

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 *b’rachah* (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.”¹⁹ 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.²⁰ One can almost imagine Paul expecting his readers to respond as “to whom be the glory forever” is read.

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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” (θαυμάζω, *thaumazō*) signals this ironic style. The word itself often denotes the response of people to a miracle.²¹ 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-

19 Cf. m.Yoma 3.8ff.

20 m.Berachot 5.4; 8.8; m.Taanit 2.5; 4.8; m.Nazir 4.2; m.Sota 2.3,5; 7.5; 9.15; m.Bava Qama 9.7-8; m.Shavuot 3.11; 4.3; 5.2,4-5; 8.2-3,5-6; m.Tamid 7.3.

21 Matt 8:27; 9:33; 15:31; 21:20; Mark 5:20; Lk 8:25; 9:43; 11:14; John 5:21; Acts 2:7; 3:12.

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”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.²³ In classical Greek it is used at times “to alter a treaty or legal agreement”²⁴ and it is used in the Lxx of those who “move” (*metatithemi*) boundary markers:

Judah’s leaders are like crooks who move (*metatithemi*) 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 (*metatithemi*) from the ways of his ancestors, and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs. (2Mac 7.24)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 worshipped 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

22 BDAG, ad loc.

23 Acts 7:16; Hebrews 7:12; 11:5; Jude 1:4.

24 Liddell and Scott, ad loc.

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” (τοῦ καλέσαντος, *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" (ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, *heteran euangelion*) "which is really not another" (ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, *ho ouk estin allo*). Much has been made in former years over the switch in words of "another" and "other." Lightfoot notes that ἕτερον, *heteron* "implies a difference of kind which is not involved in ἄλλο, *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.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.³¹ We should conclude, then, that the older argument that the two words are distinct, that *heteros* means “another of a different kind” while *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 *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:

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)

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”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

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mar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, (Chicago, 1961), §306 notes that the two words in Gal 1:6-7 “appear(s) to be used without distinction.”

30 *BDAG*, “ἕτερος,” §1.g.

31 Nanos, *Irony*, pp. 296f.

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 *ταράσσω*, *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.³³ 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 *μεταστρέφω*, *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.³⁴

Yet from the vantage point of the influencers themselves, their message may not have been considered entirely “opposite” of Paul’s.³⁵ 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

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33 Liddell & Scott, “*ταράσσω*.”

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 rabbinic 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

36 Quoted from E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63BCE-66CE* (Trintiy, 1992), p. 61. Note also Adolf Deissman, *Light from the Ancient Near East* (Baker, 1978), 80f., where the inscription itself is pictured.

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 *cherem* (חֵרֵם) behind the Greek *ἀνάθεμα* (*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

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39 E.g., Lev 27:28; Num 18:14.

40 Ex 22:20; Deut 7:26; 13:15; Josh 6:21.

41 Rom 9:3; 1Cor 12:3; 16:22.