other. In the end, both Paul and James affirm that faith and faithfulness are two sides of the same coin.

7–9 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

Paul continues his strong polemic against the Influencers, seeing the current situation of the Gentile believers as a “make-or-break” dilemma. The Gentiles believers at Galatia had been duly affected by the Influencers, and had probably grown to revere them in some measure. Paul does not come right out and name the Influencers, nor does he give even an indication that he could. In the veiled reference, the Influencers remain unknown to Paul.

He takes up the metaphor of the athlete who had begun a race and was doing well. Apparently Paul had some knowledge of the precarious position of the Gentile believers, fearing that they were ready at any moment to give in to the demands of the Influencers. Yet when he had left from his initial visit, all seemed to be well. The Gentiles believers had begun the race and were keeping the pace. Now, however, some time later, they were running poorly—so poorly that they ran the risk of not finishing the race they had begun. Paul can only surmise that they had been hindered by someone. The verb “hindered” (ἐγκόπτω, egkopto) is used by Paul of his own situation in which he was himself hindered from making a desired journey (Rom 15:22; 1Thess 2:18). Here, however, the root meaning of the verb (“to cut in,” “interrupt”) may be in view. Someone has “cut in” ahead of them and slowed them down in the race, or even taken their legs out from underneath them. It is likely that in the Greek games, this may have been a common phenomenon.

The race in which they are engaged was the race for the truth: “hindered you from obeying the truth.” Literally the phrase would be: “who cut in before you with regard to the truth so as not to obey?” Obviously, the truth that is particularly in Paul’s mind is the truth of the Gospel which he had delivered to them, namely, that being “in Messiah” was the goal, and that one came into this covenant relationship in the Messiah through faith.

Surely the teaching of the Influencers was not from God. Their persuasive speech (πείσμων, peismon) was not based upon the word of God Who had called them to repentance and faith in the Messiah. The “message of good” was clearly not the Gospel—it was another of a different sort (1:6-7). Paul thus puts the message of the Influencers at odds with the divine call of God upon those who were the elect from the nations. God Himself had engaged them in the race for the truth; the Influencers had “cut in” and were surely not sent from God as Paul himself was. Yet this raised a question about their initial reception of the Gospel, and the apparent divine initiative in their coming to faith. How could it be possible that they would now, in stark contrast to their initial confession of faith, be entertaining an acquiescence to the Influencers message? Here Paul leaves the reconciliation of divine initiative and human responsibility without explanation. But we must presume that the “either-or”
scenario already raised by Paul meant that if the Gentiles were to succumb to the message of the Influencers, they would, at the same time, prove their original confession of Yeshua to have been spurious.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump. – This seems likely to be a well known proverb which Paul quotes (he uses it also in 1Cor 5:6), but from where the saying derives we do not know. It is not found in the Tanach nor precisely in the rabbinic literature. However, it is very possible that the proverb found its origins in the rabbinic discussions, for in b.Chullin 99b, dealing with what part could contaminate the whole, the ruling is that even a single part per hundred could have effect, and leaven is specifically noted as having the ability to contaminate even with the smallest part.

With regard to homogeneous substances there is always stringency — thus if wheaten leaven [of terumah] fell into wheaten dough [of common food], and there was sufficient of it to leaven the dough, it is forbidden, whether there was so little of the leaven as to be neutralized in a hundred and one or not. If there was not so little of the leaven as to be neutralized in a hundred and one, it is forbidden, whether it could leaven the dough or not. (b.Chullin 99b)

But regardless of where the proverb originated, it was presumably well enough known to get Paul’s point across. He was fearful that if a few were persuaded by the Influencers, they might exert sufficient pressure on the rest to follow their lead. Or perhaps he was concerned that the false message of the Influencers would erode a bit of the truth, which would lead eventually to a full erosion. Or even that the reception of the false message by a few would ruin the unity of the Galatian assemblies, and eventually cause such division as to bring destruction upon the whole community. Whatever the exact reference, Paul recognized that error, regardless of how insignificant it may seem at first, has the ability to grow and grow, and to displace the truth if it is not detected and dismissed.

Thus, we too must be aware of the systemic nature of error. When it is once received, it is more difficult to eradicate. It is far better to turn from it at its first appearance and to cling to the truth.

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.

“I have confidence” ("I am persuaded" in the KJV) is a phrase Paul uses to indicate his full belief in something (cf. Rom 14:14; Phil 2:24; 2Thess 3:4). His confidence in this case, however, was “in the Lord.” NASB’s “confidence in you in the Lord” is a bit awkward. The meaning is: “confidence with regard to you (ἐγὼ ἐμπιστεύομαι ἐν σοί) in the Lord.” Paul was confident that the Lord had actually done a redemptive work in the lives of the Gentiles to whom he addresses himself. As such, he was also confident that the Lord (we should understand this to refer to Yeshua) would maintain His work in them, and that as a result, they would reject the erroneous teaching and cling to the truth. Here we see the Apostle living out the very theology he taught (Phil 1:6).

Once again, however, it is clear that the Gentiles had not yet made up their minds—they were still weighing the arguments of the Influencers. Paul’s epistle is intended to reach them before the crucial decision is made.
but the one who is disturbing you will bear his own judgment, whoever he is – We might be surprised by the reference to just one individual, as though there was one Influencer. 1:7, 12 confirm that it was otherwise. We might understand this language to suggest that there was a primary teacher who had gained a following, and that this remark is directed towards him. If the pressure upon the believing Gentiles was to be exerted primarily by a prominent teacher, Paul might have considered him most responsible. Many have attempted to speculate who this one might have been, but this is essentially a waste of time. The best one can do is to presume that this teacher was likely connected to the group from Jerusalem that had also caused Paul grief, and who were intent upon maintaining the status quo of the prevailing opinion that Gentiles needed to become proselytes in order to enjoy full membership in the Torah community of Israel (cf. Acts 15:1).

Paul uses the same word for “disturb” (ταρασσεῖν, tarassó) here as he does in 1:7. The word itself means “to cause trouble” or “stir up,” “unsettle.” The doctrines being taught by this teacher, and by those who followed him, had unsettled the Gentile believers, causing them to doubt their own identity within the people of God, or at least their equality within the believing community. Being classed as outsiders to the covenant, they were open to the false teaching that offered them a way in.

The verdict is that he “will bear is own judgment.” The verb βαστάζειν, bastazô, “to bear” is used three more times in chapter six (vv. 2, 5, 17), and though not a widely used word, could mean to “bear stress or trouble.” Perhaps Paul has in mind the judgment of the final day (it was a theme familiar in his epistles, cf. Rom 2:2-3; 3:8; 13:2; 1Cor 11:29, 34, etc.), though it is equally possible that he anticipated more immediate divine retribution upon the one who had caused trouble for the body of Messiah in Galatia. We may note that to the Corinthians, Paul estimated that the sickness incurred by some, and even their death, was the result of their unrighteous behavior (cf. 1Cor 11).

11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.

The irritation Paul has felt over the situation in Galatia comes through in his manner of writing. He is short and terse, often using compacted style as a result of his passion over the subject at hand. Thus, he moves abruptly to a new subject.

if I still preach circumcision – To what exactly is Paul referring? The answer to this question has been the matter of much debate among the commentators and theologians. We will discuss the various interpretations below, but there are some things that seem fairly clear in terms of why Paul would be bringing this issue up in the epistle of Galatians. First, apparently some (perhaps including the Influencers) were saying that Paul was in agreement with their position, that a Gentile needed to become a proselyte in order to be assured of covenant status. Secondly, it appears by the use of the word “still” (ἐτί, eti) that Paul admits to having taught this doctrine at sometime in the past. Thirdly, his logic is that if he were still teaching circumcision (proselytism), there would be no good explanation for his constantly being persecuted, for then he would be received with open arms by the majority. Finally, Paul’s perspective was that to teach circumcision (and thus to be sheltered from persecution) would be to nullify the centrality of the death of Messiah upon the execution stake: the two approaches (need for proselytism vs. covenant status as the benefit of faith in
Yeshua) could not stand together as friends. The one nullifies the other. The following represent the general interpretations of “if I still preach circumcision:”

1. That Paul, before coming to faith in Yeshua, taught circumcision, i.e., that a Gentile needed to become a proselyte in order to have covenant status.
2. That Paul’s “circumcision-free” gospel was not widely known among the communities heavily weighted by Jewish members, and that they simply presumed he still was preaching the “company line.”
3. That the word “still” (ἐτι) should be understood as “yet,” yielding “If I am yet to preach circumcision.” The point would be that Paul is asking a hypothetical question: “If I were to agree with your position that circumcision is necessary, would I no longer be persecuted? But then what would be made of the cross, since it is the real stumbling block?”
4. That Paul is actually addressing a second group of opponents other than the Influencers. This group felt that Paul needed to distance himself from his Jewishness and let his message be much more free from the constraints of the synagogue. In this case, “if I still preach circumcision” would mean “if I am still clinging to my Jewishness.”
5. That by “circumcision” Paul is referring not to physical circumcision, but circumcision of the heart. Thus, his emphasis upon “putting to death the deeds of the flesh” (cf. Rom 8:13; Col 3:5ff) was considered a “spiritual circumcision.” The meaning of the current text would thus be: “Since I continue to preach a spiritual circumcision, why am I persecuted for this?” The point would be that those who were urging proselytism were neglecting the more important point of righteous living. They were teaching the ritual only, without reference to the need for a sanctified life, something that Paul’s preaching of the cross emphasized (i.e., death with the Messiah = death to sin in all of its dimensions).
6. That Paul was being accused of being inconsistent. He was preaching a “circumcision-free” gospel to the Galatians, but when among a primarily Jewish audience, he was holding the “party line” and teaching that Gentiles needed to become proselytes, in order to avoid being ostracized from his own community.

It would seem that this final option is most likely the best, because it fits the context of Galatians, and has support from what we know of Paul’s mission in general. The other options are either far-fetched, or they do not fit the general message of this epistle.

The fact that Paul was misunderstood seems clear. Peter makes the forthright statement that some of his writings are difficult to understand, and that some were twisting his teaching to their own demise (2Pet 3:16). Moreover, the circumcision of Timothy “on account of the Jews” (Acts

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28 I’m summarizing Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 278-79 here.
16:1-3) may have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by his opponents. We know, of course, that when Paul returned to Jerusalem some years later, he was warned by James and the rest that there were those believers who were zealous for the Torah, who were circulating the false report that Paul was teaching the entire abolishment of the Torah, and specifically that he was instructing the Jewish communities “not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs” (Acts 21:21). We may add to these the words of 1Cor 9:20-21,

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Torah, as under the Torah though not being myself under the Torah, so that I might win those who are under the Torah; to those who are without Torah, as without Torah, though not being without the Torah of God but under the Torah of Messiah, so that I might win those who are without Torah.

Taken in isolation, this statement sounds very much like Paul was accepting a double standard in order to achieve his desired goal, i.e., the winning of people (both Jew and Gentile) to faith in Messiah Yeshua.

It seems very likely, then, that one of the arrows in the Influencers arsenal was that Paul was two-faced in his approach to the matter of Gentiles and proselytism, and that in his inconsistencies he was requiring something of the Galatian Gentiles which he was not requiring of other communities.

If this is how we should understand Paul’s point here, then his words are given to make sure the Gentiles realize that he is not inconsistent in his message, but that his own persecution at the hands of those who required circumcision proved beyond doubt that he was consistently teaching the inclusion of the Gentiles apart from their need to become proselytes: “why then am I still persecuted?” This coincides with the way he ends this epistle: “From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Yeshua” (6:17). The scars he bore in his body from the persecutions he endured were living proof that he was consistent in his message, whether he was in a primarily Gentile community, or one dominated by Jewish members.

Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished – The issue of how his message was perceived by the Influencers was only a minor point from Paul’s perspective. Much more important was what such an inconsistent message (of which he was accused) would do to the message of the cross. For Paul, the preaching of the death of Messiah was the core element of the gospel. If he were actually teaching that a Gentile gained a greater covenant status by becoming a proselyte, then the message of the cross had become nothing — it had been abolished. Since the beginning of this epistle Paul has made the point that the real issue at stake was the significance of the cross. The Influencers’ message disregarded the very reason why Yeshua would have had to die, and as such, their message was not “goodnews,” but rather a message of condemnation. The cross presented a “stumbling block” (σκανδάλων, skandalon), meaning that which “gives offense or causes revulsion, that which arouses opposition, an object of anger or disapproval.” The death of Yeshua was indeed a stumbling block, a “scandal” to the Jewish community because it represented the decisive opposite to their own view of covenant membership. If it were necessary for the Messiah to die in order to make sinners righteous, then it was clear that Israel did not intrinsically own righteousness as the elect people. It required the admission that Israel, the covenant people of God, were not
sufficiently righteous on the basis of their national identity. And it the
dismissal of long-held traditions that taught otherwise.

Indeed, the fact that the cross was the stumbling block in the whole
scope of the gospel was a consistent theme in the early apologetic message
of Yeshua’s followers (cf. Matt 16:23; 17:7; Rom 17:17; 1Jn 2:10; Rev 2:14).
The teaching that the royal and triumphant Messiah would be crucified at
the hands of mere mortals set the whole idea of rabbinic messianism on its
head. But perhaps most egregious was the fact that through the death of the
Messiah, the distinction between Jew and Gentile within the covenant
people of God had been abolished, and this hit at the very core of Pharisaic
teaching in regard to the covenant itself. Such taking down of the wall
between Israel and the nations was viewed as a disintegration of the essen-
tial identity markers by which the 1st Century Judaisms defined them-

selves. It was in the cross that the Jew and the Gentile both gained their
identity, an identity which first and foremost was not based upon national-
ity or lineage, but was based upon the elective love of God. In short, the
cross made it clear that Israel was not the owner of her own identity, but
that her true identity lay in her relationship to a crucified and risen Mes-
siah, and that the elect from the nations entered into this same identity as
equally chosen by God.

Dunn makes an interesting point:

More to the point here, the cross so understood would seem to have
been a stumbling block to Christian Jews (the other missionaries) as
well: they could accept the redefinition of Messiah which Jesus’
death and resurrection made necessary; but they could not accept
that a further redefinition of relationships between Jew and Gentile
was also necessary.\(^{29}\)

The cross as a stumbling block, then, is at the core of the Messianic
message of the gospel given to us by the Apostles. In the cross, human
pride in ethnicity and its corollary, the “works of the Torah” as necessary
for Gentile inclusion, is done away with. The offense of the cross is thus a
“weighty counterbalance to all pride of position, nationhood, or life-style.”\(^{30}\)
It is also the necessary fulfillment of the prophets:

Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel,
a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over. And a snare and a trap

Yet we must be careful to distinguish between the execution stake as a
stumbling block to the pride of sinful mankind, and the cross as a symbol
of prejudice and hatred. From the perspective of the Jewish people, the
cross has been used by the Christian Church as a lethal weapon, not as a
symbol of the infinite love of Israel’s God toward His creation. Rather than
viewing the cross as the mark of Christian love, Jewish people have often
seen the cross as the symbol of Christian anti-Semitism, and rightly so, for
the message of the gospel has been twisted in the history of the Christian
Church into something it never was. That therefore Jewish people may
“stumble” over this cross as falsely presented by the Christian Church is

\(^{29}\) Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 281.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 282.
not what Paul is speaking of here. If the message of the death of Messiah is to be properly lived out before a watching world, and particularly to the Jewish community, it must be demonstrated that Yeshua’s death has changed us, has recreat ed us into people who know how to walk in the footsteps of our Master. Paul could never have envisioned the gospel apart from God’s continuing love and faithfulness to Israel—even to Israel who has rejected His Messiah. And if God’s love is unchanging toward Israel, then surely those who claim to have died with Messiah should have that same perspective.

12 I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

These words of the Apostle shock our modern sensitivities! How could an Apostle of the Messiah utter such words?! “Paul gives out with a sarcastic and dismissive snort” as he shows his contempt for the work of the Influencers. This demonstrates his righteous anger against those who would disrupt the believers at Galatia. (He uses the word “trouble,” ἀναστατοῦν, anastatoũõ, which denotes considerable disturbance, cf. Acts 17:6; 21:38.) Paul’s consternation is commensurate with his love for the truth as it is found in Yeshua. If the Influencers are so certain that circumcision (cutting the flesh) would benefit the believing Gentiles, perhaps they would be willing to cut themselves! If a little error is good, perhaps a bigger error is better. This is pure irony. For Paul wishes that they would become eunuchs! The Torah is specific about the place of eunuchs: they are banned from the “assembly of the Lord” and from the priesthood (Deut 23:1, Lev 21:20). In essence, he is saying that he wishes they would be out of the picture when it comes to their ability to influence the rest.

Actually, self-castration was something engaged in by those of the cult of Cybele, which had its home in Galatia. Thus Paul’s wish is not only that these Influencers, in using the knife, would make themselves excluded from any leadership role, but that they would actually “participate in a form of paganism which could not but be thoroughly despised by the Jews.” It may also be that Paul is hearkening back to the karat (“cut off”) penalties prescribed in the Torah for those who engaged in various transgressions. If cutting was all that the Influencers had on their minds, then they deserve to be “cut off” themselves.

So while we may be shocked at this kind of language, it actually approaches the genre of the prophetic voice, which at times would lapse into grotesque metaphor to make the point (cf. Ps 137:9). Even Yeshua, in prophetic metaphor (and not in a literal sense) spoke of “cutting off” bodily members if they offended, i.e., caused stumbling. Surely Paul’s theological ire has arisen! In another sense, Paul uses reductio ad absurdum to show how utterly silly the message of the Influencers really was. In the end, it shows beyond doubt that the message of the Influencers could never be tolerated, not even to the slightest extent.

31 Dunn, Galatians, p. 282.
32 Ibid., p. 283.
34 Reduction to the absurd; a method of indirect proof by deducing a contradiction from the negation of a proposition taken together with other propositions previously proved or granted.
13–15 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Torah is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Paul has completed his primary argument against the Influencers, and he finished with a flurry! But he now turns to the positive statement of spiritual encouragement and exhortation to the followers of Yeshua at Galatia. Though he has shown his passion throughout the course of the polemic, his spirit is still energized to speak of the manner of life that should characterize the believer, a manner of life which in every way is led and energized by the Ruach.

Having shown them that the rabbinic halachah of conversion was not the course they should follow, then how were the believers to conduct themselves? If the traditions that had set aside the pure teaching of Torah were to be jettisoned, what was left for the followers of Yeshua to govern their everyday decisions? Where does freedom turn into license, and what are the characteristics of true freedom in Yeshua?

All too often this section of Galatians is interpreted to mean Paul was teaching the Galatians that they were no longer to consider the Torah as a way of life—that they had been “liberated” from the restraints of the “Law” and were now free to live as they liked. That the leading of the Spirit had now replaced the instructions of the Torah. But we know this is not the case, for the simple reason that in describing freedom in the Spirit, Paul immediately turns to the Torah for substantiation of what this freedom is (quoting Lev 19:18). Rather, Paul has made a clear and substantial case for why the Gentiles need never submit to the specific traditions of the Sages that taught inclusion into the people of God through the works of the Torah. But in jettisoning the man-made doctrines, he is not negating nor diminishing the place of the Torah in the life of the believer. “All Scripture … is profitable” (2Tim 3:16-17), profitable to equip the believer for every good deed (mitzvah). “Freedom” in the flesh is actually bondage. True freedom exists in one’s submission to the Spirit. Once again, the paradigm of the exodus is in view. Israel was set free from Egypt’s bondage in order to serve the Lord (Ex 8:1). Whenever liberty is contemplated, one must ask, “liberty for what?” Liberty without moral and holy purpose is actually a form of bondage.

you were called to freedom, brethren – Once again Paul begins with the divine initiative: God is the One who calls the sinner, who seeks those who are lost. The sovereign work of God, in effectually calling sinners, is the inevitable result of His having chosen them for salvation (thus Paul addresses them as “brethren”). Like God sending Moses to Israel in order to lead her out of the slavery of Egypt, so God, through His Spirit, calls the sinner to Himself, into the freedom of worship. Here, as elsewhere, the “calling” Paul speaks of is effectual. It is not merely an “invitation,” but a divine appointment to which the sinner has been drawn by God’s grace. The calling of God in this sense always results in repentance and faith.\(^\text{35}\)

\(^{35}\) Cf. Rom 8:28, 30; 11:29; 1Cor 1:2, 9, 26; 7:17, 22; Gal 1:6; Eph 4:4; Col 3:15; 1Thess 4:7; 2Thess 1:11; 1Tim 6:12.
only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh – Paul uses the word “flesh” (σαρξ, sarks) to mean one’s sinful nature; reliance upon oneself rather than reliance upon God; the general weakness of oneself in light of being part of the fallen world.36 Once the Gentile believers were firmly grounded in the fact that they were not under the rule of the Influencers, and that they need not become proselytes in order to be fully welcomed into the congregation of Israel, they may have drawn the erroneous conclusion that they could “make their own way,” that they could determine on their own what was right for them. Such a scenario would inevitably lead to chaos and worse. The fact that they were not to become proselytes did not mean that they could live as they pleased, or that they could form their own private halachah. Though they were not proselytes, they were still bona fide members of the covenant, and part of a covenant community of faith. As such, they could not live unto themselves—that is not what they had been freed to do.

The Greek for “freedom” is ελευθερία, eleutheria, and denotes “the state of being free,” particularly in the Scriptures from slavery to someone or something. They had been freed from the slavery of sin (the “old man” had been crucified, Rom 6:6) and had come into the state of liberty to serve God and others (the two halves of the 10 Words). They had not been set free from the bondage of man-made rules in order to “have it their way.” The word “opportunity” is ἀφορμή, aporme, which means “occasion, pretext or opportunity.” The freedom of the believer is not to be seen as an opportunity to go one’s own way.

but through love serve one another – Rather, the freedom that has been won for us by Messiah is the freedom to serve one another. We have the freedom to put our own desires second, and the needs of our neighbor first. In so doing, we exercise our freedom to be conformed to the image of Messiah. Even as the Influencers were relying upon their flesh (ethnic status) to secure a right standing before God, so the Gentile believers were not to glory in their “non-Jewishness” as though this put them into some kind of exclusive group, now favored by the message of the Apostle. Rather, each one was to serve the other as equal members in Messiah.

For the whole Torah is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” – Paul is not negating the Torah, or reducing it to just one command, as though the other claims of the Torah are now no longer applicable. Anyone who was aware of the common rabbinic propensity to summarize the Torah would be aware of Paul’s point. For instance, consider the well-known passage from the Talmud, which speaks of summing the Torah commandments:

Micah came and reduced them to three [principles], as it is written, It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: [i] only to do justly, and [ii] to love mercy and [iii] to walk humbly before thy God. ‘To do justly,’ that is, maintaining justice; and to love mercy,’ that is, rendering every kind office; ‘and walking humbly before thy God,’ that is, walking in funeral and bridal processions. And do not these facts warrant an a fortiori conclusion that if in matters that are not generally performed in private the Torah enjoins ‘walking humbly,’ is it not ever so much more requisite in matters that usually call for modesty? Again came Isaiah and reduced them to two [princi-
Also famous is Hillel’s summation:

On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, ‘Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.’ Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder’s cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, ‘What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.’

And of course we know the words of Yeshua on the matter:

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Torah? And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.” This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” On these two commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets.” (Matt. 22:36–40)

Here, in our Galatians text, Paul sums the whole Torah in the quote from Lev 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In so doing he shows that he has something in common with the Influencers, namely, a desire to do the whole Torah (cf. 5:3). The difference, of course, is how one defined the “whole Torah.” Paul, like his Master before him, sought to unshackle the Torah of God from the restrictive rabbinic oral Torah that had, in many cases, redefined it away from its primary intent. The Torah was not given to divide the people of God, but to stand as God’s gracious teaching in righteousness. The Torah, rightly obeyed, would therefore bring about a humility toward one another, not a haughty attitude revolving around who does what, and who doesn’t. In other words, both Paul and his detractors had the same goal (to obey the whole Torah), but each prescribed opposite means to achieve that goal. The Influencers wanted to “keep the whole Torah” by requiring strict conformity to the rabbinic understanding of the Torah, an understanding which was designed on the one hand to divide between Jew and non-Jew, and on the other hand, to make the Torah manageable so as to allow personal boasting. Paul’s approach to keeping the whole Torah was that the principle of love would govern, not the rulings of this Sage or that one. Surely in the diaspora, the matter of Torah life would need to be adjusted. Distance from the Temple, for instance, would surely mean that daily life would take on some differences when compared to those who lived in Jerusalem. These adjustments were ruled by the Sages and put into the community’s halachah. Paul wants the same liberty, but he wants love for one’s neighbor to be the deciding factor. From his point of

37 b. Makkot 24a.
38 b. Shabbat 31a.
view, each was to be as much concerned to aid his neighbor in obeying the Torah as he was in keeping it himself. Love for one’s neighbor was to be the constant “beit din” (ruling court) in matters of community relationship.

The quote from Lev 19:18 is directly from the Lxx, itself a direct translation of the Hebrew. Interestingly, this verse shows up only a few times in the midrashim, but is the most quoted verse from the Torah in the Apostolic Scriptures. Thus, no doubt based upon Yeshua’s assertion that the whole Torah can be summed up in the Shema (Deut 6:4ff; 11:13ff) and Lev 19:18, this verse took on special meaning within the communities of The Way. And rightly so, for it enjoined upon the followers of Yeshua a *halachah* which conformed to the very incarnation itself:

> For you know the grace of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. (2Cor 8:9)

But we must be careful to consider what “loving one’s neighbor as oneself” entails. The idea that loving one’s neighbor would be the “easier road” of the Torah is wrong headed. In fact, loving one’s neighbor requires the most careful attention to the Torah, for it is in following the wise and gracious precepts of the Torah that one is best able to love one’s neighbor. Loving one’s neighbor is “open-ended.” Nevertheless, it is limited to one’s neighbor—we’re not required to love the multitudes as we love our neighbor, nor would the Torah think such a thing possible, since love is envisioned within the scope of doing. The nature of this *mitzvah* is that there is not some list of prescribed, man-made laws to determine when one has finished. Loving one’s neighbor means willingly applying the righteous life of Torah in relationship with one’s neighbor, and this is a life-time endeavor. The whole matter of how one treats another’s property; how one respects another’s time; how one offers help to someone in need; how one shares in the corporate joys of worship; how one respects the privacy of relationships, and how one prepares in advance to love one’s neighbor—all of these constitute the living out of God’s Torah.

Moreover, in the end, one is only able to love one’s neighbor as one should, if one is also engaged in loving God with all one’s heart, soul, and might. For the motivation for loving one’s neighbor comes first and foremost from a heart that desires to please the Almighty. Love, by its very nature, is sacrificial, because it calls upon the one who loves to give himself or herself to the one being loved. Therefore love for one’s neighbor begins by trusting God, for loving one’s neighbor will inevitably call for strength where there is no strength, supply where there is no supply, and consolation where consolation may be lacking. In this perspective, then, loving one’s neighbor is the end result of walking in obedience to God’s Torah.

> But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. – There is perhaps a play on words here, owing to the rhyming sound of the verb in v. 13, “serve one another” (δουλεύετε, douleute) and the verb in v. 15, “devour one another” (δακνετε, daknete). We might attempted to capture this by an English translation: “serve one another … but if you savage one another.” The point may be that Paul intends to show the stark contrast between serving one another as over against consuming each other. The former

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40 Matt 5:43; 19:19; Mk 12:31, 33 and parallels; Rom 13:9; James 2:8.
has the other person’s welfare in mind, the latter is entirely selfish.

The scene that Paul sets before the minds of his readers is one of dogs or animals preying upon each other. The NJB captures this with “snapping at one another, and tearing one another to pieces.” It was not uncommon in the ancient literature to compare bad behavior to that of animals, but such a comparison was obviously meant to be rhetorical and sobering. Mankind is distinguished from the animals by the presence of the image of God within him. He ought not to stoop to the level of animal activity, even toward those with whom one may have violent disagreements. Paul may be subtly referring to his own treatment at the hands of those who had set themselves against him.

Moreover, a call to freedom, which included a willingness to set aside some of the rabbinic strictures in order to receive the Gentiles, could be misunderstood if the foundation of loving one’s neighbor was neglected. One’s own personal freedoms may need to be set aside in order to effectively love one’s neighbor. Here, once again, the rule of love becomes the determining factor in matters of personal halachah.

Most interesting is the fact that Paul considers only one option for the Galatian assemblies: unity. How different is his perspective than that of our day. If we consider the stern and even harsh language the Apostle has employed against the Influencers, one would expect to hear (had Paul been living in our day) an encouragement for his followers to “get up and leave” and “start their own congregation.” After all, how could those who believed the truth continue to fellowship with “the others” who held such erroneous doctrines?! But such an idea finds no place in Paul’s thinking. The only option is remaining together, and so the appeal is given not to allow the animal-like biting and snapping, perpetrated by false teaching, to continue. Such a perspective reminds us that Paul is writing to a Jewish community, not the Christian Church as it came to be known in the following centuries. In the context in which the Galatian community existed, it was impossible to “get up and start one’s own congregation.” There were only two religious communities: Judaism and paganism. To begin “something new” was simply impossible in light of the Roman sanctions against atheism. While the Jewish community enjoyed the freedom of their religion in which they were exempt from the requirements of emperor worship, and participation in the festivals of the gods, to begin something new meant leaving this protection and becoming vulnerable to the pressures of Roman in regard to religion in general. In short, the two factions we envision at Galatia (followers of Paul’s teaching vs. the Influencers), could not have left and gone to “another church.” The synagogue was the only viable place of worship for those who believed in the One God of Israel, and the synagogue was viewed as within the Jewish community, not outside of it.

16–17 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

Paul now moves into an explanation regarding life lived by the power of the Spirit (vv. 16-24). It is not enough simply to exhort the Galatians to treat each other in the realm of love, or even to enjoin upon them the Torah commandment to love one’s neighbor. There must likewise be the ability to
obey such a commandment, and especially in the face of such heated differences. For Paul, such ability for sanctified living was to be found in the work of the Spirit within the believer. It should be noted at the outset that Paul’s perspective is simply that the Spirit assists every one who is a believer. He does not begin this section by stating how one might “receive” the Spirit, or how one might gain the power of the Spirit which he or she did not have. It is the presumption of the Apostle that the Spirit has come into the life of every believer in order to assist him or her in living out a sanctified life. What is more, Paul indicates his emphasis on the matter of the Spirit in the believer’s life by the opening “I say” (cf. 4:1). He uses this as a way to say “listen up!”

This life of sanctification is characterized by the familiar Hebraic “walk:” “walk by (in) the Spirit.” The matter of halachah (from the Hebrew word חָלַךְ, halach, “to walk”) is to be a matter of the Spirit. This does not mean that our halachah is an entirely a personal matter, as though the Spirit would lead one person to live one way, and another person to live a different way. Much to the contrary! The Spirit calls each one in the family of God to walk (make life decisions) in accordance with the single standard of God’s word. The righteousness revealed in the Torah is the standard by which He leads. Thus, when we are walking in or by the Spirit, we will live in accordance with God’s Torah. This fact is highlighted by the common use of ἄνωμός, anomos, in the Apostolic Scriptures, usually translated “transgressor,” “godless,” or “lawless.” Since the Greek use of νομός, nomos stands for Torah (the Hebrew תּוֹרָה, torah, is regularly translated by nomos in the Lxx), the first readers of the Apostolic Scriptures would have understood anomos as “against Torah” or “without Torah.” For Paul, the “lusts of the flesh” are contrary to the life of righteousness taught in the Torah. Thus, to walk in or by the Spirit is to walk in obedience to the Torah; to live according to the flesh is to make one’s own fleshly desires the rule of life.

But for Paul, the whole matter of daily halachah was viewed from a different perspective than that of Influencers. While the Influencers (we would presume) simply relied upon the rulings of the Sages to determine one’s halachah, Paul appealed to the constant and present leading of the Spirit. The Sages attempted to manage the Torah by adding rules to cover every possible contingency; Paul instructs us to be led by the Law-Giver Himself. Moreover, while the Oral Torah may have given much wise and clear instruction on how to apply the Torah in every life situation, it was powerless to energize the soul to obey the Torah in the context of sacrificial love. The Spirit, on the other hand, taking the inspired Torah of God and writing it upon the heart, could move the soul to obedience in love—love for God and for one’s neighbor. While many of the Judaisms of the day were constantly paying attention to the rulings of the Sages, Paul enjoins the Galatian believers constantly to be in tune with the leading of the Spirit. It should be noted that the imperative “walk” is in the present tense (περιπατεῖτε, peripateite) which would give the sense of “constantly walk in or by the Spirit.”

Thus, taking up the common verbiage of the Tanach, to “walk in the laws/statutes” of God, Paul casts the common phraseology in terms of “walk in or by the Spirit.” What does this mean for us practically? First, it means that the written Torah, not the Oral Torah, is our first and primary authority for life’s halachah. As we study to understand the word of God, we seek the illuminating

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42 For example, Lev 26:3; Deut 8:6; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; Josh 22:5; 1Kings 2:3; 3:14; 6:12; 8:58; Ps 119:35.
and guiding help of the Spirit in making life-applications of the sacred text. Secondly, it means that in areas of life which are left open for one’s personal decisions, the leading of the Spirit becomes the deciding factor. This means that the good of one’s neighbor will inevitably take precedence when two or more viable options present themselves. Thirdly, it means that our halachah may be determined on a minority basis rather than a majority. While the perspective of the Sages was that the halachah always followed the majority voice, in the realm of the Spirit, the majority may seek to accommodate the minority in matters where there is an acceptable range of options. Note the following Talmudic discussion:

This is the general rule: after partaking of anything that belongs to the seven species, R. Gamaliel says that three blessings should be said, while the Rabbis say, one that includes three. Once R. Gamaliel and the elders were reclining in an upper chamber in Jericho, and dates were brought in and they ate, and R. Gamaliel gave permission to R. Akiba to say grace. And R. Akiba said quickly the one blessing which includes three. Said R. Gamaliel to him: Akiba, how long will you poke your head into quarrels? He replied: Master, although you say this way and your colleagues say the other way, you have taught us, master, that where an individual joins issue with the majority, the halachah is determined by the majority.\footnote{b.Berchot 37a.}

Here, Akiva, who held to a majority ruling, is with a prominent Sage, Gamliel, who held the minority opinion. When asked to pronounce the birkat hamazon (blessing after eating), he uses the majority halachah though he doubtlessly knew that Gamliel favored the minority. Akiva defends his actions by stating the common rule: halachah is determined by the majority.

Now here is an interesting scenario: if one were being led by the Spirit, is it not possible that in this case (where the halachah is pure tradition and not specifically laid out in the written Torah), one might not have switched to the halachah of the minority in deference to Gamliel? Surely the Torah commands that a blessing be said after one eats (Deut 8:10), but it does not describe what this blessing is or how it should be said. There is therefore leniency as to the exact manner in which this command should be carried out. To defer to the minority would be an act of graciousness—to consider the other person more important than oneself, and to accommodate his position, putting one’s own opinion second. This, I believe, is an illustration of how love should be a ruling factor in matters of personal halachah.

And it would appear that being led by or in the Spirit results in considering one’s neighbor as a deciding factor in halachic decisions. I hasten to repeat that walking in or by the Spirit is not some subjective, personal experience that has no connection to the unchanging and objective standard of the Scriptures. Granted, this is often how the phrase is understood in contemporary Christian circles, but such a viewpoint cannot be sustained by the Scriptures. Walking by the Spirit does not mean that one is free to act however one thinks is best, or however one feels at the moment. Paul has just quoted Lev 19:18, and the command to love one’s neighbor. In the context, walking by the Spirit is the means by which this command is obeyed. This alone should help us see that for Paul, walking by the Spirit is the same as obeying God’s word. Moreover, walking by the Spirit must be
in concert with the original receiving of the Spirit (3:3), which is by faith, so walking by the Spirit means living in the realm of faith. Finally, walking by the Spirit is the antithesis of “satisfying the desires of the flesh.” Far from some kind of autonomous “do as I feel,” walking by the Spirit means making my life decisions in accordance with the Torah of God which the Spirit writes upon the heart and constantly brings to the believer’s attention.

and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh - The verb “carry out” (τελεσθε, telesethi) could be taken as an imperative (so RSV/NRSV) but this does not seem likely. Paul’s point is that walking by the Spirit enables one to overcome the desires of the flesh. Once again, by “flesh” Paul does not mean the material aspect of humankind as over against the non-material, but rather he refers to the fallen, sinful nature inherited through Adam’s sin (Rom 5:12ff). Though the believer has been delivered from the power of darkness, and transferred into the kingdom of Yeshua (Col 1:13); and though the old self has been crucified (Rom 6:6) with the Messiah, yet there exists within one’s mortal makeup the remains of the sinful nature. This sinful nature continues to have its bent toward unrighteousness—toward the folly of thinking that momentary pleasure will actually satisfy, or that self-fulfillment is the path to happiness. In short, the sinful nature is still an ally with the enemy and therefore at odds with God. The sinful nature still whispers (and sometimes shouts) “has God said?” But the believer has already won the victory over the sinful nature, having died and risen again with Yeshua, and the indwelling presence of the Spirit secures the constant victory over the flesh through submission to God.

This contrary aspect of the flesh is highlighted by the singular: “the desire (not desires) of the flesh.” All of the debauchery woven into the sinful nature may be summed into one: rebellion against the Almighty. In truth, there are only two ways: that of submission to God, and that of rebellion against Him. The word “desire” (ἐπιθυμία, epithumian) is neutral and does not necessarily connote something evil—there are good desires. But it is often used in the Apostolic Scriptures of evil desires, and particularly of those things expressly forbidden by God. Coupled as it is here with the word “flesh,” it pictures those desires that are self-centered rather than God-centered, that are therefore contrary to the Spirit and His leading in concert with God’s word. This contrary aspect is explained further in v. 17—

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. – The structure of the sentence is clear: Paul, in chiastic arrangement, puts the flesh and its desires as opposite the Spirit and His desires. (Though the verb “desire” is not repeated in the second clause, it surely is understood, thus: “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit sets His desire against the flesh”). The chiastic arrangement sets the word Spirit (πνεῦμα, pneuma) at the center, which highlights Paul’s very point: the indwelling Spirit has made the difference. Some have suggested that the word pneuma refers to man’s spirit, not the Spirit of God, and this is a possibility. But in the overall context of this paragraph, it seems certain that Paul is speaking of the indwelling Spirit of God Who sanctifies those who have believed. It is the presence of the Spirit of God that creates the conflict with the flesh. Apart from the Spirit of God, the flesh is at best tolerated and usually indulged. The unregenerate soul knows no difference: the flesh and its desire is the norm.

Thus, the conflict that is portrayed here is one in which the unregenerate person does not participate. Indeed, it is the presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer that sets up the conflict. For man in his unregenerate state seeks
contentment with the temporal and passing pleasures of life. But when the Spirit comes, enlightening the heart and soul to the reality of the spiritual and eternal dimension, and endowing one’s soul with faith to lay hold of the promises in Yeshua, one is no longer content to be numbed by the foolishness of life lived for the moment. Instead, the soul has been raised to a new height, and has grasped a glimpse of the eternal. A new and significant purpose for one’s being is realized, and the desire to be holy even as God is holy becomes a reality. Thus, the conflict presents itself only when the soul is awakened by the presence of the Spirit, enlightening the understanding to the truth of God’s redemptive purpose.

We should note more closely what is meant by the final clause of this verse: so that you may not do the things that you please. The question at hand is how we should understand the Greek ἵνα, hina, translated “so that” by the NASB. To what does ἵνα attach? Does it show the results of the conflict between the Spirit and flesh in general, or does it rather indicate the purpose of the flesh? It would seem clearly that the latter is correct: the purpose of the flesh (here personified as the antagonist of the Spirit) is that the believer might be hindered from doing what he or she honestly desires to do. Thus, we should understand the verse this way: “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, and the goal of the flesh in setting its desire against the Spirit is so that you may not do the things that you please.” It is therefore the duty of the believer to “put to death” the flesh (cf. Col 3:5; Rom 6:11) in order that its desire might be overcome. This is the struggle of sanctification, to yield to the Spirit and not to the flesh. Moreover, the ability to accomplish this task is given to us through the indwelling Spirit Who applies the intercession of our High Priest, making His requests for our holiness (cf. John 17) a reality in our lives through the application of the inspired word of God. Yet this is a cooperation between God and the regenerate soul. Sanctification is a constant struggle so long as we remain in our mortal state. Only when mortality is transformed into immortality will this struggle be over.

This perspective of sanctification goes contrary to the often taught doctrine of modern Christianity, in which it is expected that God will accomplish our sanctification apart from our own efforts. The life of faith is one of conflict and struggle, not heavenly bliss and comfort. While we surely participate in the joy and comfort of our salvation as a foretaste of our final reward, we must reckon with the fact that our current life in Messiah involves a warfare that is on-going. Our full and complete rest awaits the world to come. So long as we live in this fallen world, and retain within our own souls the effects of the sinful nature, we will likewise remain within the struggle for sanctification.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Torah.

The resolution of the conflict described in v. 17 is clearly laid out here: being led by the Spirit is the prime characteristic of those who have been born from above (cf. Rom 8:14). The believer must yield his or her will to the leading of the Spirit, for the Spirit leads in the paths of righteousness, preparing the bride for the Bridegroom. Those who are led by the Spirit are shown to be sons of God.

In contrast, those who are under the condemnation of the Torah, are
those who have not been born from above. They remain “dead in their trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). As such, they are objects of God’s wrath, and are characterized by their sins which draw the condemnation of the Torah: “the soul that sins shall die” (Ezek 18:4).

Paul uses the term “under Torah” (ὑπὸ νόμον, hupo nomon) 11 times.44 In general we may categorize the use of this phrase under two main headings: 1) under the condemnation of the Torah, 2) under the errant teaching that a Gentile gains righteous status through becoming a proselyte (i.e., submitting to the Torah as the rabbis defined it).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Under the Condemnation of the Torah</th>
<th>Legal Jewish Status brings Righteousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rom 6:14-15; Gal 4:4-5; 5:18</td>
<td>1Cor 9:20 (4x); Gal 3:23; 4:21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reality, the two uses are united in the fact that those who relied upon their status as Jews (i.e., becoming a proselyte with the idea that this ritual would bring right-standing before God) remained under the condemnation of the Torah. Yet in 4:21, “Tell me, you who want to be under Torah, do you not listen to the Torah?” Paul must be using the phrase “under Torah” to describe those Gentiles who were contemplating undergoing the ritual of a proselyte in order to gain a status which they felt they did not possess. Either way, the point of being “under Torah” would be that there was no genuine faith. “Under Torah” describes those who were either outside of the realm of Israel’s salvation message (i.e., pagans) or were relying upon one’s status (whether Jewish or proselyte) as ascribed by rabbinic law. Thus, from Paul’s perspective, “under Torah” describes those who did not have the indwelling Spirit, and thus were neither “led by the Spirit” nor were engaged in the conflict against the flesh. In contrast, those who were not under the condemnation of the Torah, nor who were relying upon their “Jewish status” for right standing before God, were those who had come to rely entirely upon the promise of salvation through the Messiah. Rather than being identified primarily by their ethnic status, they were known as being “led by the Spirit.” Their halachah was governed first by the rule of love rather than by strict adherence to the halachah of a particular sect or rabbinic authority. “By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Unfortunately, this verse (Gal 5:18) has been regularly understood by Christian commentators to mean “if you are led the Spirit, you no longer need to obey the Torah.” But we know that this was not Paul’s perspective. In Romans 8, where he gives an even fuller exposition of the work of the Spirit in the believer’s life, he contrasts living by the flesh with living by the Spirit, even as he does in our immediate text. The one whose mind is set on the flesh experiences death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life. How is this so? The one who relies on the flesh is under the condemnation of God, a sentence of death. The one who is led by the Spirit, is a child of God (v. 14). But note carefully how he characterizes the “mind set on the flesh,” i.e., the one who relies upon the flesh (Jewish status) as sufficient for right standing before God:

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Torah of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:6-8)

Hostility toward God is further described as the inability to submit to the Torah of God. For Paul, submission to the Torah is not the same as being “under the Torah.” Being under the Torah is the state of one who would rather do his own thing (the flesh) than to do the will of God. His being “under Torah” is a reality rather than a willful decision. The person who has not been reborn by the Spirit, who still has a heart of stone upon which is impressed, not the Torah of God, but the desires of the flesh—this one is unable to submit to the Torah as a matter of delight and one’s own desire. And as such, he remains condemned in his sin. The final indictment is that the one who is governed by the flesh “cannot please God.” In contrast, those who are “led by the Spirit” are the “sons of God,” meaning that they not only have God’s will as their desire, but that they are able to submit to God’s will (Torah) and to live out a life of obedience.

19–21 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul now gives us one of his lists, a long list of sins which characterize the life governed by the flesh. The conclusion is that those whose lives are characterized by these things “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This shows conclusively that Paul is not talking about levels of maturity among the faithful, nor is he contrasting those who have faith plus the Torah with those who have faith without the Torah. For Paul, there are two categories: those governed by the flesh, and those who are led by the Spirit. The former are under the wrath of God, and, apart from a radical change through the work of the Spirit, will inevitably face condemnation at the bar of God’s justice. The latter are those who are led by the Spirit, have engaged in the struggle of sanctification, and who are promised eternal life.

He makes the point that the deeds of the flesh are evident (\(\phi\alpha\nu\varepsilon\rho\omicron\sigma\zeta,\) phaneros), meaning that there is no need to prove that they are contrary to the holiness of God, nor that those who live by the flesh are characterized by such things. He will make the stark contrast in v. 22 by showing the “fruit of the Spirit,” those characteristics which are likewise evident in the lives of those who have been born from above through faith in the Messiah.

It seems likely that by using the phrase “deeds of the flesh,” Paul was making a direct parallel to the “works of the Torah” referred to earlier (vv. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), for those who relied upon circumcision as the means of gaining right standing before God were not endowed by the Spirit, and could not, therefore, overcome the natural inclinations of the sinful nature. He therefore accredits to those who would rely upon the flesh the very thing that they confessed to despise.

The structure of the list is insightful. He begins and ends with those sins which were most egregious to the pious Judaisms of his day: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, and sorcery. Everyone would agree that these constituted the essence of paganism. He ends with envying, drunkenness, and carousing, again, the characteristics of the pagan society in which Galatia existed. But sandwiched in the middle of these obvious pagan vices are those sins which may have, in a growing way, characterized the faction
in the Galatian community: enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, and factions. The result of the Influencers had been to bring about division and strife—to set members of the community against each other, to such an extent that the community as a whole may have been more and more known for their divisions.

Following is a table with the terms employed in Paul’s list, and brief description of each:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>πορνεία, porneia</td>
<td>immorality</td>
<td>used particularly of prostitution and of all sexual misconduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀκαθαρσία, akatharsia</td>
<td>impurity</td>
<td>a general word for a state of impurity, both physical and moral. Here, most likely of sexual impurity, which would include all manner of sexual sins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀσέλγεια, aselgeia</td>
<td>sensuality</td>
<td>also “debauchery,” which could include “wanton violence” or “insolence.” Connected with the two former terms, it probably means “sexual excess.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εἰδολολατρία, eidololatria</td>
<td>idolatry</td>
<td>worship of idols; often in Jewish sources, as well as in the Tanach, sexual sin and idolatry are linked together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φαρμακεία, pharmakeia</td>
<td>sorcery</td>
<td>This comes from the word for “drug,” (note English “pharmacy”) because drugs were so often used in magic and sorcery. Attempting to contact spirits through drug inducement was common in Hellenistic culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἔχθραι, echthrai</td>
<td>enmities</td>
<td>“Hostile feelings and actions.” Used of the hostility between God and sinner (Rom 7:7), between Jew and Gentile (Lk 23:12; Eph 2:14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐρις, eris</td>
<td>strife</td>
<td>the sense of rivalry; of attempting to take sides and win over the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ζῆλος, zelos</td>
<td>jealousy</td>
<td>here in a bad sense; zealous for one’s own way without regard for one’s neighbor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θυμοί, thumon</td>
<td>outbursts of anger</td>
<td>loosing one’s temper; open display of anger; the flare up that comes in heated arguments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐριθείαι, eritheiai</td>
<td>disputes</td>
<td>selfish ambitions, the fuel for the former outbursts of anger, which result in division and contrary spirits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>διχοστασίαι, dichostasai</td>
<td>dissensions</td>
<td>no doubt given to strengthen the former term; divisions between those who should be united.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>αἱρέσεις, haireseis</td>
<td>factions</td>
<td>the word that eventually came to mean “heresies”; the divisions or factions which come as a result of selfish ambitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φθονοί, phthonoi</td>
<td>envyings</td>
<td>“the grudging spirit that cannot bear to contemplate someone else’s prosperity” (Dunn, Galatians, p. 306)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μεθαι, methai</td>
<td>drunkenness</td>
<td>a life given over to the abuse of substances which alter one’s grip on reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κομνοί, komoi</td>
<td>carousing</td>
<td>excessive feasting, characteristic of the wealthy Roman society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paul ends with a catch-all: “and things like these.” The unifying factor in all of these is that they are the result of living according to the sinful nature, the “flesh.” The are self-centered, self-fulfilling, and self-worshipping.
Paul had warned the Galatian congregations against these things, and here he warns them again: the message of the Influencers would take them in a direction they surely did not want to go. Far from bringing them closer to the Almighty, the way of the Influencers had already begun factions, and if they were to succeed in their message being received, they would doubtlessly plunge the community into irreconcilable division and failure. The only hope was that they might heed Paul’s warning, and cling to the truth as it is in Yeshua.

As noted above, Paul considers those who will inherit the Kingdom of God (one of his terms for the world to come) to be those whose lives are marked by holiness—the result of the indwelling presence of the Spirit. “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). The idea that one can “receive Jesus” and be assured of a place in the world to come apart from the struggle for holiness is not founded upon the Scriptures. Rather, the presence of the Spirit assures that such a struggle will occur, and what is more, that those who engage in that struggle will be victorious. For it is the purpose of the Spirit that all who are called by God to salvation will become conformed to the holiness exemplified in the life of Yeshua Himself.

22–23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

In contrast to the list of sins and vices, the product of the flesh, Paul now gives a list of those things which are characteristic of the Spirit’s work in the believer (δε, de, translated “But” by the NASB, is used as a coordinating connector). Fruit is the result of being attached to the tree and branches, supported by the root. It was therefore a ready metaphor for those things which are the inevitable effect of a given cause. Thus Yeshua taught, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16, 20). And Paul speaks of the “fruit of light” (Eph 5:9) and the “fruit of righteousness” (Phil 1:11). It should also be noted that the word “fruit” is singular, emphasizing that each characteristic is attached to the work of the Spirit. Thus, Paul returns, as before, to the experience of the Galatians in their conversion to faith: the Spirit was evident among them, and as such, must still be at work in their midst and in each of their lives. Therefore, rather than the sins of division and selfish strife, the fruit of the Spirit should be evident in their community.

Perhaps there is no list more well known and memorized of Paul than this one. The nine elements listed, however, should not be taken necessarily as a complete list, any more than the list of sins and vices in the previous verses would be considered exhaustive. Rather, these characteristics of the Spirit and His work in the lives of believers are given to note categories of relationship, both between the believer and God, and the believer and his fellowman.

It is not clear if Paul has developed a particular structure for this list, or if, like other lists he offers, it is simply given without a designed structure or order. Surely these nine items are in direct opposition to the list of sins given above, for in each case, the will of God and the good of one’s neighbor is the deciding factor.
Paul thus returns to that which would have met with full agreement by the genuine believers at Galatia: the presence of the Spirit was evident in their initial faith and acceptance of Yeshua as God’s means of salvation. Though His presence may have been initially manifest in miraculous works and extra-ordinary events, it is clear that for Paul, the enduring work of the Spirit in the life of the believer is the development of attitudes and actions that parallel the life of Yeshua. “Christ-like character is the principal product of the Spirit.” But we should not lose sight of the fact that Paul is contrasting the “works of the Torah/flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit.” While the works of the Torah (becoming a proselyte) might manifest itself in new activities or halachah, the fruit of the Spirit would be known through character formation. This is likewise the message of the prophets, who called Israel to have circumcised hearts (that is, proper inner spiritual motivation) which would manifest itself in obedience to God. Moreover, the plural “works of the Torah/flesh” may hint at the diversity of halachah which such a pursuit would inevitably develop, while the singular “fruit of the Spirit” may suggest a clear unity of life directed by the Spirit.

It is interesting to compare the various lists of virtues found in the Apostolic epistles. Note the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ἀγάπη, agape</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>The word agape was coined by the early followers of Yeshua as a particularly fitting word to describe “self-giving,” the highest form of love; “warm regard for and interest in another—esteem, affection, regard.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χαρά, chara</td>
<td>joy</td>
<td>“the experience of gladness,” and particularly that joy that comes from faithful relationship with God, cf. Phil 1:25.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εἰρήνη, eirene</td>
<td>peace</td>
<td>giving the sense of Hebrew שָלוֹם, shalom; that of wholeness, life as God intends it; settled calm in the midst of life’s incongruities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μακροθυμία, makrothumia</td>
<td>patience</td>
<td>1) state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome—patience, steadfastness, endurance; 2) state of being able to bear up under provocation—forbearance, patience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χρηστότης, chrestotes</td>
<td>kindness</td>
<td>1) uprightness in one’s relations with others—uprightness; 2) the quality of being helpful or beneficial—goodness, kindness, generosity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀγαθοσύνη, agathóside</td>
<td>goodness</td>
<td>positive moral quality characterized especially by interest in the welfare of others—goodness, generosity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πίστις, pistis</td>
<td>faithfulness</td>
<td>1) that which evokes trust and faith—faithfulness, reliability, fidelity, commitment; 2) state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted—trust, confidence, faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>προφυτεία, proutes</td>
<td>gentleness</td>
<td>the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance—gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐγκράτεια, enkrateia</td>
<td>self-control</td>
<td>restraint of one’s emotions, impulses, or desires; self-control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45 Dunn, Galatians, p. 308.
An evaluation of these lists yields the following observations: 1) the use of “love” (ἀγάπη, agape) is the only term that occurs in all the lists. This might suggest that the term had taken on a kind of overall “summary” of the virtues extolled by the followers of Yeshua. This may also be highlighted by the fact that “love” occurs either first or last, or as the middle term (except in 1Tim 6:11). 2) “faith” (faithfulness) occurs in all but 2Cor 6:6, again showing its priority in the minds of the Apostles. It may well be that these two terms, “love” and “faith” answer to the two-fold expression of the Torah in the teaching of Yeshua: love for God (=faith/faithfulness) and love for one’s neighbor (=agape). This is all the more evident when the following context is considered: v. 24 shows that those who display the fruit of the Spirit are those who have identified with the crucified Messiah, and 6:2 speaks of “fulfilling the Torah of Messiah” by bearing each other’s burdens.

Here we see an interesting contrast to what must have been the message of the Influencers. For their “good news” included the Gentile preparing to follow specific halachah, putting the emphasis upon rituals and ceremony. Paul’s perspective is the inward change of heart, and the on-going work of the Spirit by which obedience to specific commandments would be the inevitable result. The Influencers sought conformity to man-made ritual; Paul taught conformity to the Spirit Who would enable the believer to obey the Torah of God.

The various terms listed as the “fruit of the Spirit” deserve further consideration. Since “love” (agape) heads the list, it may be an overarching term that encompasses the rest, describing the quintessential character of the one who is energized by the Spirit. Agape took on a specific sense among the followers of Yeshua, and nearly became a technical term for the primary character of Yeshua’s disciples. The word itself is rarely found in the Greek writers, but became dominant in the writings of the Apostles (found 107 times). It was used to mean the giving of oneself to the service and care of others in the same manner that Yeshua gave Himself, that is, a love that is self-sacrificing.

Joy is the normal response of one who has come into covenant relationship with the God of Israel, that is, serving Him with joy (Deut 28:47; Ps 5:11). The very presence of God among His people is cause for joy (Is 12:6; Ps 16:11) and His presence evokes an outcry of praise and worship, which is itself an expression of joy (Ps 33:1). Indeed, the command connected with Sukkot is “to rejoice before the Lord” (Lev 23:40). Such a perspective is in direct contrast to the later monastic movement of the Catholic Church, in

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[page 206]
which piety was thought to be expressed through somber and subdued tones, and that in some way joy was connected to the lusts of this world and was therefore to be shunned. In contrast, Paul commands his readers to “rejoice” in the reality of the salvation which is theirs.

Peace is summed up in the Hebrew word שָלוֹם, itself built upon the root שָלַם, which means “complete, whole.” It describes life as it should be, both from one’s own inner perspective, as well as in regard to one’s involvement in the larger community. Peace involves “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), that is, a settled realization that one has come into a friendship with the Almighty through the covenant He has made. This peace, however, is not dependent upon one’s circumstances, for the peace which God gives is not comprehended by the natural mind, but is itself beyond comprehension (Phil 4:7). This peace is therefore bound up with faith, for one must believe that in spite of the circumstances, God is in control, and that He will cause all things to work together for good, to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). The Spirit therefore urges the believer to consider his or her settled, eternal place in God’s family, and through the comfort of the Spirit, to find in this covenant relationship a genuine peace in the midst of life’s turmoil.

Patience, as noted above, may involve two slightly different nuances. The word itself may denote the ability to remain tranquil while awaiting an outcome, or to persevere under an adverse situation. The two are not far apart, though patience may be necessary when anticipating something good as well as enduring something bad. Once again, it is the comforting presence of the Spirit that reminds the believer that God is in control, and that He brings about His sovereign, holy will in accordance with His good pleasure. As such, trusting in the goodness of God, the believer is able to remain patient, steadfast, and unmoving by holding onto the promises of God, and his or her life is therefore characterized by patience and not by the anguish that comes from despair over life’s trials.

Kindness is the natural outcome of living in the realm of God’s shalom and the patience that faith yields. Kindness is that generous disposition toward others which flows from the abundance of strength given to the inner person through the indwelling Spirit. Like a rubber band stretched to its limit, many allow the stress of life in this fallen world to stretch them to the point where they have no more ability to be stretched further for the sake of others. Kindness in this scenario is outside of their ability. They have given all they can just to cope with life’s struggles. But in the strength of the Spirit, where the circumstances of life are viewed within the scope of God’s good providence, the one who is led by the Spirit is enabled to respond in kindness because there remains sufficient strength to do so.

Goodness is manifest in the moral qualities of godliness. The heart that has been born again by the Spirit has taken on new priorities, and has accepted a new standard for what is good. This goodness is therefore the direct result of loving God and loving one’s neighbor. Those things deemed high in value by God, are likewise considered most important by the one who is led by the Spirit. The Spirit leads the believer to adopt God’s perspective towards his neighbor. As such, it becomes his desire to show the goodness of God to others. This is particularly manifest in the attribute of generosity. One who is lead by the Spirit has a loose grip on his own possessions, and is ready to part with them when the need arises. This is not to negate the need to be a faithful steward of those things that God has given us, but it does mean that, as the
Spirit prompts, we are ready and willing to give up material assets for the sake of others.

Faith is the inner reliance upon the goodness of God as demonstrated in His Son, Yeshua. True faith produces faithfulness, a life of regular obedience to God’s commands and ways. The life of faith is a life of commitment—a commitment to the truth and to righteousness. One who is faithful can be trusted, and can be counted on to follow through with those things he or she has promised. But it is clear that for Paul, this attribute of faith, as it relates to the fruit of the Spirit, is not different than the initial faith that the Galatians first placed in Yeshua. For Paul, the gift of faith when one first believes, and the on-going life of faith, are both the result of the Spirit’s work. What is more, this faith is tied to Yeshua as the object of faith: faith as the fruit of the Spirit is an outworking of life that is constantly tied to Yeshua as the Master, Shepherd, and Savior. And such a faith is linked to the application of the Scripture to the life of the believer. It is through applying the truth of Scripture to one’s life that one’s faith is strengthened and increased.

Gentleness is the “quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.” Gentleness comes from being settled with one’s self as created in the image of God, and uniquely called into covenant relationship with Him through His Messiah, Yeshua. This attribute of gentleness may be also understood by the words “humility” or “meekness,” which is particularly extolled in the Psalms (25:9; 34:2; 37:11; 45:4, etc.). Paul had learned that meekness and gentleness were significant personal attributes of Yeshua (2Cor 10:1), and that it must therefore be sought after by those who called themselves His disciples.

The Sages had much to say about humility. Note the following from Pirqe Avot:

R. Levitas of Yabneh says, “Be exceedingly humble, for the hope of humanity is the worm.” (m.Avit 4.4)

R. Meir says, “Keep your business to a minimum and make [your] business Torah. And be humble before everybody.” (m.Avit 4.10)

Anyone in whom are these three traits is one of the disciples of Abraham, our father; but [if he bears] three other traits, he is one of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked: (1) a generous spirit, (2) a modest mien, and (3) a humble soul—his is one of the disciples of Abraham, our father. (1) a grudging spirit, (2) an arrogant mien, and (3) a proud soul—his is one of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked. (m.Avit 5.19)

Self-control is the ability to restrain one’s emotions, impulses, or desires. In the on-going work of sanctification, the need to say “yes” to righteousness, and to say “no” to unrighteousness, is an obvious and important ability. Here the Spirit aids the believer by bringing to memory the words of the Scriptures which have been hidden in the heart, and urging the child of God toward obedience. But self-control is also something strengthened the more it is exercised. It is precisely for this reason that the mitzvot are so helpful. In learning to say “no” or “yes” to matters of food, clothing, days, etc., our self-control is honed to a much sharper edge so that we are prepared in heart to seek after righteousness in those areas which may be even
more tempting.

Paul ends the list of the fruit of the Spirit with the curious statement: “against such there is no Torah” (κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἐστὶν νόμος). Commentators have been baffled about what Paul meant by this. Dunn, while admitting that he is puzzled over the clause, suggests that in broad strokes Paul is simply saying that one is not required to put oneself under the Torah (=become a proselyte) in order to fulfill the urgings of the Spirit. Barrett suggests that Paul is using an ad hominem dig toward the Influencers: “You want to observe the law, don’t you? You will not find any law that forbids these things.”

But these explanations do not help explain the use of the preposition “against” (κατά, kata), “against these there is no Torah.” I would suggest that there is a loose reference to the rabbinic dictum that certain acts of charity, such as the leaving of the corner of the field for the poor, were not restrained by a fixed measure laid down in the Torah. Note m. Peah 1:1–

These are things which have no [specified] measure: [אלה דבורי שפע] (1) [the quantity of produce designated as] peah, (2) [the quantity of produce given as] firstfruits, (3) [the value of] the appearance offering, (4) [the performance of] righteous deeds, (5) and [time spent in] study of Torah.

The rabbinic term שיעור, she’ur means “a fixed measure or limit,” but is also used in the sense of “legal standards” as in m. Shabbat 7:4, where the phrase “they are subject to equivalent measures” means “they are subject to equivalent legal standards.”

Thus, the rabbinic axiom that something is not limited by a fixed measure might easily translate into “against such there is no Torah.” Interestingly, the subject at hand in Mishnah Peah is generally “fruit” in the sense of produce of the field, first fruits, and appearance offerings. This is extended to the fruit of one’s life, righteous deeds and the study of Torah (which produces obedience in regard to the Torah).

I would then understand Paul’s use of the phrase here to simply be saying that the fruit of the Spirit is without end. That is, one can never find a legislated prescription by which one could “measure” love, joy, peace, patience, etc. The work of the Spirit is not fixed by a set measure, but is unending. Indeed, love (agape) by its very nature is without bounds, as is forgiveness (cf. Matt 18:21–22). While the Influencers may have held out a very clear and easily described legislation by which a Gentile could accredit himself as having fulfilled the Torah (after all, the Oral Torah was given to manage the Written Torah), in the work of the Spirit there is an open ended perspective. Love of God and love of one’s neighbor has no packaged formula.

24 Now those who belong to Messiah Yeshua have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Paul now rounds out his argument by essentially restating his opening premise (v. 16). There he wrote: “Walk by the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Here, “those who belong to Messiah Yeshua” are equivalent to those who “walk by the Spirit.” For Paul, the two designations are equivalent. So walking by the Spirit is not some greater level of maturity among the disciples of Messiah, but is the normal life of those who belong to Him.

46 Quoted in Dunn, Galatians, p. 313.
There are several interesting issues in the Greek of this verse. First, some manuscripts have only Messiah without the addition of Yeshua (most notably D and ∏46). Moreover, all the manuscripts have the article: “the Messiah [Yeshua],” meaning that Paul here emphasizes the office of Messiah which Yeshua fills. Also, the word order is interesting: (literally) “Now those of the Messiah [Yeshua] the flesh have crucified with the passions and lusts.” The reason that the word order may be significant is that the Paul juxtaposes the two crucial elements: Messiah and flesh. The Influencers were emphasizing “flesh” (circumcision) while Paul’s gospel emphasized Yeshua as the means of circumcision of the “flesh,” that is, the putting to death of the flesh along with its passions and lusts. Once again, we should remember that Paul uses the term “flesh” to denote the sinful nature, not the material as over against the immaterial part of man.

It is striking that Paul uses crucifixion language with regard to the believer’s path of sanctification. Crucifixion was a most brutal death, and some might charge Paul with “gallows humor” by using this metaphor. But we must see in this the fact that for the early followers of Yeshua, crucifixion was understood and viewed in light of Yeshua’s own death. As hideous as the execution stake was, it had already become a rallying symbol for those who had placed their faith in the risen Messiah. Moreover, Paul’s insistence that the believer was so unified in his faith with the Messiah that he had likewise died with Him, made the crucifixion of the flesh a ready metaphor, describing the putting to death of the sinful passions, and living in the newness of resurrected life. Here, as in Romans 6, Paul makes explicit his view of union with the Messiah. Because the believer has died with Yeshua, this also means that the old self has been crucified, and in its place is a new self, intent upon pleasing the Master. The radical change that has occurred in the life of the believer is no less radical than death followed by resurrection. Thus, the believers at Galatia did not need to undergo a man-made ritual in order to attain to the sanctified life before the Almighty. This they had done through faith in the Messiah, having died with Him and now resurrected to walk in newness of life.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Dunn and others believe that this verse begins a new section in the epistle, and that the chapter break is unfortunate. It is Paul’s habit to begin a new section with a short, compacted statement, as he does in this verse. Dunn suggests that this section teaches “the thought that the order of the Spirit is marked both by sympathy towards others and readiness to criticize oneself—not the other way around.”

What is the difference that Paul wishes to convey between “living by the Spirit” and “walking by the Spirit?” It would seem that in the first clause, living by the Spirit focuses upon the life-giving aspects of the Spirit in calling the sinner to salvation in the first place. It was the work of the Spirit by which the soul is quickened and brought to spiritual life. But the living out of the proper halachah (walking) must be an on-going endeavor of the redeemed soul. The word used here (στοιχέω, stoicheõ) is not the common one for “walking,” but rather suggests “conforming to a standard,” “hold to,” “agree with.” Thus the NIV, “keep in step with.” It is possible that Paul

48 Dunn, Galatians, p. 317.
uses this Greek word to emphasize the issue of *halachah* as conformity to a set body of rules. Yet for Paul, this “set body of rules” for the believer is not the man-made or rabbinic dicta, but the eternal word of God as applied to the heart by the Spirit.

We may paraphrase it this way: “Since the Spirit is the One who gave you life in the first place, let the Spirit lead you in your daily decisions of *halachah*.” This leading of the Spirit is not some subjective “feeling,” so that each one would do what was right in his own eyes. Rather, the leading of the Spirit would be in accordance with the “fruit of the Spirit,” through the application of the inspired word. But this would mark a clear difference between the *halachic* perspective of the Influencers and that of Paul. For them, conformity to a standard of “righteousness” would be mandated by rabbinic rule. For Paul, the “walk” of the believer would be energized by the Giver of Torah Himself through the ministry of the Spirit. Here is the difference between “letter” and “Spirit” for Paul. The letter is the Torah apart from the Spirit; the Spirit denotes the letter of the Torah written on the heart. Thus, his primary point is that those who have been given life by the Spirit ought also to walk (=make life’s decisions) by the Spirit as He illumines the Scriptures and aids in their proper application.

26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Following the leading of the Spirit is first described in negative terms, particularly in negating the attitude and actions of division. “Boastful” (*kenodoxos*) has the idea of being conceited, taken with one’s own accomplishments. It is thus the opposite of the former “gentleness,” which is akin to “humble.” Apparently within the Galatian communities there were those who were putting themselves forward as authorities—making sure everyone knew just how knowledgeable they were in *halachic* matters.

The second phrase, “challenging one another” (NASB) should most likely be understood in a negative sense, as “provoking one another.” The Greek word προκαλέω, *prokaleo*, may mean simply to “invite,” but it is often used in the Greek of Paul’s day in a hostile sense, as provoking a person to fight or to engage in heated verbal exchange. One can certainly imagine how this would have been the case in early synagogues of The Way, as they dealt with the myriad of issues that must have arisen. There is nothing wrong with lively exchange. But the purpose of such dialogs is the all important factor. In the Galatian community, there were apparently those who, because of their boastful or conceited attitudes, were engaging in argumentation for the purpose of “winning the argument,” not for the sake of finding the truth. The truth belongs to God, not to any man. Thus to engage in dialog in order to discover the truth, means that one will be more than happy to admit when he is wrong as the truth is made known. To argue, however, for the sole purpose of being right (regardless of the truth) results in division and strife, the inevitable fruit of pride.

This goes right along with the final phrase, “envying one another.” The confrontative dialog that was happening in the Galatian communities was apparently a vying for position with the congregation. To “envy someone” (*phthoneo*) may also mean to “begrudge someone.” This language suggests that there was a vying for positions of authority and influence within the community, the very thing that happens when schism is ripe.
Dunn writes:

Once again Paul exhibits a shrewd insight into human psychology, as confirmed repeatedly in spiritual awakenings in the history of Christianity: those who claim to have been specially graced by the Spirit often assume an importance and authority well beyond even their Spirit-enhanced abilities, encouraging a spirit of competitiveness in charismatic manifestations and provoking schism within the larger community.49

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

The chapter division is unfortunate, because it tends to separate the context of exhortations that Paul has given in chapter five from the exhortation in this section of the epistle. The divisions that were occurring in the Galatian community, as noted in 5:26, find their remedy by the careful and diligent application of the spiritual values enumerated in the “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22f). Putting the ship back on an even keel becomes the duty of those who are “spiritual,” for by the exercise of spiritual wisdom, those who are causing the division may be brought into alignment with the leading of the Spirit.

Paul exhorts the “brethren” (αδελφοί, adelphoi). We should not presume that by this title Paul is talking only to believers in Yeshua, or even to the mature believers. His use of the same title in 1:2 would indicate that he uses the term to include all who are members of the community, as those who should be intent upon the unity of the congregation, and who are looking out for each other in a familial sense.

even if anyone is caught in any trespass – The language here is a bit ambiguous. The Greek term translated “caught” is προλαμβάνω, prolambandō, which literally means “taken beforehand,” though the emphasis of the prefix προ, pro, may actually be used in a perfective sense, giving the meaning “taken for sure.” Some have understood this to mean that if one “suspects” (i.e., before the transgression is actually committed, thus, “taken before the sin occurs”) a person of falling into transgression, then action to prevent the person from sinning should be taken. While surely it is the obligation of brothers and sisters within the community to warn one another of pending trouble, it is doubtful that the word here has that meaning. Rather, taking the prefix as perfective, the sense would be that when a person has shown himself or herself to have engaged in sin (and in the context, this would most likely be the sin of divisiveness, perpetrated by a boastful spirit of envy), it is the responsibility of those whose lives are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit to attempt to restore the erring member.

The term “trespass” (παραπτώμα, paraptōma) is a word used mostly by Paul in the Apostolic Scriptures. Of the 19 times it is found, 16 are by Paul (the exceptions are: Mk 16:14, 15; 11:25). In the Lxx, this word translates the Hebrew word group related to בַּע, ‘aval (verb) or בַּע, ‘avel (noun), which means “to act unjustly,” “to act treacherously,” “to rebel.” Paul’s use of the word may favor the idea of “wrong doing,” which would include a broader circle than a strict disregard for the clear word of the Torah. That is, “wrong doing” may also include a stubborn unwillingness to conform to accepted halachah within the community. Obviously, community halachah should never be contrary to the Scriptures. But where the Scriptures are silent on a given issue, and the community righteously adopts a certain halachah as most beneficial for the proper maintenance of the community, members should seek to find it within themselves to conform for the betterment of the whole. On the other hand, community leaders will be wise to prioritize those matters which are clearly spelled out in the Scriptures, and not to major on minors.
Paul means the whole congregation, since he has previously (3:2; 5:25) suggested that the group to which he speaks had received the Spirit. But this hardly seems likely, that the whole congregation should “descend” upon one who is erring.

2) Paul means those who are aware of the person’s transgression. Since he refers to the erring one as having been “caught” or “taken” in a transgression, it seems likely that those who know of the situation are the ones he calls upon to come to the person’s aid. The test of their spiritual maturity would be how they handle the situation, that is, how the fruit of the Spirit is made manifest in the difficult situation of confronting and restoring the one who has sinned.

3) Paul is referring to a leadership group, i.e., those who have been recognized because of their spiritual strength. This may have some parallel to James 5:14-15 where the one who is sick (perhaps as a result of their sin) call for the elders to anoint with oil and pray for their healing. In John 20:23, Yeshua gives His disciples a role in the restoration of sinners as well. But it hardly seems likely that Paul would use the term spiritual (πνευματικοί, pneumatikoi) as the sole or even primary possession of leaders. Moreover, to lay the burden of restoring those who err entirely upon the shoulders of established leaders seems improbable. For Paul, the members of the body are to minister to each other, and it is in this type of one-to-another ministry that the body is matured so that every member grows to the full stature of Messiah (Eph 4:14ff). “Speaking the truth in love” would certainly include restoring one who had transgressed.

4) Paul is speaking to some who had been primarily gifted by the Spirit with insight and ability for this particular work, i.e., confronting and restoring those who had transgressed. But since such gifting is not ever mentioned by Paul in the lists of charismata (cf. Rom 12; 1Cor 12), this would not seem to be his meaning here.

5) Paul is speaking to genuine believers in Yeshua, and specifically those who were convinced of his arguments in the present epistle, as over against those who were using the rabbinic halachah as the means of forcing conformity upon the whole group. While there may be something worthwhile in this explanation, it also flies in the face of his former descriptions of the work of the Spirit generally upon the whole community. It does not seem likely that he, at this point, is saying that only those who agree with him are spiritual.

In all of these possibilities, it would seem best to understand that Paul addresses the whole congregation by the phrase “you who are spiritual,” expecting that as the congregation as a whole deals with the transgressor,
some will be prompted to deal directly with the erring one, and to engage in the process of repentance and restoration. Perhaps the most important point, however, is to realize that for the Apostle, the manifestation of the Spirit in the lives of the believers is not so much in the extra-special manifestations of the Spirit, but in the day-to-day matter of mutual relations between the community members. It is when the community is able to deal carefully and successfully with those who sin within its midst, that the Spirit’s leadership is most clearly seen.

restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness – The purpose of confrontation is restoration. The word “restore” (κατάρτιζω, katartizō) has the sense of “repair, mend, prepare, put in order.” Furthermore, the Greek term is in the present tense, and may be understood as something that is on-going: the restoration process may take some time.

It is interesting that Paul does not immediately go to the issues of discipline and punishment, but rather to restoration. In 2Cor 2:6-8, Paul makes it clear that the one caught in sexual sin was disciplined, and it was only after clear and marked repentance that he instructs the community to restore the one who had sinned. Here, however, the one erring is most likely not someone who has clearly transgressed a moral or ethical boundary, but whose stance in the current controversies are divisive and therefore dangerous. Rather than “throwing the book at him,” Paul encourages those who are spiritual to apply the fruit of the Spirit (of which gentleness is one) to the restoration of the individual who otherwise might progress in his rebellious spirit and become liable for more severe measures.

Whether the word “spirit” here refers to the general posture of those who approach the sinner, or to the Spirit of God Who brings the ability to be gentle toward one who has erred, may be ambiguous on purpose. Those who are spiritual will recognize that their ability to work patiently with the one who has erred is, in fact, the result of the Spirit’s presence in their lives.

each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted – This admonition is cast in the singular: “so that you (singular) too will not be tempted.” The position of the one who has transgressed may seem legitimate to those who are attempting to show an over abundance of understanding and love. It may not be that the ones engaged in the restoration process will be tempted to sin in the same way as the one being restored. Rather, they may attempt to find “short cuts” to effect his restoration, short cuts that would themselves be wrong and a transgression of God’s revealed will. While restoration is surely the goal, the method of restoration must be in complete conformity to what God has said. Trying to sidestep the hard issues of repentance will never result in a genuine restoration of the one who has sinned.

One must consider the very real possibility that what Paul is confronting here is the transgression or error of false teaching. Those who were attacking him, or at least attempting to influence the Galatians against him, may have been very persuasive. Those whose duty it was to confront and restore one who may have been influenced away from the truth, are to be certain of their own grounding in the truth. The enemy is very deceitful, and apart from a constant reliance upon the Spirit of truth, error may, at times, seem very acceptable.
2 Bearing one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the Torah of Messiah.

What does Paul envision by the use of the term “burdens” (βάρος, baros)? Some have suggested that this refers to the ongoing struggles of the one who is restored, and in part, this could be the case. But it would seem that Paul’s admonition here is broader, encompassing the humdrum, day-to-day reality of community life. We know that in the time of Paul, the communities of The Way would have fallen under the general heading of “Jewish sects” as far as the Roman government was concerned, which meant that the burden of the fiscus judaicus (Jewish tax) would have been felt by all in the Galatian congregation. For some, particularly widows and slaves, this was no doubt a heavy burden, the liability of which could result in imprisonment if not for the help of the congregation. The term “burden” may likewise include other general troubles that befall the individual: sickness, suffering as a believer, poverty, and so on. The watchword for the congregations of Yeshua was that they were to extend to each other the helping hand needed to sustain such burdens. This may be all the more important in light of the fact that the Galatian community had come into conflict over the relationship of Jew to Gentile. If Gentiles were being pressured to become proselytes, one could imagine that those who refused may have been marginalized within the community. This would have made them very vulnerable to falling under the burdens of life which they could not sustain alone. Here, once again, the primary characteristic of Yeshua’s people is that they display love for each other in tangible ways.

fulfill the Torah (teaching) of Messiah – The teachings of Yeshua were no doubt known among the congregations of The Way, even before the gospels as we know them were finalized in their canonical form. The Apostles were commissioned to “make disciples of the nations” and to “teach them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:18ff). Thus, the “Torah of Messiah” (νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ) should be understood as “the Torah as Messiah taught it and lived it.” It is anachronistic to interpret the phrase as though the Torah of Messiah is different than the Torah of Moses. Surely it may have been at variance with a some of the rabbinic interpretations of the Torah, but it was not in any manner contradictory to Moses. To postulate such a thing would be to call into question the very veracity of Yeshua Himself, for any one who comes teaching something contrary to what is found in the Torah is considered a false prophet. Rather, Yeshua, both in His words and in His actions, brought the divinely intended meaning of the Torah to the eyes and ears of those He taught. His emphasis was upon living in accordance to the Torah in a manner which displayed genuine love for God and for one’s neighbor. Such was to be the driving factor in halachic decisions. While the Sages were expert at piling burdens upon men’s shoulders without lifting a finger to help them bear the load (Matt 23:4), Yeshua sought to unwrap the Torah from the entanglements of men, and to show that living a life of Torah by faith is not a burden, but a delight.

Therefore, by bearing the burdens of one another, the followers of Yeshua fulfill the Torah as it was intended to be fulfilled, by living it out in the context of love for God, and love for one’s neighbor. In this way, the Torah as taught and modeled by Yeshua would be fulfilled.
3-5 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one will bear his own load.

The admonition to “bear each other’s burdens” might be misused if this corrective were not given. It is human nature to think that one’s lack of planning or discipline automatically presents an emergency to the community. Moreover, we know that there were those who saw within the familial relations of the Yeshua communities a place to find a “free ride,” an easy “meal ticket” for those who were lazy. Paul makes it clear that one who does not work should not eat (2Thess 3:10). It stands to reason that Paul would have no need for establishing this Apostolic halachah unless there were those who were abusing the kindness of the community.

Thus, in good rabbinic fashion, Paul appears to contradict himself. For in v. 2 he admonishes the community to “bear each other’s burdens,” then immediately says that “each one will bear his own load.” We can only understand this as meaning that in those cases where the “burden” is not the result of one’s own misconduct, then all should come to his aid. But this does not mean that the community was responsible to pay the taxes (for instance) of one who had foolishly squandered his funds, or to give help to those who were unwilling to do all within their power to make their own way in the day-to-day needs of a household or individual.

The opening phrase, “if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing,” should be understood to mean “if anyone thinks he is something important when he is not.” In other words, if one puts himself forward as more important in the kingdom than others, then he is self-deceived, for in the kingdom of God, all members are equally important in God’s eyes. This does not mean that all have the same rôle within the kingdom, but it means that all have the same status as covenant members. In 5:26 Paul uses the word κενός (kenos), “boastful,” but literally meaning “empty glory.” Those who proclaim their own achievements are actually displaying an “empty glory,” for in the kingdom of God, the credit must go to Yeshua for all that is accomplished. He is the One who is “building His congregation” (Matt 16:18). This may particularly be in connection to spiritual gifts, since this exhortation (parenthesis) comes in the larger context of Paul’s description of the work of the Spirit. Thus Dunn notes:

Paul himself was familiar with Christians who, delighting in their experience of the Spirit, assumed airs and responsibilities which they were manifestly unfit to discharge. He does not name names, but the attitude of superiority and inflated self-esteem were a sufficient common occurrence for Paul to express himself in blunt terms.¹

It may also be that Jewish members, and those who had become proselytes (and thus were given legal Jewish standing in the community), were considering themselves as having a greater claim on community aid than the Gentile members. Such hierarchy within the community could not be tolerated in view of the fact that all within the body of Messiah were so because of God’s grace in Messiah. All were to view each other as equally heirs of His grace.

The remedy for such arrogance is a realistic and sober recognition that one’s abilities come from God, endowed by the Spirit of God, and thus one should

¹ Dunn, Galatians, p. 324.
give the glory to Him (cf. Rom 12:3). Thus, “But each one must examine his own work.” The word translated “examine” is δοκιμάζω (dokimazō), which has the sense of “make a critical examination, prove, test.” The ability to have a clear assessment of one’s own works was considered a desirable gift even by the contemporary philosophers of Paul’s day. Paul agreed that testing oneself was an important aspect of facing the truth (2Cor 13:5). For Paul, however, the gift of self-discrimination was also a work of the Spirit. Thus the natural mind does not discern the things of the Spirit (1Cor 2:9ff), but only through the spiritual awakening given by the Spirit is one able to discriminate between that which is true and false. It may well be that the spiritual gift of discernment (1Cor 12:10) is this ability. Thus, the spiritual ability to see things as they truly are is the antidote to “empty glory,” and a genuine mark of spiritual maturity. It should be emphasized that for Paul, the “Torah of Messiah” is the external criteria against which such a spiritual evaluation is made. Paul is not given to the modern-day thinking that one’s self-evaluation is an entirely subjective enterprise.

The next phrase seems somewhat odd: “and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.” Generally Paul considers the whole issue of “boasting” to be negative (Rom 3:27; 4:2; 15:17; 1Cor 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 9:15-16; 2Cor 12:1, 5; Eph 2:9). Apparently what Paul envisions here, is that in a true self-evaluation, one is able to speak honestly about himself, and not to compare himself to others, or seek to place himself above others. Indeed, when one makes an honest assessment of his own works, recognizing that they are the result of the work of God and not done on his own strength, he will limit his evaluation to himself, and not go about being the judge of others. This may lead to a proper “self-respect,” but it also does away with the idea that one is constantly comparing his works and accomplishments in such a way as to show himself superior to others. His evaluation begins and ends with himself—he does not take up the position as judge of everyone else.

Thus, “each will bear his own load.” The verb is the same as in v. 2, however, the noun is different. Here, the word for “load” is φορίων (phorion) whereas in v. 2, the word is βάρος (baros). As noted above, this change in terms may differentiate those burdens (baros) which are not the result of one’s own actions, or those matters in life which come upon a person for which they are not personally responsible. In contrast, phorion may point to everyday responsibilities, strengthened by the added phrase “his own.” Each is to shoulder the common responsibilities of life, without thinking that they are the responsibilities of someone else. This is the result of a sober and true evaluation of oneself. Such an evaluation draws the conclusion that there are responsibilities which cannot be neglected nor passed on to others. And this in turn is a characteristic of a maturing community, that one is able to distinguish between those loads which each individual is to bear, and those burdens where the help of the community as a whole is needed.

6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

Actually, the sentence in the Greek has the connective δέ (dē) which is often a mild adversative, most often translated either as “and” or “but.” At the least, it connects this sentence with the previous ones. Having stated
that each must bear his own burdens, Paul may have considered the possibility that his exhortation might be misunderstood. He was not saying that those who gave their time and energies in the ministry of teaching were also required in addition to earn their own living. Such a scenario would be unworkable, for the time needed to be an adequate teacher would often preclude a full-time occupation to meet life’s basic needs. Thus he adds the halachah that teachers are to be supported in order to allow them the necessary time and energy to do their work. We should therefore understand the term “all good things” to mean “those things generally agreed to be necessary to material well-being.”

The word for “teaching” is κατεχεῖν (katechêin) from which we derive our English “catechism.” It became a standard term in the emerging Christian Church of the 2nd Century for the instruction of those who had newly joined the community, and especially in preparation for baptism. However, in the Apostolic era, it appears that the mikveh symbolizing one’s change of status as he or she entered the believing community was administered immediately upon one’s confession of faith, and not sometime later. As the Church split away from the synagogue, however, the “sacrament” of baptism had gained such a place of efficacy in the theology of the Church, that it was no longer given to initiate. After all, baptism secured one’s eternal salvation in the theology of the emerging Christian Church, and to give the “sacrament” to one who had only confessed but not shown himself worthy was considered impious. Therefore, baptism was reserved for the end of a sometimes long and arduous period of instruction. The Didache seems to be, in part, just such an example of a baptismal catechism.

We should therefore not confuse the word of the Apostle here with the later phenomenon of “catechism.” When he speaks of “teaching,” he simply means the necessary instruction in the word of God upon which the community was founded, and by which it maintained its self-definition and growth. Thus Paul speaks of teaching “the word” (τὸν λόγον, ton logon), by which he means the Scriptures as contained in the Tanach, as well as the oral teachings of Yeshua and the Apostles. It is well known that the earliest communities of The Way held teachers and teaching in high regard (Acts 13:1; Rom 12:7; 1Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). On the use of “the word” to mean the distinctive message of the Gospel as founded upon Yeshua and the Apostles, cf. Lk 1:4; Acts 17:11; 1Cor 14:36; Col 3:16.

Yet it is clear from Paul’s own example that there were times when it was better for a teacher to forego remuneration for his work. Paul notes that while he had every right to expect support from those among whom he labored, he refused to accept their material support, apparently because some were accusing him of taking advantage of the believing communities (1Cor 9:3-18; 2Cor 11:7-11; 1Thess 2:9; 2Thess 3:7-10). Indeed, the problem of itinerant teachers abusing the rule that one should “share all good things” with them is a repeated refrain in the Didache, a text usually dated to the late 1st Century CE:

Let every apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a second likewise; but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet. And when he departs let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he finds shelter; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet. (Didache 11:4–6)

2 Dunn, Galatians, p. 327.
But let every one that comes in the name of the Lord be received; and then when ye have tested him ye shall know him, for ye shall have understanding on the right hand and on the left. If the comer is a traveler, assist him, so far as ye are able; but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days, if it be necessary. But if he wishes to settle with you, being a craftsman, let him work for and eat his bread. 4 But if he has no craft, according to your wisdom provide how he shall live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness. 5 If he will not do this, he is trafficking upon Christ. Beware of such men. (Didache 12:1–5)

But every true prophet desiring to settle among you is worthy of his food. In like manner a true teacher is also worthy, like the workman, of his food. (Didache 13:1–2)

It was a common axiom among the Hellenistic philosophers that a teacher was to be supported by his students. In the Hippocratic “covenant” we read:

to hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents and live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine . . . .

The problem of remuneration for Sages, however, was a different matter. It was prohibited for a teacher to demand remuneration from the public.

Teach the Torah gratis, and take no fee for it: for the words of the Torah no fee must be taken, seeing that God gave the Torah gratis. He who takes a fee for the Torah destroys the world.

Rather, it was the responsibility of the nasi of the community to see to the maintenance of the teachers. This created an unfortunate situation in which the study and teaching of the Torah was viewed as an occupation—a trade that could be passed on to the next generation as any other trade. A Sage who had gained a prominent position could attempt to pass this “office” to his son. Such a scenario moved the study and teaching of Torah from its primary goal, that of drawing people to the truth and practical application of its teaching, to one of occupational maintenance. We therefore see in the later rabbinic literature of the Amoraic period a description of the Sages as a social class distinguished by “its walk, by its speech, and by its dress in the street.” It is most likely to guard against such abuse that Abot speaks:

Rabban Gamaliel, son of R. Judah the Patriarch, says, “Fitting is learning in Torah along with a craft, for the labor put into the two of them makes one forget sin. “And all learning of Torah which is not joined with labor is destined to be null and cause sin.” (m. Avot 2.2)

R. Ishmael, his son, says, “He who learns so as to teach – they give him a chance to learn and to teach. “He who learns so as to carry out his teachings – they give him a chance to learn, to teach, to keep, and

3 Quoted from Betz, Galatians, p. 305.
5 Derek ‘eretz Zutta iv.2.
to do.” R. Sadoq says, “Do not make [Torah teachings] a crown with which to glorify yourself or a spade with which to dig. (So did Hillel say [1:13], “He who uses the crown perishes.”) “Thus have you learned: Whoever derives worldly benefit from teachings of Torah takes his life out of this world.”

Nonetheless, to honor one’s teacher (master) was also a well entrenched teaching of the Sages:

[If he has to choose between seeking] what he has lost and what his father has lost, his own takes precedence … what he has lost and what his master has lost, his own takes precedence … what his father has lost and what his master has lost, that of his master takes precedence. For his father brought him into this world. But his master, who taught him wisdom, will bring him into the life of the world to come. But if his father is a sage, that of his father takes precedence. [If] his father and his master were carrying heavy burdens, he removes that of his master, and afterward removes that of his father. [If] his father and his master were taken captive, he ransoms his master, and afterward he ransoms his father. But if his father is a sage, he ransoms his father, and afterward he ransoms his master. m. BabaMetzia 2.11)

From this later rabbinic source, we learn that while a teacher was not allowed to insist upon remuneration from the public, it was incumbent upon his students that they supply his needs in the same manner that they would supply the needs of their parents.

Paul’s words in our text appear to give the same perspective: the maintenance of the teachers fell directly upon the shoulders of those who were taught. They were to see to it that the teacher’s basic material needs were supplied in order that he might continue his important duty of instructing the congregation.

It should be noted with interest that Paul’s exhortation here in no way implies a single teacher for each congregation. The fact that he simply directs his exhortation to “the one who is taught” and does not single out a given “office” or “official” who is to be remunerated, is in concert with the historic fact that a plurality of teachers was common-place in the 1st Century synagogues including the early communities of The Way. It should also be emphasized that the presence of qualified teachers within the Torah community is not something that is a mere “nicety,” but is an essential. For only as the community is consistently and carefully instructed in the ways of the Scriptures, is that community able to maintain and grow in its effectiveness for the kingdom of God. All too often, other things (facilities, programs, etc.) are given priority and encroach upon the ability of the community to support qualified teachers. Any community that does not provide, as a priority, for the on-going maintenance of qualified teachers, will be far less than what it could or should be.

7–8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

There is no connective particle (“and,” “for,” “but”) to the former sentence, and it appears that Paul has begun a new section of final exhortations and
admonitions to the Galatians. However, there is a connection in thought and subject. For the halachah to “share all good things with the one who teaches” is a matter of reaping and sowing. When the community puts as a priority the teaching of the word, the community itself, and the individuals who make up the community, will benefit in spiritual ways. Likewise, a community that puts its resources primarily into things that are of only temporal value, will fail to reap the spiritual harvest of the word.

It is interesting that the Mishnah tractate Peah, which deals with leaving the corners of the field, begins this way:

These are things which have no [specified] measure: [the quantity of produce designated as] peah, [the quantity of produce given as] firstfruits, [the value of] the appearance offering, [the performance of] righteous deeds, and [time spent in] study of Torah. These are things the benefit of which a person enjoys in this world, while the principal remains for him in the world to come: [deeds in] honor of father and mother, [performance of] righteous deeds, and [acts which] bring peace between a man and his fellow. But the study of Torah is as important as all of them together. (m. Peah 1.1)

The idea of the rewards of learning and living the Torah are well established in the rabbinic literature. Note one more example:

He [R. Tarfon] would say, “It’s not your job to finish the work, but you’re not free to walk away from it. If you have learned much Torah, they will give you a good reward. And your employer can be depended upon to pay your wages for what you do. And know what sort of reward is going to be given to the righteous in the coming time.” (m. Avot 2.16)

But Paul’s exhortation is abrupt. Did he think the Galatians were “mocking God?” Probably not. But Paul reminds us in these sharp words that the issue of self-deception is still much on his mind. The message of the Influencers, while it may have sounded like a solution to the Jewish/Gentile problem, was, in fact, no solution at all. The Galatians received the truth from Paul at the first, and here it has been reiterated again. He therefore calls them to receive the truth, and not to give in to the self-deception of the other teachers who opposed him.

God is not mocked – (μυκτηριζεται from μυκτηριζω, mukterizō, “to turn up the nose at,” “to treat with contempt”) – NIV has “God cannot be mocked,” which is the general sense, that is, God will not stand for people disregarding His message of truth. Paul, as the Apostle of Yeshua, comes with the divine message. The Galatians cannot, therefore, plead ignorance. Nor can they expect that God will pass over their disobedience if they continue to flirt with the Influencers’ message. There are severe consequences in disregarding the message of God.

There is a common perspective in our day, that God, full of compassion and mercy, will, in the end, wink at the disobedience of man, and embrace him nonetheless. But this is not the message of the Bible. God’s justice is true and therefore harsh, for the measure or standard of His justice is His own infinite holiness. Sin will have its consequences.

for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap – Especially in an agrarian society, the truth of this metaphor was constantly seen. The seed that was
sown in the field produced “after its kind.” So we read in Job 4:8, “According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it.” Consider also Prov 22:8, “He who sows iniquity will reap vanity, and the rod of his fury will perish.”

This teaches an obvious and universal principle: choices have consequences. The redeemed individual has been given the renewed ability to make genuine choices. No longer enslaved to the flesh, the believer is able, by the strength of the Spirit and the word, to choose what is right. But the believer, beset by the remaining sinful nature, must still wrestle to overcome the flesh. And this inner struggle remains until death is overcome by the victory of resurrection at the coming of our Master.

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life – Having just finished his teaching on the “fruit of the Spirit,” it is natural for Paul to return to this most important reality. The work of the Spirit in the life of a believer brings about the fruit of righteousness. On the other hand, when the Spirit is resisted (disobeyed), and one favors the desires of the flesh, the fruit which is borne in one’s life is that of unrighteousness.

How does one “sow to his flesh,” or in contrast, “sow to the Spirit?” The answer is obvious and practical. Sowing to the flesh means giving into the sinful desires of the flesh. It means neglecting the spiritual disciplines of prayer, study and application of God’s word, meditation upon that which is holy and good (cf. Phil 4:8), and associating with those who long for and seek after righteousness. “Bad company corrupts good morals” (1Cor 15:33).

There are positive disciplines of holy living: a regular feeding on the word of God, and a contemplative life of conformity to it; engaging in regular and constant conversation with God through prayer, and listening to the promptings of His Spirit; making the gathering together with the believing community a priority, so that mutual encouragement and exhortation is experienced; guarding and keeping the mitzvot, so that the ways of God become the life of the believer; joining in the celebration of the Appointed Times (including the weekly Shabbat) as a means of experiencing and understanding firsthand the redemptive work of God. All of these require a resolve of heart and soul to seek after God. Fortunately, the work of the Spirit is to remind and prod, to urge the believer on in the life that is his or hers, to practice the truth as it is learned from the Scriptures.

There are likewise disciplines of a negative sort: we must guard ourselves from the temptations of sin to which we know we are vulnerable (the “sin that easily trips us up,” Heb 12:1). What is a severe temptation to one person, may be only a small temptation to another. We must not allow the constant drone of the world and its values to reshape our thinking. Instead, we must bring every thought captive to Yeshua (2Cor 10:5), meaning we must constantly apply the “measuring stick” of Yeshua and His example of obedience as our guide. We cannot allow the sin of bitterness and unforgiveness to leave a place of vulnerability for the enemy to advance against us (Eph 4:26-27). If Yeshua suffered for righteousness, then we should expect that we too will suffer (1Pet 2:19f). Such suffering for righteousness is not a cause for discouragement or defeat, but should be understood as the normal path for those who are seeking the kingdom of God. But this does not suggest that the joy of the Spirit, and blessing of God is only a distant reality. Our life of faith, even in the midst of suffering, is an abundant life of rejoicing that cannot be explained except through the fellowship of the Spirit (2Cor 7:4; Eph 3:19f).
will from the Spirit reap eternal life – For Paul, eternal life does not begin at the close of this life, and the ushering in of the world to come. Eternal life is the possession of every true believer. He or she experiences it, in some measure, even in this fallen world. But his point in ending the verse with this phrase is to show the contrast. Those whose lives are marked by the fruit of the flesh (unrighteousness) can only expect to reap corruption. The metaphor is clear: man was made from dust, and he returns to dust. The flesh has no ability to lay hold of eternal life.

Now this should not be wrested from its larger context. By flesh, Paul often means “trusting in one’s ethnic status.” Those Galatians who were being persuaded to rely upon a man-made ritual (becoming a proselyte) for their place in the world to come are here condemned by the Apostle’s words. One’s ethnic status will have no bearing on God’s judgment in the last days, for God is no respecter of persons (Rom 2:11). Rather, those who are born from above, and who are therefore endowed with the indwelling Spirit, will progress in a life of righteousness, actually living more and more in line with God’s commands. As a result, when they stand before the judgment, they will be pronounced righteous, because Yeshua’s sacrifice for their sin not only paid the penalty due to God’s justice, but it also recreated them into people who longed for, and lived out, God’s righteous ways. Thus, Paul can claim that not the hearers of the Torah, but the doers of the Torah will be justified (Rom 2:13).

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

Paul continues the agricultural metaphor. The work required in planting and harvesting seems never ending, not to mention the daily tending of fields and care for the crop in its growing stage. Yet the farmer has his eye on the harvest. The hard work of the days preceding the harvest are all deemed worthwhile once the harvest is in. To focus only on the day’s labor, and not on the reward which it will bring, might cause the farmer to weary of his work. But the hope of reaping is what keeps him going, even when the tasks are difficult.

The same is true for the believer in Yeshua. The doing of the mitzvot, while a joy on the one hand, may in the course of life require much diligence and work. The life of obedience is still a life of struggle. Yet our eyes must ultimately be on the harvest, that is, the time when we will stand before the Almighty and hear the words “well done, good and faithful servant” (note that He will not say “well said,” or “well confessed,” but “well done”). It is this sure hope, that one day we will “be like Him, for we will see Him as He is” (1Jn 3:2), that gives us renewed energy to “do good.”

By this phrase, “do good,” Paul is surely talking of living according to God’s commandments, following in the footsteps of Yeshua. He reiterates this concept in Titus:

looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:13–14)

The life of a believer is to be characterized by “good deeds,” or to put it
in a Hebraic sense, the mitzvot. This is a life of Torah obedience.

Thus Paul, once again, expects the Gentile believers to live according to what is “good,” and he surely must consider the Torah of God as the standard for “good.” In exhorting the believers at Galatia, and particularly the Gentile believers (since they were the target of the Influencers’ message) not to rely upon the flesh in terms of their covenant standing, he does not, in the same breath, teach that the Torah as the standard of righteousness for the believer was somehow negated or abolished. Quite the opposite: he exhorts them not to grow weary in “doing good.”

The two pitfalls Paul sees for the Galatians are that 1) they might lose heart (μὴ ἐκκακῶμεν, me ekkakōmen) and 2) they might grow weary (μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι, me ekluomenoi). The first word (ἐκκακέω, ekkakeō) is made up of two words, ek, “out from,” and kakeó, “to do evil, injustice.” The word came to mean “become discouraged” as a result of calamity, or other negative aspects of life. Discouragement is overcome by knowing the truth, and confessing it as one’s own perspective. Even when the sun is obscured by the clouds, one still is sure that the sun remains, though not seen. Likewise, the heart of faith, in the midst of difficult and discouraging times, remains steadfast upon the Lord, knowing that He ordains all things, and that He is ready and willing to forgive the repentant soul who comes to Him for help.

The second term (from ἐκλύομαι, eklúō) means literally “to lose out,” and has the sense of “lose one’s strength,” “become weary.” The constant drain of life’s demands can zap one of his or her strength. This is true both physically and spiritually. This highlights the need for community, for friends with the same goals and perspectives, that can help carry the load. The pianist who attempts to play a four-hands composition without a second pianist is doomed to failure! The life of righteousness was never designed for lone rangers. When the burdens of life become more than one can bear, the community of brothers and sisters in the Lord have the happy privilege of “bearing each other’s burdens, and thus fulfilling the Torah of Messiah.” But this takes humility on the part of the one who is growing weary. Accepting the help from one’s community members is likewise an acknowledgment that one is not entirely self-sufficient. Ultimately, it is the Great Shepherd Who bears our burdens, but often He does so through the hands of others.

The harvest that will be reaped is “in due time.” By this Paul means “in God’s appointed time.” We sow, but God gives the increase.

10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

As Paul comes to the end of this paragraph of exhortation, he incorporates the same term as in the previous verse: “in due time” (translated “while we have opportunity”). The harvest is future, in God’s appointed time, but that does not mean we simply “rely and relax” in the present time. The current hour affords us the opportunity to “fulfill the Torah of Messiah” by doing good to all, and especially the “household of faith.”

The community of Galatia was comprised, no doubt, of both believers and non-believers, Jews and Gentiles. While all within the community had committed themselves in some measure to the rule of the community (or else they would have not been part of the community), Paul does not limit his initial exhortation for doing good merely to those who had made a clear and open confession of Yeshua as the Messiah. The general life of faith is one of doing
good to all people (literally, “do what is good to all”). The Torah, emphasized by the teaching of Yeshua, commanded that one do good even to one’s enemy. Thus, the life of godliness extends to all.

Yet in the course of life, there will be limited ability to do good. One can only do so much. Thus, when choices must be made, the “household of faith” takes top priority. The familial language fits the Apostle’s point perfectly. It would hardly be right for a son to neglect his own parents in favor of helping someone outside of the family. In like manner, those who have confessed Yeshua as Messiah are to be treated with the priority of family. Their needs come before the needs of those outside of the circle of faith.

Paul’s use of the term, “household of faith,” may likewise have a direct bearing on the overall message of this epistle. For the Influencers, that which rendered a person a member of the covenant, and therefore as within the “household of Israel,” was one’s ethnic status. From the Qumran texts we discover such terms as “the house of truth in Israel” (1QS 5.6), “the house of holiness for Israel” (CD 3.10), and “the house of the Torah” (CD 20.10, 13). It would seem, then, that it was not uncommon for various sects to draw their specific boundary markers, and refer to those who were “in” as a “house” or “household.” It is remarkable, then, that Paul uses “household of faith” (τοὺς ὀικείους τῆς πίστεως). For it was not ethnicity, nor the “works of the Torah” (halachot specific to a given sect), but faith that bound the followers of Yeshua together. The “bloodline” of all true believers is faith.

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

Paul now begins a final section of the epistle (vv. 11-18), in which he gives some final words of exhortation, and a final rebuff to the Influencers, as well as his blessing upon the Galatian believers.

Paul first notes the large letters with which he was writing. We may presume that the letter was actually dictated to an assistant, and that Paul, at this point, finishes the epistle himself. To have written the entire epistle in large letters would have been highly out of the ordinary, primarily because the cost of papyrus was so high, and large letters would require more sheets.

There have been numbers of suggestions offered as to why Paul was writing with such large letters. Some have felt that this indicates a disability on Paul’s part, either in eyesight, or in his inability to hold the writing instrument carefully (because of injury or disease in his hand). Still others suggest that he intended these final words to have particular emphasis, and thus he accepted the extra expense of papyrus in order to make his point. Bruce⁷ offered the idea that Paul wrote large enough letters so that the papyrus could be raised up for all to read. Of course, all of these are speculative. It may simply have been that Paul was known for writing with large letters (for what ever reason), and that this gave the mark of authenticity to the letter itself.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, Galatians, p. 268.
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 Messiah.

Having taken stylus in hand (if indeed this is what is meant by the former notice of large letters), Paul makes his final appeal to the Galatians. Perhaps his own hand, drawing the letters in larger than normal fashion, will bring the Galatians to finally understand his personal anguish.

He addresses his remarks toward the Influencers, as he has done time and again (1:7-9; 4:17; 5:7-12). They are described as “those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh.” The phrase “make a good showing” is the Greek word εὐπροσώπευ (euprosōpet) which literally means “to have a good face.” It is not found elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures, nor is it attested in the non-biblical texts of Paul’s time. It would have been readily understood, however, by the manner in which the word is constructed (eu = “good;” prospōn = face). In the Roman world, one’s face represented one’s character, so that in the dramas an actor would portray a different character by the use of masks. The Latin word persona (from which we derive our English “person”) means “mask,” so that it came to mean “role, part, character, or personality.”

It is clear that the Influencers were not intent upon “giving a fair showing” to the general Roman population. Ironically, while the Romans and Greeks considered the human body (which would have been understood by them in the word “flesh”) to be the height of beauty, they just as much considered circumcision a barbaric mutilation and desecration of the body. In using the word “flesh,” Paul is speaking of circumcision, and thus shows that the Influencers’ purpose was to be accepted, not by the Roman populace in general, but to the Jewish community in particular. (It is unfortunate that the NIV substitutes “outwardly” for the word “flesh,” for in doing so, it obscures the rhetorical play on the term itself.)

As is often the case within the current messianic/Torah movement, there is a strong compulsion on the part of some to be accepted by the traditional Jewish community. Many who come into things “messianic,” recognize that in some measure, the life of Torah has been represented by the traditional Jewish community throughout the centuries. Feeling like “johnny-come-latelies,” some messianics attempt to conform in whatever ways possible in order to be accepted by the non-believing Jewish synagogue. Apparently this was also the motivation of the Influencers. Having confessed Yeshua as the true Messiah, they were automatically classed among those who were rejected by the normative Judaism of the time. One way to gain favorable acceptance by the Jewish community that had rejected Yeshua, was to show themselves in agreement in the substantially important issue of proselytism. If the Influencers could persuade the Gentiles to become circumcised, then the opposing synagogues of the rabbis would have no cause for taking a contrary stance. The proselytes were no longer counted as Gentiles, and in this way, the “Gentile problem” disappears.

Here we are given a most important insight into the situation of Paul’s day. The antagonism of the mainline Jewish community against the people of The Way did not center primarily upon the theology of Yeshua as Messiah. Other sects of the day had also proclaimed leading members of their sect as fulfilling the role of Messiah (as would happen eventually in the Bar Kochbah rebellion). The issue that was most egregious, and which had begun the split between the traditional synagogues and the synagogues of The Way, was the matter of
Gentiles. Gentiles, as Gentiles, simply could not be tolerated nor accepted as full-fledged covenant members, and to treat them as though they were (which the congregations of The Way did) caused deep theological and sociological problems. From the standpoint of the rabbis, to allow a Gentile to assume full covenant membership was to blur Jewish identity by allowing Gentiles to participate completely in covenant distinctions that were the primary mark of Jewishness. Moreover, from the viewpoint of the Influencers, the presence of Gentiles within the community was too dangerously close to acceptance of idolatry, for the Gentile world in Paul’s day was characterized first and foremost by their idolatrous practices. As long as The Way insisted on equal acceptance of Gentiles, the mainline Jewish communities simply could not accept them. Gentiles, as far as the rabbis were concerned, needed to be encouraged to become proselytes. For the traditional synagogue had no problem with Jews who held divergent opinions (note the stark contrasts between Pharisees and Sadducees in terms of their fundamental beliefs, yet the obvious manner in which the two sects interacted and lived together). It was the presence of Gentiles that created the division.

*try to compel you to become circumcised* – The Greek word for “compel” is ἀναγκάζω (anagkazō), the same word used in 2:14 (“… how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”). It is in the present tense here and most likely suggests an on-going action: “try to keep on compelling you to become circumcised.” The Influencers were compelling the Gentiles to seek a Jewish status in order to be accepted by the wider Jewish community.

*simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Messiah* – The NASB “simply” should be understood as “only,” as the NIV, “The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Messiah.” This is most likely an exaggeration of polemic, but it may indeed point to the primary motivation of the Influencers. It would seem probable that the Influencers were not in full agreement with the non-believing synagogue, for by all appearances they confessed Yeshua as Messiah. Thus their motivation in compelling the Gentiles to become proselytes was in no way an attempt to lead them to a denial of Yeshua. Rather, their motivation was to make a showing of compliance to the traditional synagogue in order to gain favor with them.

In what way were the Galatian communities of The Way being persecuted by the traditional synagogue? Several options may present themselves. First, it may not be that the synagogue itself was the source of persecution, but rather the Roman government. If the Gentiles failed to become proselytes, and were exposed as non-Jews, they would be required to participate in the veneration of the emperor and in other pagan rituals incumbent upon all Roman citizens. If the Gentile believes refused to become proselytes and as a result were dismissed from the synagogue, they would have been vulnerable to severe persecution at the hands of Rome. Such persecution could have been thought of as suffering “for the cross of Messiah.” Of course, if the Gentiles underwent the ritual of a proselyte, they fell under the freedom of religion granted by Rome to the Jewish community at large.

While this scenario may offer a plausible explanation for what Paul means here, it would fit better in the late 1st Century than in the pre-destruction era. We know that in the post-Bar Kochbah era, the people of The Way were persecuted because they had separated themselves from the
synagogue, and were thus viewed by Rome as atheists for their refusal to participate in the emperor cult.

Yet in Paul’s day, such a separation had not yet occurred, and even the so-called “God-fearers” were accepted by the Jewish community (with the idea that they were on their way to becoming proselytes) and tolerated by Rome. A second interpretation must therefore be sought, and it is ready at hand. Paul himself, before coming to faith in the Messiah, was the source of much persecution against the people of The Way. Moreover, after his confession of faith in Yeshua, he himself was the target of persecution from the Jewish community. While it is true that in the 2nd Century, Rome was the primary source of persecution against the believers, in Paul’s day, the persecution came primarily from the traditional synagogue.

What would have been the grounds for such persecution? Here we offer only speculation. It would seem that the grounds for persecution were different for the synagogue on the one hand, and Rome on the other. From the synagogue’s perspective, the Gentiles offered a threat of idolatry within the Jewish community itself. Driven by the need for national security and ethnic identity, the Jewish communities were striving more and more for self-identity within Torah observance. Those zealous for the Torah may have been convinced that the presence of Gentiles weakened their ability to unite as a nation, and posed a threat toward assimilation to Hellenism, an enemy that had already captivated many. From Rome’s viewpoint, citizens who sheltered themselves under the shadow of the synagogue, and failed to participate in the state rituals required of citizens, were shirking their responsibilities, and were a threat to the demise of the Roman society itself. For if citizens who refused to venerate the emperor were tolerated, this could lead to anarchy, and appeared to the populace as though treason against the emperor could be allowed.

If this scenario has warranted, then the synagogue was doing the Roman authorities a favor to root out Gentiles who were simply using the synagogue as a shelter for their unwillingness to venerate the emperor. In essence, by persecuting the Gentiles, the synagogue was exposing citizens of Rome who were failing to act as citizens. In this way, it was a “win–win” situation: the synagogue pressured Gentiles to “make up their mind,” and either become proselytes or leave the community. From Rome’s point of view, the synagogue was doing them a favor by exposing citizens who were shirking their responsibilities as citizens of the state.

This scenario would also explain Paul’s use of “for the cross of Messiah.” From an insider’s viewpoint, the persecution against the Gentiles was because they believed their covenant status was based upon the work of the Messiah, not by becoming proselytes. In refusing to undergo the ritual of proselytism, the Gentiles were clinging to Paul’s gospel, which had as its central pillar the effective work of Yeshua in His death upon the cross. Paul himself describes the unbelieving Jews as the “enemies of the gospel” (Rom 11:28), by which he most likely means “enemies of my gospel” (cf. Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2Tim. 2:8), the message of the good news which emphasized the equality of Jew and Gentile in the body of Messiah.

Dunn puts it this way:

Paul does not mean that these Jewish-Christian missionaries were persecuted (by other Jews) simply because they preached a crucified Jesus as Messiah; that message was clearly at the heart of the gospel for the Christian Jews in Palestine also, and they remained relatively undis-
turbed. Nor can we infer that the ‘different gospel’ of 1:6 denied the cross in any direct or overt manner. Paul must mean rather that the policy of insisting on circumcision was a way of removing that which in the common preaching of the crucified Messiah constituted an offense to most other Jews (5:11). And that must refer to the claim of Paul (and others) that the cross was a sufficient basis for acceptance into the inheritance of Israel – this is, the cross alone or, to be more precise, faith in the cross as wholly sufficient to remove sins (1:4) and neutralize the curse of the law so that the promise of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles as well (3:13-14).8

It is in this light that we must understand Paul’s emphasis upon the cross of Yeshua. When he claims to preach only Messiah, and Him crucified (1Cor 2:2), he is most likely emphasizing this very point, that the only means of true and eternal covenant membership was by faith in Yeshua and His work of salvation in offering Himself as the sacrifice for sinners.

13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the Torah, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.

It is not precisely clear about whom Paul speaks in this opening clause. Who are the ones who are circumcised?9 Some have suggested that Paul speaks of those Gentiles who have already succumbed to the pressure of the Influencers, and are in the process of becoming proselytes. If this were the case, then the fact that they are not obeying the Torah as a fully observant Jew would be understood as the result of their current initiation into the life of Torah. But this does not seem to support Paul’s argument, and even seems to undermine it. For surely Paul expects those who have believed in Messiah to be obedient to the Torah.

It would seem better to understand Paul to be addressing his remarks toward the Influencers themselves, as linked to the former verse. Even though they are circumcised, and are compelling the Gentiles likewise to become proselytes, they are themselves inconsistent in the manner in which they obey the Torah. This may parallel Rom 3:12-29, in which Paul teaches that mere circumcision of the flesh has no ability to bring about a changed life. The very fact that they contend for a position of superiority over the Gentiles, based upon their Jewish status (a status based in the “flesh”) indicates their heart of pride and arrogance, the very things the Torah was meant to undermine (Rom 3:9-20). Paul’s point here, then, is that submitting to the ritual of a proselyte could never guarantee an advancement in holiness, in an actual obedience to the Torah of God. Such ability to obey from the heart comes about through a change of heart, which is the work of the Spirit through the Gospel, not the result of a man-made ritual. It is a sure characteristic of all man-made religion, that it seeks to show itself worthy in the eyes of man, but it has no ability to honestly change a person.

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8 Dunn, Galatians, p. 337.
9 A textual variant puts the word “circumcised” (περιτεμνόμενοι) in the perfect tense (Φι6 B [F G] L Ψ 6. 365. 614. 630. 1175 pmr b d r sa? bo; Ambst) as over against the present tense witnessed by the majority of manuscripts (κ A C D K P 0278. 33. 81. 104. 1241: 1505. 1739. 2464 pmv ar I vg sy sa?). See the notes in Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, p. 598. The perfect tense might suggest an on-going emphasis upon winning converts.
in God’s eyes. The outside of the cup may be polished, but inside there remains refuse (Matt 23:25f).

yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh – The idea of “boasting in your flesh” most probably does not mean that the Influencers would boast to other Jews about their ability to make proselytes. Rather, “boasting in the flesh” (cf. similar ideas in Rom. 2:17, 23; 4:2) must mean taking confidence in one’s ethnic status. The Influencers were ready to encourage the Gentiles who would become proselytes, that by their Jewish status they were assured a bona fide standing within the covenant community which they otherwise would never have. To put it more simply: the Influencers were ready to welcome the Gentiles who underwent proselytism with a full embrace as covenant members, to welcome them into the life, culture, and history of the Jewish people. They were ready fully to affirm the Jewish identity of the proselyte. This may have been a powerful incentive to Gentiles who felt marginalized because they were not Jews. Unfortunately, this scenario continues in our day, where Gentiles who are made to feel as “second-class citizens” in the congregation of Messiah are ripe for those who come proclaiming the message of Jewish conversion.

14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

In direct contrast to the “boasting in the flesh” which characterized the Influencers, Paul makes the strongest assertion (μὴ γένοιτο, me genoito, the same strong words found in 2:17, 3:21) that he will boast only in the finished, salvific work of Yeshua in His death on the cross. In pointing to the death of Yeshua, Paul is not overlooking the necessity of the resurrection, ascension, and intercession of the Messiah (cf. Rom 8:34). Rather, the “cross” became a fitting symbol of the whole scope of redemption accomplished by the Messiah (cf. 1Cor 1:17-18; Eph 2:16; Phil 3:18; Col 1:20; 2:14). The very thing that was an embarrassment to the Influencers was that in which Paul glori ed. His boasting was not tied to a national identity, nor to his individual identity as a member of that nation, but first and foremost in the grace that had been given to him, and to his nation (Israel) in the Messiah Yeshua. Against the horror and disgust of crucifixion in the ancient world, Paul boasted in the crucifixion of Yeshua because it was in His death as the necessary sacrifice for sinners that God’s promises were realized and would be fulfilled.

Paul’s perspective should be a fitting corrective to all messianic Jews who might be tempted to think of their ethnicity as somehow tied to a guarantee of God’s eternal blessings, or who might consider themselves to have a greater standing before God than non-Jews. For while it is surely true that God’s blessing is eternally secure to His chosen people Israel, such blessing is possible only because of the redemption won at the cross. God’s covenant promises to Israel are based upon His sovereign prerogative to bring Israel to faith—faith in the Messiah Yeshua. His blessing will come upon ethnic Israel precisely because He has determined that He will save them, forgiving them of their sins and transgressions (Jer 31:31-34) and give them a new heart of repentance and obedience. Thus all the promises of God, including those bound up in the covenants He has made with the nation of Israel, are “yes and amen in Him” (2Cor 1:20). In this way, all who are “in Messiah” boast only in Him and in nothing else.
It is not to be missed, therefore, that Paul uses the full title for Yeshua: Adoneinu Yeshua HaMashiach, “our Lord Yeshua Messiah.” Yeshua as Lord is Master and sovereign, the One able to bring about the intended goal of His sufferings. He is Savior, the only One through whom salvation comes. And He is the Anointed One, the promised redeemer of the prophets. In using His full title here (cf. 1:3; 6:18) Paul emphasizes the full and inevitable reality of the salvation Yeshua purchased for His own at the cross.

The idea of “boasting” (καυχάομαι, kauchaomai, cf. Rom 15:17; 1Cor 1:31; 2Cor 11:30; 12:9) is that of “exulting, glorying, taking pride in, speaking with pride about.” When Gentiles underwent the ritual of becoming a proselyte, they gave the Jewish community cause to boast “in their flesh,” for in such a ritual, the overarching statement being made was that only Jews are righteous before God. The whole proselyte ritual confirmed the erroneous position of the Sages that ethnic status was the grounds of God’s blessing. Paul’s boasting, however, was in Yeshua. It was in Him that he would exult, take glory, and be proud. But the important and significant point that also must be made is that this ability to “boast” in Yeshua was equally the possession of Gentile believers. The equality of Jew and Gentile in the Messiah is because in Him, all are able to “boast” in the same way, and upon the same grounds. Thus, in 1Cor 1:31, Paul quotes Jer 9:24 as the ground for his boasting in Yeshua: “but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the LORD.”

through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world – We must first note that the word “which” (οὗ, hou) could find its antecedent in either the word “cross” or the word “Messiah” of the former clause. Nearly all the English translations opt for “which,” thus, “through the cross the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (NIV, NRSV, ESV [with note in margin], REB). Dunn opts for “Messiah” as the antecedent (since it is nearer in proximity than “cross”) and thus understands the phrase to be, “through Whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (KJV, NKJV). In the end, the meaning is nearly the same, “through the cross” no doubt would mean “through the work of Yeshua upon the cross.” But taking the antecedent to be “Messiah” seems better to me, for Paul’s point is that his current relationship with the world has drastically changed due to his own union with Yeshua in His death upon the cross. It is in Yeshua that Paul’s view of, and involvement in, the world has changed.

For Paul, the term “world” (κόσμος, kosmos) denotes “the totality of the whole creation (human as well as non-human) in its distance from God, and as yet unredeemed state.” In short, “world” for Paul is the “present evil age.” The world, with its rationale for individual and corporate independence from God, along with its system of beliefs and values, had been condemned and put to death as far as Paul was concerned. Paul believed that conformity to the world (as representing independence from God, rather than full dependence upon Him) had been rendered unacceptable for all who were in Yeshua. The thinking processes of the world, lived out in the life-style of the world, was something that had been thoroughly con-

demned by Yeshua’s death. For in that the believer has been crucified with the Messiah, he participates in that decisive act whereby Yeshua Himself refused to be conformed to the world and its ways. For the believer, then, there is no life in the world—it has been condemned as far as he is concerned. For the believer, “in Messiah’s death the whole world has been put to death, and a new world of possibilities come to birth (2Cor 5:14-17).”  

The core element of this Pauline perspective is the believer’s union with the Messiah in His death and resurrection. This union is not only a forensic reality, in which the debt owed by sinners is paid for by the life-giving sacrifice of the Son. It is that, most assuredly! But it is more, in that the believer himself has undergone a change, a death. Conformity to the world (cf. Rom 12:1-3) is no longer an option, and no longer one’s deepest desire. The “old self” or “body of sin” (cf. Rom 6:6; Col 3:19; Eph 4:22) has been done away with, and in its place is a “new self” which “concurs after the Torah of God in the inner man” (Rom 7:22).

Moreover, this change, this crucifixion of the believer to the world, and the world to him, is cast in the metaphor of the cross which is a decisive, once-for-all-time accomplished fact. There is no going back. The believer has been forever changed, both in regard to his appreciation of God and His Messiah, and His turning from, and disdain for, the world’s system which, by its very nature, strives to be independent from God, or even to usurp His place of divine sovereignty. We should note that the verb “has been crucified” (ἐσταυρώθη from σταυρόω, stauroō, “to crucify”) is in the perfect tense, emphasizing a once-for-all-time action (the crucifixion) which has continuing, present, and on going reality and application.

But in what sense has the world been “crucified to me?” How was it that Paul, viewing the matter from the world’s perspective, could say that Paul was seen as crucified? It is simply that the world saw Paul as uninviting, as someone to be disdained and shunned. His pursuit of holiness had made him just as onerous to the world as the world was to him. This accords with the words of Yeshua:

> If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (John 15:18)

> I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

Here is an important lesson for every follower of Yeshua: if we are comfortable participating in those things that are clearly contrary to the revealed righteousness of God, we should take stock as to whether or not we have been crucified with Yeshua, and have risen with Him to newness of life. The life of faith is one of clear division from the world: it garners no response of desire from us, and it equally rejects the call of righteousness to which we have set ourselves.

> You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

This does not mean that we cloister ourselves in hidden cities or erect

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11 Dunn, Galatians, p. 341.
galvanized walls so as to have no contact with unbelievers. Rather, we are “in the world,” but we are not “of the world.” While living in this fallen place, we discover that as we grow in sanctification, the world, which may appeal to our flesh, has no real place of welcome in our souls. Like a particular food that once made us very sick, we have forever lost our appetite for the things of the world.

15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

The flow of thought in verses 13–15 is clear. By linking this verse with the connective “For,” Paul is showing the contrast between those who rely upon ethnic status (the “flesh”) for covenant membership (forgiveness of sins, right standing with God, and a place in the world to come) and those who have relied upon the work of Yeshua on their behalf. If we read v. 14 in this context, it becomes clear that from Paul’s perspective, to rely upon the flesh (one’s ethnic status) is “an indication of an uncrucified state, in which the significance of the cross has not been adequately appreciated or entered into.” In contrast to the “world” is the “new creation,” a term that not only characterizes the inward renewal of the believer, but also encompasses the final and ultimate eschatological salvation.

This sentence is constructed from a Jewish perspective, for Jews would have considered themselves the “circumcision” and Gentiles as the “uncircumcised.” Once again, the issue is ethnic status. Inclusion within Israel, either through birth or becoming a proselyte, is the matter which Paul has constantly confronted throughout the epistle. Here he makes a bold, succinct statement: ethnic status does not matter. To hold that ethnic status or a people-identification marker such as circumcision is one’s grounds for hope is to be of the “world,” to find a way of “salvation” independent of the means granted by the Almighty Himself, through His Messiah. Paul has thus turned the marker of circumcision on its head. For the Jews would have considered that circumcision (ethnic status either by birth or proselytism) was that which separated them from the world of the non-Jew. Paul, however, indicates that those who rely upon circumcision have actually joined the world in that they seek a way of salvation other than that given by God. In rejecting Yeshua as the only way of covenant relationship, they have unwittingly joined the world in its rebellion against Him and thus against God.

The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me. (Luke 10:16)

Once again, Paul is not forbidding the act of circumcision (though it is understandable how this wrong interpretation could be gleaned from his words). It is not the physical act of cutting the flesh that Paul is talking about, but the reliance upon such a religious marking for one’s salvation. Thus he also says that “uncircumcision is nothing.” His point is that neither Jewish ethnic status nor Gentile ethnic status counts for anything, God accredits righteousness to those who by faith have been recreated by the power of the Spirit through the work of Yeshua.

12 Dunn, Galatians, p. 342.
The “new creation” of which Paul speaks is not a “new religion.” It is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise in the life of the redeemed individual. This same thought is given by Paul in 2Cor. 5:17:

Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

He makes the same claim in 1Cor 9:17:

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

Here, “keeping the commandments of God” is another way of saying “a new creation.” Those who are circumcised in heart evidence their changed status (“new creation”) by keeping the commandments of God.

This new creation is a foretaste of the ultimate new creation, the world to come. For in the death of Messiah, the death grip of sin upon the created universe (including mankind) has been broken. All that is needed to crush the head of the serpent has been accomplished. The “old world,” with its bent toward rebellion and idolatry, must now give way to the victory of God in Messiah. As redeemed individuals, we partake now in a share of the world to come in which God’s reign will be complete, and the “old world” will be destroyed. Even as we participated in the rebellion of the first Adam, so now we participate in the victory of the last Adam (Rom 5:14ff). Thus, for Paul the term “new creation” sums up the whole scope of God’s redemption of the individual sinner, “having put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Col 3:10).

Since the process is not yet complete, “the new creation,” in practical terms, means a life oriented both to the past (Christ’s death and resurrection as paradigmatic, for relationship to the world as well ...), and to the future triumph of God in Christ (what will be in God’s intention as creator, as providing the norms and goals for life in this world.).

16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Once again, Paul connects this with the former train of thought by the connective “and” (καί, kai). He has finished his discourse, he can say no more by way of argument or polemic. His position has been clearly expressed, and so he adds a final blessing.

Here the dividing mark pertains to those who will follow his teaching, his halakah (“walk”) in accordance with the “rule” (κανών, kanôn, from which we derive our English word “canon”) that he has given. This rule is the distinction between covenant membership as taught by the Influencers (ethnic status being the basis) and as taught by Paul (faith in the crucified and risen Messiah). He cannot petition God for “peace” and “mercy” for those who have willingly and knowingly rejected His Son. Thus, the dividing mark is set: God’s way or man’s.

13 Contrary to Betz, Galatians, p. 320: “Paul does not spell it out, but in fact he announces the establishment of a new religion.”

14 Dunn, Galatians, p. 345.
Paul uses the verb ἱστοιχεῖον (stoichèo), “those who will walk by this rule,” as he does in 5:25. The basic meaning of the verb is “be in line with a set standard or rule,” the noun ἱστοιχία (stoichos) describing things that are “in a row,” or “in line,” such as a row or course of masonry. (Note the use of ἱστοιχεῖον (stoichèion) “elements” or “building blocks” of the universe in 4:3, 9). Here, Paul’s Gospel, which emphasized the equal status of Jew and Gentile in the body of Messiah, is set forth as the rule for faith and practice.

“Peace and mercy” (שָלוֹם וְּחֶסֶד, shalom v’chesed) are markedly Jewish, being often used in the liturgical berachot as well as in Jewish literature. Thus, the last of the Shemonei Esrei (in the Babylonian recension) reads: שִׁים שָלוֹם טוּבָה וּבְּרָכָה חֵן וָחֶסֶד וְּרַחֲמִים עָלֵינוּ וְּעַל כָּל יִׁשְרָאֵל עַמֶךָ, “Grant peace, goodness and blessing, grace, lovingkindness and compassion upon us and upon all Israel Your people.” The 18th Benediction from the Cairo Genizah (Palestinian recension) reads: שִׁים שְּלוֹמֶךָ עַל יִׁשְׂרָאֵל עַמֶךָ וֶעַל עִירֶךָ וֶעַל נַחֲלָתֶךָ וְּבָרְּכֵנוּ כוּלָּנָהוּ כְּאֶחָד בָּרֹאךְ אַתָּה יהוה עוֹשֵה הַשָלוֹם, “Grant Your peace upon Israel Your people and upon Your city and upon Your heritage, and bless all of us as one. Blessed are You Adonai, Who makes peace.” That Paul includes both ἐιρήνη (eirene, “peace”) and ἐλεος (eleos, “mercy”) may indicate that he was familiar with the pre-Mishnaic form of the blessing. For in the Lxx, ἐλεος, “mercy,” is regularly the word chosen to translate חֶסֶד, “lovingkindness,” which generally focuses upon faithful loyalty to covenant promises.

Indeed, the combination of “peace and mercy” as a blessing upon Israel may well stem from texts such as Ps 125:5 and 128:6, “Peace be upon Israel,” and is found in Psalms of Solomon (4:25; 6:6; 8:27-28; 9:8; 11:9, “The mercy of the Lord be upon Israel forever and ever” and 13:12; 16:6; 17:45, “May God hasten His mercy upon Israel”). Given the fact that the combination of peace and mercy as a blessing upon Israel was common in the Jewish literature and liturgy, and that Paul here evokes this blessing “upon all who follow this rule,” his meaning is clear: both Jew and Gentile, who have come to faith in Messiah, are to be viewed as within the boundaries of the designation “Israel.” This is even more so in light of the fact that Paul uses the combination of “peace” with “mercy” in only two other places: 1Tim 1:2; 2Tim 1:2, where he is making a personal communication to his beloved disciple, Timothy.

and upon the Israel of God – We may first ask for what purpose Paul adds this much debated phrase. Several possibilities present themselves:

1) that having confidently asserted, through the use of a common Jewish blessing, that those who “walk by this rule” are who constitute Israel, i.e., those worthy of receiving the common blessing, Paul may have recoiled a bit. He may have feared that in making such a bold assertion regarding the covenant membership of the Gentiles within Israel, that he might be misunderstood as saying that unbelieving Israel had somehow lost her identity as the chosen people of God. Thus, in order to assuage such thinking, he adds “and upon the Israel of God,” i.e., the Israel of God’s choosing, regardless of their present state of unbelief.

2) that by “Israel of God,” Paul is reinforcing the fact (emphasized in the offering of the blessing upon “those who walk by this rule”) that only those who understand and accept the

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15 Quoted from Dunn, Galatians, p. 344.
message of the Gospel (i.e., that covenant membership is ultimately gained through faith and not through ethnic status) are, indeed, the “Israel of God.” By this he would be both affirming the inclusion of the believing Gentiles, and exhorting the Influencers to recognize the central place the Gospel plays in the whole matter of covenant membership.

The term “Israel of God” is not found elsewhere in the Apostolic Writings, nor in Jewish literature. The Qumran sect used מַחֲנַה אֱלֹהִים, “assembly of God,” רַמָּה אֱלֹהִים, “congregation of God,” מִסְדָּר אֱלֹהִים, “community of God,”16 but never “Israel of God.” Paul likewise speaks of the ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ, “the assembly of God”17 by which he must mean “the assembly that God recognizes as His.”

At first the expression seems redundant: Israel is obviously related to, or finds its identity in, God. But the Qumran usage would indicate that “of God” is used to establish authenticity, thus “assembly of God” means the “true assembly” as opposed to those who are false in their worship. In this regard, Paul’s use of “Israel of God” here has been often interpreted to mean the “true Israel” in distinction from those who, through whatever means, have denied God. It is true that Paul refers to the “false circumcision” (Phil 3:2), but here he is most likely referring to those of The Way who submitted to becoming proselytes. And he can also speak of Jews, who find their identity in Torah observance, yet render their “circumcision” as “uncircumcision” because of their disobedience (Rom 2:25ff).

Ultimately, the question revolves around the referent of “Israel of God.” Does it describe “those who walk by this rule,” or does it refer to those who do not accept Paul’s teaching on this matter, but who are nonetheless ethnically Jewish, and who therefore are part of the chosen people of Israel?

The sentence itself may be understood in two ways (in terms of its syntactical structure). Either the final phrase is taken as a further description of “those who walk by this rule,” or it is understood as adding a second group who also participate in the blessing alongside “those who walk by this rule.” The sentence structure itself is less clear than the English translations might indicate. Here is a literal, word-for-word rendering, leaving each word in its original order (and rendering καί, kai, the conjunctive by “and” each time):

καὶ οἱ συν τῷ κανών τοῦτῳ συντριβόμενοι, εἰρήνη ἐπὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἔπι τοῦ Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ.

“And those to this rule will walk, peace upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.”

It can be seen that “peace and mercy” are not directly joined as a pair with the word “and,” but are separated by “upon them.” As a result, some commentators have suggested a re-punctuation of the verse, to read: “And to those who walk by this rule, peace upon them, and may mercy also be upon the Israel of God.”18 In this translation, the final καί (“and”) has been understood as pleonastic, yielding “also” or “namely,” which is a common use of καί.

However, the combination of “peace and mercy” seems surely tied to a

16 See Betz, Galatians, p. 323, n. 112.
17 Acts 20:28; 1Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2Cor 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1Tim. 3:5.
18 See Betz, Galatians, p. 322-23, where he outlines this view held by Peter Richardson, Israel in the Apostolic Church (Cambridge, 1969), p. 79. Betz ends up not adopting this view.
common blessing formula represented in the Shemonei Esrei, and in other Jewish literature as well. To break it up, as though peace belongs to “those who walk by this rule,” and mercy belongs to the “Israel of God,” seems to miss the fact that peace and mercy functioned as parts of a set blessing formula.

In the end, we seem to be left with only two viable options: 1) either Paul uses “Israel of God” as a further designation for those “who walk by this rule,” or 2) he uses Israel of God to expand the blessing of peace and mercy to include those who were not willing to follow Paul’s gospel rule, but who were, nonetheless, the chosen people of God, Israel. Yet to limit ourselves to these two options is to accept the mistaken notion that Paul recognized “those who walk by this rule” as separate from the larger expression of Israel. For Paul, the ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) existed within Israel, not outside of Israel. The ekklesia is the remnant of Israel. Paul’s hope and prayer was that through the existence of The Way within Israel, and especially the ingathering of the Gentiles into Israel through the proclamation of the Gospel, all of Israel would be saved. In this way, the “Israel of God” has eschatological ramifications, for the “Israel of God” envisions the final gathering of Israel to faith. The picture Paul has is one of leaven, which, when put into a lump of dough, eventually leavens the whole lump. In the same way, the followers of Yeshua, both Jew and Gentile alike, joined by faith in Yeshua to constitute the believing remnant, would eventually be used by God as the means of Israel’s national salvation. The Israel of God is therefore not a group “other than” those who walk by this rule, but the larger covenant community in which the believing remnant exists. And this view of Israel, that it includes those Gentile who have joined her throughout the centuries, is in accordance with the promise of the Abrahamic covenant which is the central focus of Paul in this epistle. The Gentile believers are not a new entity now blessed by God, but have expanded Israel as the covenant promised. “In you (Abraham) all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3).

Therefore, Paul’s purpose in adding the phrase is eschatological in recognizing that the present ingathering of the Gentiles would have a good effect, ultimately, upon all of Israel (Rom 11:25). In his emphasis upon the equality of the Gentiles within the covenant (which has been the main theme of his polemic and exhortation throughout the epistle), he did not lose sight of the fact that God’s ultimate and final purpose in the whole scheme of redemption and salvation was that “all Israel will be saved.” To have ended the epistle with a blessing only upon those who had presently confessed Yeshua as Messiah, and who had clung to the message of his Gospel of faith, would have been to give the wrong message. Ultimately, peace and mercy would likewise come upon Israel as a nation, for in the eschaton, “all Israel will be saved.”

We may therefore paraphrase the verse in this manner: “And may peace and mercy be upon all who walk according to this rule of faith, that is, upon us, who are the remnant within Israel. And may peace and mercy ultimately and finally come upon all of Israel, the chosen of God, as He proves Himself faithful to His covenant word.”

In this regard, the final blessing of the kaddish bears the same kind of formula: יְשַׁשׁוּת שָׁלוֹם בְּרוּמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְּעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, “The One who makes peace in His heights (Job 25:2), may He make peace upon us, and upon all Israel.” Here, the adding of “upon all Israel” seems redundant:
surely those making the petition ("upon us") include themselves in Israel. So the added "and upon all Israel" is not exclusive of petitioners, but inclusive, and expansive. The same, I would suggest, is true of Paul’s use of "Israel of God." But the added "of God" emphasizes the divine sovereignty in the eschatological salvation of Israel.

17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Yeshua.

Dunn suggests that, even though in the "Israel of God," Paul has extended an olive branch to the Influencers, he here "retreats back into an impatient grumpiness." Whether or not we should impugn Paul with being "grumpy," it is clear that he has been greatly vexed by the trouble the Influencers have caused. The word translated "trouble" is κόπος (kopos), which denotes "beating" or "weariness as though one has been beaten." Paul felt as though he had undergone yet another one of his beatings, though this time not in a physical sense, but in spirit. He therefore half begs, and half commands, that the "beating" stop, and that the those who persist in foisting this theological error by which his disciples are being led astray (or might yet be lead astray) stop at once, and not begin again ("from now on …").

for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Yeshua – Paul is emphatic in the use of the redundant pronoun: ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου βαστάζω (where the pronoun "I" is put first in the sentence, with the 1st person verb thrown to the very end). He wants the Galatians to know that he personally bears the stigmata of Yeshua in his body. This no doubt is tied to his use of kopos, for in being reminded that his present trouble was ever as painful as the many beatings he had endured for the cause of Yeshua, he was also very aware that the scars these beatings had left were very much still present.

Some have suggested that there were actual "branding marks" which Paul bore as the result of his imprisonments, but this is not likely. Likewise, those later fancies of the Papist Church, given by those who taught that Paul (and others) spontaneously bleed in the very spots where Yeshua was wounded on the cross, are not worthy of our consideration.

Why would the mention of his scars have been sufficient reason for the Influencers to "lay off?" It is not that Paul was using the logic that he had been given enough pain, and that there was therefore no reason for them to add to it. Rather, the scars he bore as a result of being wiped and stoned (cf. Acts 16:22, 37; 2Cor 11:23, 25) were proof that he was not engaged in some kind of self-aggrandizing effort. He was not sporting Rolex watches or living in extravagant palaces as the rewards for some kind of "name it and claim it" gospel. The scars he bore were proof that he was willing to follow the lowly yet majestic Messiah, and to share in His sufferings (Col 1:24). The message he gave was therefore the message he must give—it held for him no great earthly comforts, as though the message was repackaged to afford him escape from tribulation. On the contrary, anyone who continued to give such a message in the face of continual reprisals must be seen as fully convinced that his message was both true and necessary.

Thus, Paul’s appeal is based upon the clear and evident veracity of his own mission and message. No one could accuse him of “doing his own thing.” The word he had given to the Galatians was the truth as he received it from Yeshua.

19 Dunn, Galatians, p. 346.
18 The grace of our Lord Yeshua Messiah be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

The benediction is typical of Paul’s epistles. The brevity of the salutation should not be construed as indicating any terseness on his part, for even in his most friendly communications (Philippians, Philemon) he uses short salutations.

Grace, one of Paul’s favorite words, ends the epistle even as he began it (1:3). It was not merely a kind of “farewell” term that had given way to formality, but it was packed with all of the glory of the divine initiative in salvation, for it is the “grace of our Lord Yeshua Messiah,” displayed in His willing death and life on behalf of His people. Moreover, Paul’s use of the full Name once again emphasized the Kingship of the One he served, together with His sovereign ability to save sinners.

Only here does Paul use “with your spirit” as part of a salutation. Perhaps this was to emphasize that the unity he felt with the Galatians, was, as this point, one of unity in spirit, since he was unable to be there physically. Paul was confident that the Spirit of God working in their spirit (cf. Rom 8:16) would indeed bring his impassioned message to its intended goal, that is, the rescuing of these Galatians from the grave error to which they had been subjected.

The most unusual part of the salutation, however, is the addition of “brethren,” found only here in the closing remarks of his epistles. Surely his words have been harsh at times, and even ironic and rhetorical. Yet in the end he wishes them to know that he counts them as true brothers “in the household of faith,” (6:10). As Bengel noted, “the severity of the whole epistle is thus softened.”

The final “amen” (“may it be so”) was not only Paul’s prayer for the Galatians, but not doubt his confidence as well. The word of truth does not return void.

20 Dunn, Galatians, p. 348.
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