

## Galatians 2:11-21

**Pastor:** Galatians 2:11-21: By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

**“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Messiah Yeshua, even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, so that we may be justified by faith in Messiah and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. But if, while seeking to be justified in Messiah, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Messiah then a minister of sin? May it never be! For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Messiah; and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Messiah died needlessly.”**

**2:11** Having just described how there was some unity between himself and the leaders of Jerusalem (Galatians 2:7-10), Paul now tells the Galatians about an incident that took place when Peter had come to visit the Believers in Antioch.<sup>1</sup> We do not know anything else about this visit, other than what Paul records. We do not know when Peter visited Antioch, and whether this was a touch-and-go visit with Peter in transit to another place, or an intentional visit to Antioch with plans to return to Jerusalem. Richard N. Longenecker notes, “There is much in 2:11-14 that we are not told about the situation at Antioch, and much of what we are told is mostly by way of allusion.”<sup>2</sup>

Even though readers lack a complete picture of the setting, this should not deter us from understanding Paul’s point to the Galatians and how Peter had broken the private agreement made between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders. As a private agreement, we must remember that the requirements which would later be laid out by the Jerusalem Council, a public forum—specifically relating to blood and strangled meats (Acts 15:20)—had yet to be formalized. Hence, when Peter visits Antioch, and a scene erupts during one of the assembly meals, he may have claimed some kind of deniability. Likewise, in Galatians 2:12 we also must consider that Paul says nothing specific about the kind of food served during these meals. Was the meal elaborate, or was it simple? How much, or how little, observance of *kashrut* was taking place? When Peter separated himself from the non-Jewish Believers, would he have done so even if bread and water were all that were served?

Paul tells the Galatians in Galatians 2:11, *prosōpon autō antestēn* (πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην), “I opposed him to his face.” This is likely affected by various Tanach passages when the outcome of a situation was very critical. In Deuteronomy 7:24, for example, Moses says, “He will deliver their kings into your hand so that you will make their name perish from under heaven; no man will be able to stand before you until you have destroyed them.”<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew *ish b’panekha* (אִישׁ בְּפָנֶיךָ) is literally rendered as “man in/with face,” as it regards the defeat of Israel’s enemies as the people march into the Promised Land. In a similar manner, could Paul at all be making an illusion that as this new chapter in salvation history is opening, Peter’s actions demonstrate that there will be at the very least tension, and most probably resistance, to the spread of the gospel among the nations? But why would Peter, as Paul puts it, stand “self-condemned” (NRSV)? Obviously,

<sup>1</sup> This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>2</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990), 64.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 9:2; 11:25; Joshua 1:5.

part of it relates to his violation of the private agreement, as one of the Jerusalem leaders, with Paul, to recognize the evangelization of the nations as valid.

But we also need to consider some of the social ramifications, and the widespread historical-political climate among Jewish communities of the First Century. Various examiners today draw attention to the fact that the Jewish people, on the whole, felt threatened by external forces, beginning with the Seleucid Greek invasion of the 160s B.C.E. to the Roman occupation of Judea. In the 40s C.E., an entire series of events helped fuel Jewish xenophobia toward Greeks and Romans, including (but by no means limited to): Caligula insisting that a statue of himself be set up in the Jerusalem Temple (40 C.E.), a series of poor Roman governors and administrators (44-46 C.E.), and the demand that the vestments of the high priest be held for safekeeping by the Romans (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.1-9). When we add to this the challenges caused by the Zealot movement, and increasingly disparate relations with Rome—at the very least we see that many Jews would want to remain constrained to themselves and limited in their contact with others. These events were all contemporary to the Antioch incident, and Paul writing Galatians. James D.G. Dunn summarizes how these events probably affected the early Jewish Believers:

“The followers of Jesus within Palestine would not have been unaffected by these mounting pressures. The death of Stephen and the subsequent persecution (early or middle 30s) presumably had the effect of ensuring that those followers of the Nazarene who had been exempted from the persecution, or who had returned to Jerusalem thereafter, would take care to show themselves good Jews, loyal to their religious and national heritage.”<sup>4</sup>

Some of these factors indicate, as Dunn further states, how “many Jewish believers took it as axiomatic that Gentiles must be circumcised if they were to have a share in the Jewish heritage, and were prepared to exercise considerable advocacy and missionary endeavour to ensure that heritage was neither diluted nor endangered.”<sup>5</sup> When we take these things into consideration, we should more easily understand some of the negative attitudes that various Jewish Believers displayed toward the non-Jewish Believers. Many of them probably thought that short of proselyte conversion, that non-Jews should not be allowed into the assembly. Likewise, many of them would have been hostile to Paul—who taught that the entryway was faith in Israel’s Messiah, as opposed to more national and/or sectarian identity markers. Yet, in spite of some of the justified skepticism that may have existed, the prejudices and phobias about the nations were not to be found in the Divine mandate issued by God in the Torah: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3, NIV).

The reason Peter stood self-condemned, after withdrawing himself from his non-Jewish brethren (Galatians 2:12), was largely because he violated some of the very principles that he should have stood up for. Before Peter even visited Antioch, or Paul visited the Jerusalem leaders, Peter had already been accused of eating with uncircumcised, ungodly people by his fellow Jewish Believers. Luke records in Acts 11:1-3 the reaction that Peter received after visiting the God-fearing centurion Cornelius:

“Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, ‘You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.’”

“[T]hose who were circumcised” is most likely referring to a group of very conservative “Jewish believers” (NLT), and not those who had undergone ritual proselyte conversion. However, rather than tell his accusers that he was somehow in the wrong, Peter instead recounts the vision of the sheet that God showed him (Acts 11:4-10; cf. 10:9-16). Peter’s own interpretation of this vision, as he told Cornelius, was “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean”<sup>6</sup> (Acts 11:28, RSV). After Peter testified to what happened regarding the salvation of Cornelius’ household (Acts 11:11-17; cf. 10:17-48), those who had accused him rejoiced and saw that God was doing something new:

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<sup>4</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), pp 133-134.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>6</sup> Grk. *koinoin ē akatharton* (κοινωνῶν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον).

“When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life*” (Acts 11:18).

By separating himself from his non-Jewish brothers and sisters in Antioch, Peter stood self-condemned because he violated the very things that began the Gentile mission: his vision of the sheet and the proclamation of the good news to Cornelius. Paul opposed Peter in Antioch for withdrawing from the table and his non-Jewish brethren, in a way similar to how Moses opposed Pharaoh (Exodus 8:20), and Joshua was promised by God to have no opposition (Joshua 1:5). Some have likened Paul’s opposition of Peter as to an ancient legal trial. Josephus describes some of the emotions from an ancient trial, which Paul may have expressed at this incident:

“They dispense their anger after a just manner, and restrain their passion. They are eminent for fidelity, and are the ministers of peace; whatever they say also is firmer than an oath; but swearing is avoided by them, and they esteem it worse than perjury; for they say that he who cannot be believed without [swearing by] God is already condemned” (*Wars of the Jews* 2.135).<sup>7</sup>

2:12 In Galatians 2:12, Paul states the reason why Peter separated himself: “before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (RSV). The Greek speaks of *elthein tinas apo Iakōbou* (ἐλθεῖν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου), “coming of certain from James” (YLT), and who these individuals were specifically, is not agreed upon by expositors. It is not agreed whether or not these people were actually from James, were just associated with James in some way, or claimed that they came from James. This is further compounded by those who believe that Paul and the Jerusalem assembly were generally in agreement (mostly conservatives/evangelicals), or those who believe that Paul and the Jerusalem assembly were at constant odds with one another (mostly liberals).<sup>8</sup>

Some might suggest that the “certain men from James” were sent to moderate possible disputes, as it is notable that James himself did accede approval to Paul for his mission among the nations (Galatians 2:9), and is the very person Paul desired to interview after his coming to faith (Galatians 1:19). This would mean that the “certain men from James” coming was actually a good thing. David H. Stern renders Galatians 2:12 in his Complete Jewish Bible with, “prior to the arrival of certain people from [the community headed by] Ya’akov,” indicating that there is some difference in how to view the verse. But even if one assumes that the arrival of these individuals from James was a good thing, and they represented James and his approval of Paul’s mission, their arrival is nevertheless what causes Peter’s inappropriate attitude and behavior to surface. Many do think that these individuals, even if genuinely sent by James, overstepped their mandate (cf. Acts 15:24).

Previously in Galatians 2:2-10, Paul had taken great pains to express that James approved of his evangelistic activities, including giving him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:8). Later, James is the one at the Jerusalem Council who made the final ruling regarding the non-Jewish Believers coming to faith (Acts 15:19-21), indicating that ritual circumcision would not be necessary for them to enter into the *ekklēsia*. So why do we see those of James’ party instigating Peter’s separation from his non-Jewish brethren?

The NASU renders Galatians 2:12 with “he *began* to withdraw,” for the imperfect verb *hupestellen* (ὑπέστειλεν) or “withdrawing.” As Donald K. Campbell describes it, “The verb tenses (imperf.) indicate a gradual withdrawal, perhaps from one joint meal a day, and then two; or it may be that he began a meal with Gentiles but finished it with only Jewish Christians.”<sup>9</sup> F.F. Bruce concurs, “he did not make an abrupt break with his former practice, but proceeded to change it gradually.”<sup>10</sup> So, while a scene took place between Peter and Paul in Antioch, it did not happen instantaneously. It is not as though on one day Peter just got up from eating with some non-Jewish Believers, moving over to an area with Jewish Believers. His withdrawing himself started off slowly, and then became more regular. It reached a point of contention, when Paul finally asked him what he was doing, violating the very revelation God had given him.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, pp 605-606.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Christopher R. Matthews, “Acts of the Apostles,” in *EDB*, pp 15-18.

<sup>9</sup> Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *BKCNT*, 595.

<sup>10</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 131.

The improper actions of Peter are well summarized by the verb *aphorizō* (ἀφορίζω), “**to remove one party from other parties so as to discourage or eliminate contact**” (BDAG).<sup>11</sup> It is not difficult at all to understand that when Peter “separated himself” (RSV), problems could easily start erupting between the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Antioch—the very thing that Paul did not want to see happen in Galatia should the Influencers continue to lead people astray.

In a point of weakness, we see Peter succumbing to peer pressure. During the moment Paul describes, Peter could have been worried about his reputation should he return to Jerusalem and word get out that he had eaten a meal with non-Jewish Believers, which would have offended the overly-conservative faction that demanded their circumcision. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, major criticism and disrepute for the expanding mission among the nations could have occurred, perhaps even with warnings being issued about Paul’s “gospel of faith.” By accusing Peter in public—presumably before these individuals—Paul could have deterred some major controversies before they began. In a dramatic way, he had to remind Peter what they all agreed about concerning his mission among the nations.

**2:13** It would seem that Paul only took action when “The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray” (Galatians 3:13, NIV). The verb *sunupokrinomai* (συνυποκρίνομαι) means “*to play a part along with others*” (LS).<sup>12</sup> Bruce renders this as “play-acting,”<sup>13</sup> as Peter’s separation set a very bad example for all of the Jewish Believers in Antioch. So bad was this example, that even Paul’s associate in ministry, Barnabas, was affected.

Table fellowship was very important in the ancient world, and so it is no surprise why Paul was so disturbed at the lack of interaction between the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Antioch, for which Peter was directly responsible. How we understand what was going on in Antioch—and properly apply it today as Messianics—is being affected by some of the proposals of the New Perspective of Paul in theological studies.

First of all, it is important to consider the specific significance of table fellowship in Ancient Judaism. The Mishnah summarizes,

“R. Simeon says, “Three who ate at a single table and did not talk about teachings of Torah while at that table are as though they ate from *dead sacrifices* (Ps. 106:28), as it is said, *For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness [if they are] without God* (Ps. 106:28). But three who ate at a single table and did talk about teachings of Torah while at that table are as if they ate at the table of the Omnipresent, blessed is he, as it is said, *And he said to me, This is the table that is before the Lord* (Ez. 41:22)” (m.Avot 3:3).<sup>14</sup>

The implication here implies that proper table fellowship has discussion that is focused around God and His Word. Surely it is not a far stretch to conclude that the conversations going on during the meals in Antioch were focused around the Lord. But another major factor that would have affected how the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers would have fellowshiped during meals, would have been much more than table conversation, but would have pertained to the meals themselves. Since the Maccabean revolt (1 Maccabees 1:62-63), the need for loyal Jews to eat kosher was not just considered obedience to the Torah, but also a matter of national preservation. At these times of fellowship, the Jewish Believers would have been concerned about the type of meat served, whether the meat was tainted by idolatry, and the matter of butchering.<sup>15</sup> Is it impossible to conclude that just to get the Jewish Believers to sit down with the non-Jewish Believers, some level of *kashrut* had to be considered?

Nothing specific is mentioned in the text regarding the type of food served at these meals, but these meals were regular occurrences and it is doubtful that they were all vegetarian. Hans Dieter Betz says, “Nothing is said whether these meals were ordinary meals or celebrations of the Lord’s Supper, or both...The point of concern is the Jewish purity requirements which must be observed whatever meals were involved.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> BDAG, 158.

<sup>12</sup> LS, 781.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 128.

<sup>14</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 678-679.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, pp 137-138.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 107.

Some kind of kosher food would have had to be present in order for the Jewish Believers to really be there, eating at the meals. Dunn notes a significant interpretation option for Galatians 2:12, which has probably not been given enough publicity among contemporary Christian readers:

“Peter and the other Jewish believers were sharing table-fellowship with Gentile believers on less clearly defined Jewish terms—that is, not only welcoming Gentiles to their table, but accepting invitations to Gentile tables without asking too many questions (cf. 1 Cor. x.27), though presumably on the assumption that the Gentile believers would have been mindful of the basic food rules. The James’ people, having come to Antioch to visit primarily the Jewish believers (cf. ii.9), would then have been shocked at the degree of laxness being shown by these Jewish believers and criticized them accordingly.”<sup>17</sup>

The level of kosher observed among the Antioch Believers would have been a basic kosher style diet, which avoided pork, shellfish, blood, etc. The First Century historian Josephus records how in this region,

“The Jewish race, densely interspersed among the native populations of every portion of the world, is particularly numerous in Syria, where intermingling is due to the proximity of the two countries. But it was at Antioch that they especially congregated....Moreover, they were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks, and these had in some measure incorporated with themselves” (*Wars of the Jews* 7.43, 45).<sup>18</sup>

It would seem probable that with many of the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch, having already been integrated into the Jewish community—even as God-fearers prior to encountering Paul and the good news of Yeshua—that they were already used to a certain level of kosher eating. Some level of *kashrut* was probably observed in Antioch, but a slight liberalizing of the kosher dietary restrictions, because of the mixed community of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, could have incurred some rebukes from the individuals sent by James. The eating in view would have had to have been consistent with the later Acts 15 ruling, of meat from proper animals with the blood drained (Acts 15:20). Yet, this may not have been the higher level of *kashrut* adhered to by the Jerusalem party, with whom Peter was associating, for which eating kosher may have been more than just observing Biblical commandments (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), but an issue of national identity.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, and far more important, is that we consider the ongoing debates in Second Temple Judaism about whether or not Jewish people could even sit down with non-Jews at the table to conduct affairs. Some discussion in the Mishnah indicates that, with few stipulations, a Jewish person could sit down with a non-Jewish person to eat and talk:

“[If an Israelite] was eating with [a gentile] at the same time, and he put a flagon [of wine] on the table and a flagon on a side table, and he left it and went out—what is on the table is forbidden. But what is on the side table is permitted. And if he had said to him, ‘You mix and drink [wine],’ even that which is on the side table is forbidden. Jars which are open are forbidden. And those which are sealed [are forbidden if he was gone] for a time sufficient to bore a hole and stop it up and for the clay to dry” (m.*Avodah Zera* 5:5).<sup>20</sup>

While this quotation indicates that Jewish and non-Jewish people could interact at a table, it is to be contrasted with the decree, “Dwelling places of gentiles [in the Land of Israel] are unclean” (m.*Ohalot* 18:7),<sup>21</sup> which largely forbade *any* Jewish and non-Jewish interaction. And as the Roman historian Tacitus indicates, the common Gentile response to these sorts of views was not that much better. As he writes, “Whatever their origin, these observances are sanctioned by their antiquity. The other practices of the Jews are sinister and revolting, and have entrenched themselves by their very wickedness” (*The Histories* 5.5.1-2).<sup>22</sup>

**These are exactly the kinds of attitudes that Paul undoubtedly wanted to see reversed in Antioch, and did not want to see settle themselves in Galatia.** He wanted both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers to

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<sup>17</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 121.

<sup>18</sup> Flavius Josephus: *Josephus: The Jewish War, Books IV-VII*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1961), pp 517, 519.

<sup>19</sup> Galatians 2:11-14 is further addressed in the *Messianic Kosher Helper*, with more attention given to the meal scene.

<sup>20</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 671.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 980.

<sup>22</sup> Cornelius Tacitus: *The Histories*, trans. Kenneth Wellesley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 273.

come together as one people in Yeshua, fellowshiping together, and uplifting Him and His grace. In the case in Antioch, the ungodly attitudes were being displayed from the Jewish segment of the Believers. Tim Hegg summarizes,

“These data highlight a phenomenon well attested throughout the literature, namely, that the *halachah* of table fellowship between Jew and non-Jew was not yet completely settled in the early centuries. There appears to have been two opinions: one, that accommodation to the Gentiles was necessary and even acceptable, and a second, that close contact with Gentiles, especially in the realm of table fellowship was not only unwise, but a compromise of essential covenant requirements. One could well imagine that the more lenient view was the majority, while this strict position was held by the few.”<sup>23</sup>

By separating himself away from his non-Jewish brothers and sisters, Peter would have been favoring the more conservative of the options. As Paul puts it, he was “fearing the party of the circumcision” (Galatians 2:12). Aside from the fact that Peter knew from previous experience, “All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also” (Acts 10:45), he gave into some of the social pressure that was common to the time within much of the Jewish community. Some level of kosher (clean meats without blood) may have very well been observed in Antioch—but the significant majority of the non-Jewish Believers had not gone through ritual proselyte conversion, and a problem ensued when those from Jerusalem arrived.

We all must learn from Peter’s example, so that as Messianic Believers today we do not take action *to separate or divide groups of Believers* on the basis of ethnicity, when God desires the Abrahamic promise of all peoples being blessed to be fulfilled. Ultimately, we know that the Jerusalem Council would meet to address this issue, which decreed a moderate solution. As Hegg indicates,

“The gospel had been so long cast in a Jewish mold, that to envision it ever existing otherwise was not only impossible, it was also theologically errant. Here we come to understand that the message of Yeshua, and even more so, Paul was revolutionary, not because it was brand new or never heard, but because it cut across so many layers of traditions. And having cut across so much tradition, it appeared innovative and new, when in fact it was a throwback to a time when Torah defined Israel rather than Israel defining the Torah.”<sup>24</sup>

We do experience some of the same issues in today’s Messianic community regarding how Jew and non-Jew are to be one in Yeshua, partaking of the blessing of Abraham. How do we maintain a high opinion of Jewish culture and tradition, while respecting the value of all peoples in the sight of God? How do we keep God’s commandments—the most important of which is to demonstrate His love and blessings to others? How strong is the temptation to break away and separate, when the Lord wants us to bond together? How often have we fallen prey to interpretations and applications of the Torah that are too overly conservative, *exactly because they separate*, when more moderate solutions (as demonstrated throughout the Pauline Epistles) are needed? Admittedly, today’s generation of Messianic Believers is asked some difficult questions by Galatians 2:11-13.

**2:14** Paul holds all of the Jewish Believers who separated from the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch responsible for not being “straightforward about the truth of the gospel” (Galatians 2:14) or not “acting consistently with the truth of the gospel” (NRSV), but Peter is specifically targeted as having been in error. Paul’s accusation before Peter in Galatians 2:14 is that he is living “like the Gentiles.” How this is to be interpreted in light of the clauses which are witnessed, has been vigorously debated in recent Christian scholarship, and is probably one of the hardest parts of the Bible for most Messianic Believers to understand.

We have to understand that first, Peter’s vision of Acts 10 (cf. 11:1-16) demonstrated that via the sacrificial work of His Son, God considers all human beings to be clean. No unnecessary impediments should be placed before the nations in order for them to be evangelized, and turn to God in repentance. Furthermore, the new, non-Jewish Believers needed to be welcomed into the assemblies of Jewish Believers as full and equal members of God’s people because of their expressed faith in Israel’s Messiah. The sharing of a common meal was critical for establishing good faith and community with people in the First Century world. But by

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<sup>23</sup> Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002), 61.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 63-64.

separating themselves, the Jewish Believers in Antioch—especially Peter—were not seeing that God’s objective of all being welcome was being fulfilled.

It is with this in mind that Paul makes the accusation, “If you, a Jew born and bred, live like a Gentile, and not like a Jew, how can you insist that Gentiles must live like Jews?” (Galatians 2:14, NEB). **What is this supposed to mean?** While Paul rightly acknowledges Peter’s background as a Jew (Grk. *su Ioudaios huparchōn*, σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων), what does he mean by saying that he “livest after the manner of Gentiles” (KJV)? Furthermore, how are we to understand the final clause, “how the nations dost thou compel to Judaize” (YLT)?

The significance of Paul’s question in Galatians 2:14, can only be appreciated from the original Greek: *pōs ta ethnē anagkazeis Ioudaizein* (πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις Ἰουδαΐζειν), “why do you compel the nations to Judaize?” (LITV). V. 14 is the text of Scripture from which the common designation “the Judaizers” originates, yet by his usage of the verb *Ioudaizō* (Ἰουδαίζω), Paul is making an important point to the Jewish Believers in Antioch which need not be overlooked. *BDAG* defines this verb as to “**live as one bound by Mosaic ordinances or traditions, live in Judean or Jewish fashion.**”<sup>25</sup> But what one considers to be Jewish customs or traditions has considerable variance among the First Century branches of Judaism. And, it is legitimate for one to wonder, as Hegg notes, “It hardly seems possible that Paul would have so sharply denounced Peter if he was simply trying to persuade the Gentiles to take on Jewish customs.”<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the most significant usage of the verb *Ioudaizō* outside of Galatians is seen in the Septuagint rendering of Esther 8:17, where we see that “in every city and province wherever the ordinance was published: wherever the proclamation took place, the Jews had joy and gladness, feasting and mirth: and many of the Gentiles were circumcised, and became Jews [*Ioudaizon*, Ἰουδαίζον], for fear of the Jews” (LXE).<sup>27</sup> The Greek verb *Ioudaizō* renders the Hebrew *yahad* (יָהַד), meaning “to **pose as a Jew**” or “to embrace Judaism” (*HALOT*).<sup>28</sup> As Longenecker renders Galatians 2:14, “If you, a Jewish believer, can live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentile believers to become Jews?” (*WBC*).<sup>29</sup> Betz well summarizes the issue of Galatians 2:14: “In Paul’s view...it describes forcing one to become a Jewish convert...”<sup>30</sup>

The answer to the problem caused by Peter separating himself, from the non-Jewish Believers to the Jewish Believers, **was that the non-Jewish Believers would have to become Jewish proselytes** in order for unity to be restored. This is something that Paul would have nothing to do with, as unity among God’s people was not something to be achieved by one’s ethnicity, economic status, or even gender (Galatians 3:28). *Unity was to be founded on what Yeshua the Messiah had accomplished for everyone*, in being sacrificed for human transgression and resurrected from the dead. Here, the issue of “Judaizing” is not so much placed at the feet of the Influencers in Galatia, but at the feet of the Apostle Peter. While the Influencers in Galatia no doubt wanted the new, non-Jewish Believers to undergo ritual conversion—what was Paul asking of Peter? What did Paul want Peter to think through, that he perhaps had not considered via his inappropriate actions?

When Paul accused Peter in the immediate clause prior, that he “live[s] in the manner of Gentiles” (NKJV) or *huparchōn ethnīkōs* (ὑπάρχων ἔθνικῶς), what did he mean? Did he mean, as some have extrapolated it, “[you] have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile” (NLT)? Was Paul claiming that now that Peter had found Christ the Mosaic Torah was now of no affect for either of them? Was it that Peter was now living like a Gentile, but in Galatians 2:14 is seen reversing his lifestyle and again living like a Jew—by peer pressure from

<sup>25</sup> *BDAG*, 478.

<sup>26</sup> Hegg, *Galatians*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> Another important usage of the verb *Ioudaizō* appears in Josephus’ account of the Jews fighting the Romans, and how a Roman named Metilius was spared from death, because he promised to be circumcised and become a Jew:

“And thus were all these men barbarously murdered, excepting Metilius; for when he entreated for mercy, and promised **that he would turn Jew, and be circumcised** [*peritomēs Ioudaïsein*, περιτομῆς Ἰουδαΐσειν], they saved him alive, but none else.” (*Wars of the Jews* 2.454; *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 626).

The verb *Ioudaizō*, “to Judaize,” is something which tends to occur in instances or situations of force.

<sup>28</sup> *HALOT*, 1:393.

<sup>29</sup> Longenecker, 63.

<sup>30</sup> Betz, 112.

outsiders—meaning that he was not following the Torah, and was now following it? Or, was Paul making the observation that Peter’s behavior and attitudes—though he was a Jew—were more consistent with that of pagan Gentiles?

Many consider Paul’s remarks made to Peter that being a Jew, versus being a Gentile, are to be understood as living according to Jewish and Gentile cultural norms—in this case pertaining to the kosher dietary laws and/or ritual purity.<sup>31</sup> From this point of view, Peter considers ritual purity—his “being a Jew”—to be more important than sitting down with his non-Jewish brothers and sisters and fellowshiping as one in the Lord. Among Messianic interpreters, Hegg partially concurs with this view, viewing Paul’s remark to “live like the Gentiles” as regarding the table fellowship of the Believers in Antioch (as opposed to the validity of *kashrut*) from which Peter withdrew. He suggests that Jews who did not follow a set of particular cultural expectations could be considered as though they were a Gentile (1QS 2.4-5). Thus, when Paul tells Peter that he is “living like a Gentile,” this would be a phrase common to First Century Jews where Peter would be associating with non-Jews at the table.<sup>32</sup> Having done this, how then can Peter reverse his actions and require the non-Jewish Believers to somehow “Judaize”?

While this would be one way of looking at Paul’s comments to Peter in Galatians 2:14, I would suggest that Paul’s remarks do not primarily concern Peter’s observance of ritual purity and/or *kashrut*, **but instead concern Peter’s behavior and motives**. A better way of looking at Paul’s rebuke to Peter, “live like a Gentile,” is to approach it from an ethical standpoint. The term *ethnikos* (ἔθνικός) can “**pert. to nationhood foreign to a specific national group, w. focus on morality or belief**” (*BDAG*).<sup>33</sup> Note that Paul’s accusation to Peter is that he is “living [like] the nations,” yet from a ritual standpoint Peter clearly is not. Peter has separated himself to go join those who came from James (Galatians 2:11-12), who likely held to highly conservative views of the Torah and ritual purity. If anything, Peter was living like highly conservative, (hyper-)purity-conscious Jews. So how in doing this *can Peter actually be considered to be living as a pagan Gentile?*

Consider how Peter had adopted the same kind of attitude that the Gentiles at large held of the Jews, perhaps similar to what the Roman historian Tacitus, who has been previously quoted, claimed: “The...practices of the Jews are sinister and revolting, and have entrenched themselves by their very wickedness” (*The Histories* 5.5.1-2).<sup>34</sup> Paul publicly rebukes him, “you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews.” By separating himself to the Jewish Believers in Antioch—and not sharing table fellowship with the non-Jewish Believers—a big gulf between them would be created. And this is why Paul asks Peter the pertinent question: “why do you compel the nations to Judaize?” (LITV).

In Galatians 2:14, Paul could very well be using some form of ironic rebuke, to get Peter to reconsider his actions. Peter, in wishing to demonstrate an example as a “good Jew” to those who came from James, in actuality found himself living like a pagan Greek or Roman who would tend to treat Jews with disgust. By his attitudes here, Peter had surely lost all moral authority as an Apostle and representative of the pillars in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). He does not demonstrate this behavior toward his fellow Jewish Believers—and instead fails to show generosity, hospitality, or a welcoming attitude toward his fellow non-Jewish Believers. Peter, in attempting to be Jewish, was behaving no differently than a Gentile Greek or Roman and how he would treat a Jew. As Ben Witherington III points out (for his extended observations on Galatians 2:1), throughout the Mediterranean, “competition was [often] the essence of such a culture, not least because it was believed that honor was a limited good, that is in short supply, such that for one person to have it, another would have to be deprived of it.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Longenecker, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Hegg, *Galatians*, pp 65-69.

As Hegg concludes regarding the statement “live like the Gentiles,” “we should understand the phrase ‘live like the Gentiles’ to be a common phrase of the intra-Jewish debate over the inclusion of Gentiles. The party of the circumcision must have used language like this to disparage those Jews who were willing to forego the *halachah* of separation from Gentiles, by judging them as having adopted a Gentile lifestyle. Paul uses the very language of the influencers to shame Peter” (Ibid., 65).

<sup>33</sup> *BDAG*, 276.

<sup>34</sup> Tacitus, *The Histories*, 273.

<sup>35</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 129.

By separating himself from his fellow non-Jewish brethren in Antioch, Peter would definitely have found himself robbing his fellow Believers of their self-respect and who they were as new creatures in the Lord, and certainly be caught not acting in accordance with “truth of the gospel,” in a manner disrespectful of Yeshua’s work. He treated them no differently than they—were they non-Believers—would commonly have treated him. The Greco-Roman hostility toward the Torah practice of circumcision, and the Jews who practiced it, is well documented.<sup>36</sup> Could it be that Peter was acting in a reverse attitude toward uncircumcised, new non-Jewish Believers, as they would have probably acted toward him prior to their salvation experience?

I would paraphrase what Paul asks Peter in Galatians 2:14 as, “How can you {dare} compel non-Jewish Believers to convert to Judaism, when you act like a pagan Gentile?” *Peter had no right, by his actions, to imply the necessity of proselyte conversion for the non-Jewish Believers, when he had ethically acted like a pagan!* The aspects of “to Judaize” (YLT) in Galatians 2:14 here are seen as negative, as by his actions Peter may have had no idea what he communicated to the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, Peter may not have even been that consciously aware that, by separating himself unto the Jewish Believers, the only way that many of the non-Jewish Believers may have thought that they could have fellowship with them, was by going through ritual proselyte conversion and by becoming a member of the overly conservative, somewhat secluded Jewish community (that Paul himself, even though a loyal Pharisaic Jew, did not represent). Rather than having one group of people fellowshiping in one accord in Antioch, with their common identity being rooted in the Lord Yeshua and His completed work—Peter found himself instigating a schism with two groups, with the great travesty being that Peter had attitudes more like those of the pagans than his own Jewish people who were raised with a Torah ethic (Galatians 2:15).

It is unfortunate that many Christians have taken Paul’s words in Galatians 2:14 and misconstrued them as Paul being against all Jewish tradition for all time—separating his words from the actual scene in Antioch. If anything, Paul was against embedded Jewish tradition and attitudes which impeded the Torah’s mandate for Abraham’s blessing to reach out to all nations (Galatians 3:8). This, in Paul’s mind, came before the rite of circumcision and took precedent. Of all the Jerusalem Apostles who should have understood this—Peter should have. Peter, one of Yeshua’s inner three Disciples, could have fellowshiped with the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch and told them all about the Messiah who they had come to believe in. He did not do this.

Peter needed Paul to confront him, and realize that what he communicated, to his fellow non-Jewish brethren in Antioch, was more important than what his fellow Jewish brethren from Jerusalem might see (Galatians 2:12). Peter could easily go back home to Jerusalem and explain his actions in Antioch to those who may have heard that he “ate” with “Gentiles” (cf. Acts 11:18)—issues that would later be hammered out at the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council. But Peter would leave Antioch with no explanation for his actions of separation *but his actions*. And, that could cause some problems that Paul did not want to have to rectify. Paul wanted Peter to set a proper example. Paul explains this to the Galatians to demonstrate how Peter was in the wrong, and how he did not want the Galatians’ own times of fellowship to be divided between those who were overly conservative in their Torah observance—at the sake of splitting up the assembly—and those who were new in faith and needed to be welcomed in, treated with respect, and certainly disciplined in holy living.

2:15 Paul reminded Peter in Galatians 2:15, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners” (NRSV).<sup>38</sup> The reason “sinners of the nations” (YLT) were considered as such is because they did not have the Torah to definitively guide them. The Seleucid occupiers of Jerusalem were considered to be “sinful people, lawless men” (1 Maccabees 1:34). Yeshua indicated that He “[would] be handed over to the Gentiles, and [would] be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and...scourged” (Luke 18:32-33; cf. 24:7), a reflection on their sin. While Paul will later write the Romans, “for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22-23), a status including both the Jewish people and those of the nations, in

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. J.P. Hyatt, “circumcision,” in *IDB*, 1:629-631.

<sup>37</sup> As Witherington, *Galatians*, 159 indicates, “It is doubtful that Peter was in fact ‘compelling’ Gentiles to Judaize, this is just Paul’s polemical way of indicating that Peter left the Gentiles no choice if they wanted to have fellowship with him and other Jewish Christians.”

<sup>38</sup> Grk. *hēmeis phusei loudaioi kai ouk ex ethnōn hamartōloi* (ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί).

telling Peter that the two of them (Peter and Paul) were Jews and not sinners—he is indicating that they have God’s Law, have been trained in it, and should know better.

But what was considered to be the key sin here, that the Jewish Believers in Antioch should have known about? Having been trained in the Torah’s instruction their whole lives, knowing its principles of right and wrong, and knowing what God expected of them, what were Peter and those he separated to doing wrong? How did it relate to Jewish and non-Jewish relations in the Body of Messiah? Much of it pertains to the attitudes of exclusivism, turning people from the nations who were definitely seeking God away, and in promoting a spiritual culture that seeks to minimize the inclusion of others from outside.

**2:16-17** Galatians 2:16-17 are commonly interpreted in evangelical Christian circles as meaning that no human action, particularly observance of the Law of Moses, can bring a person salvation. This is certainly a true concept. As the Apostle Paul says elsewhere, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). But in Galatians 2:16-17, we see the first usage of the term “works of law.” What does Paul mean when he says “we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (ESV)? Keep in mind, that while he is telling this to the Galatians, his dialogue with Peter in Antioch has not ended, and does not close until Galatians 2:21.

Most of your average Christian readers of Paul’s words in Galatians 2:16-17, equate “works of law” as pertaining to direct Torah obedience. And, many extrapolate Paul’s comments as meaning that not only does he recognize that justification does not come via “works of law,” but he does not want any of the Galatians observing any part of the Torah, either. Too many Christians today take the position that Paul attacks the Torah, yet the result of such conclusions speak for themselves. Today’s evangelical Church is debating ethical and moral issues that many years ago would not be debated, per its current and widespread antagonistic view of the Law of Moses.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, many pastors and lay leaders are uninformed as to the discussions and questions posed in contemporary Galatians scholarship, and find it easier to simply remain disengaged. Consider Longenecker’s remarks and questions that are currently being asked:

“The watershed of all discussions regarding Paul and the law has to do with Paul’s view of the Mosaic law as a religious system. And the principal question here is: Is Paul’s polemic directed against the law itself or against a particular attitude toward the law that sees the law as a means of winning favor with God (i.e., ‘legalism’)?...[[I]t continues to be a question that divides scholarship today.”<sup>40</sup>

Most Christians are unaware of the fact that there are alternative views in scholastic circles today which equate “works of law” as involving *other factors* than just being obedient to the commandments of God in the Torah. Perhaps these “works of law” that Paul refers to do involve legalism, or perhaps the way the Torah is followed by a particular segment of the Jewish community, as would be seen in the document 4QMMT in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Perhaps it does not speak of obedience to God as much as it speaks of *how a group or sect* follows His Law, possibly in an inappropriate manner given Paul’s rebuke of Peter separating himself from his fellow Believers. In addition to this, what important dynamics of “faith” might be overlooked by those who are only reading Paul’s letter from an English translation, which doubtlessly need to be considered? Is there a major difference between “faith in Yeshua the Messiah” *versus* “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah”?

**2:16** In Galatians 2:16, Paul uses the plural perfect participle *eidotes* (εἰδότες), “knowing,” linked to *hēmeis* (ἡμεῖς) or “we,” appearing previously in Galatians 2:15. He says that “we know that a person is not justified by works of the law” (ESV). Paul is likely telling Peter how they both knew that human beings are not made righteous before God, on the basis of “works of law.” Individuals are not justified via whatever these “works of law” are, but via their faith (Romans 3:24-25). Many have thought that Paul is making a direct appeal to Psalm 143:1-2:

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<sup>39</sup> Note that while Paul acknowledges in Ephesians 2:8-9 that salvation does not come by works, commonly unquoted is Ephesians 2:10, which emphasizes “For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

<sup>40</sup> Longenecker, 85.

“Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications! Answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness! And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous.”

Here, the answer for being made righteous is *emunah* (אֱמוּנָה) or faith, not any kind of human action relating to the Law. The “righteousness” or “justification” (Heb. *tzedakah*, צְדָקָה) that Ancient Israel was to have, though, involved much more than just an individual’s vindication of sin. Dunn summarizes some of the options at the interpreter’s disposal:

“For Israel that meant pre-eminently the relationship with Yahweh, that is the covenant he had made with Israel when he chose Israel to be his people: to be righteous was to live within the covenant and within the term is laid down (the law); to be acquitted, recognized as righteous, was to be counted as one of God’s own people who had proved faithful to the covenant.”<sup>41</sup>

Paul is clear that “justification” (Grk. verb *dikaioō*, δικαίωω), whether readers regard it as a cleansing from sins and/or someone being reckoned as a member of God’s covenant people—does not occur *ex ergōn nomou* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) or “by works of the law.” If Paul’s Jewish background is rightly assumed, though, then Paul is speaking of righteousness as not just involving one’s legal vindication from sin—meaning eternally forgiven via the work of Yeshua—but is also speaking of how one is made a member of God’s own. Faith in Messiah Yeshua, while being the entryway into a restored relationship with the Creator God—also subsequently reckons one as a member of the Creator’s own chosen community. Individual salvation, by a person placing his or her trust in the Messiah, will result in a new, corporate status as being a part of “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

But how are we to consider “works of law”? Being righteous before God via faith in His Son certainly does require that the redeemed obey Him and follow His code of conduct. This code of conduct is clearly laid out in the Torah, **but it by no means is what remits people of their sins** (Galatians 2:21). It is intended to keep God’s people away from sins and such obedience comes as a result of justification (cf. Galatians 6:2). Yet, here in Galatians 2:16, it is likely that “works of law” is something specific, and may not be regarded as just general obedience to the Torah.

What Paul says in Galatians 2:16 that he and Peter, “we,” knew that a person cannot be justified by “works of law,” probably indicates—just as in Galatians 2:15 he and Peter as Jewish people were not “sinners from among the Gentiles”—is that “works of law” was a term known to many within the First Century Jewish community, and not necessarily by the non-Jews in Antioch. **This would make “works of the Law” something more specific than just general Torah observance.**

Galatians 2:16 includes three usages of the phrase *ex ergōn nomou* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου). Paul has just said that the non-Jewish Believers do not have to be Judaized (Galatians 2:14), meaning go through ritual proselyte conversion, in order to be considered full and equal members of God’s people. How *ergōn nomou*, “works of law,” is translated in one’s Bible, often greatly affects (or impedes) an English reader’s ability to understand what Paul is communicating. The NIV extrapolates it as “observing the law,” and the NEB has “doing what the law demands.”

A common conclusion drawn is seen from Witherington, who says “The Mosaic Law and obedience to it is not, in Paul’s view, how one got into Christ, how one stays in Christ, or how one goes on in Christ. It is no longer what defines and delimits who the people of God are and how they ought to live and behave.”<sup>42</sup> Of course, how conclusions such as this have been applied in the religious world today—often causing people to totally discount the Torah as relevant instruction to be studied and spiritually considered—result in some of the significant problems that contemporary Christianity presently faces.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, pp 134-135.

<sup>42</sup> Witherington, *Galatians*, 172.

<sup>43</sup> To be fair to Witherington, he does previously remark “As we shall see Paul is not anti-works, not anti-obedience to God, not even anti-Law, indeed he will argue for the ‘Law of Christ’ as the guiding principle for Christians” (Ibid.). Of course, a major question we should ask pertaining to this “Law of Christ” is whether it has any basis in the Torah, or whether *it actually is* the Torah itself. For many Christians, the answer is sadly “no.” But for Messianics, the answer is a firm “yes.” **We are to follow the Torah as the Messiah Himself and His Apostles followed it.** Interestingly enough, those who would disagree would instead say that such an independent “Law of Christ”

In his Complete Jewish Bible, Stern extrapolates *ergōn nomou* as being “legalistic observance of *Torah* commands” (cf. Galatians 2:16[3x]; 3:2, 5, 10; Romans 3:20, 28). The “works of law” denounced by the Apostle Paul are not the *Torah*, per se, but rather a legalistic application and/or perversion/manipulation of its original intention. This is certainly a value judgment made on Stern’s behalf, but one which has been proposed before him in Galatians and Romans scholarship. Stern remarks, “I submit that in every instance ‘*erga nomou*’ means not deeds done in virtue of following the *Torah* the way God intended, but deeds done in consequence of perverting the *Torah* into a set of rules which, it is presumed, can be obeyed mechanically, automatically, *legalistically*, without having faith, without having trust in God, without having love for God or man, and without being empowered by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>44</sup>

Stern relies heavily on the conclusions of British expositor C.E.B. Cranfield, who indicates in his commentary on Romans,

“[T]he Greek language of Paul’s day possessed no word-group corresponding to our ‘legalism’, ‘legalist’ and ‘legalistic’. This means that he lacked a convenient terminology for expressing a vital distinction, and so was surely seriously hampered in the work of clarifying the Christian position with regard to the law. In view of this, we should always, we think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that Pauline statements, which at first sight seem to disparage the law, were really not directed against the law itself but against that misunderstanding and misuse of it for which we now have a convenient terminology.”<sup>45</sup>

In Stern’s estimation, *ergōn nomou* (“works of law”) must be some form of legalism, as opposed to just general obedience to the *Torah*. This could certainly be a valid conclusion, and indeed both Stern<sup>46</sup> and Cranfield offer some thoughts and spiritual factors which cannot be easily discarded when one considers the application of “works of law” leading to justification, when compared to faith in Yeshua and what He has accomplished leading to justification. However, on the basis of some newer discussions regarding “works of law” within the broad world of First Century Judaism, it is difficult to agree with Stern’s extrapolation of *ergōn nomou* meaning “legalistic observance of *Torah* commands.” *Ergōn nomou* is simply too technical a Greek phrase to not see any precedent in any ancient literature.

In recent Pauline studies, largely present among advocates of the New Perspective of Paul, a great deal of attention regarding the relationship of the “works of law” in Galatians (as well as Romans) to the document 4QMMT (4Q394-5) in the Dead Sea Scrolls,<sup>47</sup> and its usage of *ma’asei haTorah* (מעשי התורה) to define the rules for inclusion among the Qumran community, the Hebrew equivalent for “works of (the) *Torah*/Law,” has been emphasized. The proposal that is currently being made by advocates, of the New Perspective of Paul in theological studies, is that *ergōn nomou* largely corresponds to religious characteristics that were distinctively Jewish, yet recognizable by their Greek and Roman neighbors. They were regulations which kept the Jewish and pagan communities separate. The term *ergōn nomou* is likely Paul’s Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *ma’asei haTorah*. This is not found in the Hebrew Tanach, but is employed in 4QMMT to relate to the Qumran community’s distinct religious *halachah*:

“Now we have written to you some of the works of the Law [Heb. *miqsat ma’asei ha-Torah*, מעשי התורה], those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen [that] you possess insight and knowledge of the Law” (4Q399).<sup>48</sup>

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composes the principles elaborated upon in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7)—yet the Sermon on the Mount itself, as important as it surely is, is predicated on the basis of the *Torah* retaining validity (Matthew 5:17-19).

<sup>44</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 537.

<sup>45</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans 9-16* (London: T&T Clark, 1979), 853.

<sup>46</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 537 validly indicates a challenge that exists for all Messianic expositors:

“Christian scholars have discoursed at length about Sha’ul’s [Paul’s] supposedly ambivalent view of the *Torah*. Their burden has been to show that somehow he could abrogate the *Torah* and still respect it. Non-Messianic Jewish scholars, building on the supposedly reliable conclusion, gratuitously supplied by their Christian colleagues...have made it their burden to show that the logical implication of Sha’ul’s abrogating the *Torah* is that he did not respect it either and thereby removed himself and all future Jewish believers in Yeshua from the camp of Judaism.”

<sup>47</sup> Wise, Abegg, and Cook, pp 358-364; Geza Vermes, trans., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp 220-228.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 364.

This statement is made after the Qumran community lays forth “A Sectarian Manifesto”<sup>49</sup> regarding a series of observances which members of its order are to observe. These communal regulations largely regard ritual purity and who is, and who is not, allowed into *their* camp. As it has been observed, “only the *Manifesto* and Paul’s Letters to the Galatians and Romans discuss the connection between works and righteousness,”<sup>50</sup> and indeed the major thrust of both of those letters is that one gains entry among God’s community via faith in His Son and not some sort of “works.”

Today, among advocates of the NPP, it is suggested that when Paul uses *ergōn nomou* he is using it in a similar way to how it is used in 4QMMT among the DSS. Dunn states, “As in MMT, the phrase seems to be first used (in Gal. 2.16) as a summary reference to a series of legal/halakhic rulings/practices which have been at the centre of the previous paragraphs” regarding “table-fellowship with Gentiles.”<sup>51</sup> In the case of Peter and the other Jewish Believers rebuked in Antioch, their “works of law” involved ritual proselyte circumcision being required for one to be justified, or made a full member of God’s covenant people. Yet, a particularized group of regulations, followed by a Jewish sect, is not how advocates of the NPP have commonly applied viewing *ergōn nomou* in light of *ma’asei haTorah* in 4QMMT.

Among the Greeks and the Romans, Jewish people would have been easily recognizable by their observance of various “works of law” as they pertained to ritual purity. Dunn is one examiner who concludes, “We may justifiably deduce, therefore, that by ‘works of law’ Paul intended his readers to think of *particular observances of the law like circumcision and the food laws.....we know that just these observances were widely regarded as characteristically and distinctively Jewish.*”<sup>52</sup> Not being Messianic, Dunn does not have the same high regard that we do for these practices—filling in “works of law” with what he believes Paul is addressing in Galatians. But he does make conclusions that few interpreters make: **“works of law” is not general observance of the Torah.** At the very least, it is observing a segment or sub-set of God’s commandments that was intended to identify someone as definitely being a part of Israel. But perhaps more, following “works of law” pertained to **a sectarian observance of commandments.** Surprisingly, James Montgomery Boice concurs with some of these conclusions, remarking,

“It is important to note that the article is not present in the phrases ‘observing law’ or ‘works of law.’ This means that Paul’s emphasis is not on the Jewish law, the law of Moses, at all, though it includes it, but rather on any system of attempting to please God by good deeds. ‘Works of law’ are ‘deeds of men.’”<sup>53</sup>

The debate that has arisen in contemporary theology today is (1) whether Paul uses *ergōn nomou* to represent strict, legalistic Torah observance, or (2) whether Paul uses *ergōn nomou* to represent a particular class of “works.” Bruce actually renders *ergōn nomou* as “legal works,” stating “The *ἔργα νόμου* are the actions prescribed by the law.”<sup>54</sup> But are these actions prescribed generally by the Torah, or are they actions interpreted and applied by a particular sect—in some cases applied entirely inappropriately? If the latter, with 4QMMT in view to be considered, then by Paul using *ergōn nomou* in Galatians 2:16, he is not so much saying that observance of the Torah will vindicate a person before God, but he is more saying that observing various “legal works” required by a factitious sect will not bring one into His Messianic community. Messianic teachers like Hegg, understanding the connection between *ergōn nomou* and *ma’asei haTorah*, rightly conclude,

“What we now understand is that the phrase ‘works of the Law/Torah’ was used in Paul’s day to refer [to] specific sets of rules or *halachah* which a group required for its self-definition. Simply put, such a list of ‘works of the Torah’ constituted the entrance requirements into the group...‘Works of the Torah,’ then, refers to *halachah* required for entrance into the covenant community (as required by each sect), not personal obedience to God’s word.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 343.

<sup>52</sup> Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 191.

<sup>53</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Galatians,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 10:449.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 136, 137.

<sup>55</sup> Hegg, *Galatians*, 100.

Going back to Paul's statements before Peter in Antioch, in telling him that they both knew that no person could be justified by "works of law"—Paul was specifically reminding Peter that inclusion among God's people did not come via the sectarian observance he was following. The justification that involves being equal members of God's people is to be brought about by personal faith in Messiah Yeshua. Yet, when Paul says that an individual's justification comes *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), there too is some controversy with what Paul means, because of issues of Greek grammar. While no major doctrines of the faith are in question or dispute here, there are some important differences to consider. Some modern study Bibles are having to place footnotes for verses like Galatians 2:16, indicating the alternative rendering, "Or *by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ*."<sup>56</sup> Daniel B. Wallace summarizes what has emerged in recent decades, in his textbook *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*:

"Older commentaries...see Χριστοῦ [*Christou*] as an objective gen[itive], thus, 'faith *in* Christ.' However, more and more scholars are embracing these texts as involving a subjective gen[itive] (thus, either 'Christ's faith' or 'Christ's faithfulness')."<sup>57</sup>

It should be immediately noted that the Hebrew *emunah* (אֱמוּנָה) in the Tanach Scriptures can be legitimately rendered as either "faith" or "faithfulness,"<sup>58</sup> and the same goes for *pistis* (πίστις) in Greek.<sup>59</sup> Context determines which is correct. Longenecker indicates, "when πίστις is understood in terms of the Hebrew term אֱמוּנָה, *ēmūnâ*, which means both 'faith' and 'faithfulness,' then it is not too difficult to view Paul"<sup>60</sup> as using it the same way.

What changes in Galatians 2:16, if *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* is rendered as "by/through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ"? Betz summarizes the traditional rendering of "through faith in Jesus Christ" as, "For the Apostle, 'faith in Christ Jesus' is faith in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ."<sup>61</sup> None of us who read Galatians 2:16 would argue against the fact that born again Believers must recognize Yeshua the Messiah as crucified and physically resurrected to be redeemed. Yet the genitive (case indicating possession) clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* can mean "the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah," a significant Divine action that Paul contrasts to misguided human action. Aware of this, why would there be those who disagree with recognizing that here Paul expects one to be reckoned as a member of God's people, on the basis of what Yeshua's faithfulness has accomplished?

Bruce takes the position that "faith in Jesus Christ" is the correct understanding. He concludes, "The principal and, indeed conclusive argument for taking the genitive to be objective here is that, when Paul expresses himself by the verb πιστεύω and not the noun πίστις"<sup>62</sup> he describes an action that people have to make. In his estimation, the usage of the verb *pisteuō* (πιστεύω), meaning to have faith or to believe, must determine how the preceding noun *pistis* is viewed.

When Paul says "even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua," *kai hēmeis eis Christon Iēsoun episteusamen* (καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν), he asserts that since both he and Peter have placed their belief/faith/trust in Yeshua, so must it be the same for everyone else without exception. **Expressing faith in Yeshua is necessary for redemption, and thus being reckoned as a member of God's people.** For many, since all people placing trust in Yeshua is the issue in this clause, the preceding clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* cannot be viewed as a subjective genitive, but has to be viewed as an objective genitive. Dunn concurs with this view: "In short, the phrase is still best taken as expressing faith in Christ, that is, acceptance of the reliability of what was said by and about Christ."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *God's Game Plan: The Athlete's Bible 2007*, HCSB (Nashville: Serendipity House Publishers, 2007), 1136.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 115.

<sup>58</sup> *CHALOT*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> *BDAG*, pp 818-820.

<sup>60</sup> Longenecker, 87.

<sup>61</sup> Betz, 117.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 139.

<sup>63</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, 139.

None of us are in disagreement that in order to be redeemed and/or reckoned as members of God's people, acknowledgement, of the principal acts of salvation, and believing in them, is required. The usage of the verb *pisteuō* makes this clear. Witherington agrees how "There is no doubt that Paul not only affirms faith *in* Christ, but sees it as an important matter (cf. Rom. 10:14; Phil. 1:29), as this very paragraph of Galatians shows."<sup>64</sup> But, in his Galatians commentary Witherington shows a strong preference for "faithfulness of Jesus Christ" being the correct view. Is the first clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou*, so directly affected by the second clause, where the verb *episteusamen* is used, that it has to be "faith *in* Yeshua the Messiah"? Not all are convinced.

If one chooses to take the position that "the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah," *His action for us*, is what is being contrasted to "works of law"—then it must be assumed that some kind of recognition of His crucifixion and resurrection has already been accomplished. "The faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah" has to be qualified and defined by some kind of actions, after all. In reading Galatians 2:16 as first relating to Yeshua's faithfulness, *the focus is simply shifted to awe of what He has done*, to then be followed with a proper response of how "even we have believed." With Yeshua as the centerpiece of how He has died *for all*, there should be no "works of law" or *halachic* issues separating those who are to come together as fellow brothers and sisters in Him.

Longenecker describes how "the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah" is to properly work. He says, "Paul uses πιστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in his writings to signal the basis for the Christian gospel: that its objective basis is the perfect response of obedience that Jesus rendered to God the Father, both actively in his life and passively in his death."<sup>65</sup> If Yeshua gave Himself up for us via "faithfulness," then we surely have the responsibility to believe in this.

For the sake of Paul's argument to Peter, he was by no means speaking against having faith in Yeshua. If we choose to view the Greek clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* as a subjective genitive, then his use of "the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah," rather, was specifically employed **to highlight where the *ekklesia* needed to place its central attention**. As Paul further explains to Peter, "I have been crucified with Messiah...the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [*en pistei zō tē tou huiou tou Theou*, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ], who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). *En pistei* or "in faith" is certainly a part of the equation, but not all of it. The faith that people place in Yeshua is preceded by recognizing the faithfulness Yeshua has demonstrated. Expressing belief in Yeshua's sacrifice, and what He has accomplished, should come as a direct result of people clearly recognizing the pain and suffering that He endured to ensure eternal atonement.

The significance of viewing "works of law" as human-oriented applications or *halachah* derived from the Torah, contrasted to "the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah" for a person to be reckoned righteous, forgiven of sin and made a member of God's own, **is quite serious**. The Apostle Paul, contrasts limited, even relatively worthless, human activity—to grand and magnificently Divine activity. No one is to be reckoned as "justified" before God because of any mortal actions (*ergōn nomou*, ἐργῶν νόμου), even regarding their (errant) interpretation or application of His Law. Instead, justification is to come *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), "through the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah." Such faithfulness, meaning the Messiah's obedience to the Father unto death for sinful humanity, secures that all people who look to Him may be reckoned as a part of the elect. It definitively requires that people look to what He has accomplished, in order to be truly recognized as a part of God's own.

**2:17** In Galatians 2:17, Paul makes an intriguing remark to Peter, which needs to be weighed in light of the previous discussion of "works of law." He tells Peter, "in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!" (RSV). He continues using the plural, seen here with the participle *zētountes* (ζητοῦντες), "seeking," indicating that both he and Peter alike are among those who seek their justification in the Messiah Yeshua and not in "works of law." Paul actually expresses strong confidence in Peter by this remark, perhaps indicating that as he confronts him, he knows that Peter

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<sup>64</sup> Witherington, *Galatians*, 179.

<sup>65</sup> Longenecker, 87.

will make the right choice and recognize faith, and not “works of law,” as being primary. Peter’s bad behavior is to ultimately not be regarded as a reflection back on Yeshua and His example.

Yet, Paul does recognize that even if one seeks justification in the Messiah, sin may creep in. But this does not mean that Yeshua is the One responsible for the sin. Far from being a “ministrant of sin” (YLT), Paul’s usage of *diakonos* (διδάκωνος) should cause us to consider Him as “a servant, waitingman” (LS),<sup>66</sup> particularly to the point of washing the Disciples’ feet (John 13:1-20). The Messiah is by no means responsible for causing sin and division among His followers. Such is something that they are ultimately responsible for in their human weakness. It can only be remedied by Believers allowing themselves to be transformed by God’s love, where they recognize that all human beings—regardless of ethnicity—have value in His eyes.

Some readers, however, have a skewed view of Galatians 2:17, considering Paul’s remark of “if...we ourselves have also been found sinners.” It is even extrapolated that Paul is saying that Peter and his party in Antioch have been found “sinners” because they are Jews who keep the Mosaic Law. By extension, it is God’s Torah that has caused the sin and has caused the ungodly division among the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers. It is concluded that Yeshua, not being an “agent” (RSV) of sin, does not therefore uphold the instruction of the Torah as a means of living holy.

Of course, the problems with viewing Galatians 2:17 from this angle are immense. It is almost like asking the ridiculous question “Is it sinful to keep God’s Law?”—to which we should answer, “Does God want us to be lawless?” The answer to both questions is a clear “No,” as sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). It is not sin to turn to God’s instruction in the Torah and keep it, living properly according to the standard of God. But it is sin when people disobey God’s Torah, and such sin includes much, much more than just laws pertaining to ritual purity. **Sin can also include one’s attitude, and whether or not a man or woman is being a blessing to others as the Torah requires.**

Sin is found in one’s disobedience to the Torah, which can either come from flesh that is weak and still maturing in one’s relationship with the Lord, or with one who is unregenerated. In the case of Peter, we clearly see someone who was struggling with the non-Jewish question and who needed to be reminded of the coming of Yeshua *to save all humanity*, and not just his fellow Jews. Peter was specifically found to be in the wrong because of his withdrawal during fellowship meals in Antioch.

Truly growing in Yeshua should not cause a person to disobey the high principles of the Torah, and especially should consider the original thrust of Israel being a light to the nations. For Paul in Galatians, one of the greatest sins that could be practiced was racial discrimination (cf. Romans 2:17, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:19-31), of which both Jews and Greeks and Romans were blatantly guilty. For the Jewish Believers, in particular, such attitudes deterred the mandate given by God to Israel to bless others in the world.

Paul is very clear that the problems he saw in Antioch did not come from Peter’s belief in Yeshua, but rather from something in Peter that needed to be discarded. His declaration *mē genoito* (μὴ γένοιτο), “May it never be,” “Certainly not!” (RSV), or “No, never!” (NEB) is important to consider. In Psalm 72:19<sup>67</sup> in the LXX, *genoito genoito* (γένοιτο γένοιτο) is used to render the Hebrew *Amein v’Amein* (אָמֵן וְאָמֵן). *Mē genoito* would be thus a negation of “Amen,” or for our purposes, “No-Amen,” if there could be such a word. Paul is undeniably clear: Yeshua is not responsible for Peter’s breaking of the ethos of the Torah of being a blessing to the nations. That responsibility rests on Peter himself. Yeshua directs His followers to an obedience *where the blessings promised in the Torah can be actualized*, especially in acts of service to one another (Galatians 6:2).

**2:18** Paul’s further comments to Peter in Galatians 2:18, after describing that Yeshua is not responsible for his sin, are also very important to keep in the context of what has thusfar been examined. The common view of Paul’s words, “For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor” (ESV), is that Paul tells Peter that he will violate what he has come to believe if he once again advocates observance of the Mosaic Law. Notably the NIV renders the Greek *parabatēs* (παράβατης), “one who stands beside” (LS),<sup>68</sup> as “lawbreaker.”

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<sup>66</sup> LS, 189.

<sup>67</sup> “And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen” (Psalm 72:19).

<sup>68</sup> LS, 594.

So a common view of Galatians 2:18 actually is, if Paul advocates a return of Believers to following the Torah, he is now a Torah breaker. As Longenecker describes it,

“Paul insists, to go back to the law (as a Christian) after having been done with the law (for both acceptance before God and living a life pleasing to him) is what really makes one a lawbreaker—which, of course, sounds paradoxical, but is what happens if one rejects legalism but still espouses nomism.”<sup>69</sup>

According to this view, Messianics’ who believe in Torah observance as a result of living a holy life of obedience, espousing nomism, would actually find themselves to be the “lawbreakers”—as opposed to Christians who reject the Torah’s instruction as being valid for their lives. Indeed, as Longenecker puts it, this view is “paradoxical,” **and we should rightly reject it**. This view is disjointed from Paul’s actual rebuke of Peter, in responding to Peter’s actions of separating from the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch.

Paul’s argument in Galatians 2:18 does not pertain to the holy standard of living as embodied in the Torah, but rather Paul’s previous way of doing things similar to the Influencers in Galatia. Paul will prove himself to be a transgressor if he goes along with any of the extreme ideas of the Judaizers—those advocating ritual conversion—because it is opposed to the spirit of the Law (Romans 7:6). Prior to his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would have undoubtedly believed many of the same views of the Influencers, and those asking the new, non-Jewish Believers to be circumcised. The primary thrust of the Torah emphasized by Paul was the Abrahamic promise of God’s people blessing all nations (Genesis 12:2; Galatians 3:8), something to actually be realized by their obedience to His Law (Deuteronomy 4:6). Faith in the Creator God and His Messiah came first, and to suggest anything else as being primary to Paul, was to go back to a previous life when he did not understand this crucial revelation.

It is not impossible to conclude that when Paul will later write, “For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall” (Ephesians 2:14)—an artificial construct that the Torah of Moses by no means commands or would ideologically permit—that his comments in Galatians 2:18 may have been ringing in his mind. The overly conservative group from Jerusalem that Peter was associating with may not have yet fully recognized that faith in Yeshua was the entryway into God’s community, not circumcision, and could have been still working through the issue of non-Jewish inclusion. Paul was not about to re-erect any “works of law” which prohibited entry for anyone into the community of the redeemed, on the basis of their ethnic status.

**2:19** In the final words of his dialogue with Peter, Paul makes some remarks that readers need to consider in the scope of the entire Pauline corpus of his letters—not to only consider him to be saying here. Galatians 2:19, “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God,” is often interpreted as meaning that Paul has nothing more to do with the Torah’s instruction, so now he could live a new life in Yeshua the Messiah and proclaim Him among the nations. Of course, proclaiming the good news of being a blessing to all was something that was seen in the Torah (Genesis 12:2), so how could Paul say that he had died to this when one of the major thrusts of him writing the Galatians was for them to see that the promise of salvation is for all?

Is Paul setting God’s Law as being opposed to faith in God’s Messiah? Oftentimes as Messianics, Galatians 2:19 is quoted to us by well-meaning Christian brethren, most of whom are quoting this Scripture verse in the fear of us “losing our salvation.” Any position that we espouse of keeping the Torah’s commandments for a proper life in the Lord is often viewed as being redundant at best, legalistic and/or apostate at worst. Things often get more complicated by overly vocal, overly conservative Messianics who tend to place their Torah observance *ahead of* their faith in Yeshua.

Does, as Longenecker put it, the death of Yeshua on the cross release us “from the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law”<sup>70</sup> Are we now no longer supposed to love the Lord with all of our beings as the Torah commands (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)? It is notable that Paul later clarifies that “Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law” (Galatians 3:13). **It is the curse of the Torah pronounced upon sinners that Believers in Yeshua have been freed from, not its principles of proper behavior.**

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<sup>69</sup> Longenecker, 90.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Even though their conclusions may vary, commentators on Galatians are widely agreed that Paul provides further clarification of his remark in Galatians 2:19, with what we see in a passage like Romans 7:9-10.<sup>71</sup> As Romans 7:9-10 explains,

“I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me.”

Here, Paul describes the person, who once hearing about one of God’s commandments, *dies*. He or she dies because instinctively—as a sinner—such a person disobeys the commandments. The commandments themselves are not the cause of the person’s spiritual death, but rather it is the disobedience. To this end, Boice validly describes, “The law cannot bring life, for no one has ever fulfilled it. Law brings death, for by it all stand condemned. Nevertheless, even in doing this, law performs a good function. For in the very act of destroying all hope for salvation by human works, law actually opens the way to discovering new life in God.”<sup>72</sup> When a person discovers that he or she is condemned by inherent disobedience to God’s commandments, one should be forced to cry out to Him for the salvation He has provided in His Son (Galatians 3:23-24).

Generally speaking, it is more modern commentators who interpret Paul’s words as being antagonistic toward the Torah, as opposed to older and more historical commentators who take a more moderate position. Undeniably the more antagonistic views of the Torah are affected by liberal higher criticism, Pentateuchal source criticism, and whether or not Moses even played a role in the Torah’s composition (that is, if he even existed), ideas which have been around since the mid-Nineteenth Century.<sup>73</sup>

From my family’s own evangelical Christian tradition, John Wesley indicates that for Paul to live to God meant, to “Not continue in sin. For this very end am I, in this sense, freed from the law, that I may be freed from sin,”<sup>74</sup> and elsewhere in his works Wesley was quite clear that he believed that the moral instructions of the Law of Moses, as he considered them, at least, were to be certainly followed as a matter of Christian piety.

In Galatians 2:19, was the Apostle Paul actually released from the Torah’s standard of proper living, **or its penalties pronounced upon sinners?** Is this not what Paul means when telling the Romans, “we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6)? As sinners, we were bound by the penalties pronounced upon us by violating the Torah’s commands. Now freed in Yeshua, we have the ability to serve God in the Spirit, by Him writing those same commands onto our hearts as promised in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:15-17). In Galatians 2:19, Paul is referring to how he has died to the Torah’s penalties, now being empowered to live a new life of service to the Lord empowered by His Spirit. Hegg appropriately concurs,

“[T]he Torah without the Spirit accomplishes death and condemnation, and is a harsh master without mercy. What is more, the Torah without the Spirit of God, that is, apart from genuine saving faith, only causes a person to sin more. And Paul was personally aware of all of these attributes of the Torah. Thus, when he glories in the fact that he had ‘died to the Torah,’ we must understand this primarily that he had died to the condemning, death-giving aspects of the Torah in all of its administrations.”<sup>75</sup>

Many of the historical commentators of our Christian past would be appalled if they saw the state of the Church today and the immense moral problems it faces because too many have disregarded the Torah. While they may not have believed in a fuller Torah observance as we Messianics believe, they certainly would not commonly cast it aside as is all too commonplace today. Today’s Christian Church suffers because it has widely taken Paul’s words as meaning that he opposes any kind of obedience to the Torah.

Some, however, such as Witherington, will claim that Believers are “now under a new mandate, namely the Law of Christ, which [means] first and foremost following the example of Christ, of his self-sacrificial community-creating obedience and faithfulness expressed pre-eminently on the cross.”<sup>76</sup> I certainly cannot

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Bruce, *Galatians*, 143; Dunn, *Galatians*, 143; Witherington, *Galatians*, pp 188-189.

<sup>72</sup> Boice, in *EXP*, 10:451.

<sup>73</sup> Consult the relevant sections of the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>74</sup> Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 685.

<sup>75</sup> Hegg, *Galatians*, pp 72-73.

<sup>76</sup> Witherington, *Galatians*, 189.

disagree with the fact that Messiah followers are to wholeheartedly and eagerly follow the example shown to us by our Lord! But where are the principles that Yeshua demonstrated for us *not seen* throughout the Torah? Those who commonly argue that the “law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) is something different from the Torah, have to instead say that it is Yeshua’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7). Yet, the Sermon on the Mount itself is predicated on the continued validity of the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19).

The Messiah Himself said, “if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46). By disregarding the Torah, God’s people will fail to understand much of the purpose, and certainly the intricacies, of the Messiah’s ministry and mission. Furthermore, how are Believers to understand the greater meaning of Hebrews 10:7, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD” (cf. Psalm 40:6-8), if they do not understand the foundational texts that compose the Holy Bible—which are to point to the Messiah? When Paul wrote Timothy “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16), are we to understand this as meaning that he thought that the Torah and Prophets did not have a message and worthwhile directions that born Believers should be following?

**2:20** The central focus of Paul’s existence is his life in Yeshua the Messiah. This is plainly evident through any examination of his letters (especially Philippians). As Paul tells Peter, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, RSV). The death “to the Law,” that he has described (Galatians 2:19), is quantitatively involved with the crucifixion of his sinful flesh, and in identifying with Yeshua’s atoning work for fallen human beings. The thrust of the gospel, beyond that of redemption and inclusion among God’s people, is in being completely united to Yeshua the Messiah. While Paul may have not died physically, he does nevertheless recognize that it was his own sin—his own violation of God’s Torah—that assisted in nailing Yeshua to the cross (cf. Romans 6:5-18).

Paul recognizes that he was redeemed as a sinner because of the trust that he had placed in that atoning work, not because of any kind of circumcision, be it circumcision as an infant child as a Jew (Philippians 3:5), or ritual proselyte circumcision for non-Jews. If anything, Paul will place a higher emphasis on water immersion than circumcision, contingent with the lenient thoughts of some Hillelite Pharisees (b.*Yevamot* 46a). He will later tell the Galatians in this letter, “For all of you who were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah” (Galatians 3:27; cf. Romans 6:3).

**2:21** In his final words to Peter, as relayed to the Galatians, Paul tells him “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose” (Galatians 2:21, RSV). It is clear, that the prime emphasis for Paul in his ministry, is to declare the grace of God to all people, so that they might be saved from their sins and brought into the company of His own. This is something that Peter himself, at the Jerusalem Council, would later affirm (Acts 15:9, 11). While the specific justification spoken of in Galatians 2:17 pertained more to the identity of being a member of God’s people, Galatians 2:21 has legal vindication from sins in view.

A person’s legal justification before God, being remitted of sins, does not come *dia nomou* (διὰ νόμου) or “through law.” The Torah cannot provide anyone with redemption; Paul has just made it clear in v. 20 that his new life comes through the sacrificial atonement of Yeshua. But secondly, it is also true that in a corporate sense, entry into God’s community is to come via faith and trust in Him.<sup>77</sup> Any obedience to the Torah is to come as a result of that faith (Galatians 6:2), *but is not to precede it*.

One critical question that can be asked of today’s broad Messianic movement, some sectors of which often call themselves “the Torah movement,” could be: “Does God *only want* obedience to His Law?” To this I would answer: “Why did Yeshua enter onto the scene?” Surely, if all God wanted was general obedience to His commandments, then there were many people, of a rather reforming nature who were genuinely interested in good works, in the milieu of First Century Judaism, able to fulfill this quite well. Yeshua Himself said in His Sermon on the Mount, “unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not

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<sup>77</sup> It is Dunn’s conclusion, “Paul’s object here is not the law *per se*, but the law understood as preventing Gentiles’ full and free participation in the grace of God as Gentiles” (*Galatians*, 149).

enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20), indicating that many individuals among these groups of people, indeed followed the Torah rather well. It would have been inappropriate for the Apostle Paul to only target sectarian “works of law” or Torah application that was improper (Galatians 2:16-18), without also addressing the place of the Torah in general (Galatians 2:19-21).