

God's Glory in God's Word

Galatians Part 2

Slavery vs Freedom

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

(Gal 4:21-31)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. (Gal 5:1-6)

Flesh vs Spirit

In considering the contrast Paul provides here, it is important to remember his comments in Romans 8:

*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.** For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it **cannot**. **Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.** (Rom 8:3-9)*

The Flesh

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21)

The Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5:22-24)

What does a life in the Spirit look like?

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:1-2)

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10)

What does a life in the flesh look like?

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. (Gal 6:12-13)

In light of everything Paul has written in this letter, how should we interpret 6:16?

*For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, **and** upon the Israel of God. (Gal 6:15-16)*

Recall...

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-8)

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (Gal 5:2-4)

I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! (Gal 5:12)

The entire letter was written to make clear that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything – what matters is as new creation. Why would Paul be proclaiming peace and mercy on groups opposed to this – to translate “and upon the Israel of God” suggests that Paul is proclaiming peace and mercy on those adhering to this rule – AND other people – i.e. 2 groups of people.

A better way to consider the verse is to apply a possible meaning of the Greek kai. It CAN mean “and”. According to Friberg’s Analytical Greek Lexicon, it CAN also mean: “to explain what preceded and so, that is, namely”.

And considering that “Israel of God” has been defined earlier in the same context, I believe it is the preferred translation: “And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, **(that is, namely)** the Israel of God.

*Know then that it is **those of faith** who are the **sons of Abraham**. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, **those who are of faith are blessed** along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Gal 3:7-9)*

