
Beginning with the Foundation

ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας

Introduction

Paul's letter to the church or churches of Galatia is a straightforward one. He clearly contrasts the Gospel with any other work or works that one might attempt in order to get to God. It is not difficult to understand the words he uses or the concepts to which he points. It is extremely difficult, however, to die to our own selfish ambition and trust in the finished work of Christ alone for our eternal salvation.

Paul's Background

Paul was the "Apostle to the Gentiles," but he was also the "Pharisee of Pharisees." His position was one of prestige on both sides of the aisle, but this sometimes played out to his detriment rather than benefit. Paul was no slouch in his education, and he was even more dedicated to clear teaching and the implications thereof.

Setting the Scene (Acts 15)

Pharisees from Judea came to Antioch with their intentions set on proclaiming the necessity of all Christians to be circumcised (such a thing would only begin a life of lawful adherence that was said to be required for true salvation). Their teaching rattled the Galatian Christians, and Paul and Barnabas were appointed to bring the matter to apostolic counsel in Jerusalem. The discussion included Apostles, elders and some Pharisees. The result was a hearty affirmation of the exclusivity of Christ and the Gospel. The Council sent Barsabbas and Silas, along with Paul and Barnabas, with a letter of freedom in Christ to the Galatian Christians. Paul's letter to the Galatians is subsequent to the Judaizing rebuttal to that first letter and personal pronouncement.

Passage: Galatians 1:1-5

Authorship

No conservative orthodox scholar disagrees with the authorship of this book. **Unanimously, the Apostle Paul was indeed the author.** Simply put, the authorship of this text is not disputed in any real sense. Paul does name himself in the opening statements, and this can sometimes be an indication of pseudo-authorship. In this case, however, Paul is beginning the letter with a personal address and a claim to his derived authority.

Dating

Dating can be difficult for any ancient texts, but the biblical texts are quite replete with dating references and indications. Therefore, we can be quite certain that **Galatians was written around 50 AD.**

"The Gospel – the message that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope – creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth, for obedience, for love." -Timothy Keller

Galatians 1:1-5

1a Paul, an apostle not from men nor through man

1. Who is Paul?

- Saul/Paul was a well-educated Jew from Tarsus, the capitol of Cilicia and a hub of commerce, travel, military and education (Acts 21 & 22).
- Saul/Paul approved of and participated in the persecution and execution of Christians (Acts 7:58-8:3).
- Saul/Paul was converted in the middle of his active participation in the persecution of Christians.
 - Acts 9:1-5 – “1 But Saul (later called Paul), still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” 5 And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”
 - Nearly immediately after his Damascus road experience (his conversion to Christ) Paul/Saul proclaimed the Gospel of Christ in the very place that represented all he had been fighting for – the synagogues (Acts 9:20-22).
- Paul was considered the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (Gal 2:8).

2. What is an Apostle?

- αποστολος - a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders
- **Are there apostles today that can be appointed by men?**
 - It seems that both Silas and Barnabas are referred to as apostles, but distinct from the office held by Paul and only several others.
- Apostles were *not from men nor through man*
 - Chrysostom – “The not being “*from man*” has reference to all alike for the Gospel’s root and origin is divine, but the not being “*through man*” is peculiar to the Apostles; for He called them and not by men’s agency but by His own.”¹

¹ Chrysostom, John. *Commentary on Galatians*. San Bernardino, CA: Beloved Publishing, 2014. (p. 4)

- Apostles met 3 requirements

(1) Be with Jesus from His baptism to His arrest/death. They needed to be eye and ear witness of Christ's resurrection and all that He did. (Acts 1:21-22; 10:39-41)

(2) They had to receive a direct appointment by Jesus Christ.

This was underscored in the selection of Matthias to take the place of Judas (Luke 6:12-13; cf. Acts 1:23-26).

(3) They must have received the Holy Spirit, which was given for two closely-related purposes (Acts 1:1-8):

(a) To supernaturally enable them to be witnesses of Christ, inerrantly writing the Word of God by divine inspiration along with some closely connected with them, such as Mark and Luke (Matt. 10:5a, 18-20; Jn. 16:12-15, 14:25-26).

(b) To enable them to prove their testimony trustworthy with supernatural 'signs and wonders' (Mt. 10:1; 2 Cor. 12:11-12). These 'signs and wonders' were connected with the Apostles because they supported their divinely inspired witness, even as new periods of divine revelation had been generally accompanied by such miraculous signs in past redemptive history (Moses and Elijah).

1b but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead

Paul was called / commissioned as an Apostle by the risen Christ.

- Paul was converted (Acts 9:1-22) and commissioned (Acts 22:21) by the risen Christ.
- Notice also the synonymous use of 'Christ' and 'Father' here.
 - It is not that Paul means to make both Christ and Father the same in essence – *the Christ is the Father...* No, the distinction is clear. Jesus Christ *and* God the Father are distinctly named agents. Paul does make them equal in authority and action – *as Jesus Christ sends with authority, so God the Father sends the same and wields the same authority to do so.*
- Notice the similar ascription of activity to God the Father that is also shared in the Godhead.
 - It is true that God raised and exalted Christ (Rom. 4:24, 8:11; 2 Cor. 1:9, 2:12; Eph. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:21).
 - It is also true that Jesus raised Himself (Jn. 2:19, 5:26, 10:17-18).

2a and all the brothers who are with me,

What implication does this phrase give?

Community, Accountability, Authority, Familial-like Relationship

2b To the churches of Galatia:

To whom was the letter written?

Galatian Christians

Note that the greeting is less than warm.

- Compare the greetings:
 - Romans 1:7 - "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints..."
 - 1 Corinthians 1:2 - "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints..."
 - Ephesians 1:1b - "To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus..."
- Chrysostom - "Consider the grave indignation contained in the phrase, '[to] the churches of Galatia:' he does not say, 'to the beloved' or 'to the sanctified,' and this omission of all names of affection or respect, and the speaking of them as a society merely, without the addition 'Churches of God,' for it is simply 'Churches of Galatia,' is strongly expressive of deep concern and sorrow."²

Because the letter is not written to us, how might we benefit from it?

We can learn from the successes and failures of others if we are willing to do our homework

3a Grace to you and peace

Paul offers a prayer in his greeting, and he begins a brief Gospel presentation.

- Chrysostom - "[S]ince they were in danger of falling from grace he prays that they may recover it again, and since they had come to be at war with God, he beseeches God to restore them to the same peace."³
- All who have now received grace through Christ enjoy peace (Luke 2:29).

² Chrysostom, John. *Commentary on Galatians*. San Bernardino, CA: Beloved Publishing, 2014. (p. 7)

³ Chrysostom, John. *Commentary on Galatians*. San Bernardino, CA: Beloved Publishing, 2014. (p. 8)

3b from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

From Whom does grace and peace come?

- Grace and peace are the gifts of God (Acts 11:23; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 3:7; Titus 2:11; 1 Pet. 4:10)!
- See also Paul's use of the phrase "our Father" to refer to God.
 - Chrysostom – "O you who were lately slaves, enemies, and aliens, what right do you suddenly acquired to call God your Father? It was not the Law which conferred upon you this relationship; why did you therefore desert Him who brought you so near to God, in return to your tutor?"⁴

4a who gave himself for our sins

Grace and Peace only come through the sacrifice of Christ – not through methods!

- Ephesians 1:7 – "In him [that is in Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace..."
- Colossians 1:20 – "through him [Jesus Christ] God reconciled everything to himself. He [God] made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross."
- Romans 5:9 – "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his [Christ's] blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."

4b to deliver us from the present evil age,

Paul understands the sinful corruption of all men and the pervasiveness of it.

- The sinner's 'fallenness' is *Radical* or *Total* (Rom. 3:11-18).
- Sin is not merely contained in one sinner here and another there, but it is universally entrenched during the *present evil age* (Rom. 3:23, 5:12).
- Such evil, sin, and bondage are exactly what Christ gave Himself to *deliver us from* (Gal. 1:4)!

⁴ Chrysostom, John. *Commentary on Galatians*. San Bernardino, CA: Beloved Publishing, 2014. (p. 8)

4c according to the will of our God and Father,

The Gospel is accomplished and applied according to the will of God – salvation is of the Lord!

- God does all that He does (especially in the saving of sinners) according to His own will or “Good Pleasure” (Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 2:13; Luke 10:21, 12:32; Gal. 1:15; 1 Cor. 1:21; Matt. 11:26; Isa. 61:2).

5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Because salvation is wholly of God, He deserves all glory, honor and praise!

- God alone is to be glorified for the great salvation He has delivered (Gal. 1:5; Eph. 1:14).
 - Chrysostom – “Having spoken of the Cross, and Resurrection, of redemption from sin and security for the future, of the purpose of the Father, and the will of the Son, of grace and peace and His whole gift, he concludes with an ascription of praise.”⁵
- God never stops being glorified for delivering grace and peace to sinners (Rev 21:11, 23; 22:5).

Paul ends his opening sentence with an ‘Amen.’

- 1 Corinthians – 16, final greeting in last chapter
- 2 Corinthians – 13, final greeting in last chapter
- Ephesians – 3, middle (after lengthy Gospel and doxology)
- Philippians – 4, final greeting in last chapter
- Colossians – 4, final greeting in last chapter
- 2 Timothy – 4, final greeting in last chapter

What he has already said is sufficient for the Galatians Christians and for us to measure our beliefs and lives against in order to understand our error and embrace the Gospel for our great joy, but in the remaining chapters the Apostle Paul will itemize the errors of the congregation in Galatia as they conflict with this singularly good message.

⁵ Chrysostom, John. *Commentary on Galatians*. San Bernardino, CA: Beloved Publishing, 2014. (p. 12)

Takeaway:

Do you hear the word that comes from God and not men?

Do you seek to believe and live according to this good message?

Do you embrace the person and work of Christ as your only hope for salvation?

Do you love the grace and peace that God has delivered to you?

Do you recognize that the present conditions of the world in which you live are evil?

Do you acknowledge that the evil conditions of this world are also found in you?

Do you have gratitude and humility in your heart and mind for the gift of salvation?

Do you glorify God only for the wonderful redemption He has provided for you?

Is this Gospel the foundation of your life, happiness, peace, and serenity?