

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 sacrifice<sup>39</sup> or that which was under God's wrath and ultimate judgment.<sup>40</sup> Paul always uses the word *anathema* in this second sense.<sup>41</sup>

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.

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.<sup>42</sup> 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 harken back to the opening verses where 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, *paralambanō*) 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” (γαρ, *gar*) does link it to the previous section.<sup>43</sup> 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” (ἄρτι, *arti*) stands first in this sentence, something quite unusual for this word in normal, Greek word order.<sup>44</sup> The emphasis upon the word “now” is heightened by the following “still” (ἔτι, *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” (πείθω, *peithō*, “to persuade”) and “to please” (ἀρέσκω, *areskō*). 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.”<sup>45</sup> 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 πιθανουργικὴ τέχνη) 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.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup>

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 γὰρ *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.<sup>48</sup> 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-

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Philo, *Special Laws [Spec.Leg.]* 1:1-11 as an example of how circumcision was ridiculed within the Greco-Roman culture.

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 Yeshua. 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.

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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 Scriptures, 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 revelation 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”).<sup>49</sup> 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,”<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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 others 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).

50 *Immanuel* 14[1982] 35-6, 39-40, quoted from Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 57.

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.<sup>52</sup>

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 ....<sup>53</sup>

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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 *Ioudaismos*.

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.<sup>54</sup>

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 προκόπτω (*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”

(Ἰουδαϊσμός) here points especially to the particular *halachah* and sect-identification of Paul, which was that of the Pharisees. While he still considered

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<sup>54</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism* (Baker, 2000), p. 234.