

Paradise or Pair of Dice

In ancient Jewish tradition there were considered to be four distinct levels for interpreting Scripture. An acronym was made to remember these four levels. By using the first letter of each word these levels spell out *Pardis*, the Hebrew word for Paradise. A good understanding of these levels expose when our teachers are using good exegesis (PaRaDiSe) or are just coming to conclusions by chance (Pair of Dice).

The first level is the literal, known in Hebrew as *Pashat*. This is the most proclaimed form of exegesis used by Christianity. Most preachers will discuss in detail the literal meaning of the text. However, where ever there are two preachers discussing the literal meaning, there are at least two explanations of what is the literal meaning. The reason for this confusion is that neither knows what literal means. They generally confuse it to mean, "what I have been taught," not the simple plain explicit understanding of the words within their context. For example, "**NKJV Genesis 12:3** I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you;..." is literally speaking about Abraham, not the modern nation of Israel. However, the literal is not the only way to derive meaning from Scripture so if we follow proper rules, other conclusions can be made from this text.

The second level or method of understanding Scripture is known as a hint, or in Hebrew called a *Remez*. It would be difficult for Scripture to blatantly state every possible wrong that mankind could commit or to deal with every varied situation to which man could find himself exposed. Therefore God did expect us to determine some things for ourselves using Scripture as our guide. Yehoshua (Jesus), exposes that this is expected when He spoke with the Sadducees concerning their disbelief in the resurrection.

NKJV Mark 12:26 "But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *burning bush passage*, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? ²⁷ "He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

Yehoshua seemed somewhat indignant that these studied religious men had not determined properly the resurrection. He used one strong verse, Exodus 3:6, to determine that there must be a resurrection. Would you have passed the test with that same passage? Remember, during Yehoshua's time, many books of the Hebrew Bible had not yet been canonized. The entire category known as the Writings was not yet authorized as a part of the Bible. It was not until the council of Yavneh around 90 AD when the Jews officially added the Writings to their Canon of Scripture. This explains why Yehoshua often said the Law and the

Prophets spoke of Him, but only added the one additional book of Psalms a couple of times. This means the clear references to the resurrection in the book of Daniel were not sanctioned at that time as sacred Scripture. With this example as well as others, it is well established that God expected us to understand some things by deriving them from the text without explicit statements. Thus God gives hints, and it is up to us to properly interpret the meaning of the hint. To determine a further application from the text by finding a strong statement in Scripture, or by combining two similar passages or by using similar phrases and idioms is to use this second level of interpretation known as *Remez*.

The third level for understanding Scripture is known as *Drash*. The word *Drash* means to *search*. This is homiletical in nature, often allegorizing a text in order to make a modern application. Not all *Drash* is allegory, but all allegory is *Drash*. Many sermons today are using this method of interpretation. Allegory is fine, but one must realize that it becomes illegitimate once it contradicts the literal meaning of the text. This non-contradictory premise is a historical principle for interpreting Scripture known as the *Literal Principle*. No text should lose its literal meaning.

The remaining level for interpreting and understanding Scripture is known as *Sod* meaning *hidden*. This method is much more esoteric and should not be attempted by a novice. However, the apostle John seems to use this method often. The Revelation of John is full of symbols and even one clear case of numerology. The same applies to John's gospel where he begins with a Sod interpretation of Genesis 1:1 using an Aramaic translation as his source text and elaborating on some hidden meanings derived from the text.

This concludes the brief introduction to the four levels of interpretation. Our topic today will be studying some verses in the Brit Khadasha (New Testament) where Paul uses the second and third levels of interpretation, yet is often misunderstood since many Christians believe every doctrine is based on a literal interpretation, and every passage in the Brit Khadasha is speaking of the literal interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

When I first began teaching the four levels of interpretation it became apparent that few students understood the word *allegory*. It was confused with an *analogy*. An analogy is a comparison of two or more objects showing the similarity between them. The text will often contain the words *like* or *as* to distinguish that an analogy is being given. "It is as dark as pitch," is an analogy. An allegory is a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another. An allegory is a symbolical narrative. It may take a literal historical event and interpret it as symbolic having a deeper, more abstract meaning. Before we look at Scripture and find an example of an allegory, we briefly need to consider obedience and the

literal, concrete meaning of some historical events recorded in the Hebrew writings.

Adam had the choice to obey God or to reject His instruction. Adam rejected God's instruction by eating of the forbidden fruit. Noah had the opportunity to reject God's instruction, yet Noah obeyed and made the Ark. The Scriptures are full of examples of people making this choice, some properly, others improperly. Abraham is an example that adds another dimension to obedience. Abraham had a word from God telling him that he would be the father of many nations. This was an impossible promise since Abraham's wife Sarah was too old to bear children. He and Sarah began to try to save God's reputation. They knew what He had stated was impossible with her, but with Hagar, Sarah's slave girl, it would be quite possible. Thus, Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham for a wife. Hagar bore a son and then God, through Abraham and Sarah's execution of their plan, has saved face. From their perspective, the promise had been fulfilled.

Unfortunately, this **man made** solution was not what God had in mind. Instead, God planned to restore Sarah's fertility. This was a true miracle considering that Sarah was ninety years old, consequently this made all of Abraham's descendants of promise, miracle children. A repeat of this healing of barrenness transpired in the next two generations. Rachael and Rebecca also were infertile, yet neither had gone through menopause. They each produced children and those children also received a special blessing. Rebecca gave birth to Jacob and Esau, but only Jacob was the child of promise. Rachael gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin, and Joseph's son Ephraim received a special blessing as did also his uncle Judah, Jacob's son by his wife Leah. God really desired to place His mark upon this family. Three generations of miracles exhibit to what degree He desired to call them out to be a people of His. God did not need any help in bringing about His plan. He did not need Abraham's help when he attempted to fulfill prophecy through Sarah's handmaid, nor did He need Moses' help 350 years later when Moses attempted to deliver the Children of Israel while he was still living in Pharaoh's palace. My point is this; there is a way of God and there is a way of man, the two are not the same, and neither are they compatible.

When we turn to the book of Galatians we should ask ourselves several questions. The first one should be concerning the purpose; what is the purpose of the book of Galatians? Is it a part of Torah? Is it prophetic? Is it poetry or psalms of praise? Galatians is a letter written by Paul to a specific church or groups of Churches in Galatia. There is no decisive answer as to where Galatia is. Some say it is a western Province of the Roman Empire near the Mediterranean Sea in modern day Turkey. Some say it is France (Gaul). Others place it farther north in the Roman Empire closer to modern day Germany. Its location is secondary to its religious background. Most of the members in this congregation were once idol worshipers.

Most scholars consider them to be Celtic tribes that migrated to Turkey. If they were Celts, we know that they had been practicing the Druid religion. They were now either turning to God, or were returning to God and they had plenty of advisors.

Paul, being one of the originators of this congregation wrote them this letter to deal with specific problems that this congregation or people group was having. Paul was not writing Torah. Neither was he negating Torah. Paul was making commentary on Torah. He was taking Scripture, and interpreting it in such a way as to give insight on how to deal with the specific problems that this congregation was facing. This is applying the Torah and the Prophets to the lives of the individuals within this congregation.

Paul did not have the authority to change Torah! To have done so would have immediately invalidated his message. One cannot be a continuation of a specific group or message when he contradicts all previous canonized writings of that group. So if Paul is a spokesman for the Messiah of the Jews, he cannot be invalidating the Scripture of the Jews which is the source of the Messiah's claim to Messiahship. Therefore, we **must** recognize this letter as being a dissertation concerning the Scriptures and that Paul was making application to his contemporary times. It cannot be construed as a rewriting or correction of the books of authority. With this in mind, let us read a section of Galatians where Paul uses drash to reveal a deeper meaning to the Hebrew Scriptures.

(KJV Galatians 4:22) ²² For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise. ²⁴ Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. ²⁵ For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. ²⁶ But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. ²⁷ For it is written, Rejoice, *thou* barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. ²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. ²⁹ But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now. ³⁰ Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. ³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Verses 22 and 23 speak of *the promise* versus *the flesh*. *The promise* was a miracle brought about as Abraham believed God. *The flesh* was Abraham attempting to bring about God's promise through his own schemes and devises.

The promise required no manipulative work on Abraham's part, only waiting in expectation of God's fulfillment. Paul continues to state that the two women represent the two covenants. The two covenants to which he refers are called the *Old Covenant* and the *New Covenant* in Christian circles today. I believe this is a misnomer, yet, I will use the terms for the sake of communication. In defining the Old Covenant, I will align it with the Mosaic Covenant which was given from Mt Sinai. When speaking of the New Covenant, I am referring to the one which is spoken about in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

The distinguishing factor between the Old and New covenants is not the requirements, nor the number of laws, nor the specifics involved in those laws. It does not have anything to do with the punishment deserved or administered between them. The difference stems from the place on which they are written. The Old Covenant was written on stone, being an external marker, while the New Covenant is written on the heart of a child of promise (an elect one) giving an internal heart change exhibiting external manifestations. Hence, he does not become one who perfected himself through diligent observance, but one who did not inhibit the spirit's work in his life. The laws are the same, the actions should be similar at least in regard to obedience, yet the Old Covenant can be a laborious attempt, whereas the New Covenant is a miraculous transformation.

Where do I get this distinction between the Old and the New Covenants. It is first given in the Torah. First let us look at a recording of when the Torah was given to the Children of Israel and what was said concerning how Israel was to act in relationship to it.

Sinai Proclamation

(NKJV Deuteronomy 10:12) " And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ "and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? ¹⁴ "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, *also* the earth with all that *is* in it. ¹⁵ "The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. ¹⁶ "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer."

These commandments were to be kept for the good of the keepers. They were to be considered a blessing, and the recipients were to circumcise the foreskin of their heart. The idea of laying these commandments on their hearts was given as a task they were to complete. They were to rid themselves of their own stiff-necked

ways. Compare this to a later verse in Deuteronomy. This verse is preceded by a long dissertation of God telling them all the blessings and cursings that accompany the law. God does not say, "If you break my commandments," rather He says, "When you break my commandments." These warnings were given with the full knowledge that Israel would not keep His laws. After He tells of all the consequences, He reveals His mercy and informs them how He, Himself will correct the situation. Let us read the first mention of the New Covenant.

New Covenant Proclamation

NKJV Deuteronomy 30:1 "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you,² "and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul,³ "that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you.⁴ "If *any* of you are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.⁵ "Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.⁶ "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

Notice in these verses God states that He will bring them back from their captivity. He will have compassion on them. God will gather them unto their own land. And lastly, God will circumcise their heart. Here in Deuteronomy 30 we have the first proclamation of the New Covenant. He states that after they have proven themselves incapable of completing the task, God will perform it for them. Later in the Prophets we have a much clearer definition given of what will take place in the New Covenant. Let us read it to understand the details.

The New Covenant Defined

(NKJV Jeremiah 31:31) " Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah --³² "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.³³ "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be

their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." ³⁵ Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts *is* His name): ³⁶ "If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, *Then* the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever."

Unfortunately, Christianity has often taught that the New Covenant is manifested through them within the Church today. This is a complete misunderstanding of these verses and God's timing. This is equivalent to Sarah telling her neighbors that she is a mother immediately after Abraham announced God's promise to her. Proclaimed in faith, that may have been a good thing to do, yet in truth and physical reality, it was a future event at that time which God intended to complete. It was at least ten years before God manifested the reality that He spoke into existence when He proclaimed the promise the first time. In like manner, the New Covenant was proclaimed in Deuteronomy, defined in Jeremiah, cut in the Gospels, but will be manifested in its fullness in the Millennial Kingdom. He will renew the Old Covenant on the hearts of Israel making it impossible for us to break. We will keep that covenant given to Abraham and elaborated on by Moses in that day. In the present time, we have received the Holy Spirit as an earnest (10% down, balance due on fulfillment) leading us to keep the law.

Now that we have discussed some facts concerning these covenants let us review the next two verses. Paul states, " ²⁵ For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. ²⁶ But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." Notice the words "now is." Paul is stating that we now operate in the earthly Jerusalem. This is the old covenant from Sinai which was written in stone. However, since we are of the children of promise, the Heavenly Jerusalem is our mother. God has promised a miracle transformation upon all Israel who will become the sons of God. We will be transformed by His work, not by our own. This is showing how the children of promise were brought about by a miracle, not the laborious tasks of those attempting to make it work. A graph of these two concepts will give a clearer vision of what Paul is presenting in these verses.

<i>Who</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Source/Place</i>	<i>Inscribed</i>	<i>Corresponds</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
Hagar gave birth to Ishmael	Bondwoman Slave son	Flesh (Abraham attempted to fulfill God's promise by his own methods)	Covenant on Stone (Sinai) Exodus 24:3...	Jerusalem which now is	Presenting a Circumcision of Flesh made by an earthly father
Sarah gave birth to Isaac	Freewoman Free son	Promised Miraculous Transformation	Covenant on Heart (Jeremiah 31)	Heavenly Jerusalem	Presenting a Circumcision of heart, made by a Heavenly Father

We must remember that the Law given at Sinai was given to the children of promise, not to the children of the slave women. The law is not made invalid by these allegorical interpretations. Paul was merely dealing with the fleshly striving for perfection by keeping the law and using the law to point out how righteous we are. The outward manifestations of keeping the law often become grounds for bragging. Remember, both sons, Ishmael and Isaac were circumcised. This was of no merit to them, **they** had not done anything to receive this mark. It was merely a sign that their father desired to obey God. The only command for a person to circumcise himself in the flesh was given to Abraham. From then on out the commandment was to the father of the child. The son was to be circumcised on the eighth day. An eight day old infant is incapable of making a decision let alone doing anything to complete the task asked of his father. How could a person gain a right to brag, or use this as a symbol of holiness, when nothing he had done brought the sign about? The circumcision did not make the distinction between these two sons. The distinction came from God. One was the child of promise, one was not.

Paul is often thought to be belittling or negating the commandments of God in these verses. When he says, “answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children,” the word *bondage* is often applied to the law. Bondage does not refer to *the law*, rather to *the children*. We all are in bondage to sin at this present time. The law points out the sin, and we are incapable of perfecting ourselves. As we submit to the Spirit, He will enable us to keep the law and will set us free from the bondage to sin. Ultimately, we will be perfected through God's work, not by our own works. The flesh does not perfect, only the work of God can perfect a fallen man. Paul states that we are of the heavenly Jerusalem, which reveals that he believes that his audience consists of the children of promise.

Remember the *Literal Principle*, Paul's drash (allegory) must not do away with the pashat (the literal meaning). Paul knows that the Israelites are the children of

promise. He also recognizes that the law was given to the children of promise. He is not replacing or excluding either of these facts by giving this interpretation of the text. He is merely applying it to the people with whom he is speaking. He emphasizes that the miracle which came about by the promise is of the greatest significance. To do so he states, “²⁷ For it is written, Rejoice, *thou* barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, *thou* that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. ²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” This may be a sign Paul believes these people were included in the original children of promise, being a descendant of one of the lost tribes, or it could be that he recognizes them as full heirs to the promise because they have tied themselves to the people of promise and the God who gave the promise. Either way, Paul believed them to be heirs to the kingdom even though they may not have been able to exhibit the outward sign of circumcision. Remember, circumcision was proof that the father obeyed God, not that the child did. Paul was well aware of the fact that none in the northern kingdom of Israel would have fathers who were obedient to the commands of God. He recognized that this did not prove anything concerning the sincerity or inward work of God, rather it only proved their fathers intent, which was known by all to have been lacking.

Paul continues to emphasize a contrast between the one who proudly promotes the evidence of his perfection by showing how it lines up with every legal edict to the one who can show only a change of heart and a promise from God to perfect. The former will always try to lord over the latter by presenting this evidence and attempting to make the latter feel second rate or insignificant due to their lack of evidence. In reality, the evidence is forth coming. Paul continues to apply his allegory concerning the actions of Ishmael who harassed Isaac continuously. Ishmael was jealous of Isaac because Isaac was the child of promise. Paul states, “²⁹ But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now.” Paul was referring to those who wanted to point out the lack of circumcision in those who were coming into the knowledge of Messiah. Those who emphasize such differences can always present their own perfection as manifested in this one act, but are overlooking the glaring flaw presented by their attitude. Paul was repulsed by their arrogance and lack of love toward their brothers.

Paul’s next statements are often misconstrued. He says, “³⁰ Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. ³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.” This has often been taken to say that those who follow the law will be cast out from the promise. Again, this is misunderstanding what the subject of this dissertation is. The subject is not the law, rather the using of the law as a proof text for one’s own righteousness and

lording over others with that document. The casting out of the bondswoman and her son if taken literally would mean to reject every Arab. This is not the intent, remember, this is an allegory. Another application is to assume this is talking about the Jew, since they received the law at Sinai. This is making the *law* the subject, and Paul attempts to dispel this thinking numerous times in Scripture. In *Acts* he made a sacrifice to clear up the confusion, in Romans 7:12 he states, “Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” and in 1 Timothy 1:8 he says, “But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully.”

Paul is allegorically using Sinai to represent the way some of his brethren are lording over the new comers with those edicts handed down at Sinai. These brethren, showing how they have done this since birth, portray the new comers as second rate. They continue to instruct the new comers to put on the appearance of righteousness (circumcision which in reality was to be done by their father, not them) rather than recognize that the heart change in the newcomers will equip them with a much superior physical manifestation. (The putting away of the lusts of the flesh and seeking after God) This is the intent of Paul’s presentation. Therefore, the bondswoman’s children are those who are lording over the congregation, not the Jews or law keepers as a group.

The distinction between *the action* and *the ones doing* the action may seem irrelevant at the moment. Yes, those doing the action were Jews. Unfortunately, we often categorize people and lump them all into one group while ignoring the similar actions within our or another group. This causes much harm as well as affects our understanding of Scripture. I have attended synagogues where the understanding of grace was far superior to that of grace touting Christian denominations. In fact, often the grace touters lord over others with their supposed superior manifestation of God’s intent. History repeats itself, only this time we use grace as our measuring stick rather than law. Paul addresses the **attitude** expressed by *lording over a person* whether one uses law or grace as the means. We can easily ignore the same action within the “grace camp” when it is our own, while railing the Jews for their “legalism.” This is the result of group association rather than action association.

Paul makes his point after the allegory. Chapter 5 begins with the application that he wishes for the reader to understand. As long as the associations are properly made, one can understand the intent, but if they are incorrectly made, or we attempt to make this a literal rather than allegorical interpretation of Scripture, we will cause great problems with the text. Continue reading.

(NKJV Galatians 5:1) Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.³

And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

The word *liberty* has been shown to be speaking of the *children of promise*, a miraculous transformation. The *Yoke of bondage* is “the proving” oneself as perfected rather than looking to a future time of promised miraculous perfection. Paul’s next statement that Christ will profit you nothing if you become circumcised is referring to relying on that **outward** manifestation to show others evidence of your submission. It does not negate the command concerning circumcision. The father is still required to circumcise his sons on the eighth day. This was spoken to those who were not circumcised on the eighth day and were being manipulated into performing this upon themselves. It was being used strictly as a proof of righteousness, not as submission to God. If we use this as our sign, and do not look forward to the work of Messiah, that is all that we will get. We will be left with the mere physical manifestation, rather than the miraculous work that Messiah will do in the millennial kingdom. If our focus becomes centered on the law as a means of *final* justification we stop acting in faith and looking forward to the ultimate manifestation of what the law and the prophets proclaim. This obviously does not mean that Messiah cannot perfect one who is circumcised. It only means that circumcision will not be the indicator of whom Messiah will perfect.

Paul continues to show that it is not merely circumcision, rather the whole law that proves ones righteousness. Those proving their superior status based on circumcision should look a little closer at themselves, recognizing their inadequacy proven by their failure in other places. After all, they had nothing to do with their circumcision, it is the remainder of the law by which they pass the test. All of us should be looking forward to the final work of Messiah, not the temporal work that we do in this life as fallen mankind. When one believes that he is fully justified by his works, he has no need for grace. The definition of grace is *unmerited favor* as opposed to *merited favor*. If we believe we are *merited*, we have no need for a future perfecting, and no need for grace. However, as the spirit leads us to obey God through keeping his commands, we recognize how unmerited we are from birth. We did not gain our justification on the eighth day, nor have we earned our justification by a later perfection gained through perfectly keeping the law. We look forward to a day when God writes his laws on our hearts, making us a new creation, transformed into perfect sons of God.

Notice Paul’s statement concerning estrangement, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

The two words in italics “attempt to” are not in the Greek. It literally states, you who be justified by law. Again, this shows the attitude with which Paul was dealing. It was not that they were *attempting* to do the law, it was that they thought *they had* gained justification by keeping the law. It was the thought that they had already completed the task, no longer needing a future perfection granted from Messiah. Paul is speaking from their point of view, while strongly disagreeing with them. In today’s language, we would call this *sarcasm*. The addition of the words “*attempting to*” is the translators attempt at removing the sarcasm of Paul’s statement, but in doing so he is giving his own interpretation of Paul’s initial point. In my opinion if we desire to eliminate the sarcasm it would be better worded, “you who *believe you are* justified by law....”It is proper to remove sarcasm because often people do not understand it as such. I am adding my own interpretation of what Paul means, just as the translator has in the NKJV. This is a part of the translation process. Another solution would be to proceed this verse by, “Paul sarcastically addresses his adversaries saying, you who be justified by law,” but that would not work with the wording of his preceding dissertation.

Explaining various figures of speech, hermeneutic techniques or language nuances becomes very difficult for the translator. This is one reason translated texts are often misunderstood. The translators are carefully dealing with these difficulties and are often criticized for their inadequate success. I hope that those reading this article will understand the translators a little better and will be more forgiving of their inabilities.

Frank Houtz

Most of this article is taken from Frank Houtz’s Biblical Research Techniques manual. The course for which this manual is used deals with translation problems at length as well as other hermeneutic and exegetical problems in dealing with a Greek text of origin for the Brit Khadasha (New Testament) and a Hebrew text of origin for the Hebrew Scriptures. For those who wish to discover the Hebrew basis to the Greek texts and find out why some of the meaning in the New Testament is misunderstood, the Biblical Research Techniques course is a must.