

Galatians 2:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

Analysis

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage. The compound term pseudadelphous (ψευδαδέλφους, "false brothers") is devastatingly blunt—these weren't mere theological opponents but infiltrators pretending brotherhood while undermining truth. The verb pareisaktous (παρεισάκτους, "secretly brought in") suggests deliberate covert operation, like enemy spies smuggled into a fortress.

Their mission: kataskopēsai (κατασκοπεῖσαι, "to spy out") the eleutherian (ἐλευθερίαν, "freedom/liberty") believers possess en Christō Iēsou (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, "in Christ Jesus"). This freedom isn't license but liberation from the law's condemnation and the futile attempt to earn righteousness through works. The final purpose clause reveals their sinister goal: hina hēmas katadoulōsousin (ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσουσιν, "that they might enslave us completely")—the intensive compound verb suggests reducing to absolute slavery.

Paul identifies spiritual warfare behind theological debate: Satan's strategy is always to add requirements to grace, making salvation dependent on human performance rather than divine gift. The contrast between eleutheria (freedom) and douleia (slavery) defines the stakes—we either live in the freedom Christ purchased or return to bondage under law.

Historical Context

These "false brothers" were likely Jewish Christians who insisted Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law (Acts 15:1). They may have come from Jerusalem with impressive credentials, claiming to represent James or the apostles. Their infiltration of Gentile churches threatened to split the early Christian movement into incompatible Jewish and Gentile factions, destroying the unity Christ achieved through the cross.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What modern teaching subtly replaces grace with performance-based acceptance before God?
2. Why does adding any human requirement to faith in Christ constitute a return to spiritual slavery?
3. Where in your Christian walk might you be accepting false teaching that undermines the freedom Christ purchased for you?

Interlinear Text

διὰ	δὲ	τοὺς	παρεισάκτους	ψευδαδέλφους	οἵτινες	
that because of	And	G3588	unawares brought in	false brethren	who	
G1223	G1161		G3920	G5569	G3748	
παρεισῆλθον	κατασκοπῆσαι	τὴν	ἐλευθερίαν	ἡμῶν	ἣν	
came in privily	to spy out	G3588	liberty	our	which	
G3922	G2684		G1657	G2257	G3739	
ἔχομεν	ἐν	Χριστῷ	Ἰησοῦ	ἵνα	ἡμᾶς	καταδουλώσωνται
we have	in	Christ	Jesus	that	us	into bondage
G2192	G1722	G5547	G2424	G2443	G2248	G2615

Additional Cross-References

Jude 1:4 (References Jesus): For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:1 (References Christ): Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

2 Corinthians 11:26 (Parallel theme): In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

Galatians 4:3 (Parallel theme): Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

Isaiah 51:23 (Parallel theme): But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

Acts 20:30 (Parallel theme): Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Acts 15:1 (Parallel theme): And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Acts 15:24 (Parallel theme): Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

2 Peter 2:19 (Parallel theme): While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

1 John 4:1 (Parallel theme): Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.