

GALATIANS

Introduction

Author. The authorship of this epistle is undisputed.

Date. A.D. 48

Occasion. The discussion of the historical background of this book is directly dependent upon the view one holds concerning the destination of the epistle. This writer holds to what has become known as the South Galatian view. The following material is presented on the assumption that the Galatia to which Paul refers is the Roman provincial territory, in which he had ministered.

In the early part of the third century B.C. a group of the Gauls moved into north Central Asia Minor. In order to distinguish this group from the West-European Gauls, they became known as the "Gallo-Graecians" from which the name "Galatians" is derived. By the first century B.C. these people had become extremely useful to the Romans and thus were allowed to expand their territory, especially to the south. By 64 B.C. they had become a client of Rome and in 25 B.C. when their leader, Amyntas, died all of their territory became the Roman province of Galatia.

Paul travelled through this region of Galatia on his first missionary journey preaching in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. His evangelistic efforts in this area were met with Jewish opposition and persecution, and Gentile reception. Soon after Paul's return to Antioch he confronted Peter publicly about his partisan attitude toward Gentile believers. At the same time certain false teachers had introduced an heretical teaching of sanctification to the newly established Galatian believers and sought to persuade them. A concomitant of their teaching was a slandering of the authority of Paul. With such a milieu of confusion concerning the relationship of Church age believers to the law, Paul penned a letter to the Galatian Christians defending the origin and nature of his gospel, outlining the theology of sanctification.

Message Statement. *The doctrine of the Gentiles' freedom from the law comes not from man but from God.*

Argument

1A INTRODUCTION

1:1-9

As is Paul's custom, he introduces the theme of this epistle in the introduction. In a situation where his authority and message are questioned he identifies himself as a divine emissary chosen by God Himself. After the customary greeting of grace and peace Paul skips the normal thanksgiving to God for the recipients of the letter. The matter is so urgent that he immediately plunges into the problem at hand.

Paul's assessment of the competing message of the Galatians is that it is a different gospel, one worthy of eternal condemnation. Obviously the error was not minor. Showing emphasis and urgency Paul repeats his initial charge of *anathema* in verse 9.

- 1B THE ORIGIN OF PAUL'S GOSPEL: FROM GOD RATHER THAN MEN 1:10--2:21
Paul's point in this section is rather simple: to demonstrate that *his* gospel is actually *God's* gospel. He plainly states the fact and then proves it from his personal history. His explanation of the gospel is reserved for chapters three and four.
- 1B The Statement 1:10-12
This short section provides the interpretive key for the remainder of chapters one and two. Contrary to his accusers, Paul was not a man pleaser and had not received his gospel from man. It came directly from God. His motives and his message were pure.
- 2B The Proofs 1:13-2:21
With the pre-understanding of 1:9-12, the significance of this section becomes clear. Paul is not simply giving a personal history, but rather proving that this gospel which he preaches must have come from God because he did not receive it from men.
- 1C Proof #1: Paul's Manner of Life and Conversion 1:13-16a
Paul's life before salvation was spent at the feet of Gamaliel. From this teacher he only learned zeal for the law. He thus, did not learn his gospel before salvation. His experience of salvation clearly altered his way of life.
- 2C Proof #2: Paul's Course After Conversion 1:16b-17
After his salvation Paul did not learn his gospel from any man. He did not consult those who were teaching in Jerusalem. In fact, he went to Arabia, a place known only for its desolation and not its schools.
- 3C Proof #3: Paul's Independence from the Apostles and Established Churches 1:18-24
When Paul did come to Jerusalem it was only for a short visit with Peter. He then returned to his home country so that none of the churches near Jerusalem had any contact with him. Unquestionably, Paul's gospel was not learned from any renowned teacher.
- 4C Proof #4: Acknowledgment from the pillars 2:1-10
When Paul did have further contact with the pillars of the church they fully accepted him and endorsed his ministry. The issue of Jewish and Gentile relations were addressed and Paul's particular direction of ministry was recognized.
- 5C Proof #5: Acknowledgment from Peter 2:11-21
This section provides a transition to the next two chapters. Paul finishes his historical survey proving that his gospel was from God and, by his theological interpretation of the event, paves the way for his doctrinal discussion of chapters three and four.
- Paul's rebuke of Peter's hypocrisy further establishes the validity of Paul's message. Even Peter, the chief apostle, acknowledged his error and Paul's truth when the confrontation occurred. Based upon his interpretation of the event, Paul's basic contention with Peter involved not only Peter's shunning of the Gentiles but also a works orientation to the law. Paul's closing discourse in this section (2:17-21) contrasts his own salvation experience of faith with a merit oriented observance of the law.
- 1C THE EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S GOSPEL 3:1--5:1
This portion embodies the heart of the epistle as Paul expounds his theology of law and salvation. Having established that the source of his gospel was not to be found in human teaching he now begins to explain and thus defend his teaching.
- 1B The Problem: Trying to Achieve Sanctification by Keeping the Law 3:1-5
Although the problem of the means of sanctification has implications for the means of salvation as well, the particular issue addressed by Paul involves the Galatians' method of progress after salvation. Verse three captures the spirit of this section well as Paul queries *After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?* The same idea is expressed in verse five when Paul parallels *observance of the law with human effort* and *beginning in the Spirit with belief*. The matter of concern then does not seem to be mere attention to the Mosaic law but the particular pharisaical and

works oriented approach to the law.

- 2B The Solution: Walk by Faith 3:6-9
Because the principles of justification and sanctification are analogous Paul seems to be equally at ease in arguing from either standpoint. In this section Abraham's classic example of faith is held out as the ideal approach to the Galatians' question.
- 3B The Explanation in Terms of the Law 3:10--4:11
Because the readers' problem ultimately involved a misunderstanding of the law Paul begins to correct their error with his own theology of law. He first discusses the proper place of the law and then addresses its original purpose.
- 1C To evidence rather than produce sanctification 3:10-18
The law was always intended to reveal the holiness of God and to provide direction for the redeemed people of God. As such it was an avenue for the expression of obedience not means of meriting salvation.
- 1D the principle stated 3:10-14
In Paul's theology faith is the means of justification and keeping of the law is only an evidence. Paul's statement that the law is not based on faith (3:12) does not mean that the law is in opposition to the principle of faith. Rather, his point is that the law concerns doing and the evidence of salvation rather than believing and the means of salvation. Those who would attempt to be justified by law observance will find themselves under a curse. The curse of the law is the condemnation which it pronounces upon sinners. The basis for this freedom from sin and thus, this curse, was finally provided on the cross. Paul's discussion here is theological and not chronological. The redemption from the curse of the law is the experience of every saint not just those who have lived after the event of Calvary.
- 2D the principle explained 3:15-18
Paul explains the fact that the law has never had a place in man's salvation by citing the chronology of the law. Because we are saved by our participation in the Abrahamic promise (participation secured through faith), the law which was added later can not alter the conditions of salvation. Thus any use of the law as an aid to justification is misguided.
- 2C To lead to salvation by faith 3:19--4:11
If the law was not intended as a means to salvation, then one might wonder what its purpose was. Paul's answer is that it was given because of transgressions. It did not replace the promise because it was fundamentally different from the promise. The promise of salvation to Abraham was a unilateral agreement whereas the law was a bilateral covenant. Because salvation is fundamentally a provision of God's grace an agreement in which man participated such as the law could have no place in salvation. It did however reveal and exacerbate sin, however, so that the world's need of salvation by faith was made clear. The law was intended to lead men to Christ. As the law pointed out failure the only adequate solution would be Christ.
- Paul illustrates his point about the timing of the law by referring to a child's temporary relationship to a tutor. After a time of maturity he no longer needs the tutor. Paul relates the time of childhood in the analogy to the pre-salvation experience of the Galatians. Thus his point of reference is theological rather than particularly temporal. That is, the law is important to point out sin before salvation. After it has demonstrated the need for salvation its basic purpose is accomplished.
- Paul's final concern is that the Galatians have retreated in their thinking by resorting to a works oriented system of righteousness. Their observance of the law is compared to the activity of pagans.
- 4B The Exhortation: to Accept Paul's Gospel 4:12-5:1
Having made his basic theological points Paul next exhorted the people to accept his Gospel. He encourage them because of their personal relationship to him and to Christ.
- 1C Based on their relationship to Paul 4:12-20
Paul's relationship with the Galatians had been a warm one in the past. He appeals to them not only on the past but also his present relationship. His concern is for their welfare while that of his opponents is selfishly motivated.

- 2C Based on their relationship to Christ 4:21--5:1
Paul's final appeal is based upon the freedom which the Galatians now enjoy in Christ. His analogy comes from the results of faith and human effort in the life of Abraham as represented by his two sons. Paul compares his opponents to Hagar and Ishmael while his gospel is represented by Sara and Isaac. Because the two cannot coexist Paul urges the Galatians to disassociate themselves from the advocates of law.
- 1D THE APPLICATION OF PAUL'S GOSPEL 5:2--6:10
Having defended himself and his gospel Paul sets to applying it to his audience. His emphasis is twofold: warning and encouragement.
- 1B The Warning 5:2-5:15
Paul delineates the implications of this doctrine. To seek to be sanctified by human effort inherently cuts one off from grace. Human effort is antithetical to faith. Paul then warns that those who teach these doctrines will be severely judged. His final note of admonition is that true fulfillment of the law would express itself in love for each other rather than infighting.
- 2B The Encouragement to Sanctification 5:16--6:10
The encouragement to attain the goal in question by the proper means is now given. A proper relationship to the Spirit of God will result in fulfilling the law of Christ.
- 1C The method: dependence upon the Spirit 5:16
Crucial to the whole discussion is the choice of trust in human effort or in divine enabling. The Spirit of God is the source of power for the life which pleases God.
- 2C The explanation 5:17-24
Paul explains the differences between self sufficiency and God sufficiency. Trust in self will only promote the desires of the flesh, but trust in the spirit will promote the fruit of the Spirit.
- 3C The application 5:25--6:10
Paul specifies two areas where Spirit led living will manifest itself. The first is in genuine concern for a brother caught in sin. The proper response is a concern which restores the one who has strayed from the way. The second avenue involves proper use of finances. As one sows to the Spirit he will also reap spiritual benefits.
- 1E CONCLUSION 6:11-18
Paul's closing reveals the heart of the apostle. In his last words he appeals to the Galatians to accept his gospel for their benefit. Contrasted with the motives of his opponents, Paul's desires are particularly selfless. The opposition however has only a selfish and fleshly desire to boast. Although they desired to leave the mark of circumcision on the Galatians, the more telling testimony of faithfulness to God were the marks of persecution to be found on Paul's body.

