

2 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.”⁴ 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, *dokēō*, 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

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⁴ BDAG, “ἀνατίθημι”.

reputation.”⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹ 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

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5 BDAG, “δοκέω”.

6 1Cor 8:9; 9:27; 2Cor 2:7; 9:4; 11:3; 12:20; Gal 4:11; 1Thess 3:5.

7 2Cor 6:1; Phil 2:16; 1Thess 3:5.

8 Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 93-4.

9 Each time the promise to bless the nations is mentioned (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), it comes last in the listing of covenant blessings. This places it in a position of finality and the goal to which the covenant moves.

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 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.¹⁰ 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" (*Ἕλλην, hellein*) 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,"¹¹ 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-

¹⁰ Cf. Eph 3:4ff.

¹¹ Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10; 10:12; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11.

cised.¹² This same action was taken for all males in surrounding areas after the victory of the Hasmoneans.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.

14 Tacitus, *Histories*, 5.5.2. Quoted from W. Hamilton Fyfe, *Tacitus – The Histories*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1912), 2.207.

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.¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷ 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” (παρείσακτος, *pareisaktos*) is put to the front: “on account of the sneaked in false brethren” The adjective, however, is most likely to be construed as passive¹⁸ 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,”¹⁹ 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,” (κατασκοπήσαι) 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” (ψευδαδελφος, *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?”

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²⁰ Nanos, *Irony*, pp. 147–48.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Excursus: Our Liberty in Messiah Yeshua

The word used in Galatians 2:4, translated “liberty,” is ἐλευθερία, *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 (ἐλεύθερος, *eleutheros*, “free”; ἐλευθερία, *eleutheria*, “freedom”; ἐλευθερώω, *eleutheroō*, “to cause someone to be free”) has a basic sociological meaning, that is, to have a social status that is opposite of “slavery.” It’s 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

abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:25)

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 synergistic 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.²² 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 (ἀλήθεια, *aletheia*) of the Gospel. In the standard classical Greek, *aletheia* denotes that which has “reality” in contrast to that which has “mere appearance.”²³ In the Lxx, however, *aletheia* often translates אֱמוּנָה, *emunah*, “faithfulness.”²⁴ 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.

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22 Note the remarks of L. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew* (KTAV, 1985), pp. 37-8.

23 Liddell & Scott, “ἀλήθεια.”

24 Is 11:5; 25:1; 59:4; Ps 119:30, 75, 86, 138; 145:18; 2Chron 19:9.