



Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Chapter 5, Verses 1 - 12

by Tim Kelley

Paul had used the Tnakh as his basis for his understanding of the gospel message that he was to deliver – that being that YHVH would restore His people in the 'latter days' and that The Messiah would be the vehicle by which this is accomplished. He often referred to the example of Abraham - the icon of righteousness for the Jewish people – showing that even Abraham was considered righteous by YHVH before he was physically circumcised. He later showed that it was to Abraham's one seed – Messiah Yeshua – that the promises were made, and that without faith and belief in Him, you will not receive the inheritance. He later showed that if a person relied on the Torah to secure his inheritance, he would be like Hagar – a woman born in bondage, and whose son never received the inheritance even though he was a descendant of Abraham.

He has made his case. Now Paul reverts to simply appealing to the heart of the Galatian believers. Are they willing to simply trade one type of bondage for another as the perpetrators of the “other Gospel” are proposing, or are they going to believe what the prophets and Messiah have said, and live in the freedom YHVH had promised them 1500 years earlier.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 5:1** Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Paul had again defined bondage in the previous allegory. It was the state of 1st century Jerusalem¹, a city where the Pharisees and Oral Torah controlled the minds of the people. But what is liberty and freedom? In this passage Paul repeats the term “liberty” that he used earlier in his letter where he gave his reason for not encouraging Titus to be circumcised before bringing him to Jerusalem². The word “liberty” in both passages is from the Greek word “eleutheria” (1657) which simply means “freedom from bondage”. It's the same word used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word “chuphshah” (חֲפֻשָׁה – Strong's 2668) in Leviticus 19:20 which talks about a slave woman who is still in bondage. It's also used by Peter as he admonishes the non-Jewish Israelite believers³ in Galatia and other parts of Asia Minor to not use their new-found freedom as a club over the heads of other (Jewish) believers.

Liberty is what YHVH promised through Moses and the prophets. It's the liberty that comes when an individual, family, or tribe decides to not continue down a path that leads to destruction but repents and returns to the walk of God. Moses prophesied of it –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 30:1-3** Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, ² "and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ "that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you.

¹ Galatians 4:25-26

² Galatian 2:4

³ 1 Peter 1 clearly shows that Peter's audience is the non-Jewish Israelites

But before this can happen, we must be redeemed, and the price for our redemption is the blood of a lamb..

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 52:3-7** ³ For thus says the LORD: "You have sold yourselves for nothing, And you shall be redeemed without money . . . ⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good *things*, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

So again - Paul's question is simply this: "Since by Yeshua's blood you've been redeemed and are no longer being held captive in the nations, are you willing to trade bondage to ungodly men for bondage to a man-made system of laws?"

^{NKJ} **Galatians 5:2-4** Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

As we saw at the beginning of chapter 2, the term circumcision or circumcised is a reference to the Jewish tradition that a person must convert to Judaism if they wish to have part in the covenant and the kingdom of God. Conversion through ritual circumcision was just part of an entire code of man-made traditions that were added to, and sometimes superseded⁴ the Written Torah given by God – thus the term "whole law".

But the prophets never said that conversion to Judaism is what restores Israel to the covenant, instead they said that the Messiah would restore Israel. Israel would be called to the Messiah, not to Judaism -

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 48:12-14** " Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I *am* He, I *am* the First, I *am* also the Last. ¹³ Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; *When* I call to them, They stand up together. ¹⁴ "All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear!

It was the Messiah who would cause the people to return to God and the covenant –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 49:6** Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;

If through Messiah Yeshua you are being brought back, why do you believe you must also go through a Jewish conversion process to be part of the covenant? And if the conversion process, i.e. – circumcision, makes you part of the covenant, what need is there for the sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua?

Therefore Paul becomes very emphatic. It was Paul who years earlier helped them understand that the prophecies of covenant restoration were being fulfilled because the Messiah had come, and that they were being drawn back to the covenant because of their faith that Yeshua was indeed that promised Messiah. Now Paul is again making it clear – if you don't believe that Yeshua alone is able to restore you to a state of righteousness and bring you back into covenant, then the Messiah is of no value to you. What's more, if you are dependant on one aspect of the oral tradition in order to restore you to righteousness, then you must submit to it all. He goes on to say that if you maintain that being restored to a state of righteousness is in any way dependant on oral law, or even written law for that matter⁵, then

⁴ Matthew 15:3

⁵ Romans 3:20; 24, Note that James 2 teaches that the byproduct of justification should be works, i.e. – obedience to the Torah – since it was because of lawlessness that we needed to be justified in the first place.

you have rendered as worthless (Gr. *katargeo* – Strong's 2673) the sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua, and can no longer depend on His grace – His sacrifice.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 5:5-6** For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

In contrast to those who claim righteousness by association with Judaism, Paul is reiterating what he's said all along that righteousness is by faith, as is indicated by the prophets. The Greek word translated "hope" in this passage is "elpis" (Strong's 1680). It's a word that can mean an expectation of evil or of

good, and is used in many places in the LXX to translate the word "tikvah" (תִּקְוָה – Strong's 8615).

The prophets often spoke of the fact that YHVH is the hope of scattered Israel, and without Him, there is no hope –

^{LXE} **Psalm 65:5** *Thou art wonderful in righteousness. Harken to us, O God our Saviour; the hope (elpis/tikvah) of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are on the sea afar off:*

Of course, Ezekiel's dry bones prophecy is the epitome of hope for the people of Israel -

^{NKJ} **Ezekiel 37:11** Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope (elpis/tikvah) is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!

But YHVH will put His spirit in them and they will long to return –

^{NKJ} **Ezekiel 37:12-14** "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel . . . ¹⁴ "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* and performed *it*," says the LORD.' "

And according to Ezekiel, ALL Israel – both Israel and Judah – are like dry bones. The Jewish bones are not any less dry than the non-Jewish Israelite bones. They both are in need of a Saviour. Thus being "in" or "of" Judah has no importance. What's important is be "in" or "of" Messiah Yeshua. "This Psalm sums it up –

^{ESV} **Psalm 85:1-4; 7-10; 12-13** LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. ² You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin. Selah ³ You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger. ⁴ Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us! . . . ⁷ Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. ⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly. ⁹ Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. ¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other . . . ¹² Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. ¹³ Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.

Verse 6 begins with the Greek word "gar" (Strong's 1063) which according to Thayer's⁶ "a particle of affirmation and conclusion". In other words, this sentence ends Paul's point, and he ends it by pointing the Galatians to what they should really be concerned about – showing their faith in Messiah by loving one another.

⁶ Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Baker Books, copyright 1997; pg. 109

^{NKJ} **Galatians 5:7-9** You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸ This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you. ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Paul seems to be making a reference back to his opening statement –

^{NKJ} **Galatians 1:6** I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

What had happened to them? They seemed to be firm in resisting the influence of the perpetrators of that “new gospel”, then something happened and they began to fail. Were they being pushed out by their Jewish brothers? Were they facing having to go back into paganism in order to stay alive?

The Greek word for “hindered” is “anakopto” (Strong’s 348) and it’s more than what we understand as hindering someone, it’s more like you are running a race and the person in the adjacent lane intentionally tripped you. In this case, the Galatians were sticking to the gospel message as delivered by Paul, then one or more of them fell for the “other gospel” that was being advanced by the perpetrators, a gospel that did not come from God.

Then Paul makes the simple statement “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Apparently after the first person fell, the others began to do so also, and like leavening, it began to permeate the congregation.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 5:10-11** I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.. ¹¹ And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

In chapter 4 Paul appears to be somewhat agitated saying things like “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (vs. 16) and “. . . I have doubts about you.” (vs. 21b), but after he penned those words he came up with the Sarah / Hagar analogy - a very compelling argument. Thus, but the time he wrote vs. 10 & 11 of this chapter, he seems to have cooled down a little, or was at least more confident in his persuasive ability because in this passage he writes that he is confident that they will eventually see it his way. This might indicate that the Galatian congregation had not yet decided to convert, but were still asking questions. These questions may be what prompted this letter.

Paul’s confidence in them is based on the fact that he’s confident in his understanding of the gospel message – the curse of the law was beginning to be lifted, and Messiah Yeshua paved the way for it to happen. Thus if the kingdom was to be restored, it was going to happen by those who understood that they have a part in the kingdom because a price had been paid for their redemption, not because they converted to Judaism.

Paul expressed the same confidence to the believers in Philippi when he said –

^{NKJ} **Philippians 1:3-6** I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

Back in chapter one Paul wrote that there are “some who trouble you” (vs.7), yet in this passage he used a masculine singular suffix for the word translated “troubles”. This indicates that there is a central person who introduced the “other gospel” to the congregation. In fact, the word for “trouble” is “tarasso” (Strong’s 5015) and it means to “agitate” or “cause commotion”. It’s as if that person wanted to cause trouble in the Galatian camp. This same person likely took advantage of Paul’s absence from the congregation and used it as an opportunity to mis-represented Paul, claiming that he was “on board” with this new understanding of the gospel.

What's could be the motivation for this deception? It was probably a person of Jewish descent, probably likely with a Pharisee background, who was not happy seeing all these "gentiles" in the synagogue. Obviously, we don't know and can only speculate, but what we do know is that this one person's doctrine spread to and through others, and would soon permeate the entire congregation if it were not stopped.

In regards to Paul's statement ". . . if I still preach circumcision . . ." there are a number of theories as to what he was saying. I believe he was simply answering a question the Galatians may have posed to him - something like "they say you still teach circumcision, so do you?" Paul's answer seems to indicate that he did not, but to understand his answer, we have to understand the context of the letter, which again is simply "is conversion to Judaism, and it's associated ritual of circumcision, required for non-Jews who are turning to God?" More specifically, is it required for non-Jewish Israelites who are RE-turning to God? Though Paul obviously did teach it at one time, his answer now is clearly NO, and because his belief went against the grain of 1st century Judaism, Paul suffered persecution by his own Jewish counterparts⁷.

Unfortunately, most theologians have no desire to understand the culture of the 1st century Jewish people and thus fail to understand that Paul's answer pertained to an idiom, not an act.

The last part of verse 11 is somewhat confusing. What does Paul mean "then the offense of the cross has ceased."? A more easily understood version of that passage is found in the English Standard Version where it says "In that case the offense of the cross has been removed." In other words, if Paul is still preaching circumcision as a means to righteousness and inclusion into the family of God, then there was no need for Yeshua to die and therefore He is no longer an offense – no longer a stumblingblock.

Why was Yeshua an offense to the Jews? Simply because He paved the way for the restoration of Israel. Many passages throughout the scripture point out that this was His purpose. But if Israel were to be restored as a "Hebrew" nation instead of a "Jewish" nation, the Jews would lose prestige and power, and more importantly, Israel – the northern tribes – would once again be on equal terms before YHVH as Judah.

John 11:49-52 ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 49:6** he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Mark 10:45 ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

John 10:14-16 ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Isaiah 8:14-15 ¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken."

⁷ Acts 21:21 – this was obviously a false accusation based on half-truths. The word for children does not mean newborn.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 5:12** I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Strong words! Obviously out of frustration and pointed at those who continue to teach circumcision. Some commentators understand this to mean that Paul wishes the perpetrators would attempt to circumcise themselves, but slip and cut off more than they intended, but this doesn't appear to be Paul's intent since the word that is normally used to denote the act of circumcising a person⁸ is not used. Instead the word "apokopto" (Strong's 609) – a word that means to amputate is used. Yeshua uses the same word when he talks about cutting off a hand or a foot if it offends you.⁹ It's also the word used when Peter cut off the ear of the High Priests servant.

It's more likely that Paul was hoping these people would just go away. They were trouble makers sowing division among the people, obviously for selfish reasons. The Torah addresses these types -

^{ESV} **Numbers 15:30-31** But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people.³¹ Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him."

Though this may not apply directly to the perpetrator's situation, it's important to understand that from time to time people come into the congregation with an agenda. Paul could have encouraged his followers to simply "put them out", but instead, he chose to educate the people with the hope that the perpetrators would not find a fertile field in which to sow their seeds, and eventually move on.

Unless there's been a clear, bold, and continual violation of Torah, this is probably the best way to handle these situations.

To review what we've seen in this part of Galatians –

- As we come out of the world, we must be careful to not swap one type of bondage for another. In Galatians, the former bondage was the pagan system of the Greeks and Romans. The bondage Paul wanted them to avoid was a sense of redemption and salvation by association.
- If a person in any way believes he has earned salvation, he has discounted the work of Messiah Yeshua

Shalom Alecheim

⁸ "peritemno" - Strong's 4059

⁹ Mark 9:43