

*but the one who is disturbing you will bear his own judgment, whoever he is* – We might be surprised by the reference to just one individual, as though there was one Influencer. 1:7, 12 confirm that it was otherwise. We might understand this language to suggest that there was a primary teacher who had gained a following, and that this remark is directed towards him. If the pressure upon the believing Gentiles was exerted primarily by a prominent teacher, Paul might have considered him most responsible. Many have attempted to speculate who this one might have been, but this is essentially a waste of time. The best one can do is to presume that this teacher was likely connected to the group from Jerusalem that had also caused Paul grief, and who were intent upon maintaining the status quo of the prevailing opinion that Gentiles needed to become proselytes in order to enjoy full membership in the Torah community of Israel (cf. Acts 15:1).

Paul uses the same word for “disturb” (ταρασσω, *tarassō*) here as he does in 1:7. The word itself means “to cause trouble” or “stir up,” “unsettle.” The doctrines being taught by this teacher, and by those who followed him, had unsettled the Gentile believers, causing them to doubt their own identity within the people of God, or at least their equality within the believing community. Being classed as outsiders to the covenant, they were open to the false teaching that offered them a way in.

The verdict is that he “will bear his own judgment.” The verb βαστάζω, *bastazō*, “to bear” is used three more times in chapter six (vv. 2, 5, 17), and though not a widely used word, could mean to “bear stress or trouble.” Perhaps Paul has in mind the judgment of the final day (it was a theme familiar in his epistles, cf. Rom 2:2-3; 3:8; 13:2; 1Cor 11:29, 34, etc.), though it is equally possible that he anticipated more immediate divine retribution upon the one who had caused trouble for the body of Messiah in Galatia. We may note that to the Corinthians, Paul estimated that the sickness incurred by some, and even their death, was the result of their unrighteous behavior (cf. 1Cor 11).

### **11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.**

The irritation Paul has felt over the situation in Galatia comes through in his manner of writing. He is short and terse, often using compacted style as a result of his passion over the subject at hand. Thus, he moves abruptly to a new subject.

*if I still preach circumcision* – To what exactly is Paul referring? The answer to this question has been the matter of much debate among the commentators and theologians. We will discuss the various interpretations below, but there are some things that seem fairly clear in terms of why Paul would be bringing this issue up in the epistle of Galatians. First, apparently some (perhaps including the Influencers) were saying that Paul was in agreement with their position, that a Gentile needed to become a proselyte in order to be assured of covenant status. Secondly, it appears by the use of the word “still” (ἔτι, *eti*) that Paul admits to having taught this doctrine at sometime in the past. Thirdly, his logic is that if he were still teaching circumcision (proselytism), there would be no good explanation for his constantly being persecuted, for then he would be received with open arms by the majority. Finally, Paul’s perspective was that to teach circumcision (and thus to be sheltered from persecution) would be to nullify the centrality of the death of Messiah upon the execution stake: the two approaches (need for proselytism vs. covenant status as the benefit of faith in

Yeshua) could not stand together as friends. The one nullifies the other.

The following represent the general interpretations of “if I still preach circumcision:”<sup>28</sup>

1. That Paul, before coming to faith in Yeshua, taught circumcision, i.e., that a Gentile needed to become a proselyte in order to have covenant status.
2. That Paul’s “circumcision-free” gospel was not widely known among the communities heavily weighted by Jewish members, and that they simply presumed he still was preaching the “company line.”
3. That the word “still” (ἔτι) should be understood as “yet,” yielding “If I am yet to preach circumcision.” The point would be that Paul is asking a hypothetical question: “If I were to agree with your position that circumcision is necessary, would I no longer be persecuted? But then what would be made of the cross, since it is the real stumbling block?”
4. That Paul is actually addressing a second group of opponents other than the Influencers. This group felt that Paul needed to distance himself from his Jewishness and let his message be much more free from the constraints of the synagogue. In this case, “if I still preach circumcision” would mean “if I am still clinging to my Jewishness.”
5. That by “circumcision” Paul is referring not to physical circumcision, but circumcision of the heart. Thus, his emphasis upon “putting to death the deeds of the flesh” (cf. Rom 8:13; Col 3:5ff) was considered a “spiritual circumcision.” The meaning of the current text would thus be: “Since I continue to preach a spiritual circumcision, why am I persecuted for this?” The point would be that those who were urging proselytism were neglecting the more important point of righteous living. They were teaching the ritual only, without reference to the need for a sanctified life, something that Paul’s preaching of the cross emphasized (i.e., death with the Messiah = death to sin in all of its dimensions).
6. That Paul was being accused of being inconsistent. He was preaching a “circumcision-free” gospel to the Galatians, but when among a primarily Jewish audience, he was holding the “party line” and teaching that Gentiles needed to become proselytes, in order to avoid being ostracized from his own community.

It would seem that this final option is most likely the best, because it fits the context of Galatians, and has support from what we know of Paul’s mission in general. The other options are either far-fetched, or they do not fit the general message of this epistle.

The fact that Paul was misunderstood seems clear. Peter makes the forthright statement that some of his writings are difficult to understand, and that some were twisting his teaching to their own demise (2Pet 3:16). Moreover, the circumcision of Timothy “on account of the Jews” (Acts

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28 I’m summarizing Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 278-79 here.

16:1-3) may have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by his opponents. We know, of course, that when Paul returned to Jerusalem some years later, he was warned by James and the rest that there were those believers who were zealous for the Torah, who were circulating the false report that Paul was teaching the entire abolishment of the Torah, and specifically that he was instructing the Jewish communities “not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs” (Acts 21:21). We may add to these the words of 1Cor 9:20-21,

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Torah, as under the Torah though not being myself under the Torah, so that I might win those who are under the Torah; to those who are without Torah, as without Torah, though not being without the Torah of God but under the Torah of Messiah, so that I might win those who are without Torah.

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Taken in isolation, this statement sounds very much like Paul was accepting a double standard in order to achieve his desired goal, i.e., the winning of people (both Jew and Gentile) to faith in Messiah Yeshua.

It seems very likely, then, that one of the arrows in the Influencers arsenal was that Paul was two-faced in his approach to the matter of Gentiles and proselytism, and that in his inconsistencies he was requiring something of the Galatian Gentiles which he was not requiring of other communities.

If this is how we should understand Paul’s point here, then his words are given to make sure the Gentiles realize that he is not inconsistent in his message, but that his own persecution at the hands of those who required circumcision proved beyond doubt that he was consistently teaching the inclusion of the Gentiles apart from their need to become proselytes: “why then am I still persecuted?” This coincides with the way he ends this epistle: “From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Yeshua” (6:17). The scars he bore in his body from the persecutions he endured were living proof that he was consistent in his message, whether he was in a primarily Gentile community, or one dominated by Jewish members.

*Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished* – The issue of how his message was perceived by the Influencers was only a minor point from Paul’s perspective. Much more important was what such an inconsistent message (of which he was accused) would do to the message of the cross. For Paul, the preaching of the death of Messiah was the core element of the gospel. If he were actually teaching that a Gentile gained a greater covenant status by becoming a proselyte, then the message of the cross had become nothing — it had been abolished. Since the beginning of this epistle Paul has made the point that the real issue at stake was the significance of the cross. The Influencers’ message disregarded the very reason why Yeshua would have had to die, and as such, their message was not “goodnews,” but rather a message of condemnation. The cross presented a “stumbling block” (σκανδάλον, *skandalon*), meaning that which “gives offense or causes revulsion, that which arouses opposition, an object of anger or disapproval.” The death of Yeshua was indeed a stumbling block, a “scandal” to the Jewish community because it represented the decisive opposite to their own view of covenant membership. If it were necessary for the Messiah to die in order to make sinners righteous, then it was clear that Israel did not intrinsically own righteousness as the elect people. It required the admission that Israel, the covenant people of God, were not

sufficiently righteous on the basis of their national identity. And it the dismissal of long-held traditions that taught otherwise.

Indeed, the fact that the cross was the stumbling block in the whole scope of the gospel was a consistent theme in the early apologetic message of Yeshua's followers (cf. Matt 16:23; 17:7; Rom 17:17; 1Jn 2:10; Rev 2:14). The teaching that the royal and triumphant Messiah would be crucified at the hands of mere mortals set the whole idea of rabbinic messianism on its head. But perhaps most egregious was the fact that through the death of the Messiah, the distinction between Jew and Gentile within the covenant people of God had been abolished, and this hit at the very core of Pharisaic teaching in regard to the covenant itself. Such taking down of the wall between Israel and the nations was viewed as a disintegration of the essential identity markers by which the 1st Century Judaisms defined themselves. It was in the cross that the Jew and the Gentile both gained their identity, an identity which first and foremost was not based upon nationality or lineage, but was based upon the elective love of God. In short, the cross made it clear that Israel was not the owner of her own identity, but that her true identity lay in her relationship to a crucified and risen Messiah, and that the elect from the nations entered into this same identity as equally chosen by God.

Dunn makes an interesting point:

More to the point here, the cross so understood would seem to have been a stumbling block to Christian Jews (the other missionaries) as well: they could accept the redefinition of Messiah which Jesus' death and resurrection made necessary; but they could not accept that a further redefinition of relationships between Jew and Gentile was also necessary.<sup>29</sup>

The cross as a stumbling block, then, is at the core of the Messianic message of the gospel given to us by the Apostles. In the cross, human pride in ethnicity and its corollary, the "works of the Torah" as necessary for Gentile inclusion, is done away with. The offense of the cross is thus a "weighty counterbalance to all pride of position, nationhood, or life-style."<sup>30</sup> It is also the necessary fulfillment of the prophets:

Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Is 8:14, cf. Rom 9:33; 1Pet 2:8).

Yet we must be careful to distinguish between the execution stake as a stumbling block to the pride of sinful mankind, and the cross as a symbol of prejudice and hatred. From the perspective of the Jewish people, the cross has been used by the Christian Church as a lethal weapon, not as a symbol of the infinite love of Israel's God toward His creation. Rather than viewing the cross as the mark of Christian love, Jewish people have often seen the cross as the symbol of Christian anti-Semitism, and rightly so, for the message of the gospel has been twisted in the history of the Christian Church into something it never was. That therefore Jewish people may "stumble" over this cross as falsely presented by the Christian Church is

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<sup>29</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 281.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

not what Paul is speaking of here. If the message of the death of Messiah is to be properly lived out before a watching world, and particularly to the Jewish community, it must be demonstrated that Yeshua's death has changed us, has recreated us into people who know how to walk in the footsteps of our Master. Paul could never have envisioned the gospel apart from God's continuing love and faithfulness to Israel—even to Israel who has rejected His Messiah. And if God's love is unchanging toward Israel, then surely those who claim to have died with Messiah should have that same perspective.

## 12 I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

These words of the Apostle shock our modern sensitivities! How could an Apostle of the Messiah utter such words?! "Paul gives out with a sarcastic and dismissive snort"<sup>31</sup> as he shows his contempt for the work of the Influencers. This demonstrates his righteous anger against those who would disrupt the believers at Galatia. (He uses the word "trouble," *ἀναστατόω*, *anastatoō*, which denotes considerable disturbance, cf. Acts 17:6; 21:38.) Paul's consternation is commensurate with his love for the truth as it is found in Yeshua. If the Influencers are so certain that circumcision (cutting the flesh) would benefit the believing Gentiles, perhaps they would be willing to cut themselves! If a little error is good, perhaps a bigger error is better. This is pure irony. For Paul wishes that they would become eunuchs! The Torah is specific about the place of eunuchs: they are banned from the "assembly of the Lord" and from the priesthood (Deut 23:1, Lev 21:20). In essence, he is saying that he wishes they would be out of the picture when it comes to their ability to influence the rest.

Actually, self-castration was something engaged in by those of the cult of Cybele, which had its home in Galatia. Thus Paul's wish is not only that these Influencers, in using the knife, would make themselves excluded from any leadership role, but that they would actually "participate in a form of paganism which could not but be thoroughly despised by the Jews."<sup>32</sup> It may also be that Paul is hearkening back to the *karat* ("cut off") penalties prescribed in the Torah for those who engaged in various transgressions.<sup>33</sup> If cutting was all that the Influencers had on their minds, then they deserve to be "cut off" themselves.

So while we may be shocked at this kind of language, it actually approaches the genre of the prophetic voice, which at times would lapse into grotesque metaphor to make the point (cf. Ps 137:9). Even Yeshua, in prophetic metaphor (and not in a literal sense) spoke of "cutting off" bodily members if they offended, i.e., caused stumbling. Surely Paul's theological ire has arisen! In another sense, Paul uses *reductio ad absurdum*<sup>34</sup> to show how utterly silly the message of the Influencers really was. In the end, it shows beyond doubt that the message of the Influencers could never be tolerated, not even to the slightest extent.

31 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 282.

32 Ibid., p. 283.

33 Gen 17:14; Ex. 9:15; 30:33, 38; 31:14; Lev 7:20-21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9; 18:29; 19:8; 20:5, 18; 23:29; Num 9:13; 15:30.

34 Reduction to the absurd; a method of indirect proof by deducing a contradiction from the negation of a proposition taken together with other propositions previously proved or granted.

**13–15 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Torah is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.**

Paul has completed his primary argument against the Influencers, and he finished with a flurry! But he now turns to the positive statement of spiritual encouragement and exhortation to the followers of Yeshua at Galatia. Though he has shown his passion throughout the course of the polemic, his spirit is still energized to speak of the manner of life that should characterize the believer, a manner of life which in every way is led and energized by the Ruach.

Having shown them that the rabbinic *halalchah* of conversion was not the course they should follow, then how were the believers to conduct themselves? If the traditions that had set aside the pure teaching of Torah were to be jettisoned, what was left for the followers of Yeshua to govern their everyday decisions? Where does freedom turn into license, and what are the characteristics of true freedom in Yeshua?

All too often this section of Galatians is interpreted to mean Paul was teaching the Galatians that they were no longer to consider the Torah as a way of life—that they had been “liberated” from the restraints of the “Law” and were now free to live as they liked. That the leading of the Spirit had now replaced the instructions of the Torah. But we know this is not the case, for the simple reason that in describing freedom in the Spirit, Paul immediately turns to the Torah for substantiation of what this freedom is (quoting Lev 19:18). Rather, Paul has made a clear and substantial case for why the Gentiles need never submit to the specific traditions of the Sages that taught inclusion into the people of God through the works of the Torah. But in jettisoning the man-made doctrines, he is not negating nor diminishing the place of the Torah in the life of the believer. “All Scripture ... is profitable” (2Tim 3:16-17), profitable to equip the believer for every good deed (*mitzvah*). “Freedom” in the flesh is actually bondage. True freedom exists in one’s submission to the Spirit. Once again, the paradigm of the exodus is in view. Israel was set free from Egypt’s bondage in order to serve the Lord (Ex 8:1). Whenever liberty is contemplated, one must ask, “liberty for what?” Liberty without moral and holy purpose is actually a form of bondage.

*you were called to freedom, brethren* – Once again Paul begins with the divine initiative: God is the One who calls the sinner, who seeks those who are lost. The sovereign work of God, in effectually calling sinners, is the inevitable result of His having chosen them for salvation (thus Paul addresses them as “brethren”). Like God sending Moses to Israel in order to lead her out of the slavery of Egypt, so God, through His Spirit, calls the sinner to Himself, into the freedom of worship. Here, as elsewhere, the “calling” Paul speaks of is effectual. It is not merely an “invitation,” but a divine appointment to which the sinner has been drawn by God’s grace. The calling of God in this sense always results in repentance and faith.<sup>35</sup>

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35 Cf. Rom 8:28, 30; 11:29; 1Cor 1:2, 9, 26; 7:17, 22; Gal 1:6; Eph 4:4; Col 3:15; 1Thess 4:7; 2Thess 1:11; 1Tim 6:12.

*only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh* – Paul uses the word “flesh” (σάρξ, *sarks*) to mean one’s sinful nature; reliance upon oneself rather than reliance upon God; the general weakness of oneself in light of being part of the fallen world.<sup>36</sup> Once the Gentile believers were firmly grounded in the fact that they were not under the rule of the Influencers, and that they need not become proselytes in order to be fully welcomed into the congregation of Israel, they may have drawn the erroneous conclusion that they could “make their own way,” that they could determine on their own what was right for them. Such a scenario would inevitably lead to chaos and worse. The fact that they were not to become proselytes did not mean that they could live as they pleased, or that they could form their own private *halachah*. Though they were not proselytes, they were still *bona fide* members of the covenant, and part of a covenant community of faith. As such, they could not live unto themselves—that is not what they had been freed to do.

The Greek for “freedom” is ἐλευθερία, *eleutheria*, and denotes “the state of being free,” particularly in the Scriptures from slavery to someone or something. They had been freed from the slavery of sin (the “old man” had been crucified, Rom 6:6) and had come into the state of liberty to serve God and others (the two halves of the 10 Words). They had not been set free from the bondage of man-made rules in order to “have it their way.” The word “opportunity” is ἀφορμή, *aphorme*, which means “occasion, pretext or opportunity.” The freedom of the believer is not to be seen as an opportunity to go one’s own way.

*but through love serve one another* – Rather, the freedom that has been won for us by Messiah is the freedom to serve one another. We have the freedom to put our own desires second, and the needs of our neighbor first. In so doing, we exercise our freedom to be conformed to the image of Messiah. Even as the Influencers were relying upon their flesh (ethnic status) to secure a right standing before God, so the Gentile believers were not to glory in their “non-Jewishness” as though this put them into some kind of exclusive group, now favored by the message of the Apostle. Rather, each one was to serve the other as equal members in Messiah.

*For the whole Torah is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”* – Paul is not negating the Torah, or reducing it to just one command, as though the other claims of the Torah are now no longer applicable. Anyone who was aware of the common rabbinic propensity to summarize the Torah would be aware of Paul’s point. For instance, consider the well-known passage from the Talmud, which speaks of summing the Torah commandments:

Micah came and reduced them to three [principles], as it is written, It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: [i] only to do justly, and [ii] to love mercy and [iii] to walk humbly before thy God. ‘To do justly,’ that is, maintaining justice; and to love mercy,’ that is, rendering every kind office; ‘and walking humbly before thy God,’ that is, walking in funeral and bridal processions. And do not these facts warrant an *a fortiori* conclusion that if in matters that are not generally performed in private the Torah enjoins ‘walking humbly,’ is it not ever so much more requisite in matters that usually call for modesty? Again came Isaiah and reduced them to two [princi-

36 For the use of the word “flesh” in Paul, note the following: Rom 6:19; 7:14, 18, 25; 8:3-8; 13:14; 2Cor 4:11; 10:2-4; Eph 2:3; Phil. 3:3-4.

ples], as it is said, Thus saith the Lord, [i] Keep ye justice and [ii] do righteousness [etc.]. Amos came and reduced them to one [principle], as it is said, For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me and live. To this R. Nahman b. Isaac demurred, saying: [Might it not be taken as,] Seek Me by observing the whole Torah and live? — But it is Habakuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said, But the righteous shall live by his faith.<sup>37</sup>

Also famous is Hillel's summation:

On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, 'What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.'<sup>38</sup>

And of course we know the words of Yeshua on the matter:

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Torah? And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." On these two commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:36–40)

Here, in our Galatians text, Paul sums the whole Torah in the quote from Lev 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In so doing he shows that he has something in common with the Influencers, namely, a desire to do the whole Torah (cf. 5:3). The difference, of course, is how one defined the "whole Torah." Paul, like his Master before him, sought to unshackle the Torah of God from the restrictive rabbinic oral Torah that had, in many cases, redefined it away from its primary intent. The Torah was not given to divide the people of God, but to stand as God's gracious teaching in righteousness. The Torah, rightly obeyed, would therefore bring about a humility toward one another, not a haughty attitude revolving around who does what, and who doesn't. In other words, both Paul and his detractors had the same goal (to obey the whole Torah), but each prescribed opposite means to achieve that goal. The Influencers wanted to "keep the whole Torah" by requiring strict conformity to the rabbinic understanding of the Torah, an understanding which was designed on the one hand to divide between Jew and non-Jew, and on the other hand, to make the Torah manageable so as to allow personal boasting. Paul's approach to keeping the whole Torah was that the principle of love would govern, not the rulings of this Sage or that one. Surely in the diaspora, the matter of Torah life would need to be adjusted. Distance from the Temple, for instance, would surely mean that daily life would take on some differences when compared to those who lived in Jerusalem. These adjustments were ruled by the Sages and put into the community's *halachah*. Paul wants the same liberty, but he wants love for one's neighbor to be the deciding factor. From his point of

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37 b. *Makkot* 24a.

38 b. *Shabbat* 31a.



view, each was to be as much concerned to aid his neighbor in obeying the Torah as he was in keeping it himself. Love for one's neighbor was to be the constant "*beit din*" (ruling court) in matters of community relationship.

The quote from Lev 19:18 is directly from the Lxx, itself a direct translation of the Hebrew. Interestingly, this verse shows up only a few times in the midrashim,<sup>39</sup> but is the most quoted verse from the Torah in the Apostolic Scriptures.<sup>40</sup> Thus, no doubt based upon Yeshua's assertion that the whole Torah can be summed up in the Shema (Deut 6:4ff; 11:13ff) and Lev 19:18, this verse took on special meaning within the communities of The Way. And rightly so, for it enjoined upon the followers of Yeshua a *halachah* which conformed to the very incarnation itself:

For you know the grace of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. (2Cor 8:9)

But we must be careful to consider what "loving one's neighbor as oneself" entails. The idea that loving one's neighbor would be the "easier road" of the Torah is wrong headed. In fact, loving one's neighbor requires the most careful attention to the Torah, for it is in following the wise and gracious precepts of the Torah that one is best able to love one's neighbor. Loving one's neighbor is "open-ended." Nevertheless, it is limited to one's neighbor—we're not required to love the multitudes as we love our neighbor, nor would the Torah think such a thing possible, since love is envisioned within the scope of doing. The nature of this *mitzvah* is that there is not some list of prescribed, man-made laws to determine when one has finished. Loving one's neighbor means willingly applying the righteous life of Torah in relationship with one's neighbor, and this is a life-time endeavor. The whole matter of how one treats another's property; how one respects another's time; how one offers help to someone in need; how one shares in the corporate joys of worship; how one respects the privacy of relationships, and how one prepares in advance to love one's neighbor—all of these constitute the living out of God's Torah.

Moreover, in the end, one is only able to love one's neighbor as one should, if one is also engaged in loving God with all one's heart, soul, and might. For the motivation for loving one's neighbor comes first and foremost from a heart that desires to please the Almighty. Love, by its very nature, is sacrificial, because it calls upon the one who loves to give himself or herself to the one being loved. Therefore love for one's neighbor begins by trusting God, for loving one's neighbor will inevitably call for strength where there is no strength, supply where there is no supply, and consolation where consolation may be lacking. In this perspective, then, loving one's neighbor is the end result of walking in obedience to God's Torah.

*But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.* – There is perhaps a play on words here, owing to the rhyming sound of the verb in v. 13, "serve one another" (δουλεύετε, *douleuete*) and the verb in v. 15, "devour one another" (δάκνυτε, *daknete*). We might attempted to capture this by an English translation: "serve one another ... but if you savage one another." The point may be that Paul intends to show the stark contrast between serving one another as over against consuming each other. The former

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39 Mid. Rab. *Gen* 55:3; Mid. Rab. *Lev* 24:5; Mid. Rab. *Ecc* 8:8; it does not seem to appear in the Bavli.

40 Matt 5:43; 19:19; Mk 12:31, 33 and parallels; Rom 13:9; James 2:8.

has the other person's welfare in mind, the latter is entirely selfish.

The scene that Paul sets before the minds of his readers is one of dogs or animals preying upon each other. The NJB captures this with "snapping at one another, and tearing one another to pieces." It was not uncommon in the ancient literature to compare bad behavior to that of animals, but such a comparison was obviously meant to be rhetorical and sobering. Mankind is distinguished from the animals by the presence of the image of God within him. He ought not to stoop to the level of animal activity, even toward those with whom one may have violent disagreements. Paul may be subtly referring to his own treatment at the hands of those who had set themselves against him.

Moreover, a call to freedom, which included a willingness to set aside some of the rabbinic strictures in order to receive the Gentiles, could be misunderstood if the foundation of loving one's neighbor was neglected. One's own personal freedoms may need to be set aside in order to effectively love one's neighbor. Here, once again, the rule of love becomes the determining factor in matters of personal *halachah*.

Most interesting is the fact that Paul considers only one option for the Galatian assemblies: unity. How different is his perspective than that of our day. If we consider the stern and even harsh language the Apostle has employed against the Influencers, one would expect to hear (had Paul been living in our day) an encouragement for his followers to "get up and leave" and "start their own congregation." After all, how could those who believed the truth continue to fellowship with "the others" who held such erroneous doctrines?! But such an idea finds no place in Paul's thinking. The only option is remaining together, and so the appeal is given not to allow the animal-like biting and snapping, perpetrated by false teaching, to continue. Such a perspective reminds us that Paul is writing to a Jewish community, not the Christian Church as it came to be known in the following centuries. In the context in which the Galatian community existed, it was impossible to "get up and start one's own congregation." There were only two religious communities: Judaism and paganism. To begin "something new" was simply impossible in light of the Roman sanctions against atheism. While the Jewish community enjoyed the freedom of their religion in which they were exempt from the requirements of emperor worship, and participation in the festivals of the gods, to begin something new meant leaving this protection and becoming vulnerable to the pressures of Roman in regard to religion in general. In short, the two factions we envision at Galatia (followers of Paul's teaching vs. the Influencers), could not have left and gone to "another church." The synagogue was the only viable place of worship for those who believed in the One God of Israel, and the synagogue was viewed as within the Jewish community, not outside of it.

**16–17 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.**

Paul now moves into an explanation regarding life lived by the power of the Spirit (vv. 16-24). It is not enough simply to exhort the Galatians to treat each other in the realm of love, or even to enjoin upon them the Torah commandment to love one's neighbor. There must likewise be the ability to