

Here is emphasized the corporate election of Israel as God's first-born son.<sup>24</sup> God as "Father" is revealed to Israel in the context of his "sonship." However, Israel's sonship is a matter of God's grace, and not the mere outworking of the natural course of events, for Israel is "adopted," that is, chosen by God to be His son. Thus, for Paul, even though the nation is currently in a state of unbelief, Israel is still the adopted (and thus rightful) son of God, for he uses the present tense: "to whom *belongs* the adoption as sons."

But for Paul, God's adoption process is not restricted to the physical offspring of Jacob. All of God's chosen ones, whether descended from Jacob or brought near from the nations, comprise the people called God's adopted son:

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15, cf. v. 23)

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will. (Eph 1:5)<sup>25</sup>

This metaphor of adoption emphasizes the "already / not yet" in Paul's theology. On one level, Israel as the physical descendants of Jacob have *not yet* received Yeshua on a national scale. Yet she retains the "adoption as sons" because the promise of the covenant has been made to her. Her adoption is secure only because God intends, in the kindness of His grace and faithfulness to His word, to bring her as a corporate entity to faith in the Messiah. However, the remnant, consisting of both Jew and non-Jew, has *already* received her Messiah and are witnesses of God's adoptive grace, for the remnant already behaves as His true son, embracing the Messiah through Whom the adoption has been secured.

----- *End of the Excursus* -----

Thus, to receive the adoption as sons pertains to all who are saved by grace, whether Jew or non-Jew. All in the family of God have equal status because all are adopted sons and daughters. There can be no confidence "in the flesh." Our identity is based upon the grace of God Who has adopted us into His family. We are all called by His name, and are identified as children in His family.

This speaks directly to Paul's primary argument in Galatians: the Gentiles are *bone fide* members of the covenant, not on the basis of a declared ethnicity (becoming proselytes), but by the gracious, sovereign election of God by which they were adopted into His family through the redemption made by Yeshua. This extends the point he has already made in 3:28, that

<sup>24</sup> Ex 4:22f; Jer 31:9; Hosea 11:1.

<sup>25</sup> The notion that Paul uses first-person pronouns in Eph 1 to refer to Jews, and second-person pronouns to refer to Gentiles, is an eisegesis that fails to consider the epistle as a whole. Paul's emphasis throughout the next two chapters is that Gentile believers occupy the same legal status within the body of Messiah as do Jewish believers. Moreover, in the opening verses, Paul extols the elective decree of God whereby He chose those who would be blessed in Yeshua (cf. v. 4), which surely includes Gentile as well as Jewish believers in Yeshua.

there is neither Jew nor Greek, for the Jewish believer could not consider himself above his Gentile brother, as though he was a “natural son” and the Gentile an “adopted son.” Indeed, the only “natural son” is Yeshua, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>26</sup>All other children in God’s family are adopted, whether Jew or Gentile. And as noted above, the adopted children were given the full status of “sonship,” nothing more nor less.

It is in this way, then, that everyone within the body of Messiah finds his or her ultimate identity, not in one’s lineage (or lack thereof), but in Messiah. It is by His redemption that we have all received our family heritage, and in Him we are able to call Abraham our father, and the Almighty, “Abba.”

### **6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”**

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The way in which this sentence begins in the English translations might lead some to the conclusion that the giving of the Spirit is subsequent to becoming a son. That is, “because you are sons” means “as a result of being a son,” and that therefore the giving of the Spirit is the result of being sons, not the cause of sonship. But the Greek construction does not necessarily bear this connotation. The word translated “because” is the Greek ὅτι, *hoti*, which can mean “because” or “on account of” but can also have the meaning “to show that” or “to prove that.”<sup>27</sup>

A classic example of this usage is to be found in the story of the woman who anointed Yeshua’s feet with oil. Yeshua compares the owner of the house with the woman: when He arrived, the host did not greet Him or wash His feet, yet the woman bathed his feet in oil and did not stop kissing His feet. The conclusion the Master draws is found in Luke 7:47, “For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for (*hoti*) she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Why were her sins forgiven? Because she loved much? In other words, is one required to love God in order to have his or her sins forgiven? Clearly not: while we were still His enemies, He loved us! (Rom 5:6-10). Rather, in this phrase we have the same construction using *hoti*. If we understand it as meaning “proof of,” then the words of Yeshua ring true: “... her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, and the proof is that she loves much.” One who is truly forgiven demonstrates this reality by loving the One Who has extended His forgiveness.

We may offer the same interpretation of *hoti* here. “As proof that you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” Thus, the identity of sons is that they have the indwelling Spirit of God. This accords with Paul’s previous statement that “be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham” (3:7). It is the life of faith that demonstrates genuine sonship.

The giving of the Spirit is here attributed to God the Father, Who sends the “Spirit of His Son.” In the history of the Christian Church, the issue of the “procession of the Spirit” became a hotly debated topic, sufficient to produce severe and lasting division between the Greek and Latin Church of the 9th Century. The Eastern Church regards the doctrine of the single procession of the Spirit (that the Spirit was given by the Father alone) as the cornerstone of

<sup>26</sup> Matt 1:20.

<sup>27</sup> See the remarks of C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 147; Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (T & T Clark, 1965), pp. 37ff.

orthodoxy. The Western Church held that the Spirit proceeds both from the Father and from the Son. This debate came to be known as the *filioque* controversy, the Latin term meaning “of the Son.” In 589 CE, the Nicene Creed was expanded to include the *filioque* clause, so that the confession read: “And we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life; Who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son],” and the division over the issue ensued. The whole matter was primarily an argument of metaphysical theology, and an extension of the Trinity doctrines against the Arian heresies of the day. The primary texts upon which the controversy raged were John 14-16.<sup>28</sup>

Obviously, Paul had no such debate in mind when he wrote Galatians! Paul writes that God “sent forth” (ἐξαποπέλλω, *exapostellō*, “to send out from”) the Spirit. The verb is used only here and in 4:4, where it is used in connection with God “sending forth” His Son. In this regard, the sending of the Spirit by the Father references the Shavuot experience of Acts 2, in which the Spirit is sent to accomplish a specific task, namely, the ingathering of the nations. Paul is linking that reality with the evidence of the Spirit in the lives of the believers in his day. For the fact that the Galatian community is comprised both of Jew and Gentile, and that both evidenced the presence of the indwelling Spirit, showed that the mission of the Spirit was being accomplished—the witness of Yeshua, carried by His apostles, was bringing about the ingathering of the Gentiles.

*into our hearts* – The locus of the Spirit’s work is in the heart. For Paul, as for all the writers of Scripture, the heart is the place of moral decision as well as the fountain of emotions and desires. Thus, the Spirit affects and governs “the motivating and emotive center of the person.”<sup>29</sup> This marks the person as a true “son” in that the inner work of the Spirit brings about a conformity of life to the thoughts and ways of God, as perfectly demonstrated in His Son, Yeshua. This is a constant theme throughout the Pauline epistles.<sup>30</sup>

While Paul’s primary emphasis here was the manner in which the Gentiles had been gathered into the people of God, he still uses the inclusive “our hearts,” for the work of the Spirit knows no division among the people of God.

The lynch pin of Paul’s theological statement here, however, is his claim that the Spirit is “the Spirit of God’s Son.” Since the Gentiles have evidenced the abiding Spirit in their hearts, and since He is the Spirit of the Son of God, they too share in the adoption as sons. Their status of sonship is both in regard to Abraham (since Yeshua is Abraham’s son) and to God (since Yeshua is God’s Son). Here, in one brief clause, Paul expounds the mystery of the transcendence of God as well as His nearness. How could God be “wholly other” while at the same time be personally involved in the lives of each of His children? How could the Spirit of God, the very Spirit of Yeshua, take up residence in the hearts of believers? This is the mystery of God’s salvation, and one which betrays a full explanation. Yet the reality of it is true: God, manifest in His Son, and brought near by His Spirit, dwells among mortals. This is the goal of salvation, that God should dwell with His people, and they with Him. And though the fullness of this reality

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28 For a complete discussion of the *filioque* controversy, see Schaff, *History of the Christian Church 8 vols* (reprinted by Hendrickson, 1996), 4.476ff.

29 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 220.

30 Rom 2:29; 5:5; 6:17; 10:8-10; 2Cor 1:22; 3:2-3; 4:6; Phil 4:7; 1Thess 3:13.

awaits the future, it is already being experienced in the lives of His children. Thus, the proof of our adoption as sons is the presence of the Spirit in our lives whereby we are being conformed more and more to the image of His Son. The “Spirit of His Son” has become our Guide in life, and is applying the eternal truths of the Scriptures to our everyday decisions and actions.

*crying “Abba!” Father* – The activity of the Spirit in the heart of the believer is here characterized as a crying out to God. The verb for “crying” (κράζω, *krazō*) has the sense of urgency or intensity, as from one’s inner being (heart) and with emotion. It pictures the cry of a child to his father, whether in times of need or joy. Is Paul describing a form of prayer here, or is it a wider description of the general heart-cry of the believer? It is difficult to say, but it could be both. We know that Yeshua used the Aramaic term *abba* to address the Father (Mark 14:36), and it is interesting that in both of Paul’s references (here and Rom 8:15f), the use of the term *abba* is in the context of the Spirit of His Son or the Spirit of Messiah. It would appear that scholars such as Jeremias and Dunn are correct in concluding that the *abba* tradition in the prayers of Yeshua’s followers was patterned after Yeshua’s own prayer style.<sup>31</sup>

But why would the Aramaic *abba* be used, especially among Hellenistic Greeks who populated the ever-widening community of The Way? While the rabbinic view of prayer was moving more and more away from a personal approach to God, and was being cast in corporate terms, the prayer of Yeshua, and thus of His disciples, was centered in a personal, “son” relationship to the Father.<sup>32</sup> Dunn goes so far as to conclude:

The clear implication of Rom 8:15f. and Gal 4:6f. is that Paul regarded the *abba* prayer as something distinctive to those who had received the eschatological Spirit. Had it been in common usage within any other large group or class within Palestine or Judaism Paul could hardly have thought of it in this way, as a distinguishing mark of those who shared the Spirit of Jesus’ sonship, of an inheritance shared with Christ. In short, the evidence points consistently and clearly to the conclusion that Jesus’ regular use of ‘*abba*’ in addressing God distinguished Jesus in a significant degree from his contemporaries.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, if Dunn has captured the truth of the issue, then this distinction of Yeshua in the manner in which He prayed is nothing more or less than the similar distinction He made in regard to the Torah as essentially a function of the circumcised heart. For Yeshua called His disciples to the realization that their covenant relationship with God was one of close intimacy with the Father, the kind demonstrated in His own life. It was the hypocrisy of “going

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31 See Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Westminster, 1980), pp. 26ff. Barr “‘Abba Father’ and the Familiarity of Jesus’ Speech” *Theology* 91(1988), 173-79 takes exception to the findings of Jeremias and Dunn, arguing that the term was common, and would have been used as responsible adult speech.

32 For a full study on the issue of prayer in rabbinic theology and writings, see Seth Kadish, *Kavvana: Directing the Heart in Jewish Prayer* (Aronson, 1997). He shows that the majority of rabbinic authorities, while not discounting the use of personal requests in prayer, urged the pray-er to seek God’s good for the community rather than for personal issues, and that in some traditions, one’s personal prayers (those composed by oneself) were discouraged and even forbidden.

33 Dunn, *Christology*, p. 27.

through the motions” that brought Yeshua’s condemning words toward His contemporaries, a hypocrisy that was the result of a lack of genuine communion with the Father as fostered by the Spirit. For though the outside of the cup could be polished, inside there was filth.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, it is the heart of the genuine believer, upon which the Torah has been written by the Spirit, that calls out in familial terms to the Father. The life of faith, then, is a life of communion; of relationship and growing awareness of one’s true identity within the family of God. It is a life lived in the Spirit in which the common cry is “Abba.”

Abba (אָבאָ, ‘abba’) has been historically understood as a diminutive form of אָב, *av*, “Father,” thus “Daddy.” So the Talmud states: “an infant cannot say ‘father’ (*abba*) and ‘mother’ (*imma*) until it has tasted of wheat” (i.e., until it is weaned).<sup>35</sup> An interesting notice is found in b.*Taanit* 23b:

Hanan ha-Nehba was the son of the daughter of Honi the Circle-Drawer. When the world was in need of rain the Rabbis would send to him school children and they would take hold of the hem of his garment and say to him, Father (*abba*), Father (*abba*), give us rain. Thereupon he would plead with the Holy One, Blessed be He, [thus], Master of the Universe, do it for the sake of these who are unable to distinguish between the Father (*abba*) who gives rain and the father (*abba*) who does not.

One should note, of course, the contrast between the pleas of the children and the manner in which the Sage addresses God. He does not use *abba* but “Master of the Universe,” yet he still refers to God as *abba* in the following line.

A study of the word *abba*, however, shows that it was not so much a diminutive form as it was the common manner in which a child would address his or her father. In fact, it was not only used by children, but by adults when they addressed their father as well.<sup>36</sup> However, even though it is not equivalent to our common English “Daddy,” it was, nonetheless, a familial term, and one which captured the relationship of father and child. As such, it did take on a special meaning among The Way as they emulated the words of their Master, Yeshua.

For Paul, in our immediate context, the use of *abba* as a cry from the child to his father likewise emphasizes the status of sonship enjoyed by all who are God’s children. And this is his point: the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, who have come into God’s family via faith in Messiah Yeshua, are equally privileged to address the Almighty as Father—as *Abba*. The point of it all is that we are children in the same family, with the same Father.

### **7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.**

Paul’s conclusion is simple and to the point: since the Spirit of Messiah has been given to all who believe, they are no longer counted as slaves (using the Roman analogy) but they have been fully adopted as sons. The sentence is cast in the singular: “Therefore you (singular) are no longer a slave ....” Thus, Paul expects each one, whether Jew or Gentile, to recognize

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34 Cf. Matt 23:25–26; Luke 11:39.

35 b.*Berachot* 40a; b.*Sanhedrin* 70b.

36 Hofius, “Abba” in *DNTT*, 1.614.

his or her status as a *bona fide* child within the family of God, and thus with equal privileges to call upon the Father as *Abba*. While the slave had no potential for inheritance, the son was a full heir, and thus the rightful recipient of the Father's wealth. This inheritance principle brings us back to the issue of the promise made to Abraham and to his descendants. As full-fledged members of the family of God, the believer (both Jew and Gentile) may anticipate receiving the inheritance of the covenant, that is, the blessings which come through the work of God in Messiah Yeshua.

**8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.**

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Having confirmed the freedom that the Gentile believers had through their faith in Yeshua, Paul goes on to contrast it with the bondage of slavery which was theirs before they believed. His overall argument at this point is clear: "you should certainly know what slavery is, since you were slaves to your pagan beliefs before coming to Yeshua. How could you be enticed, then, to return to a position of slavery after you have experienced the liberty in Yeshua?!"

The phrase "at that time" translates the simple Greek ἄλλὰ τότε, *alla tote*, "But then ...." Obviously Paul is referring to their former life in paganism. This former life is characterized by two things: (1) you did not know God, and (2) you were slaves. The idea of "knowing God" is a thoroughly Hebrew one, taking "know" in the sense of covenant relationship. The "knowledge of God" (cf. Num. 24:16; Job 18:21; Prov. 2:5; Hos. 4:1; 6:6) as well as "knowing God" was the privilege of Israel (Deut 4:39; Is 43:10) to whom God had revealed Himself and His Torah (cf. Ps 147:19-20). But it was also Israel's responsibility to receive and accept the revelation God had given. Failure to do so resulted in God's rebuke (Jud 2:10; Is 1:3; Jer 22:16; Hos 4:6; 5:4; 6:6).

In contrast, the nations do not know God (Ps 79:6; Jer 10:25) and have no covenant relationship with Him (Amos 3:2). They worship what they think are gods, but what, in reality, are not gods but demons (2Chron 13:9; Is 37:19; Jer 2:7-11; 16:20). As such, their worship is actually a morbid enslavement to demonic forces that desire to destroy them.

Paul enters into the metaphysical realm of the Hellenistic world when he writes "which by nature are no gods." There is nothing in the Hebrew that corresponds to the Greek word "nature" (φύσις, *phusis*). This Greek term is not found in the canonical books of the Lxx, but only in the apocryphal works (3Mac. 3:29; 4Mac. 1:20; 5:8-9,25; 13:27; 15:13,25; 16:3; Wis. 7:20; 13:1; 19:20). But recognizing the Hellenistic background of the Gentiles at Galatia, Paul utilizes their thinking process, and simply says that the essential nature of the gods they formerly worshiped was, in fact, not divinity at all. At the heart of all idolatry is the presence of demons who deceive and portray themselves as divine beings. In reality, there is only one God—there is none else (Is 45:14, 18).

**9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?**

As noted in the previous verse, the Gentiles whom Paul is addressing had come to "know God," that is, they had come into a covenant relationship with God. But Paul makes a very important corrective here, lest the means by which

they had come into this covenant relationship should be misunderstood. He adds, “or rather to be known by God” (μάλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ). This is because any relationship with God begins with God, not man. Apart from God’s initiation in salvation, it simply does not come about. Man is not able to find God, much less to draw Him to act on his behalf. God’s salvation is a matter of His pure and sovereign grace, meaning that He dispenses it as a matter of His own free will, without being acted upon by any outside force.

Thus, since the Galatians had come to genuine faith in Messiah, evidenced by their changed lives and the presence of the Spirit in them, Paul affirms that they have “been known by God.” Having this covenant relationship means that they have entered into liberty, that is, the freedom and ability to obey God—to fulfill the very purpose for which they were created.

Given the fact that the Gentile believers had undergone a genuine conversion, experiencing the presence and works of the Spirit, what would have been sufficient to turn them toward the message of the Influencers? Nanos, along with others, suggests that the influence may well have been a growing persecution. We know that under Roman law in Paul’s day, the Jewish community had received a *religio licita*, that is, the right to congregate, to carry on Jewish worship, and to collect money.<sup>37</sup> However, this privilege was granted to Jews only, not to Gentiles. It is further clear that Gentiles who neglected to perform the necessary acts of allegiance to the emperor were punished, and that in the years preceding the 1st Jewish revolt, the enforcement of the requirements to participate in the Imperial cult were heightened. This meant that Gentiles who had not officially converted to Judaism, (i.e. were not proselytes) were at the mercy of the Jewish community. If the Jewish community continued to shelter them and treat them as one of their own, all was well. But if the Jewish community refused to maintain their relation with Gentiles, but rather marked them out publicly as non-Jews, they were obligated to participate in the Imperial cult.

This, of course, created a great dilemma for the believing Gentiles. On the one hand, Paul had forbidden them to become proselytes, since by doing so they would be acquiescing to the idea that covenant status was based upon being Jewish. Yet on the other hand, they could not participate in the Imperial cult, which included offering sacrifices to the gods and to the Emperor himself, and still maintain their true confession of Yeshua. They were faced with only one option: suffer for the name of Yeshua.

In light of these data, it seems very probable that the Gentile believers at Galatia to whom Paul was writing were seeking to “straddle the fence,” maintaining their connection with the synagogue while at the same time returning to the required participation in the Imperial cult. This made the Influencers’ message all that much more appealing: if they were to undergo the ritual of a proselyte, they would be declared Jews, and would be exempt from involvement in the rituals of Emperor worship. Though they would suffer some persecution and estrangement from their Roman community and families, they would be free from the persecution of Rome. Thus the Influencers’ message appeared as “good news” after all!

For Paul, however, to be involved with the Imperial cult, even if one’s heart was not in it, was to become enslaved again in the paganism from which they had been delivered. Paul uses the phrase “turn back again” (πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν). The word for “turn back,” ἐπιστρέφω, *epistrephō*, is

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37 See the data in Mark Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians* (Fortress, 2002), pp. 260f.

regularly used in the Lxx to translate the Hebrew word שׁוּב, *shuv*, use in a positive way to indicate turning to God in repentance, but in a negative way for turning away from God (Num 14:43; 1Sam 15:11; 1Ki 9:6; Ps 78:41; Jer 3:19). However, in these cases where the negative aspect of שׁוּב is in place, the Lxx uses a different word, ἀποστρέφω, *apostrephō*. It could be that the Lxx translators are influenced by the rabbinic use of *shuv* to mean “repentance toward God.”

Elsewhere, Paul uses this word both in 2Cor 3:16 and 1Thess 1:9 in the positive sense of turning to God in repentance. Here, however, the sense of turning back is to return to the domination (enslavement) of the “weak and worthless elements” (ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα). He uses the same term, *stoicheia*, that he used in v. 3. Indeed, the Roman Imperial cult was the very center of the paganism which believed that the “elements,” including the stars, moon, and sun controlled the destiny of mankind. Such superstitions were part and parcel of the cult itself.

Paul says that they “desired to be enslaved all over again” to these “weak and worthless elements.” This emphasizes a true but difficult reality: the choices offered them were, in one sense, all bad. They were forced to choose between a denial of Yeshua by participation in the Imperial cult, or a denial of Yeshua by submitting to the rabbinic ritual of a proselyte. The only other choice was to suffer from all sides, Rome and synagogue alike. But Paul clearly urges them to this choice. Their willingness to begin again to participate in the Imperial cult is viewed by Paul as their choice to seek enslavement rather than endure suffering for their confession of Yeshua.

It is not surprising, however, that the history of Christian interpretation has taken this passage to teach that the Torah is itself connected with the “weak and worthless elements” of the world, and that believers should therefore rightly reject it in favor of faith in Yeshua. One hardly needs to comment on such an interpretation, since it is impossible when one considers Paul’s consistent praise of the Torah, his own willingness to submit to it, and his message as Yeshua’s Apostle that would necessarily need to uphold Yeshua’s own view of the Torah (Matt 5:17-20). Moreover, to posit, as many commentators do, that this passage proves the Torah to be for the Jews but not for the Gentiles, is equally fallacious. For if the Torah is that which partakes of the “weak and worthless elements,” then it is good for no one! Yet Paul considers the Torah to be holy, just, and of a genuinely spiritual nature (Rom 7:12, 14). If one is able to appreciate Paul’s view of the Torah as the divine revelation of God to His people, then one simply cannot interpret this passage as forbidding the Gentiles to espouse Torah. Rather, if we interpret the passage in light of the social and religious events of the day, we understand a scenario where Gentile believers found themselves with only one valid choice: suffer for the name of Yeshua. It is easy to understand how some, perhaps many, would strongly consider either returning to a participation in the Imperial cult or becoming a proselyte to avoid this persecution.

**10–11 You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.**

Most commentators consider this entire section to be a polemic against the Torah, in which Paul puts faith in Yeshua as over against life in Torah, and considers the one valid, while the other to be an enslavement to the “weak and worthless elements” of the world. Those who take this view consistently

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understand v. 10 to be speaking of the Sabbath, Rosh Chodesh (New Moon), *moedim* (Appointed Times = seasons) and perhaps the *Sh'mittah* and *Yovel* (Sabbatical and Jubilee years). Their take on this verse usually goes like this: "You are beginning to observe the Sabbath, the New Moon, the other festivals and even the Sabbatical and Jubilee years! What's happened to you?! I'm beginning to think my labors have been in vain, that you've entirely left the faith!"

However, if we understand the social background that was causing the Gentile believers to flirt with some involvement in the Imperial cult in order to escape persecution, we may continue to interpret Paul's words as applying to pagan rituals, not Torah observance.

The Imperial cult had its own days, months, seasons, and years.

Troy Martin has argued, against the consensus, that what the addressees are turning back to are not Jewish practices but pagan ones. I find his case convincing, and it is useful for evaluating the matter at hand. Stephen Mitchell makes an observation that sharpens the point ... "the force which would have drawn new adherents back to conformity with the prevailing paganism, was the public worship of the emperor. The packed calendar of the ruler cult dragooned the citizens of Antioch into observing days, months, seasons, and years which it laid down for special recognition and celebration."<sup>38</sup>

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One author goes so far as to say that "time itself was changed by the imperial cult."<sup>39</sup>

This interpretation, that Paul is referring to pagan days, months, seasons, and years fits best with the language he uses in which he speaks of the Gentiles as "turning back again" (ἐπιστρέφετε, *epistrefete*) to the weak and worthless elements. He has already identified their past as that of idolatry (v. 8). To use the term "turn back again" for those whose former life was one of idolatry helps us identify that to which they were tempted to turn.<sup>40</sup>

This should not be construed as suggesting that the Gentile believers were considering a denial of their faith. Nor is it to suggest that immediate persecution was upon them if they did not become proselytes. It is more likely that they were weighing all of the options: if they became proselytes, their "father in the faith" (Paul) would consider that they had compromised the Gospel he had delivered to them. If they refused to become proselytes,

38 Nanos, *Irony*, p. 267. He quotes Martin, "Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal 4:10 and Col 2:16," *NTS* 42(1996): 120-32 and Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor* (Oxford, 1993), 2.10.

39 S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1984), 106-7, quoted from Nanos, *Ibid.*

40 Some have argued that the similar notice in Col 2:16ff cannot be interpreted as referring to pagan worship, and since these texts are parallel, this would suggest that our text cannot be so interpreted. However, in the Colossian text, Paul does not include the element of "years" which he does include here. Furthermore, the context of Col 2 is that of a gnosticism that has been mixed into the worship of the community, and it is probable that the early Gnostic heresies also included sectarian "rules" regarding the Sabbath, Festivals, and Rosh Chodesh (New Moon). So while Paul uses similar language in both instances, it is quite feasible that the situations he addressed were very different.

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!<sup>41</sup>

## **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

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<sup>41</sup> Nanos, *Irony*, p. 270.