

will from the Spirit reap eternal life – For Paul, eternal life does not begin at the close of this life, and the ushering in of the world to come. Eternal life is the possession of every true believer. He or she experiences it, in some measure, even in this fallen world. But his point in ending the verse with this phrase is to show the contrast. Those whose lives are marked by the fruit of the flesh (unrighteousness) can only expect to reap corruption. The metaphor is clear: man was made from dust, and he returns to dust. The flesh has no ability to lay hold of eternal life.

Now this should not be wrested from its larger context. By flesh, Paul often means “trusting in one’s ethnic status.” Those Galatians who were being persuaded to rely upon a man-made ritual (becoming a proselyte) for their place in the world to come are here condemned by the Apostle’s words. One’s ethnic status will have no bearing on God’s judgment in the last days, for God is no respecter of persons (Rom 2:11). Rather, those who are born from above, and who are therefore endowed with the indwelling Spirit, will progress in a life of righteousness, actually living more and more in line with God’s commands. As a result, when they stand before the judgment, they will be pronounced righteous, because Yeshua’s sacrifice for their sin not only paid the penalty due to God’s justice, but it also recreated them into people who longed for, and lived out, God’s righteous ways. Thus, Paul can claim that not the hearers of the Torah, but the doers of the Torah will be justified (Rom 2:13).

9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

Paul continues the agricultural metaphor. The work required in planting and harvesting seems never ending, not to mention the daily tending of fields and care for the crop in its growing stage. Yet the farmer has his eye on the harvest. The hard work of the days preceding the harvest are all deemed worthwhile once the harvest is in. To focus only on the day’s labor, and not on the reward which it will bring, might cause the farmer to weary of his work. But the hope of reaping is what keeps him going, even when the tasks are difficult.

The same is true for the believer in Yeshua. The doing of the *mitzvot*, while a joy on the one hand, may in the course of life require much diligence and work. The life of obedience is still a life of struggle. Yet our eyes must ultimately be on the harvest, that is, the time when we will stand before the Almighty and hear the words “well done, good and faithful servant” (note that He will not say “well said,” or “well confessed,” but “well done”). It is this sure hope, that one day we will “be like Him, for we will see Him as He is” (1Jn 3:2), that gives us renewed energy to “do good.”

By this phrase, “do good,” Paul is surely talking of living according to God’s commandments, following in the footsteps of Yeshua. He reiterates this concept in Titus:

looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:13–14)

The life of a believer is to be characterized by “good deeds,” or to put it

in a Hebraic sense, the *mitzvot*. This is a life of Torah obedience.

Thus Paul, once again, expects the Gentile believers to live according to what is “good,” and he surely must consider the Torah of God as the standard for “good.” In exhorting the believers at Galatia, and particularly the Gentile believers (since they were the target of the Influencers’ message) not to rely upon the flesh in terms of their covenant standing, he does not, in the same breath, teach that the Torah as the standard of righteousness for the believer was somehow negated or abolished. Quite the opposite: he exhorts them not to grow weary in “doing good.”

The two pitfalls Paul sees for the Galatians are that 1) they might lose heart (μη̄ ἐκκακῶμεν, *me ekkakōmen*) and 2) they might grow weary (μη̄ ἐκλύομενοι, *me ekluomenoi*). The first word (ἐκκακέω, *eklakeō*) is made up of two words, *ek*, “out from,” and *akeo*, “to do evil, injustice.” The word came to mean “become discouraged” as a result of calamity, or other negative aspects of life. Discouragement is overcome by knowing the truth, and confessing it as one’s own perspective. Even when the sun is obscured by the clouds, one still is sure that the sun remains, though not seen. Likewise, the heart of faith, in the midst of difficult and discouraging times, remains steadfast upon the Lord, knowing that He ordains all things, and that He is ready and willing to forgive the repentant soul who comes to Him for help.

The second term (from ἐκλύω, *ekluō*) means literally “to lose out,” and has the sense of “lose one’s strength,” “become weary.” The constant drain of life’s demands can zap one of his or her strength. This is true both physically and spiritually. This highlights the need for community, for friends with the same goals and perspectives, that can help carry the load. The pianist who attempts to play a four-hands composition without a second pianist is doomed to failure! The life of righteousness was never designed for lone rangers. When the burdens of life become more than one can bear, the community of brothers and sisters in the Lord have the happy privilege of “bearing each other’s burdens, and thus fulfilling the Torah of Messiah.” But this takes humility on the part of the one who is growing weary. Accepting the help from one’s community members is likewise an acknowledgment that one is not entirely self-sufficient. Ultimately, it is the Great Shepherd Who bears our burdens, but often He does so through the hands of others.

The harvest that will be reaped is “in due time.” By this Paul means “in God’s appointed time.” We sow, but God gives the increase.

10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

As Paul comes to the end of this paragraph of exhortation, he incorporates the same term as in the previous verse: “in due time” (translated “while we have opportunity”). The harvest is future, in God’s appointed time, but that does not mean we simply “rely and relax” in the present time. The current hour affords us the opportunity to “fulfill the Torah of Messiah” by doing good to all, and especially the “household of faith.”

The community of Galatia was comprised, no doubt, of both believers and non-believers, Jews and Gentiles. While all within the community had committed themselves in some measure to the rule of the community (or else they would have not been part of the community), Paul does not limit his initial exhortation for doing good merely to those who had made a clear and open confession of Yeshua as the Messiah. The general life of faith is one of doing

good to all people (literally, “do what is good to all”). The Torah, emphasized by the teaching of Yeshua, commanded that one do good even to one’s enemy. Thus, the life of godliness extends to all.

Yet in the course of life, there will be limited ability to do good. One can only do so much. Thus, when choices must be made, the “household of faith” takes top priority. The familial language fits the Apostle’s point perfectly. It would hardly be right for a son to neglect his own parents in favor of helping someone outside of the family. In like manner, those who have confessed Yeshua as Messiah are to be treated with the priority of family. Their needs come before the needs of those outside of the circle of faith.

Paul’s use of the term, “household of faith,” may likewise have a direct bearing on the overall message of this epistle. For the Influencers, that which rendered a person a member of the covenant, and therefore as within the “household of Israel,” was one’s ethnic status. From the Qumran texts we discover such terms as “the house of truth in Israel” (1QS 5.6), “the house of holiness for Israel” (CD 3.10), and “the house of the Torah” (CD 20.10, 13). It would seem, then, that it was not uncommon for various sects to draw their specific boundary markers, and refer to those who were “in” as a “house” or “household.” It is remarkable, then, that Paul uses “household of faith” (τοὺς οἰκείους τῆς πίστεως). For it was not ethnicity, nor the “works of the Torah” (*halachot* specific to a given sect), but faith that bound the followers of Yeshua together. The “bloodline” of all true believers is faith.

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

Paul now begins a final section of the epistle (vv. 11-18), in which he gives some final words of exhortation, and a final rebuff to the Influencers, as well as his blessing upon the Galatian believers.

Paul first notes the large letters with which he was writing. We may presume that the letter was actually dictated to an assistant, and that Paul, at this point, finishes the epistle himself. To have written the entire epistle in large letters would have been highly out of the ordinary, primarily because the cost of papyrus was so high, and large letters would require more sheets.

There have been numbers of suggestions offered as to why Paul was writing with such large letters. Some have felt that this indicates a disability on Paul’s part, either in eyesight, or in his inability to hold the writing instrument carefully (because of injury or disease in his hand). Still others suggest that he intended these final words to have particular emphasis, and thus he accepted the extra expense of papyrus in order to make his point. Bruce⁷ offered the idea that Paul wrote large enough letters so that the papyrus could be raised up for all to read. Of course, all of these are speculative. It may simply have been that Paul was known for writing with large letters (for what ever reason), and that this gave the mark of authenticity to the letter itself.

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7 F. F. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 268.

12 Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Messiah.

Having taken stylus in hand (if indeed this is what is meant by the former notice of large letters), Paul makes his final appeal to the Galatians. Perhaps his own hand, drawing the letters in larger than normal fashion, will bring the Galatians to finally understand his personal anguish.

He addresses his remarks toward the Influencers, as he has done time and again (1:7-9; 4:17; 5:7-12). They are described as “those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh.” The phrase “make a good showing” is the Greek word *εὐπροσώπεω* (*euprosōpeō*) which literally means “to have a good face.” It is not found elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures, nor is it attested in the non-biblical texts of Paul’s time. It would have been readily understood, however, by the manner in which the word is constructed (*eu* = “good;” *prosōpōn* = face). In the Roman world, one’s face represented one’s character, so that in the dramas an actor would portray a different character by the use of masks. The Latin word *persona* (from which we derive our English “person”) means “mask,” so that it came to mean “role, part, character, or personality.”

It is clear that the Influencers were not intent upon “giving a fair showing” to the general Roman population. Ironically, while the Romans and Greeks considered the human body (which would have been understood by them in the word “flesh”) to be the height of beauty, they just as much considered circumcision a barbaric mutilation and desecration of the body. In using the word “flesh,” Paul is speaking of circumcision, and thus shows that the Influencers’ purpose was to be accepted, not by the Roman populace in general, but to the Jewish community in particular. (It is unfortunate that the NIV substitutes “outwardly” for the word “flesh,” for in doing so, it obscures the rhetorical play on the term itself.)

As is often the case within the current messianic/Torah movement, there is a strong compulsion on the part of some to be accepted by the traditional Jewish community. Many who come into things “messianic,” recognize that in some measure, the life of Torah has been represented by the traditional Jewish community throughout the centuries. Feeling like “johnny-come-latelies,” some messianics attempt to conform in whatever ways possible in order to be accepted by the non-believing Jewish synagogue. Apparently this was also the motivation of the Influencers. Having confessed Yeshua as the true Messiah, they were automatically classed among those who were rejected by the normative Judaism of the time. One way to gain favorable acceptance by the Jewish community that had rejected Yeshua, was to show themselves in agreement in the substantially important issue of proselytism. If the Influencers could persuade the Gentiles to become circumcised, then the opposing synagogues of the rabbis would have no cause for taking a contrary stance. The proselytes were no longer counted as Gentiles, and in this way, the “Gentile problem” disappears.

Here we are given a most important insight into the situation of Paul’s day. The antagonism of the mainline Jewish community against the people of The Way did not center primarily upon the theology of Yeshua as Messiah. Other sects of the day had also proclaimed leading members of their sect as fulfilling the role of Messiah (as would happen eventually in the Bar Kochbah rebellion). The issue that was most egregious, and which had begun the split between the traditional synagogues and the synagogues of The Way, was the matter of

Gentiles. Gentiles, as Gentiles, simply could not be tolerated nor accepted as full-fledged covenant members, and to treat them as though they were (which the congregations of The Way did) caused deep theological and sociological problems. From the standpoint of the rabbis, to allow a Gentile to assume full covenant membership was to blur Jewish identity by allowing Gentiles to participate completely in covenant distinctions that were the primary mark of Jewishness. Moreover, from the viewpoint of the Influencers, the presence of Gentiles within the community was too dangerously close to acceptance of idolatry, for the Gentile world in Paul's day was characterized first and foremost by their idolatrous practices. As long as The Way insisted on equal acceptance of Gentiles, the mainline Jewish communities simply could not accept them. Gentiles, as far as the rabbis were concerned, needed to be encouraged to become proselytes. For the traditional synagogue had no problem with Jews who held divergent opinions (note the stark contrasts between Pharisees and Sadducees in terms of their fundamental beliefs, yet the obvious manner in which the two sects interacted and lived together). It was the presence of Gentiles that created the division.

try to compel you to become circumcised – The Greek word for “compel” is ἀναγκάζω (*anagkazō*), the same word used in 2:14 (“... how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”). It is in the present tense here and most likely suggests an on-going action: “try to keep on compelling you to become circumcised.” The Influencers were compelling the Gentiles to seek a Jewish status in order to be accepted by the wider Jewish community.

simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Messiah – The NASB “simply” should be understood as “only,” as the NIV, “The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Messiah.” This is most likely an exaggeration of polemic, but it may indeed point to the primary motivation of the Influencers. It would seem probable that the Influencers were not in full agreement with the non-believing synagogue, for by all appearances they confessed Yeshua as Messiah. Thus their motivation in compelling the Gentiles to become proselytes was in no way an attempt to lead them to a denial of Yeshua. Rather, their motivation was to make a showing of compliance to the traditional synagogue in order to gain favor with them.

In what way were the Galatian communities of The Way being persecuted by the traditional synagogue? Several options may present themselves. First, it may not be that the synagogue itself was the source of persecution, but rather the Roman government. If the Gentiles failed to become proselytes, and were exposed as non-Jews, they would be required to participate in the veneration of the emperor and in other pagan rituals incumbent upon all Roman citizens. If the Gentile believes refused to become proselytes and as a result were dismissed from the synagogue, they would have been vulnerable to severe persecution at the hands of Rome. Such persecution could have been thought of as suffering “for the cross of Messiah.” Of course, if the Gentiles underwent the ritual of a proselyte, they fell under the freedom of religion granted by Rome to the Jewish community at large.

While this scenario may offer a plausible explanation for what Paul means here, it would fit better in the late 1st Century than in the pre-destruction era. We know that in the post-Bar Kochbah era, the people of The Way were persecuted because they had separated themselves from the

synagogue, and were thus viewed by Rome as atheists for their refusal to participate in the emperor cult.

Yet in Paul's day, such a separation had not yet occurred, and even the so-called "God-fearers" were accepted by the Jewish community (with the idea that they were on their way to becoming proselytes) and tolerated by Rome. A second interpretation must therefore be sought, and it is ready at hand. Paul himself, before coming to faith in the Messiah, was the source of much persecution against the people of The Way. Moreover, after his confession of faith in Yeshua, he himself was the target of persecution from the Jewish community. While it is true that in the 2nd Century, Rome was the primary source of persecution against the believers, in Paul's day, the persecution came primarily from the traditional synagogue.

What would have been the grounds for such persecution? Here we offer only speculation. It would seem that the grounds for persecution were different for the synagogue on the one hand, and Rome on the other. From the synagogue's perspective, the Gentiles offered a threat of idolatry within the Jewish community itself. Driven by the need for national security and ethnic identity, the Jewish communities were striving more and more for self-identity within Torah observance. Those zealous for the Torah may have been convinced that the presence of Gentiles weakened their ability to unite as a nation, and posed a threat toward assimilation to Hellenism, an enemy that had already captivated many. From Rome's viewpoint, citizens who sheltered themselves under the shadow of the synagogue, and failed to participate in the state rituals required of citizens, were shirking their responsibilities, and were a threat to the demise of the Roman society itself. For if citizens who refused to venerate the emperor were tolerated, this could lead to anarchy, and appeared to the populace as though treason against the emperor could be allowed.

If this scenario has warranted, then the synagogue was doing the Roman authorities a favor to root out Gentiles who were simply using the synagogue as a shelter for their unwillingness to venerate the emperor. In essence, by persecuting the Gentiles, the synagogue was exposing citizens of Rome who were failing to act as citizens. In this way, it was a "win-win" situation: the synagogue pressured Gentiles to "make up their mind," and either become proselytes or leave the community. From Rome's point of view, the synagogue was doing them a favor by exposing citizens who were shirking their responsibilities as citizens of the state.

This scenario would also explain Paul's use of "for the cross of Messiah." From an insider's viewpoint, the persecution against the Gentiles was because they believed their covenant status was based upon the work of the Messiah, not by becoming proselytes. In refusing to undergo the ritual of proselytism, the Gentiles were clinging to Paul's gospel, which had as its central pillar the effective work of Yeshua in His death upon the cross. Paul himself describes the unbelieving Jews as the "enemies of the gospel" (Rom 11:28), by which he most likely means "enemies of my gospel" (cf. Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2Tim. 2:8), the message of the good news which emphasized the equality of Jew and Gentile in the body of Messiah.

Dunn puts it this way:

Paul does not mean that these Jewish-Christian missionaries were persecuted (by other Jews) simply because they preached a crucified Jesus as Messiah; that message was clearly at the heart of the gospel for the Christian Jews in Palestine also, and they remained relatively undis-

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turbed. Nor can we infer that the 'different gospel' of 1:6 denied the cross in any direct or overt manner. Paul must mean rather that the policy of insisting on circumcision was a way of removing that which in the common preaching of the crucified Messiah constituted an offense to most other Jews (5:11). And that must refer to the claim of Paul (and others) that the cross was a sufficient basis for acceptance into the inheritance of Israel – this is, the cross alone or, to be more precise, faith in the cross as wholly sufficient to remove sins (1:4) and neutralize the curse of the law so that the promise of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles as well (3:13-14).⁸

It is in this light that we must understand Paul's emphasis upon the cross of Yeshua. When he claims to preach only Messiah, and Him crucified (1Cor 2:2), he is most likely emphasizing this very point, that the only means of true and eternal covenant membership was by faith in Yeshua and His work of salvation in offering Himself as the sacrifice for sinners.

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13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the Torah, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.

It is not precisely clear about whom Paul speaks in this opening clause. Who are the ones who are circumcised?⁹ Some have suggested that Paul speaks of those Gentiles who have already succumbed to the pressure of the Influencers, and are in the process of becoming proselytes. If this were the case, then the fact that they are not obeying the Torah as a fully observant Jew would be understood as the result of their current initiation into the life of Torah. But this does not seem to support Paul's argument, and even seems to undermine it. For surely Paul expects those who have believed in Messiah to be obedient to the Torah.

It would seem better to understand Paul to be addressing his remarks toward the Influencers themselves, as linked to the former verse. Even though they are circumcised, and are compelling the Gentiles likewise to become proselytes, they are themselves inconsistent in the manner in which they obey the Torah. This may parallel Rom 3:12-29, in which Paul teaches that mere circumcision of the flesh has no ability to bring about a changed life. The very fact that they contend for a position of superiority over the Gentiles, based upon their Jewish status (a status based in the "flesh") indicates their heart of pride and arrogance, the very things the Torah was meant to undermine (Rom 3:9-20). Paul's point here, then, is that submitting to the ritual of a proselyte could never guarantee an advancement in holiness, in an actual obedience to the Torah of God. Such ability to obey from the heart comes about through a change of heart, which is the work of the Spirit through the Gospel, not the result of a man-made ritual. It is a sure characteristic of all man-made religion, that it seeks to show itself worthy in the eyes of man, but it has no ability to honestly change a person

⁸ Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 337.

⁹ A textual variant puts the word "circumcised" (περιτεμνόμενοι) in the perfect tense (Ⲡ⁴⁶ B [F G] L Ψ 6. 365. 614. 630. 1175 *pm* b d r sa? bo; Ambst) as over against the present tense witnessed by the majority of manuscripts (Ⲡ A C D K P 0278. 33. 81. 104. 1241^s. 1505. 1739. 2464 *pm* ar f vg sy sa?). See the notes in Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 598. The perfect tense might suggest an on-going emphasis upon winning converts.

in God's eyes. The outside of the cup may be polished, but inside there remains refuse (Matt 23:25f).

yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh – The idea of “boasting in your flesh” most probably does not mean that the Influencers would boast to other Jews about their ability to make proselytes. Rather, “boasting in the flesh” (cf. similar ideas in Rom. 2:17, 23; 4:2) must mean taking confidence in one's ethnic status. The Influencers were ready to encourage the Gentiles who would become proselytes, that by their Jewish status they were assured a *bona fide* standing within the covenant community which they otherwise would never have. To put it more simply: the Influencers were ready to welcome the Gentiles who underwent proselytism with a full embrace as covenant members, to welcome them into the life, culture, and history of the Jewish people. They were ready fully to affirm the Jewish identity of the proselyte. This may have been a powerful incentive to Gentiles who felt marginalized because they were not Jews. Unfortunately, this scenario continues in our day, where Gentiles who are made to feel as “second-class citizens” in the congregation of Messiah are ripe for those who come proclaiming the message of Jewish conversion.

14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

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In direct contrast to the “boasting in the flesh” which characterized the Influencers, Paul makes the strongest assertion (μη γένοιτο, *me genoito*, the same strong words found in 2:17, 3:21) that he will boast only in the finished, salvific work of Yeshua in His death on the cross. In pointing to the death of Yeshua, Paul is not overlooking the necessity of the resurrection, ascension, and intercession of the Messiah (cf. Rom 8:34). Rather, the “cross” became a fitting symbol of the whole scope of redemption accomplished by the Messiah (cf. 1Cor 1:17-18; Eph 2:16; Phil 3:18; Col 1:20; 2:14). The very thing that was an embarrassment to the Influencers was that in which Paul gloried. His boasting was not tied to a national identity, nor to his individual identity as a member of that nation, but first and foremost in the grace that had been given to him, and to his nation (Israel) in the Messiah Yeshua. Against the horror and disgust of crucifixion in the ancient world, Paul boasted in the crucifixion of Yeshua because it was in His death as the necessary sacrifice for sinners that God's promises were realized and would be fulfilled.

Paul's perspective should be a fitting corrective to all messianic Jews who might be tempted to think of their ethnicity as somehow tied to a guarantee of God's eternal blessings, or who might consider themselves to have a greater standing before God than non-Jews. For while it is surely true that God's blessing is eternally secure to His chosen people Israel, such blessing is possible only because of the redemption won at the cross. God's covenant promises to Israel are based upon His sovereign prerogative to bring Israel to faith—faith in the Messiah Yeshua. His blessing will come upon ethnic Israel precisely because He has determined that He will save them, forgiving them of their sins and transgressions (Jer 31:31-34) and give them a new heart of repentance and obedience. Thus all the promises of God, including those bound up in the covenants He has made with the nation of Israel, are “yes and amen in Him” (2Cor 1:20). In this way, all who are “in Messiah” boast only in Him and in nothing else.