



Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Chapter 2 , Verses 1-10

by Tim Kelley

As we concluded the first chapter, we saw that the good news Paul was sharing came directly from the scriptures as revealed by Messiah Yeshua, and was not tainted by the Judaism of his day. This is important to understand because Paul was, and continued to be, a Pharisee¹, but there were some aspects of the Judaism of his day that he no longer agreed with. In order to avoid bringing any outside influence to his new understand, Paul stayed away from the disciples of Yeshua until he was well grounded in what he now saw.

As Paul continues with the narrative about how he came to his new understanding, he's now ready to challenge the established apostles on a very significant point.

Let's continue . . .

►^{ESV} **Galatians 2:1-2** Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

It's been approximately 14 years since Paul's "Damascus Road Experience". Though he had previously met with Peter and James, he's now ready to discuss what he's learned, seen, and done with those who we might presume would be the rest of the disciples – those who had been witnesses to the life of Messiah Yeshua.

Though the text indicates that Paul visited with those who were influential in the movement, the text only indicates that they were thinkers. The Greek word that's translated "reputation / influential" is "dokeo" (Strong's 1380) and in most cases simply means "to think, thought, supposed". Yeshua's used this word often and almost every time it's translated "think". For example –

^{ESV} **Matthew 6:7** "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

The same thing is true in the book of Luke – a book written by a person with a Greek background. Here's another example.

^{NKJ} **Luke 19:11** Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately.

So instead of Paul visiting people of notoriety, maybe he was visiting men who were *thinkers*, men who were willing to look beyond normative Judaism and see what the scriptures actually said instead of simply absorbing and repeating what they had learned in their Yeshiva. These were the type of men Yeshua would have wanted as disciples because they would be willing to "step out of the box" and think for themselves without at the same time "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" which is basically what Christianity has done.

Just as Paul receive the gospel via a revelation from Yeshua, his trip to Jerusalem was motivated by the same thing². For some reason, Yeshua wanted Paul to commune with the disciples, but apparently had not given him a reason. You can imagine what would have been going through Paul's head after the Son

¹ Acts 23:6

² See notes on Galatians 1:11-24

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

of God told him to discuss these things with them. Had Paul misunderstood what Yeshua had revealed to him? Did he understand the prophets correctly? Or was his mission that of helping the other apostles better understand the gospel themselves? Apparently, Paul was concerned that he may have misunderstood the gospel and had lead others away from the truth, so he wanted to know what they thought. He was going to lay it all out before them.

►^{ESV} **Galatians 2:3-5** But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in - who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery - ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

On this trip, he took both Barnabus and Titus. Barnabus was a Levite born in Cyprus³, but Titus we know little about other than what Paul said here – “. . . he was a Greek.” Being a Greek can mean at least two different things. With the influence of the Greek culture into the middle east shortly after Alexander the Great, many Jews were assimilated into that culture. As a result, many Jews stopped keeping the Sabbath, began eating pork, began to use Greek as their language, and even failed to be circumcised⁴ or even reversed their circumcision. Thus there was friction between those Jews who maintained the defining characteristics of the Law of Moses, and those Jews who did not. Those Jews who did not were considered Grecians, Hellenists, or simply Greeks.

The friction between the “Jews” and the “Hellenists” continued on into the first century even within the believing community –

^{ESV} **Acts 6:1** Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

By that time, the term “Hellenist” had morphed into a number of meanings. These meanings were all based on context, and without the context we don't know for sure what was being said. Some of those meanings could be –

- A Jew who spoke Greek
- A non-observant Jew
- A person who was born to at least one Greek parent (Jewish heritage on one side only)
- A person who had no Jewish heritage

In addition to the above, the term could simply mean a heathen . . . a person who did not believe in the God of Israel. Strong's defines the term “Grecian” this way –

Hellenistes (Strong's 1675) – 1) one who imitates the manners and customs or the worship of the Greeks, and use the Greek tongue 1b) used in the NT of Jews born in foreign lands and speaking Greek

“Hellenistes” comes from the word “Hellen” which Strong's defines as –

Hellen (Strong's 1672) - 1) a Greek either by nationality, whether a native of the main land or of the Greek islands or colonies 2) in a wider sense the name embraces all nations not Jews that made the language, customs, and learning of the Greeks their own; the primary reference is to a difference of religion and worship

“Hellen” is always translated as either “Greek” or “Gentile”.

In the Acts 6 case, we don't know for sure who the Hellenists are. They would more than likely fit into one of the 4 categories above, but we do know that they had become believers in the God of Israel and His

³ Act 4:36

⁴ Fathers failed to circumcise their children because of Greek law

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Messiah. They were more than likely proselytes and thus had not converted to Judaism. It's assumed that Stephen was a Grecian since he had a non-Hebrew name.

Getting back to Titus, all we know is that he was not born a Jew. There is much speculation that Titus may have been a nickname of sorts for another well know disciple of Paul's named Timothy. If that's the case, then Titus would have had a Jewish mother and a Greek father⁵.

Paul makes it a point that he took Titus with him to Jerusalem and that he had not been "compelled to be circumcised". It's assumed that if Titus had been compelled to be circumcised, it would have been Paul who would have done the compelling; but based on verse 5, Paul did not. Why did he bring circumcision up anyway? What point was Paul trying to make? Could it be that the "false brethren" who were brought in to spy on them were from Jerusalem themselves and thus Paul was making a statement that "I was not intimidated by them"? Because of Paul's use of broken sentences in this passage, it's hard to understand what point he's trying to make, but we can get a better grasp by understanding the cultural aspects of circumcision within the first century Jewish community.

When discussing Paul's writings, it important to understand that there is circumcision and there is circumcision. What I mean is this . . . the Torah requires physical circumcision for an Israelite and for a non-Israelite (a Gentile) who "converts" to the God of Abraham⁶. There's no question in this regard. On the other hand . . . in the first century, the Jewish leadership required a person to convert to JUDAISM in order to be considered a part of the people of God; and as a final act of conversion, a person had to be physically circumcised OR BE ritually circumcised if he was already circumcised. The ritual circumcision was (and still is) called "Hatafat Dam Brit" – the drawing of a drop of blood – and is not dictated in the Torah, but is simply a creation of the rabbis.

Paul is opposed to this because it flies in the face of the gospel message that had been given to him - that YHVH, the God of Israel, would scatter Israel throughout the nations because of their sins, but in His time, He would begin to gather them back as a people. He would free them from the pagan-cultic religions they had been a part of and bring them back into the freedom of His Torah. God was not drawing His people back to Judaism, but to the Torah walk their forefathers had abandoned 800 years earlier. Thus to undergo a man-created ritual circumcision to confirm a person's place in the people of Israel was not necessary, and in fact, Paul considered it *bondage*. Apparently, to Paul, Titus - a believer in the God of Israel and a man who had obviously abandoned the man-made Greek religions - represented freedom, and thus if he had undergone (a man-made ritual) circumcision he would then represent bondage.

Obviously, the false brethren had to be Jews who were pretending to be believers, otherwise they would not be very convincing spies. They were there to bring the believers into bondage, which by reference is circumcision. Note that the false brethren were not there to take away their liberty, but were to bring them under bondage. In other words, the liberty that the believers now had would be suppressed by a different type of bondage.

So what is the liberty that Paul mentions in verse 4? Is it freedom from the Torah? Is it freedom from sin? We can eliminate "freedom from Torah" simply by looking at what the other apostolic writers have said. For instance, James makes it quite clear –

^{NKJ} **James 1:25** But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

According to James, the Torah is the Law of Liberty. Later in life, Paul himself continues to support the Torah –

^{NKJ} **Romans 7:12** Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

⁵ Acts 16:1;3

⁶ Exodus 12:48

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Even today, we understand that liberty comes as a result of moral and ethical laws. We use to sing about it in school –

O beautiful for pilgrim feet , Whose stern impassioned stress.
A thoroughfare of freedom beat , Across the wilderness!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law!

So the liberty being spoken of by Paul is not freedom from the law, but instead – it's freedom from sin, or more correctly – freedom from the consequences of sin. And what are the consequences of sin? According to the Torah, it's exile.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 28:58-64** ⁵⁸ " If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book . . . ⁶⁴ " Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known -- wood and stone.

The believers were free from the exile. They were being brought back to the God of Israel just as the gospel said, but the "false brethren" wanted to bring them under a different type of bondage, and that bondage was Judaism, with all its oral traditions. Paul was unwilling to give in to their desires. He was unwilling to compromise the gospel that he'd been given, thus he brought Titus to Jerusalem to show that he – Titus, a believer, but not a convert to Judaism – was as much a believer as a believing Jew.

► ^{ESV} **Galatians 2:6** And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) - those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me . . .

Paul seems to be linking those who *appear to be influential* with the "false brethren" of verse 4. He's not saying that they are the false brethren, but maybe they are the ones who brought them (the false brethren) into the believing congregations. The word that's translated into "appear to be influential" ("seemed to be somewhat" in KJV and NKJ) is the same word used in verse 2. It's the Greek word "dokeo" which again means "thinkers".

Could it be that after Paul went to Jerusalem to confer with them that they in turn sent spies to "check out" what Paul was doing? Think about it for a minute . . . you're part of the leadership of an organization that has it all figured out (1st century Judaism) and someone comes to report that he's seeing explosive growth in what he's doing . . . spreading basically the same message, but with a different bent. Would you not want to figure out "how he's doing it?". Maybe that's what drove the "dokea". Maybe there was a little jealousy involved since they were not experiencing the growth in their congregations that Paul was. So they sent spies to see what he was doing so that they too could find the key, and what they saw was that Paul was not requiring ritual circumcision as a means to be accepted into the believing community. "That's how he's was doing it!", they probably said to each other. That's the key to the growth of the non-Jewish congregations.

Obviously this is speculation, but whatever status the "dokea" had in Paul's mind when he went to Jerusalem was now gone. Notice that Paul says "what they were makes no difference to me". Their standing in Paul's mind was now diminished greatly. He may have even considered them to be false teachers, or even non-believers . . . men who simply jumped on the Yeshua bandwagon because it was the next fad. In other words, these "dokea" were simply putting on a show in order to draw more people. Notice how the Young's Literal Translation renders this passage –

^{YLT} **Galatians 2:6** And from those who were esteemed to be something (dokea) -- whatever they were then, it maketh no difference to me -- the face of man God accepteth not, for -- to me those esteemed (dokea) did add nothing,

The "dokea" - the esteemed ones - looked good, but obviously were not acceptable to God, and Paul was able to see through their charade. He never found anything of value in what they were saying, and thus they added nothing to his message. Contrast that to the next group of men.

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

►^{ESV} **Galatians 2:7-10** ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Verse seven begins with the Greek word “allah” which means “but”, “yet”, “nevertheless”. The NKJ translates it as “on the contrary”. Paul is making a clear distinction between the previous group – the “dokeia” and Yeshua’s disciples - Peter, James, and John. This is somewhat confusing because it appears that the pronoun “they” should go with the previous group, but that’s simply because of Paul’s broken sentences. The context clearly puts “they” with Peter, James, and John. The passage is also confusing because of the translator’s added words. In most translations the words “the gospel” as in “the gospel to the circumcision” is added making it appear that there are two gospels being spoken of – one to the uncircumcised (assumedly Gentiles) and another to the circumcised (the Jews). But that’s simply not the case. There is one gospel and it applies to all.

^{NKJ} **Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

When you take out the added words, verse seven would read like this –

^{TLK} **Galatians 2:7** On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter to the circumcised . . .

This makes it clear – there is one gospel that is delivered by two different messengers to two different peoples. It’s been that way from the beginning, and the advent of Messiah Yeshua didn’t change that, it just inaugurated it.

One more confusing aspect of this passage is the difference between the words “uncircumcised” and “circumcision”. On the surface it looks like opposites, but that’s not the case. In this passage the Greek word for “circumcision” is “peritomay” (Strong’s 4061). In order to make an opposite of a word in Greek, you add an “a” to it. Thus the opposite of “peritomay” would be “aperitomay”. But “aperitomay” is not the word Paul used. The word used for “uncircumcised” is “akrobustia” (Strong’s 203) which not only means “uncircumcised”, but also “having the foreskin”. The Strong’s dictionary goes on to say that it means “a condition in which the corrupt desires rooted in the flesh were not yet extinct”⁷.

Thus a physically circumcised person could be considered “akrobustia” – uncircumcised. This indeed was the case, and still is the case amongst a number of both Jewish and non-Jewish men. They wear the mark of the covenant, but don’t live as if they are in covenant.

Though it’s clear that Paul was sent to and worked with many congregations outside the boundaries of 1st century Israel, i.e., Gentiles, that doesn’t necessarily mean they were not circumcised.

Paul goes on to say that Peter, James, and John – the “Pillars” understood that Paul’s understanding of the gospel was through grace . . . it was given by God. God opened Peter’s mind to this understanding via Cornelius and He open Paul’s mind on the Damascus Road.

In verse nine there’s another confusing statement that implies that Paul and Barnabus were to “go to” the Gentiles, but again it’s the case of added words.

To conclude, Paul has shown that his message has not been influenced by the “Judaism” of his day. Even after notable men came from Jerusalem, possibly to persuade him in his gospel message, he didn’t change. On the other hand, he did submit his view of the gospel to the leading apostles in Jerusalem, and they agreed that he was correct in his beliefs.

⁷ Bible Works Strong’s dictionary

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

In the next study, we'll see Paul defend his message before one of Yeshua's closest friends and His leading disciple.