

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 γένωιτο, *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.

It is not to be missed, therefore, that Paul uses the full title for Yeshua: Adoneinu Yeshua HaMashiach, “our Lord Yeshua Messiah.” Yeshua as Lord is Master and sovereign, the One able to bring about the intended goal of His sufferings. He is Savior, the only One through whom salvation comes. And He is the Anointed One, the promised redeemer of the prophets. In using His full title here (cf. 1:3; 6:18) Paul emphasizes the full and inevitable reality of the salvation Yeshua purchased for His own at the cross.

The idea of “boasting” (καυχάομαι, *kauchaomai*, cf. Rom 15:17; 1Cor 1:31; 2Cor 11:30; 12:9) is that of “exulting, glorying, taking pride in, speaking with pride about.” When Gentiles underwent the ritual of becoming a proselyte, they gave the Jewish community cause to boast “in their flesh,” for in such a ritual, the overarching statement being made was that only Jews are righteous before God. The whole proselyte ritual confirmed the erroneous position of the Sages that ethnic status was the grounds of God’s blessing. Paul’s boasting, however, was in Yeshua. It was in Him that he would exult, take glory, and be proud. But the important and significant point that also must be made is that this ability to “boast” in Yeshua was equally the possession of Gentile believers. The equality of Jew and Gentile in the Messiah is because in Him, all are able to “boast” in the same way, and upon the same grounds. Thus, in 1Cor 1:31, Paul quotes Jer 9:24 as the ground for his boasting in Yeshua: “but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the LORD.”

*through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* – We must first note that the word “which” (οὗ, *hou*) could find its antecedent in either the word “cross” or the word “Messiah” of the former clause. Nearly all the English translations opt for “which,” thus, “through the cross the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (NIV, NRSV, ESV [with note in margin], REB). Dunn opts for “Messiah” as the antecedent (since it is nearer in proximity than “cross”) and thus understands the phrase to be, “through Whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (KJV, NKJV). In the end, the meaning is nearly the same, “through the cross” no doubt would mean “through the work of Yeshua upon the cross.” But taking the antecedent to be “Messiah” seems better to me, for Paul’s point is that his current relationship with the world has drastically changed due to his own union with Yeshua in His death upon the cross. It is in Yeshua that Paul’s view of, and involvement in, the world has changed.

For Paul, the term “world” (κόσμος, *kosmos*) denotes “the totality of the whole creation (human as well as non-human) in its distance from God, and as yet unredeemed state.”<sup>10</sup> In short, “world” for Paul is the “present evil age.” The world, with its rationale for individual and corporate independence from God, along with its system of beliefs and values, had been condemned and put to death as far as Paul was concerned. Paul believed that conformity to the world (as representing independence from God, rather than full dependence upon Him) had been rendered unacceptable for all who were in Yeshua. The thinking processes of the world, lived out in the life-style of the world, was something that had been thoroughly con-

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10 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 340. Cf. Rom 3:6, 19; 5:12-13; 1Cor 1:20-21; 2:12; 6:2; 7:31-34; 2Cor 5:19; 7:10.

demned by Yeshua's death. For in that the believer has been crucified with the Messiah, he participates in that decisive act whereby Yeshua Himself refused to be conformed to the world and its ways. For the believer, then, there is no life in the world—it has been condemned as far as he is concerned. For the believer, “in Messiah's death the whole world has been put to death, and a new world of possibilities come to birth (2Cor 5:14-17).”<sup>11</sup>

The core element of this Pauline perspective is the believer's union with the Messiah in His death and resurrection. This union is not only a forensic reality, in which the debt owed by sinners is paid for by the life-giving sacrifice of the Son. It is that, most assuredly! But it is more, in that the believer himself has undergone a change, a death. Conformity to the world (cf. Rom 12:1-3) is no longer an option, and no longer one's deepest desire. The “old self” or “body of sin” (cf. Rom 6:6; Col 3:19; Eph 4:22) has been done away with, and in its place is a “new self” which “concur[s] after the Torah of God in the inner man” (Rom 7:22).

Moreover, this change, this crucifixion of the believer to the world, and the world to him, is cast in the metaphor of the cross which is a decisive, once-for-all-time accomplished fact. There is no going back. The believer has been forever changed, both in regard to his appreciation of God and His Messiah, and His turning from, and disdain for, the world's system which, by its very nature, strives to be independent from God, or even to usurp His place of divine sovereignty. We should note that the verb “has been crucified” (ἐσταύρωται from σταυρόω, *staurōō*, “to crucify”) is in the perfect tense, emphasizing a once-for-all-time action (the crucifixion) which has continuing, present, and on going reality and application.

But in what sense has the world been “crucified to me?” How was it that Paul, viewing the matter from the world's perspective, could say that Paul was seen as crucified? It is simply that the world saw Paul as uninviting, as someone to be disdained and shunned. His pursuit of holiness had made him just as onerous to the world as the world was to him. This accords with the words of Yeshua:

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (John 15:18)

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

Here is an important lesson for every follower of Yeshua: if we are comfortable participating in those things that are clearly contrary to the revealed righteousness of God, we should take stock as to whether or not we have been crucified with Yeshua, and have risen with Him to newness of life. The life of faith is one of clear division from the world: it garners no response of desire from us, and it equally rejects the call of righteousness to which we have set ourselves.

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

This does not mean that we cloister ourselves in hidden cities or erect

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11 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 341.

galvanized walls so as to have no contact with unbelievers. Rather, we are “in the world,” but we are not “of the world.” While living in this fallen place, we discover that as we grow in sanctification, the world, which may appeal to our flesh, has no real place of welcome in our souls. Like a particular food that once made us very sick, we have forever lost our appetite for the things of the world.

**15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.**

The flow of thought in verses 13–15 is clear. By linking this verse with the connective “For,” Paul is showing the contrast between those who rely upon ethnic status (the “flesh”) for covenant membership (forgiveness of sins, right standing with God, and a place in the world to come) and those who have relied upon the work of Yeshua on their behalf. If we read v. 14 in this context, it becomes clear that from Paul’s perspective, to rely upon the flesh (one’s ethnic status) is “an indication of an uncrucified state, in which the significance of the cross has not been adequately appreciated or entered into.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the “world” is the “new creation,” a term that not only characterizes the inward renewal of the believer, but also encompasses the final and ultimate eschatological salvation.

This sentence is constructed from a Jewish perspective, for Jews would have considered themselves the “circumcision” and Gentiles as the “uncircumcised.” Once again, the issue is ethnic status. Inclusion within Israel, either through birth or becoming a proselyte, is the matter which Paul has constantly confronted throughout the epistle. Here he makes a bold, succinct statement: ethnic status does not matter. To hold that ethnic status or a people-identification marker such as circumcision is one’s grounds for hope is to be of the “world,” to find a way of “salvation” independent of the means granted by the Almighty Himself, through His Messiah. Paul has thus turned the marker of circumcision on its head. For the Jews would have considered that circumcision (ethnic status either by birth or proselytism) was that which separated them from the world of the non-Jew. Paul, however, indicates that those who rely upon circumcision have actually joined the world in that they seek a way of salvation other than that given by God. In rejecting Yeshua as the only way of covenant relationship, they have unwittingly joined the world in its rebellion against Him and thus against God.

The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.  
(Luke 10:16)

Once again, Paul is not forbidding the act of circumcision (though it is understandable how this wrong interpretation could be gleaned from his words). It is not the physical act of cutting the flesh that Paul is talking about, but the reliance upon such a religious marking for one’s salvation. Thus he also says that “uncircumcision is nothing.” His point is that neither Jewish ethnic status nor Gentile ethnic status counts for anything. God accredits righteousness to those who by faith have been recreated by the power of the Spirit through the work of Yeshua.

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<sup>12</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 342.

The “new creation” of which Paul speaks is not a “new religion.”<sup>13</sup> It is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise in the life of the redeemed individual. This same thought is given by Paul in 2Cor. 5:17:

Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

He makes the same claim in 1Cor 9:17:

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

Here, “keeping the commandments of God” is another way of saying “a new creation.” Those who are circumcised in heart evidence their changed status (“new creation”) by keeping the commandments of God.

This new creation is a foretaste of the ultimate new creation, the world to come. For in the death of Messiah, the death grip of sin upon the created universe (including mankind) has been broken. All that is needed to crush the head of the serpent has been accomplished. The “old world,” with its bent toward rebellion and idolatry, must now give way to the victory of God in Messiah. As redeemed individuals, we partake now in a share of the world to come in which God’s reign will be complete, and the “old world” will be destroyed. Even as we participated in the rebellion of the first Adam, so now we participate in the victory of the last Adam (Rom 5:14ff). Thus, for Paul the term “new creation” sums up the whole scope of God’s redemption of the individual sinner, “having put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Col 3:10).

Since the process is not yet complete, “the new creation,” in practical terms, means a life oriented both to the past (Christ’s death and resurrection as paradigmatic, for relationship to the world as well ...), and to the future triumph of God in Christ (what will be in God’s intention as creator, as providing the norms and goals for life in this world.)<sup>14</sup>

### **16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.**

Once again, Paul connects this with the former train of thought by the connective “and” (καί, *kai*). He has finished his discourse, he can say no more by way of argument or polemic. His position has been clearly expressed, and so he adds a final blessing.

Here the dividing mark pertains to those who will follow his teaching, his *halachah* (“walk”) in accordance with the “rule” (κανών, *kanōn*, from which we derive our English word “canon”) that he has given. This rule is the distinction between covenant membership as taught by the Influencers (ethnic status being the basis) and as taught by Paul (faith in the crucified and risen Messiah). He cannot petition God for “peace” and “mercy” for those who have willingly and knowingly rejected His Son. Thus, the dividing mark is set: God’s way or man’s.

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<sup>13</sup> Contrary to Betz, *Galatians*, p. 320: “Paul does not spell it out, but in fact he announces the establishment of a new religion.”

<sup>14</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 345.