

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 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-

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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).⁴³ 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 (perceived 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.”)⁴⁴

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

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 *ἰουδαῖζω*, *ioudaizō*, “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 legoumena* מִיתְיָהָדִים, *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 (*ἀναγκάζω*, *anagkazō*⁴⁵) 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 *ὀρθοποδεῶ*, *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

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45 Found 8 other times in the Apostolic Scriptures: Matt 14:22; Mark 6:45; Luke 14:23; Acts 26:11; 28:19; 2Cor 12:11; Gal 2:3; 6:12.

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 *δέ, 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

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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 clichés 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

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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.

Covenant Blessings: circumcision of the flesh	Covenant Blessings: circumcision of the heart
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nation of Israel maintained • blessing for blessing; cursing for cursing • great name • given the Torah (written revelation) • blessings of Torah life & community • history and culture (Exodus, Sinai, Fathers) • Life of worship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forgiveness of sins • Torah written on the heart - ability to obey • given the Spirit • recognition and acceptance of Messiah • fulfillment of divine purpose • promise of a place in the world to come • worship in Spirit and truth

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 sectarians describe the Jewish community from which they had

⁴⁷ Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70*, 3 vols. (Brill, 1971), 3:303-4, as noted by James D. G. Dunn, “Pharisees, Sinners, and Jesus” in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, Neusner, et al., eds. (Fortress, 1988), p. 266.

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 fore-ordained 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.”⁴⁹ 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,”⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹

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.⁵² 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. “. . . a

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.

man is not justified.” 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 (δικαιῶν, *dikaioō*) 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 = δικαιώσεις) 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 δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ (*dikaiothomen ek pisteos Xristou*), 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 *אֱמוּנָה*, *‘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, *pisteuō / 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, *zeteō*) 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

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⁵³ Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 138–39.