

they might face the indignation of Rome. Perhaps in working out the various scenarios, they were contemplating the possibility that they could participate in the Imperial cult in part (even against their conscience) in order to save their skin.

But there is a further dynamic in the argument of Paul. In showing his disgust at even the thought of their returning to participate in the Imperial cult, Paul has also shown them exactly where they stand with the Influencers. These teachers who were urging them to become proselytes really did not have their interests at heart, but only their own desire to control and rule them. If they would force them to engage in the Imperial cult in order to avoid persecution, then they were surely not treating them as brothers or as honest members of the community. Forcing the issue of the Imperial cult helped to shine the light of reality upon the Influencers and uncover their true motivations (cf. v. 17).

Thus, in the context immediately following, Paul will rehearse the brotherly camaraderie that existed between himself and the Galatians, and he will appeal to this *chavrut* (fellowship) as a basis for the sincerity of his message. In contrast, the Influencers only have themselves in mind.

For Paul, leaving the pure message of the gospel on either side of the issue was a disaster. If the Gentiles succumbed to the pressure of the Influencers and became proselytes, they were giving in to the belief that, in some measure, salvation rested upon ethnic status. If they refused the Influencers, and, under pressure from Rome began again to participate in the Imperial cult, they would return to the enslavement of idolatry from which they had been freed. Either choice was a bad one. And for Paul, to see them make either choice was to bring into question the validity of their faith and ultimately the value of Paul's own work in their midst. They must "stay the course" and be willing to stand firm on the truth of the Gospel as it had been delivered to them.

In summary, then, the

"yoke of slavery" (cf. 5:1) for these Gentiles believers was not the Jewish Law observance but observance of pagan practices such as are expressed by participation in the Imperial cult and other idolatrous festivities that are part of pagan civic life, which these Influencers themselves are free from, yet ironically, support as appropriate for the addressees in their present pagan state!⁴¹

12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong;

Paul interrupts his argument from Scripture (he will return to it in 4:21ff) to offer a genuine, personal appeal. The style of the Greek at this point is abbreviated which fits a more personal, passionate appeal (note the italicized words in the NASB, which are needed to "fill in" the gaps left by the Greek).

Some commentators take Paul's words here to mean: "I gave up Torah observance to come to you and bring you the Gospel, now it's time for you to do the same." But as I have noted repeatedly, there is no evidence that Paul gave up any clear Torah commands of the Scriptures, though he surely discarded some of the rabbinic Oral Torah, especially the growing number of restrictions regarding fellowship with Gentiles. And it may be that Paul is speaking to them on this level, regarding Oral Torah. Even as he was willing to

[page 160]

⁴¹ Nanos, *Irony*, p. 270.

let the man-made rulings drop by the wayside in order to be obedient to the Written Torah and to Yeshua, it seems to me very probable he is also calling the Gentile believers to be willing to suffer for the truth, even as he had suffered.

Increasingly Paul was being rejected by those who considered that he had abandoned Torah (because he had dare “transgress” some of the rulings of the Sanhedrin). Indeed, this rejection would grow to such a point that some would eventually plot to kill him. By the time he had written his third epistle to the Corinthians (our 2Corinthians), we hear him relating that he had received lashes five times by the synagogue authorities. It is not as though Paul was uncaring or unfeeling for the situation in which the Gentile believers found themselves. It no doubt caused him inner turmoil to think that his Gospel would bring about the persecution of the Gentile believers. But Paul had learned for himself that persecution was not something to fear, or to cause one to compromise his faith. Rather, Paul had learned that to be persecuted as a follower of Yeshua brought a deepening of his faith in and love for the Messiah. To the Colossians he would write:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the *ekklesia*, in filling up what is lacking in Messiah’s afflictions. (Col 1:24)

He had learned that suffering for the truth worked its own measure of grace and maturity through the ever-indwelling Spirit, and had allowed him to appreciate in ways otherwise unknown of the sufferings of Messiah. He had experienced that standing for the truth, even in the face of persecution, wrought deep benefits for the soul.

If the Gentile believers in Galatia were to be faced with no other option than to be persecuted at the hands of Rome, then they, like him, would deepen in their faith through that persecution. It is in this way, I believe, that he calls them to become like him.

But how is it that Paul became like them? In jettisoning the rabbinic *halachah* which would have separated Paul from the Gentiles, and in openly fellowshiping with the Gentiles, eating with them and congregating with them in their homes, Paul had identified with the Gentiles and as such, had no doubt been shunned by many in the Jewish community. He had followed in the footsteps of Messiah, Who left the glory of His heavenly dwelling with the Father in order to become a man and to fellowship with men. Paul had become like them because he was treated as one of them by his Jewish colleagues, especially in Jerusalem. It was this very issue which brought the confrontation of Peter to the fore.

Paul’s words in 1Cor 9:19–22 may support this viewpoint. In reference to the traditional synagogue community, Paul can say: “To the Jew I became as a Jew” and “to those under the Torah, as under the Torah” (v. 20). Likewise Paul identifies with those Gentile believers who were labeled as “without the Torah” by the Jewish community by stating: “to those who are without the Torah, as without Torah, though not being myself without the Torah but under the Torah of Messiah” (v. 21). But notice the different language in the next comparison (v. 22): “To the weak I became weak.” He leaves out the little word “as.” He did not become *as* weak, but actually claims to be weak. In short, the Jewish community judged the Gentile as unable to gain covenant membership, as having an inherent weakness that made covenant

membership an impossibility. *And Paul identifies personally with that same weakness.* For the ability to be a member of the covenant was not something automatically possessed by those who were born Jewish. All people, regardless of their ethnic status, are unable (weak) to be covenant members in God's family apart from His grace and saving work in Yeshua. Thus, if the Gentiles were judged as "weak" because they lacked Jewish legal status, then Paul willingly claimed that same weakness for himself. The ability or right to be a covenant member in God's family was possessed by no man, because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

Here, to the Galatians, Paul is begging them to become as he was, that is, to acknowledge their utter inability to garner God's favor. He was imploring them to admit their "weakness" as he had, and in doing so, to trust fully and only in the grace of God as manifest in the Messiah, Yeshua.⁴²

Once again, we have no indication that Paul is suggesting he abandoned the word of God (the Torah) in order to fellowship with the Gentiles. On the contrary, there is every evidence to suggest that as he was among the Gentile communities, he taught them the "obedience of the faith," that is, a conformity of life to the teaching of God in the Torah. What he did abandon, in part, was the rabbinic *halachah* which had erected walls of separation based upon ethnic criteria and had taught that Gentiles could not be covenant members apart from acquiring legal Jewish status through the act of becoming a proselyte.

You have done me no wrong – Paul makes it clear, now, that though his words have been harsh, they were so because of his perception that the Gentile believers were hanging on a spiritual precipice and were about to fall. But his anger is not actually directed toward them—rather his surprise (in ironic fashion) is that they could so easily be "duped" by the false "message of good" brought by the Influencers. Paul still feels a deep friendship with his converts, and wants them to know that they have done him no wrong. They are not like others (the Influencers, for instance) who had waged war against him personally, and against his Gospel which announced the equal inclusion of the Gentiles as *bona fide* sons of Abraham. In his final epistles to Timothy, Paul even names some of those who had wronged him (cf. 2Tim 4:9ff).

13–14 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Messiah Yeshua Himself.

The account of Paul's journeys in Acts and other brief historical notes in his epistles give us no information regarding the physical sickness to which Paul here refers. It seems reasonable to presume that this "bodily illness" (literally "weakness of the flesh") is similar to or even the same as his "thorn in the flesh" mentioned in 2Cor 12:7. Whatever it was, the illness was apparently of such a nature that it prohibited him from journeying on past Galatia, and required that he stop to recuperate there. That he speaks of preaching the gospel to them "the first time" does not necessarily mean that he went a second time. The Greek word πρότερος, *proteros* can mean either "first of several" or simply "once." Since the word is used both ways,⁴³ its presence

42 For a fuller exposition of 1Cor 9:19–23, see my paper "'All Things to All Men' – Paul and the Torah in 1Cor 9:19–23," available at www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html.

43 Cf. BDAG, "πρότερος" for the various uses.

here cannot be used to determine whether Paul visited Galatia once or twice. Regardless, the point he makes is that it was a sickness that provided the opportunity to stop in Galatia, an opportunity that resulted in his preaching the Gospel and the ingathering of the Gentiles to the faith. Here we see Paul's theology in action. He would make this explicit when he wrote to the Romans that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). In this he stands as an example for us all. We must find in the events of life, even in those that are uncomfortable, the hand of God working for His glory and our good.

and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition (literally, "in my flesh") *you did not despise or loathe* – Perhaps the REB gives the sense of this compacted sentence: "you resisted the temptation to show scorn or disgust at the state of my poor body." The language translated "you did not despise or loathe" is literally "you did not despise or spit out." This second verb, "spit out" (ἐκπτύω, *ekptuō*) may hint at the ancient custom of spitting when coming into contact with that which appeared demonic or as a defense against sickness. Schlier has suggested: "the Galatians resisted the temptation to see in Paul someone demonically possessed because of his sickness."⁴⁴ This may help us appreciate the superstitious world in which the Galatians lived. One Greek author (Theocritus, vi.39) writes that one could ward off the evil eye by spitting three times. The "elemental things of the world" were clearly part of their culture.

Regardless, the Galatians did not succumb to the pagan superstitions of their culture, but received Paul with his disgusting sickness, treating him as an "angel (or messenger) of God." From a Hebraic standpoint, the offering of hospitality, on the analogy of Abraham in Genesis 18, always held out the possibility that one would entertain angels without knowing it. We should understand here, however, that they received Paul because they recognized that he was, in fact, God's messenger—one who was coming with the truth of God. But Paul's message was very specific: it was the message of the Gospel which centered in the person of Messiah Yeshua. Even as the Master Himself taught that when we do kindness to any of His brethren, it is as though we were serving Him directly, so the Galatians received Paul as though they were receiving Yeshua Himself. Here again we find good teaching for our own lives: we are to serve one another with the same heart we would serve Yeshua Himself. When we minister, even to the least of His brethren, we minister to Him.

Paul has therefore emphasized the kind and loving kinship that resulted between himself and the Galatians. This relationship resulted in a caring for each other that went well beyond the common, cultural expectations. There was a willingness to sacrifice one's own comforts for the sake of the other.

15–16 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

The common greeting among the Jewish communities for a visitor was בָּרוּךְ הַבָּא, *baruch haba*, "blessed is the one who comes." This was not merely a formality (though it could surely devolve to that) but a hope that when a

[page 162]

44 TDNT, 2.448-9, mentioned by Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 234.

visitor entered one's home or community, they would receive a blessing and be a blessing. In Paul's visit to the Galatians, doubtlessly both were true. He was blessed by their generous care for him, and they were blessed by the message of the Gospel which he brought. This idea of *berachah*, "blessing" characterized his time with them. So his question comes with a bit of a sting (once again the words and phrases are compressed): Where is that same sense of *berachah* which we shared together previously?

The reference to "plucking out eyes" could be taken two ways: (1) it could simply be metaphorical for that which is most precious, and thus most valuable. This would mean that the Galatians would have stopped at nothing to minister to Paul; (2) it could mean that Paul's ailment was in his eyes, and that for some reason he was unable to continue his trip because of temporary blindness or some sort of eye failure. Some have suggested that it was poor eyesight that required Paul to write in such large letters (6:11).

Most commentators take the first option, and make "plucking out the eyes" as an idiom, much like our saying "I'd give my right arm for" Dunn, against the majority, opts for the second idea, and suggests that Paul's ailment had to do with his eyes.⁴⁵ In the end, both options have the same emphasis: the Galatians would have done whatever possible to serve and minister to Paul. It was this relationship (one of "blessing," a typical Hebrew concept of "shalom") with which Paul left Galatia, one which he presumed was still in place. To have received the news that the Galatians were now contemplating disregarding his message was to wonder what had happened. Thus, in reminding them of the friendship they had once enjoyed, Paul calls them back to an acceptance of his message even as they had done when he was with them.

So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? – Once again, Paul uses strong irony (or even hyperbole) to get his point across. The former camaraderie enjoyed with the Galatian Gentiles has appeared to disintegrate into thin air. Instead of friends they are acting as "enemies." And why? Simply because Paul has been bold to speak the truth. While this is surely an overstatement in regard to the Gentile believers (they have not yet succumbed to the false teaching), it may hint at how the Influencers might have viewed Paul. From their vantage point, he may have been considered an apostate and traitor to the truth. Since Paul had charged Peter as "living like the Gentiles," the Influencers could have considered that Paul had abandoned the true, historic faith (encapsulated in the rabbinic traditions and theology) for a teaching that was, in their opinion, errant in the extreme. For in their way of looking at things, Paul had turned his back on God's way of entering the covenant in favor of something which actually undermined the covenant, i.e., allowing Gentiles into the covenant as Gentiles.

But the truth that Paul has offered is nothing less than the "truth of the Gospel" (2:5, 14), centered as it was in Yeshua as the true Messiah, and the One through Whom the eschatological promise of the covenant would be realized. Paul's gospel seemed to dismiss "Israel's 'most favored nation status ... and the Torah praxis which protected it.'"⁴⁶ It was this that had brought the wrath of his fellow Jews upon him, including the believing Jews of Galatia.

[page 163]

45 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 236.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.

Paul does need to specifically identify who he refers to by the pronoun “they.” The Galatians know he is referring to the Influencers. But here he speaks to their motivations, made apparent by their actions. They “eagerly seek you.” The verb (ζηλόω, *zeloō*) can have either a positive or negative connotation. Positively, it means “to strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly, court someone’s favor,” or negatively, “to be filled with jealousy or envy toward someone.”⁴⁷ Paul uses the same word in the next verse, and it may be important to see that he also uses this verb in Rom 10:2, “For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.” Thus, the idea that the word here in our text should be understood as “flattery”⁴⁸ may not capture Paul’s meaning. He may simply be referring to the common zeal of the Jewish community to maintain their self-identification, a zeal which in and of itself was not wrong.

But the zeal of the Influencers in attempting to persuade the Gentile believers to adopt their theology of covenant inclusion must have been done in such a way so as to expose their zeal to be self-serving. Their method of persuasion is one of “shutting out” (ἐκκλείω, *ekkleiō*) in order to change the minds of the Gentiles. The willingness to allow Gentiles as “God-fearers” to remain within the community was being abandoned in the hopes that presenting an “either-or” scenario would prompt the Gentiles to accept rabbinic conversion. As noted above, this scenario would have offered a good deal of fear to the Gentile believers. Being excluded from the Jewish community would also mean that they no longer enjoyed the covering offered by the Roman government for Judaism as a legitimate religion (*religio licita*). That, in turn, would leave them unprotected in the matter of the Imperial cult, and meant that they would face the decision to participate in paganism or face severe persecution. The “offer” of the Influencers, therefore, came with tremendous incentive to receive it.

The obvious hope of the Influencers was, that given such a scenario, the Gentile believers would “seek them” (ζηλόω, *zeloō*), that is, would be zealous for their way of “salvation,” (covenant membership). We could just as well translate “in order that you might be zealous over them” (note the NIV). The method of the Influencers, then, was not one of acceptance on the basis of the Gospel (i.e., faith in Yeshua), but on the basis of conformity to the accepted *halalchah*. Given the fact that they were convinced their perspective was God’s perspective, they no doubt hoped that such a “strong-arm” tactic would bring about submission to the “truth” and the full “salvation” of the Gentiles.

However, Paul questions their true motivation: was it for the salvation of the Gentiles, or the maintenance of Israel as they had defined her? Paul is convinced that they really do not have the best interest of the Gentiles in mind, but the continued establishment of their own self-definition. Their motivation is thus primarily selfish. In contrast, Paul’s motivation was evident by the fact that he was willing to suffer on behalf of the Gentiles, even experiencing being “shut out” by his own Jewish community.

[page 164]

⁴⁷ BDAG, “ζηλόω”.

⁴⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 229–30.