



Galatians

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INTRODUCTION

Although in a minority view, I have been convinced for nearly three decades that Paul's letter to the Galatians, although the ninth book in the NT canon and the fourth letter in the Pauline section of that canon, is not only the first letter that he wrote which is in the NT canon, but also carries the distinction of being the earliest of all of the 27 documents in the NT. But the viewpoint I have adopted does not follow the typical South Galatian Theory advocates, mostly found among evangelical writers. Later, we will get to the reasons for my viewpoint further into this study.

9.1 Galatians: Introduction to [BIC vol. 12](#).

Unquestionably, Galatians stands as one of the most influential documents inside the NT in so far a Protestant Christianity is concerned.¹ It played an important role in the early Protestant ministries of both Luther and Calvin, and continues that role in the denominational streams flowing out of these two reformers, which amounts to the vast majority of Protestant

¹“One of Paul's major letters. Galatians has played a central role in Christian theology because it provides one of the NT's most explicit teachings on justification by faith. This teaching, however, is Paul's response to a serious crisis in the churches of Galatia rather than a systematic or doctrinal presentation of justification.” [Frank J. Matera, “Galatians, Letter to The,” ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 476.]

Christians.² The central emphasis upon ‘justification by faith’ in the letter stands as a hallmark of Protestantism, and thus elevates the status of the letter greatly.

The standard ancient letter structure is adhered to by Paul, but with one major exception. The Proem, the prayer of thanksgiving and intercession, is missing in this letter and is replaced with a traditional Greek rhetorical structure, the Exordium, that lays out in blunt terms Paul's agenda for the letter (cf. 1:6-10). More about that below. But in adopting this alternative pattern Paul puts his frustrations with the Galatians on the table very quickly and signals clearly what the letter is about.

9.1.1 Praescriptio, 1:1-5

1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, 2 καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοὶ

ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας,

3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4 τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλθῃ ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἵωνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ

²“The letter to the Galatians is one of the most studied letters of the New Testament. It is perhaps second in influence only to Romans among Paul's traditional 13 letters. It was the object of attention in early and medieval Christianity. Its influence increased during the Reformation period.

- Luther (1483–1546) lectured on it in 1519 and 1523. The substance of his lectures were later compiled into a commentary on it bearing his name (see Graebner, “Preface,” iv–v).
- Calvin (1509–1564) cited it frequently in his Institutes, preached on it, and also wrote a commentary on it.
- In more recent times, Boice described it as the “Magna Carta of Christian liberty” (“Galatians,” 403).
- Longenecker and Bruce, in large measure owing to the influence of Galatians, characterized Paul as the “Apostle of Liberty” (1964) and “Apostle of the Free Spirit” (1977).

[James P. Sweeney, “Galatians, Letter to The,” ed. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).]



πατὸς ἡμῶν, 5 ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων, ἀμήν.

1 Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— 2 and all the members of God’s family who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Here we discover the typical three elements of an ancient letter Praescriptio: Superscriptio (vv. 1-2a); Adscriptio (v. 2b); Salutatio (vv. 3-5).

9.1.1.1 **Superscriptio**, vv. 1-2a. The core name and title stand as the first two words in the letter: Παῦλος ἀπόστολος, Paul an apostle. Παῦλος is the Greek form of the apostle’s name, with the Hebrew / Aramaic form יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (šā·ūl) being written in Greek as Σαῦλος, which is found exclusively 15 times in the Acts of the Apostles. Interestingly, from the launching of the first missionary journey onward Luke switches over uniformly to Παῦλος (127 uses) in Acts.

The title ἀπόστολος, apostle, used here in the Superscriptio and 8 other times in the same place in Paul’s letters (1-2 Cor; Rom; Col; Eph; 1-2 Tim; Titus), stresses his assumed role of a spiritual leader in early Christianity on a level with the Twelve who were set apart by Jesus (cf. Lk. 6:13) for a special founding role in the Christian religion launched on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The expansion elements in the Superscriptio build off this title and signal a major theme of the body proper of the letter. First, οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου, not from men nor through a man, anticipates the opening thesis of the body proper in 1:11-12 of the independency of Paul’s apostleship to any authorization of the Twelve or of its leader Peter. Chapters one and two of the body proper will demonstrate this independency with a series of ‘proofs’ structured around traditional Greek rhetorical evidences proper to such a claim. The summarizing climax is reached in 2:15-21.

In contrast to a denial of human authorization for his apostleship Paul asserts a divine origin for his apostleship: ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. This apostleship claim made here links Paul’s rights as an apostle to preach the Gospel message which centers in the resurrection work of the Father in the life of Jesus Christ. It is this message that is also vigorously defended in the entire body proper over against the Judaizing

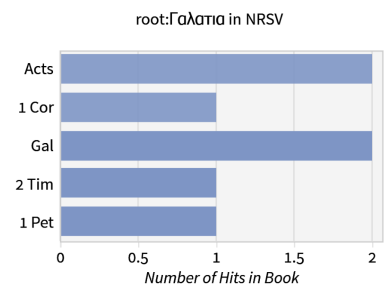
tendency to compromise it as a mixture of traditional Judaism and Christian teaching.

The second specification of letter sender comes in verse two as καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί, and all the brothers with me. This broad, inclusive reference does not give names of specific individuals. The possible identification of who is included in this reference depends entirely on where Paul was and at what point in time the letter was composed. Largely it remains a mystery. The term οἱ...ἀδελφοί can designate spiritual brothers in a general manner as well as probably functioning here as a designation of close associates present with Paul at the time of the writing of the letter. The only associates mentioned by name in the letter body are Barnabas and Titus (2:1-4). But they are mentioned only in reference to an event that happened many years prior to the writing of the letter. Because of the tone of the letter, no specific mention of associates is made in the letter Conclusio which does not contain the usual Greetings section.

The reason for Paul adding this very generalized additional specification of letter senders most likely was to affirm that the strong stance taken in the letter was shared by a group of fellow Christians with Paul at the time of the composition of the letter. It was not just one man’s opinion, but instead a collective opinion of those committed to the apostolic Gospel. Thus the sometimes exceedingly blunt language in the letter reflected a group view point of criticism of the Galatians. With this letter being composed in and read by individuals functioning in a collective society rather than an individualistic society, such group uniformity of view point took on a level of validation not typical in an individualistic society.

9.1.1.2 **Adscriptio**, v. 2b. Another signal of the impending harshness of this letter comes with the unusually short specification of the recipients of the letter: ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, to the churches of Galatia. Of the [thirteen Pauline letters](#) and especially of the nine addressed to churches, this is the most abrupt and curt Adscriptio of all. I strongly suspect that when this letter was read to the various house church groups in the cities of the province of Galatia that this did not escape their attention. It is clearly a minimalist Adscriptio with just enough information to identify generally those to whom the letter was written.

One of the huge controversies in modern times arises over the proper understanding of the term τῆς



Γαλατίας, of Galatia.³ The term Γαλατία in first century Greek can refer to two somewhat different regions in what is now central Turkey.⁴ In the usage inside the NT, the reference in First Peter 1:1 is clearly the broader provincial meaning of the term. The Acts 16:6 ἤν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν, region of Phrygia and Galatia, seemingly favors the ethnic meaning of northern Galatians, but this is the use of the adjective rather than the geographical noun. The same construction, τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν, appears a second time in Acts 18:23 but this time the adjective clearly favors the provincial understanding, rather than the ethnic designation. The construction ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς

³Γαλατία, ας, ἡ (Diocles 125; Appian, Mithr. 17 §60; 65 §272 al.; Cass. Dio 53, 26; ins) Galatia, a district in Asia Minor, abode of the Celtic Galatians, and a Roman province to which, in addition to the orig. Galatia, Isauria, Cilicia, and northern Lycaonia belonged. The exact mng. of G. in the NT, esp. in Paul, is a much disputed question. **Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Ti 4:10** (in this pass. some mss. have Γαλλίαν, and even the better attested rdg. Γαλατίαν can be understood as referring to Gaul: Diod S 5, 22, 4 al.; Appian, Celts 1, 5 al.; Polyaeus 8, 23, 2; Jos., Ant. 17, 344; other ref. in Zahn, Einl. I 418.—To avoid confusion, it was possible to say something like Γαλατία τῆς ἑσῆας=eastern [Appian, Bell. Civ. 2, 49 §202] or Γαλάται οἱ ἐν Ἀσίᾳ [Appian, Bell. Civ. 4, 88 §373]); **1 Pt 1:1**. *For the NT there are only two possibilities, both of which involve the Galatia in Asia Minor.* The view that G. means the district orig. inhabited by the Galatians (North Gal. theory) found favor with Mommsen (ZNW 2, 1901, 86), ASteinmann (esp. detailed, D. Leserkreis des Gal. 1908), vDobschütz, Jülicher, MDibelius, Feine, Ltzm., JMoffatt, Goguel, Sickenberger, Lagrange, Meinertz, Oepke, EHaenchen (comm. on Ac 16:6), et al. Impressive support is given this point of view by Memnon of Asia Minor, a younger contemporary of Paul. For him the Galatians, of whom he speaks again and again (no. 434 Fgm. 1, 11ff Jac.), are the people with a well-defined individuality, who came to Asia Minor from Europe. Paul would never have addressed the Lycaonians as Γαλάται.—The opp. view, that G. means the Rom. province (South Gal. theory), is adopted by Zahn, Ramsay, EMeyer, EBurton (Gal 1921), GDuncan (Gal '34), esp. VWeber (Des Pls Reiserouten 1920). S. also FStähelin, Gesch. d. kleinasiat. Galater 1907; RSyme, Galatia and Pamphylia under Aug.: Klio 27, '34, 122–48; CWatkins, D. Kampf des Pls um Galatien 1913; JRopes, The Singular Prob. of the Ep. to the Gal. 1929; LWeisgerber, Galat. Sprachreste: JGefcken Festschr. '31, 151–75; Hemer, Acts 277–307 (North-Gal. hypothesis 'unnecessary and improbable' p. 306) Pauly-W. VII 519–55; Kl. Pauly II, 666–70.—New Docs 4, 138f. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 186–187.]

⁴Γαλατία (4x) is part of a word group in the NT that includes the adjective Γαλατικός, -ή, -όν (pertaining to Galatia; 2x) and the personal noun Γαλάτης, ου, ό, Galatian (1x). Γαλατικός, -ή, -όν is used twice by Luke in Acts 16:6 and 18:23 most likely in reference to the district of ethnic Galatia in the north. The personal noun Γαλάτης, is used by Paul once in Gal. 3:1 referring to the inhabitants of Galatia which depends upon the specific meaning of the geographical noun Γαλατία.

As the chart on the right indicates Γαλατία is scattered across Paul's letters and Acts.

Γαλατίας, to the churches of Galatia, in 1 Cor. 16:1 clearly favors the provincial meaning of the noun. But the construction Κρήσκης εἰς Γαλατίαν, *Crescens to Galatia*, is too vague to know for certain.

One major problem with understanding Γαλατία as an ethnic term referring to a group of people living in the northern part of the Roman province of Galatia is that no mention is made either by Luke or Paul of any evangelizing activity among this group of people. But for this letter to be addressed to Christians among them, a huge assumption has to be made that such activity by Paul took place without any clear evidential basis. On the other hand, when Γαλατία is taken as a reference to the Roman province by that name, it clearly references the churches established by Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey.

The understood meaning of Γαλατία has substantial implications for the time of the writing of this letter. If the provincial meaning is adopted then this letter comes either after the first missionary journey of Paul when he and Barnabas arrived back at Antioch. Or, as I am convinced, soon after he and Silas revisit these churches on the beginning let of the second missionary journey and after they arrived in Macedonia. But if the ethnic meaning is adopted, the writing of this letter is pushed back to the third missionary journey once Paul arrived in Ephesus. The three possible dates for the letter composition then are in the late 40s; in the early 50s; and in the middle 50s. Each of these three scenarios presents somewhat different circumstances motivating the writing of the letter.

In the history of interpretation of the letter, the last scenario was the dominating viewpoint until the nineteenth century.⁵ But for the past century plus a large

⁵“Up till the nineteenth century, the view that Paul wrote to the churches of North Galatia held sway. This North Galatian hypothesis, given its classic expression by J. B. Lightfoot in that century and subsequently forcefully stated by James Moffatt,³ is still championed by many scholars today, predominantly but not exclusively in Germany.⁴ The South Galatian hypothesis, first laid on a firm archaeological foundation by W. M. Ramsay, who based his arguments for the case on the facts of historical geography,⁵ is followed by the majority of modern interpreters—at least as far as the English-speaking world is concerned.⁶ We will not rehearse in detail here the arguments which have been used in the debate,⁷ but only mention three considerations in support of the South Galatian hypothesis which commend themselves to us as particularly cogent: (a) what is known of the geographical situation at the time: none of the main roads in Asia Minor even passed through North Galatia, so that had Paul wanted to go to preach the gospel there he would not have set out from Lystra (cf. Acts 16:1, 6);⁸ (b) Paul's evangelistic strategy: it is obvious from Acts that Paul consistently concentrated his efforts on the main roads and centers of communication in the Roman Empire, and until the end of the third century South Galatia was more important than North Galatia and correspondingly more developed;⁹ (c) the silence of Acts regarding

number of biblical scholars, more recently mostly evangelical in orientation, have championed the provincial understanding of Γαλατία and identified the letter as being addressed to the churches established on the first missionary journey of Paul.⁶ For good or ill, in today's world, the issue tends to fall on evangelicals adopting the provincial meaning while most every else adopts the ethnic meaning.

Some of the arguments for the ethnic meaning are among the most convoluted phantasy expressions I have ever come across. Wild imagination runs rampant here. But the provincial meaning is not without problems either. The dominant 'South Galatian' hypothesis faces insurmountable barriers in trying to link the Jerusalem visit of Gal. 2:1-10 with the Acts 'famine' visit in 11:27-30, rather than with the quite obvious linkage with the Jerusalem council meeting of 15:1-29. While not as 'imaginative' as the arguments of the North Galatian hypothesis, they none the less are just as unconvincing.

Gerhard Vos years ago in the NIC Galatians volume in the first series proposed a middle ground and made quite convincing arguments in favor of it. These persuaded me then and have continued to do so for well over forty years. Most of the barriers to either of the above viewpoints are resolved by understanding the establishment of churches in North Galatia: this silence, over against the author's explicit mention of churches in South Galatia, would be extremely difficult to explain if the controversy reflected in Galatians had been a controversy with the churches in North Galatia.¹⁰⁷ [Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 1-3.

⁶⁶The South-Galatian view was first proposed by J. J. Schmidt, rector of Ilfeld, whom J. D. Michaelis combated in his *Einleitung*⁴, 1788. (See Zahn, *Einleit.* 2 I 130, E. T. p. 183, but for 1199 read 1788); then advocated more at length by Mynster in *Einleitung in den Brief an die Galater* in his *Kleinere Schriften*, 1825; by Böttger, *Beiträge*, 1837; and Thiersch, *Die Kirche im apostolischen Zeitalter*, 18521, 18793. It received fresh attention when Perrot advocated it in his *De Galatia Provincia Romana*, 1867, and since his day has been defended by Renan, *St. Paul*, 1869, and various later editions; Hausrath, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*; by Ramsay, who has written voluminously in its defence (*Church in the Roman Empire*, 18931, 18954; *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica*, vol. IV, 1896; *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 1900, and various essays, especially in *The Expositor*); Rendall, in *The Expositor*, Ser. IV, vol. IX; Gifford, in *The Expositor*, Ser. IV, vol. X; Clemen, "Die Adressaten des Galaterbriefs," in *ZwTh.* XXXVII 396-423; also Paulus, vol. I, 1904; McGiffert, *Apostolic Age*, 1897; Askwith, *The Epistle to the Galatians: Its Destination and Date*, 1899; Bartlet, *Apostolic Age*, 1899; J. Weiss, art. "Kleinasien," in *PRE.* vol. X; Bacon, *Introd. to N. T.* 1900; Woodhouse in *Encyc. Bib.* vol. II, col. 1592 ff.; Zahn, *Einleitung* 2, 1900, E. T., 19091, 19172; *Kommentar*, 1905; Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, 1911; Emmet, in *The Readers' Commentary*, 1912." [Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1920), xxiv.]

that the letter was written to the churches of the first missionary journey after Paul and Silas had revisited these churches on the beginning of the second missionary journey in the early 50s. The objections to one another by the advocates of both in the above two views dissolve both completely and legitimately with this alternative proposal. Thus [volume 12](#) of the BIC commentary will be exegeted assuming the scenario of the second missionary journey.

9.1.1.3 **Salutatio**, vv. 3-5. Both in the Superscriptio and Salutatio expansion elements signal impending themes in the letter body. The rather standard Pauline version of greetings is given at the beginning: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, [Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ](#). As described in the above [Introduction](#), this 'twin' greeting of χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη, [grace to you and peace](#), represents both a 'Christianized' Greek and Jewish 'hello' in terms of normative patterns in the first century both verbally and in written letter form. The intent of such a Greeting was to take a friendly stance toward the recipients by the sender(s) of the letter.

Here again the expansion elements immediately shift away from the recipients to a fundamental belief declaration that builds off the expansion elements in the Superscriptio section. This core declaration is in verse four: τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, [of Him who gave Himself up for our sins, so that He might Himself rescue us from this present evil age⁷ according to the will of God even our Father](#). Thus the resurrection of Christ produced by the Heavenly Father (v. 1) confirms the self-sacrifice of Christ as the divine Resuer of humanity from the clutches of evil.

In Paul's vigorous defense of the Gospel that God called him to proclaim as an apostle the pivotal events of resurrection (v.1) and crucifixion with this stated objective (v.4) stands as the foundation of that message. This was in danger of being corrupted by the false

⁷Just as accurate translation of ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ is [from this present age of the Evil One](#). The Greek text statement covers both ideas but none of the modern western languages has a single expression that can cover both these ideas. Thus each translation committee or translator is forced into choosing which one to use for the Greek expression. Therefore one reads both expressions in modern translations.

The choice is not between which one is correct, but which one is chosen since both can't be used. Some translations will put the other option in a footnote marking the range of meanings. But these must not be read as either/or options, since both ideas are incorporated into the single Greek expression. The problem is with modern western limitations on thought patterns. That is our problem, but wasn't Paul's since he faced no such dilemma.

teaching of the Judaizers, and thus produced this vigorous rebuttal from Paul. Drawing heavily upon conceptualizations from apocalyptic Judaism of two ages of human history, the apostle frames the spiritual consequences of Jesus' death on the cross as a rescue of humanity from the clutches of Satan in this present evil age. The ἡμᾶς, *us*, in his statement ἐξέληται ἡμᾶς specifically id's those rescued as believers in Christ. The close connection between Christ and the Heavenly Father is once again affirmed with the contention that this self-sacrifice based rescue is κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, *according to the will of God even our Father*.

Thus with this heavily theological *Salutatio* the apostle greets the members of the churches across the Galatian province. His concern centers on proper understanding of the apostolic Gospel and he lets the readers know this through the expansion elements in both the *Superscriptio* and *Salutatio*.

9.1.2 Proem/Exordium

6 Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, 7 ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, εἰ μὴ τινές εἰσιν οἱ ταρασσόντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ. 8 ἄλλὰ καὶ ἐὰν ἡμεῖς ἢ ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ εὐαγγελίζηται [ὑμῖν] παρ' ὃ εὐηγγελισάμεθα ὑμῖν, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω. 9 ὡς προειρήκαμεν καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω· εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ' ὃ παρελάβετε, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.

10 Ἄρτι γὰρ ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἢ τὸν θεόν; ἢ ζητῶ ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκειν; εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώποις ἤρεσκον, Χριστοῦ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἦμην.

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!

10 Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

What we have here is not the standard Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μνησίαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, *We give thanks to God always in every remembrance of you in our prayers...* (1 Thess. 1:2). Instead comes Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, *I am astounded that you are so quickly thusly turning from the One who*

called you in the grace of Christ into another gospel.... This obviously is not the usual prayer of thanksgiving found in the vast majority of Paul's letters.

What is this then? In ancient Greek rhetorical patterns, especially for a speech of persuasion, the orator or writer would begin with an *Exordium* which stated the thesis being argued in the speech.⁸ As we will discover below, the structural arrangement of the letter body follows closely many of the basic elements in a speech of persuasion in ancient Greece.

Thus what Paul signals here in unusually strong language is his displeasure with some developing trends taking place in the Galatian churches.

The heart of his displeasure is stated in οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, *in such a manner you are quickly turning away from the One who called you in the grace of Christ into another gospel*. These churches were coming under a corrupting influence that pushed them into rejecting the apostolic Gospel presented to them by Paul in their beginning. It was being replaced by another gospel message that Paul labels ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, *another gospel*, and then quickly defines as ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, *which is not another*. His clever play on these two pronouns *for another* carries a meaning almost impossible to translate into English. The ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον of these false teachers was a totally different message completely incompatible with the apostolic Gospel alluded to in the *Superscriptio* and *Salutatio*. This is the point of the relative modifying clause ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο that literally means *which is not another version* of the apostolic Gospel. That is, the Galatian Christians were being pushed into a non-existing gospel under false guise of it be the true gospel.

Further amplification of Paul's point comes with the exceptive negative clause εἰ μὴ τινές εἰσιν οἱ ταρασσόντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *except that certain ones are those troubling you and desiring to pervert the Gospel of Christ*. No names are mentioned here but what these teachers were essentially attempting to do is laid out very clearly, and this will be expanded several times in the letter body.

The impossibility of legitimately making such a change in the apostolic Gospel is then presented by two hypothetical statements in verses eight and nine. The concessive statement in verse eight sets up a highly unlikely scenario of either Paul or a heavenly angel

⁸The Latin noun *exordium* comes from the verb *exordiri* meaning 'to begin.' The Greek equivalent in oratory was *προ-οίμιον*, *proimion*, or *proem* with a meaning close to the English words Preface or Introduction. One should note that the Greek epistolary use of the term narrowed the definition down to an open health wise prayer. .

preaching such a different message to the Galatians. Should such happen both he and the angel would deserve to be banished to Hell for eternity!

The second first class conditional sentence in verse nine assumes that individuals are trying to evangelize the Galatians with this different non-gospel. And they also deserve banishment to eternal damnation for such actions. The repeated ἀνάθεμα ἔστω, *let him be anathema*, as the apodosis main clause of both statements, is the strongest language that Paul could use to express his displeasure with these false teachers.

He quickly moves in verse ten to distance himself from these false teachers as much as possible. Through a pair of rhetorical questions⁹ and a second class conditional statement¹⁰ he affirms passionately his legitimate role as Christ's servant speaking the true message from God to the Galatians.

With the laying out of his 'agenda' in the Exordium in 1:6-10, Paul has given his readers a clear signal of what this letter is about. They have been alerted to the very heart of the apostolic Gospel in the Superscriptio and Salutatio expansion elements. Now Paul's stance toward the Galatians is spelled out very clearly in the Exordium. The Galatians are being pushed to abandon this gospel for a phony alternative that will spell spiritual disaster for them. The apostle's expressed intention is to argue the case for the apostolic Gospel through his proclamation of it as an apostle in the hopes of persuading the Galatians to not be intimidated into adopting the phony alternative being thrust upon them by the Judaizing teachers. Almost certain is that the Judaizers were claiming apostolic validity for their gospel which necessitated casting doubt on Paul's claim to apostleship as the foundation for his Gospel.

9.1.3 Letter Body

From the later part of the past century, biblical scholars have increasingly recognized the important and insightful analysis of Hans Dieter Betz in the volume on Galatians in the Hermeneia commentary series.¹¹ Although most have moved beyond Betz in refinements and revisions, he begun the conversation

⁹The rhetorical questions in their open ended structuring set up the contrary to fact statement that follows. The Galatians knew well that Paul's passion was God's will and total adherence to it no matter what the response of his audience.

This structuring of his 'thesis' in the Exordium will open the door for a vigorous defense of his apostleship along with his apostolic message.

¹⁰A contrary to fact type sentence that affirms the opposite of what is stated in exceedingly strong terms.

¹¹For a more comprehensive analysis see my article in the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* titled "A Rhetorical Reading of Galatians." I heavily quote from this article in the material of this study. A digital copy is available online at <http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/GalRead.pdf>.

about the arrangement of the contents of Galatians for contemporary analysis. Galatians, as has become clear to those who work with ancient materials closely, is arranged very rhetorically around the principles of a 'letter of friendship' pattern in the first century world.

The implications of this for exegesis is to provide clearly defined labels for the obvious units of text material for the letter body. These are as follows:

Narratio,	1:11-2:21
Probatio,	3:1-4:31
Exhortio,	5:1-6:10

Inside each of these units of text the strategy of idea presentation follows either a dominantly Greek orientation or a scribal Jewish orientation, and sometimes a mixture of both. In appealing to the Galatians to remain true to the apostolic Gospel, the apostle reaches deeply into his dual heritage as a Diaspora Jew and utilizes every possible strategy to make his case for the Gospel. Interestingly where the emphasis is countering the Judaizing message more directly, especially in the Probatio, Paul's strategy is more scribal Jewish like a Pharisee would argue. The other sections reflect a more Greek way of thinking.

9.1.3.1 **Narratio, 1:11-2:21.** In this section, Paul moves to establishing the divine nature of his calling as an apostle. In 1:11-12, he affirms the implications of the expansion elements in the Superscriptio and Salutatio with the contention of the divine origin of the Gospel that he preaches: τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον αὐτὸ οὔτε ἐδιδάχθην, ἀλλὰ δι' ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the Gospel which is proclaimed by me that it is not according to man, for I neither received it nor was taught it by a man, rather through revelatory disclosure from Jesus Christ.*

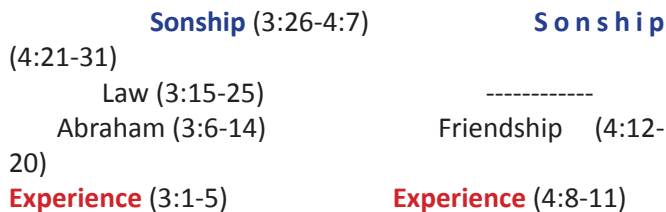
This becomes the foundational stance that Paul now sets out to prove through a set of historical evidences:

- His conversion and calling, 1:13-17.
- His first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian, 1:18-19.
- His subsequent relationship with the churches of Judea, 1:20-24.
- His participation in the Jerusalem council, 2:1-10.
- His rebuke of Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch, 2:11-14.

He brings these evidences to a climatic summation in 1:15-21. Very creatively he carefully transitions from the rebuke of Peter in 2:11-14 into his summation with vv. 15-17 and reaches the summation in vv. 18-21. The zenith of this summary is the well known declaration in vv. 19b-20, Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι· 20 ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, *With Christ I stand cru-*

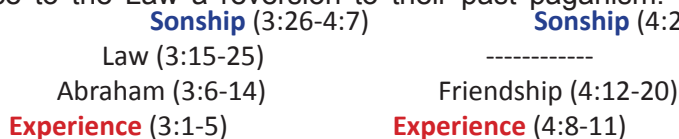
cified; and I live no longer, but in me lives Christ, and what I now live in the flesh I live in faith commitment to the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. This statement perhaps more than any other statement of Paul helped trigger the Protestant Reformation. The Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, in teaching this text to students could not get away from its haunting indictment of his dependence upon works of penance etc. for his salvation. God used Paul's statements here to turn his life around in a spiritual revolution that eventually changed not only Europe but the western world itself.

9.1.3.2 **Probatio, 3:1-4:31.** The Narratio looked to personal historical events in Paul's life as evidence of the divine origin of his message and calling to proclaim it. The Probatio shifts to more ideological arguments for evidence of the divine origin of his calling as an apostle and especially the Gospel message God commissioned him to preach as an apostle. Here some Greek rhetorical patterns help give structure, but most of his arguments have a very scribal Jewish orientation. Paul's strategy begins with experience (3:1-5) and moves toward a climactic assertion of sonship on the basis of experience (3:26-4:7), Again he starts with experience (4:8-11) and moves toward the sonship assertion (4:21-31) The pattern can be charted somewhat as follows:



What is meant by the label "experience"? In both 3:1-5 and 4:8-11 the apostle challenged the Galatians to recall their initial conversion experience as pivotal to where they now are spiritually. In 3:1-5, through a series of probing rhetorical questions he reminded them of the faith basis of their beginning experience in the Gospel. The alternative "hearing leading to faith" was pitted against "works of Law." Their initial experience was the former, not the latter now being argued by the trouble-makers in Galatia. That faith commitment had effectively brought them as far as they had progressed spiritually. Why now should they change boats in mid-stream?

Similarly in 4:8-11, Paul reminded them of the powerful transformation from paganism to Christianity that characterized that initial experience. Their present inclination to return to τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα, **the weak and beggarly elements** (4:8), made present adherence to the Law a reversion to their past paganism.



Thus in both sections Paul attempted to demonstrate that the present demands to conform to Torah stood in hypocritical contradiction to the way they had begun their spiritual pilgrimage in the Gospel. If they would only think about beginnings, they would find insight for present directions!

In 3:6-9, the linkage of the Christian community to Abraham is set forth on the basis of a common faith experience. This was foreseen and established in the OT scriptures. Faith became the connection, not Law, as is set forth emphatically (1) in 3:10 -14 where being ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, **in work of law**, means condemnation and (2) in 3:15 -18 where the 430 years later given Law in no way changes the covenant promise made to Abraham and his descendents, the children of faith. Here Paul evidently is taking on some of the central arguments of the trouble-makers. With the OT itself he proves the impossibility of their stance and the correctness of his linkage of believers -- Jewish and Gentile -- with Abraham.

This leads to the crucial question in 3:19, Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; **Why then the Law?** Before climaxing his point of faith and Abraham, this question of the value of the Law must be addressed. Via the graphic imagery of prison and παιδαγωγός, he asserts its fundamental role was to prepare the way for faith in Christ. If the modern reader jumps from 3:18 to 3:26 the continuity of thought-flow will be seen bringing the issue set forth in 3:1-5 to its climax. 3:19-25 is important, but only as a side issue to prevent a charge against Paul as having absolutely rejected the revelation of God to Moses. The Sinaitic Code was significant, but not a means of salvation. Thus in 3:26-4:7, Paul emphatically asserts regarding the Gentile Galatians: εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι, **And since you indeed are Christ's, then Abraham's seed you are, according to promise, heirs** (3:29). The Roman aristocratic household with slaves and sons provides the reinforcing imagery of this sonship in 4:1-7. The Galatians' initial faith commitment legitimately linked these Gentiles to the divine covenant with Abraham and assures them of being in good standing with God. To interject the legalism of Law into the picture only messes things up; that the Galatians should consider when feeling pressure from the trouble makers!

Paul hurls a second missile at the Galatians from the launchpad of experience in 4:8-11 The appeal to conversion experience here concludes with Paul's pressing their relationship with him both then and now. Throughout the letter he has appealed to the sensitivities of the Galatians by pushing them away and pulling them toward him.¹² Here marks the turning point

¹² |==> "I am shocked that you..." (1:6); |==< "O stupid Galatians, who has bewitched you..." (3:1); |==> "I'm afraid

from pushing them away to pulling them back. His fussing at them now shifts into images of confidence and warmth. A father wisely uses bonds of relationship with his children to encourage them to do what is right!

This provides the basis for Paul's lengthy appeal to friendship in 4:12-20. A triangle of relations is set up: Galatians to Paul; Paul to Galatians; Galatians to trouble makers; trouble makers to Galatians; Paul to trouble makers. By reminding the Galatians of their fervent love for him initially he presses them to renew that warmth now. The trouble makers are 'courting' the Galatians (4:17) but with improper motives. Thus the Galatians should reject their advances. Paul is the affectionate one with proper motive; in fact, his affections are more than a 'suitor's', they are those of a mother giving birth. The Galatians will hopefully recognize who genuinely cares for them. A lesson modern readers should heed in relating to spiritual leaders today!

Paul moves again to the sonship issue in 4:21-31. The same route of connection to Abraham as the means to sonship is asserted. This time, though, Paul employs a peculiar method of argumentation to the modern reader, an allegory.¹³ The sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac along with their mothers, provide the typological pattern for Paul's emphasis. By an untraditional association of the synagogue tradition with Hagar and Ishmael and the Christian community with Sarah and Isaac the theme of sonship via divine promise is linked to believers -- an assertion made before in 3:26-4:7 In the second emphasis here Paul uses this motif to prepare the way for the third major section of the body proper, 5:1-6:10. Sonship means freedom, versus slavery through the demands of the Law.

To a large extent in the Probatio section, Paul turns the argument of his Judaizing opponents on its head and demonstrates through using most likely many of their argument strategies that just the opposite of their phony message is the Gospel message that he preaches.

9.1.3.3 **Exhortio, 5:1-6:10.** The structure of Paul's approach is as follows: the axiom of freedom in Christ with a positive/negative admonition to stand in this freedom. This foundation is then expanded and developed in three subdivisions (5:1,2-12; 5:13,14-24; 5:25,26:10) that build on each other while advancing the idea of freedom. Notice the beginning structure for each section. The axiom / admonitions introduction

I've wasted my time messing with you" (4:11); <==| "My children, whom again I suffer the pains of birth over... (4:19-20); <==| "You were running well" (5:7); <==| "I am persuaded of you in the Lord that you won't be otherwise minded" (5:10).

¹³In modern literary terms, the label typology is more accurate than allegory. The Greek word for allegory (4:24) was broad enough to carry this meaning.

sets the tone for each of the sections which largely is an elaboration of this beginning structure. Here Paul's own creativity shines forth.

(1) 5:1

Τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν axiom
 στήκετε οὖν admonition +
 καὶ
 μὴ πάλιν ζυγῶ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε. admonition -

(2) 5:13

Ἵμεῖς γὰρ ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ ἐκλήθητε axiom
 ἀδελφοί
 μόνον μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῆ σαρκί, admonition -
 ἀλλὰ
 διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις. admonition +

(3) 5:25

Εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματι, axiom
 πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν admonition +

In the first subdivision (5:1-12), Paul applies this axiom/admonition structure to the issue of circumcision and Law obedience, In strong language, he presents the Galatians with the option: either Law or grace (5:2-6). They must decide on one or the other; the option of the trouble makers of both Law and grace is rejected as false. In 5:7-12, he appeals to them to choose grace by expressing confidence in their past track record and for the future, He comes down extremely hard on the trouble makers as the cause of the problem with the Galatians. Thus the seriousness of the issue of the non-gospel by the troublemakers is underscored. It's decision time for the Galatians! Freedom involves responsibility. The Galatians must take their stand.

In the second subdivision (5:13-24), Paul advances the issue of freedom to deal with the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian behavior. Freedom is no license to sin; rather, it is the base of loving service to others. Verses fourteen and fifteen enlarge upon the negative/positive admonitions in verse thirteen in an a/b // b'/a' sequence.¹⁴ 5:16-24 provides the source for the difference between responsible and irresponsible use of freedom: the Holy Spirit. The role of the Spirit has frequently surfaced already in the letter in both salvation and Christian living,¹⁵ but now is more fully expressed as the decisive force in overcoming the power of the flesh. Here is precisely why there was so much at stake

¹⁴Interestingly, Paul uses graphic language in the a//a' sequence: flesh//biting and gnawing on one another. In the b//b' section he sets forth the admonition to serve (b), then supports it with a scripture proof (b'). Thus, irresponsible use of freedom turns into the destruction of relationships; whereas responsible use leads to sacrificial service building up relationships.

¹⁵Cf. 3:2,3,5,14; 4:6,29; 5:5.



with the Galatians. To have chosen Law over grace would have cut them off from the Spirit of Christ who alone can make the difference between success and failure in coping with fleshly desires. This emphasis reaches a high point in 5:24: “Those belonging to Christ have crucified the flesh together with its passions and cravings.”

In the third subdivision (5:25-6:10), Paul develops further the ethical implications of this freedom in Christ that unleashes the power of the Spirit in the believer. On the premise that we owe our spiritual life (both conversion and daily living) to the Spirit (5:25a), we are admonished to “get in step” (στοιχῶμεν) with the Spirit, i.e., walk in harmony with his leadership (5:25b). This has profound implications for the believer, both inwardly (attitude) and outwardly (actions).¹⁶ Failure, (5:26)

¹⁶An alternative way of classifying Paul’s thought structure here is self-esteem and stance toward others. A positive self-esteem goes with edifying ministry toward others; a negative self-esteem leads to destructive actions toward others.

attitudinal (“vainglory”), goes hand in glove with wrong actions (“provoking one another, envying one another”). Positively, helpful ministry to the wayward brother depends on keeping careful focus on one’s own vulnerability (6:1). Also, supportive ministry in carrying burdens depends on proper spiritual self-perception (6:2-5). Sharing with spiritual leaders stands as another implication of following the Spirit’s leadership (6:6). Spiritual insight into the principle of sowing and reaping wraps up this section (6:7-10), again encompassing both inward spiritual perceptiveness and outward actions of good deeds toward others.

The letter body stands as a beautiful example of how a Diaspora Jew can utilize his twin heritage in both Greco-Roman culture and Jewish religious heritage to make a powerful argument for the apostolic Gospel. It is a wholistic approach that touches on his readers experience, on their ways of thinking both as Jewish

and non-Jewish Christians, shows his clever exposure of the falseness of many of his opponents' arguments in order to undermine the credibility of their position et als. The letter body is driven by intense passion from Paul not just for the apostolic Gospel but for the integrity of the faith commitment of his Galatian readers. His personal investment in them was substantial as Luke's description in Acts 13 - 14 depicts. He did not want to see them led astray by these false teachers. They had given him Timothy from Lystra and would provide other leaders later on who labored faithfully along side Paul.

9.1.4 Conclusio

By the time of the emperor Augustus with the ancient letter, the conclusion section normally contained two or three elements: health wish for recipients; word of farewell, e.g., "Ἐρρωσθε in Acts 15:29; a closing greeting preceding the first two. Paul expanded the pattern in this section more than anywhere else in the letter format with benedictions and/or doxologies replacing the health wish and other elements.

In Galatians one finds an autographic postscript (cf. 6:11 which served to authenticate the contents of the letter actually written by an amanuensis. As part of this verifying process, the central issues of the letter were summarized by Paul in his own handwriting (6:12-16) with verse sixteen reaching a climax through the pronouncement of blessing upon all the Galatians who adopt the position Paul has advocated. Verse seventeen reasserts Paul's own genuineness as a spokesman for the Lord -- a major issue in the letter.

Then verse eighteen contains the benediction typical in the Pauline letters, although some unique elements are present, Most interestingly, ἀδελφοί, found only in this Pauline benediction, concludes the letter with a touch of warmth and affection The liturgical ἀμήν became the congregational affirmative response to the public reading of this letter.

CONCLUSION

One of the ongoing inquiries into Galatians concerns **the identification of the false teachers** who stood behind this alternative message that Paul attacks.

First a profile of these individuals from within Galatians. In the Exordium (1:6-10) and the Sender Verification (6:11-16) we find more detail. In the letter body only scattered references surface.

1:7, τινές εἰσιν οἱ ταρασσόντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, **certain ones are those troubling you and wishing to pervert the Gospel of Christ.**

1:9, εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ' ὃ παρελάβετε, **if anyone proclaims a message to you beyond what you re-**

ceived.

1:11-12. The strong implication in Paul's affirmation of the divine origin of his Gospel message is that the alternative from these false teachers had a purely human origin.

1:13-17. He claim of independency from both Peter and the Twelve in Jerusalem carries strong implications of the false teachers claiming an apostolic endorsement of their message from the leaders in Jerusalem.

2:4-5. διὰ δὲ τοὺς παρεισάκτους ψευδαδέλφους, οἵτινες παρεισήλθον κατασκοπήσαι τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν ἣν ἔχομεν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσουσιν, 5 οἷς οὐδὲ πρὸς ὦραν εἶξαμεν τῇ ὑποταγῇ, ἵνα ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου διαμείνη πρὸς ὑμᾶς, **But because of the secretly slipped in false brothers who wormed their way in so that they could spy out the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, in order to re-enslave us, to who not for a moment did we yield in submission so that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you.** This depiction corresponds to Luke's references: Καί τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐδίδασκον τοὺς ἀδελφούς ὅτι, ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι, **and after certain ones came down from Judea they began teaching the brothers that unless you are circumcised by the custom of Moses you cannot be saved (15:1) and Ἐξανέστησαν δὲ τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες λέγοντες ὅτι δεῖ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως, But there stood up in opposition certain ones from the sect of the Pharisees who were believers saying that it is divinely mandated to be circumcised and to obey the law of Moses for Gentile believers (15:5).** Even though both Gal 2:1-10 and Acts 15 is describing an earlier event in which this viewpoint was soundly defeated by the decision of the Twelve and of the Jerusalem church leadership, it seems that some sort of connection with this opposition in Jerusalem to Paul exists with these false teachers now in Galatia within a couple of years of the Jerusalem agreement. The nature of that connection is vigorously debated, but the connection is usually affirmed.

2:11-14. The lasting impact on the church in Antioch of Peter's hypocritical actions of refusing table fellowship with non-Jewish Christians in the church clearly did not help the issue of maintaining a pure apostolic Gospel. This came sometime fairly soon after the Jerusalem conference agreement with the Twelve who under Peter's leadership affirmed Paul's Gospel apart from works of Law (cf. 2:7-10). Whether Peter's and Barnabas' caving into the demands to distance themselves as Jewish believers from Gentile believers at Antioch spurred on these false teachers is hard to say. Clearly it didn't help Paul with the Galatians.

3:1. Ὁ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος; *O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was paraded as the Crucified One?* With sarcastic tones, Paul taunts his readers as having been blinded by these false teachers functioning like witch doctors so that they could not see clearly the crucified Christ that Paul had earlier preached to them.

4:9-10. 9 νῦν δὲ γνόντες θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ, πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα οἷς πάλιν ἄνωθεν δουλεῦειν θέλετε; 10 ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς, *But now having known God, rather however, having been known by God, how can you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which again do you want to be re-enslaved? You observe days and months and times and years.* Here Paul alludes clearly to the spiritual disaster of turning to Torah obedience as required for salvation. He sees it as re-enslavement to the spiritual blindness of the paganism that many of the Galatians had come out of in their conversion to Christ. This represents the impact of this false message being taught among the churches.

4.17. ζηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς οὐ καλῶς, ἀλλ' ἐκκλεῖσαι ὑμᾶς θέλουσιν, ἵνα αὐτοὺς ζηλοῦτε, *they court you improperly, rather they want to exclude you so that they can take control of you.* By using the rather rare example of men seeking a wife in that world, Paul underscores that their intention is not to bring the Galatians to Christ but instead to take possession of them for their own cause. This stands in stark contrast to Paul's motives for trying to influence the Galatians (cf. vv. 18-20).

5.7-8. 7 Ἐτρέχετε καλῶς· τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοπεν [τῆ] ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πειθεσθαι; 8 ἡ πεισμονὴ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς. *You were running well; who has kept you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from the One who calls you.* With the athletic metaphor, Paul pictures these false teachers as having thrown up 'road blocks' across the spiritual path of the Galatians. And these barriers they used have no connection to God whatsoever.

5.10b. ὁ δὲ ταρασσῶν ὑμᾶς βαστάσει τὸ κρίμα, ὅστις ἐὰν ᾖ. *The one troubling you will bare judgment, whoever he may be.* Paul asserts that all of the false teachers, no matter who he may be in the eyes of men, will face the wrath of God for their teaching.

5.11-12. 11 Ἐγὼ δέ, ἀδελφοί, εἰ περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω, τί ἔτι διώκομαι; ἄρα κατήργηται τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ. 12 Ὅφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς. *And I brother, if I still were preaching circumcision, why then am I being persecuted? Oh that those upsetting you would castrate themselves!* Paul here alludes to a cowardice by the false teachers prompting them to preach a message of circumcision in order to

avoid facing persecution from the synagogues in the cities of Galatia. Luke describes on the first missionary journey how vicious the synagogue opposition to Paul and Barnabas was. These false teachers want to compromise the Gospel to lessen the person danger.

Then in verse twelve Paul blurts out the most blunt statement found in the NT. If in circumcision cutting a little flesh does some good, then why don't the teachers cut off the entire genital!

6:12-13. 12 Ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπήσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται. 13 οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρα σαρκὶ καυχῆσωνται. *Those desiring to make a good showing in the flesh are the ones compelling you to be circumcised, for the sole reason that they may not be persecuted because of the cross of Christ. Now these having been circumcised do not themselves keep the Law, but they want you to be circumcised so they can boast about your flesh.* In this Sender Verification in the letter Conclusio, Paul in his own handwriting rather than that of the writing secretary summarizes what had been inferred about these false teachers up to this point. These teachers sought to soften the demands of the Gospel with a mixture of Judaism into their message. This would appease the local synagogues and allow Christianity to be in good standing with these synagogues. Paul's observations paint a group more interested in compromise than in maintaining the pure message of salvation by faith apart from works of Law. He attacks their motives as much as their compromised message.

What does not emerge from this is the personal identity of these individuals. He shifts back and forth between referencing single individuals and group designations. Thus trying to attach any names to these individuals is an utter waste of time. Yet, in the silence of scripture, men wax forth with eloquent nonsense!¹⁷

¹⁷“Kirsopp Lake's suggestion that they were local Jews seeking to win the Galatians over as proselytes to Judaism² appears less natural, in view of the clear evidence of Judaizing activity at least as far as Antioch and Syria-Cilicia (Acts 15:1, 24), than the supposition that such activity extended to the churches of Galatia from elsewhere.³ It faces the further difficulty that Paul's opponents seem to have been Christians, whose 'gospel' bore some resemblance to the authentic gospel (1:6-7).⁴

“J. H. Ropes, elaborating an earlier thesis put forth by Wilhelm Lütgert, maintains that Paul was battling on two fronts: on the one hand, Judaizers (not intruders from outside but local Gentile Christians who had yielded to the pressure of local synagogue Jews and were now themselves Judaizing) and, on the other hand, libertine radicals (also Gentile Christians) who wished to sever all association with Judaism.⁵ This view is open to the fatal objection that there is really no evidence that Paul had to wage war on a double front in Galatia;⁶ Ropes's major presupposition that the same

gnosticizing tendency as was present in Corinth ‘would naturally present itself elsewhere’ has also been called into question.⁷

“Johannes Munck argues that the opponents were some of Paul’s own Gentile converts who, considering themselves insufficiently instructed by Paul, now wished to conform to the practice of the Jerusalem church.⁸ But while Paul addresses his own converts in the second person, the opponents are referred to throughout in the third person (a distinction most clearly seen, e.g., at 4:17); comparison with a similar approach in the Corinthian letters, where ‘offenders within the church of Corinth are rebuked in the second person, while interlopers from elsewhere are denounced in the third person,’ strongly suggests that in Galatians as well the agitators have come from outside.⁹

“Walther Schmithals’s thesis that the Galatian heretics were Jewish Christian Gnostics¹⁰ has gained little acceptance among scholars — deservedly so, since it is based on several dubious assumptions. The objection has been raised, for instance, that the interpretation of the heretics’ demand for circumcision as a means of securing release symbolically from the dominion of the flesh has no basis at all in the letter; the strong insistence on the law throughout the epistle indicates that the Galatian opponents were advocates of a Jewish legalism — which ill fits a Gnostic theory; certain tendencies which may be expected of Gnosticism (such as a thoroughgoing dualism) do not appear; and, unlike 1 Corinthians, gnōsis (“knowledge”) plays no role in the letter.¹¹

“A similar attempt to identify the Galatian agitators as Jewish Christian syncretists who sought enlightenment through legal observance, including circumcision,¹² fails to satisfy, if only because it involves the unjustifiable procedure of reading the Colossian situation into Galatia and the unlikely conclusion that Paul must have himself adhered to some Jewish mystery-cult before his conversion.¹³

“Robert Jewett understands the Galatian agitators to be a politically-orientated group of nomistic Christians in Judea; his hypothesis is that

Jewish Christians in Judea were stimulated by Zealot pressure into a nomistic campaign among their fellow Christians in the late forties and early fifties. Their goal was to avert the suspicion that they were in common with lawless Gentiles. It appears that the Judean Christians convinced themselves that circumcision of Gentile Christians would thwart Zealot reprisals.

“It is in this light, Jewett believes, that Galatians 6:12–13 is to be interpreted.¹⁴ According to his theory, the agitators employed the tactic not of directly opposing Paul or his theology, but of offering a completion to it (3:3) through the way of circumcision (vv. 6–18); such an offer of perfection would exert a powerful attraction on the Hellenistic Christians of Galatia, who would be acquainted with it as the familiar aim alike of the mystery religions and of classical philosophy, and who, moreover, themselves had ‘an intensely proud spiritual self-consciousness.’¹⁵

“Though favorably received by some scholars,¹⁶ Jewett’s interpretation does not seem to be free from difficulties. The main difficulty is that the evidence in support of the claim that it was specifically Zealot pressure — as distinct from non-Christian Jewish pressure in general — which occasioned the nomistic campaign among the Gentile churches is neither substantial nor unequivocal. In view of the sharply antithetical relationship between the Zealot movement and the Christian Church at the outbreak of the Jewish War,¹⁷ it may be doubted if the Judean Christians did entertain the conviction earlier that a nomistic campaign among the Gentile Christians would thwart Zealot reprisals;¹⁸ the Zealots as a party¹⁹

What appears to me to be the only legitimate ‘modern’ question here is whether these teachers were local or outsiders. The profile of insider Galatians hints at both rather one over the other. Ultimately the issue is rather moot, because the same impact results regardless of their origin. The temptation to compromise the Gospel that brought uncircumcised Gentiles into the Christian community in order to get along with the Jewish synagogue community to which many of the Jewish Christians and many of the converted God-fearer Gentiles were attached was a powerful dynamic. It ‘legitimized’ the Christian gospel in the eyes of men; it avoided the nasty hostility of the local Jews against the Christians; it made life much easier for the Christian community. With the beginning of severe tensions between the Jews and the Romans in the emergence of the Zealot movement in Palestine, it is not difficult to see how a ‘let’s get along with everyone’ attitude could be appealing.

The internal profile of these false teachers does not portray them as passionate ideologues blindly committed to a religious principle. Instead, Paul’s criticism portrays them more as opportunists wanting to avoid a hostile Jewish community’s wrath. Oddly, this angle doesn’t tend to receive much attention from modern scholars whose own contemporary approach is geared to getting along with everyone at nearly any cost.

What seems to be the case from a few very isolated later references is that this letter had most of Paul’s desired impact on the Galatian churches. Luke describes him returning through this region on the third missionary journey about a year or so later, enjoying a positive experience with the churches: *Καὶ ποιήσας χρόνον τινα ἐξήλθεν διερχόμενος καθεξῆς τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν, ἐπιστηρίζων πάντας τοὺς μαθητάς.* [After spending time there \[in Antioch\], Paul departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phry-](#) appear to have been more concerned with trying to overthrow the occupying power than with seeking to prevent the Judean Christians from having communion with lawless Gentiles. It is not beyond dispute that the plot against Paul’s life in Jerusalem (Acts 23:12–15; cf. 20:3) was engineered by members of the Zealot party, as Jewett makes out;²⁰ the easy access of the conspirators to the Jewish authorities and their ready collaboration with them (Acts 23:14–15) suggests otherwise.²¹ The anti-Christian persecution in Judea described in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16, which Jewett implies was connected with the activities of the Zealots,²² can be satisfactorily explained without the supposition of such a connection.²³ Further, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the Galatian agitators’ ‘program’ would show some sign of affinity with the aims of the Zealots who allegedly were exerting the pressure; but the offer to bring Gentile Christians to ‘perfection’ (Gal. 3:3) appears remote from Zealot interests.²⁴

[Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 3–8.

gia, strengthening all the disciples (Acts 18:23).

When assessing the thematic contents of the letter, the above analysis makes it clear that the twin interconnected themes of Paul's apostleship and his Gospel message become the organizing stack poles of every subtheme. The summarizing sections of the Praescriptio and Exordium at the beginning and the Conclusio segments at the end of the letter unquestionably frame the discussion in the letter body around these two themes. Understanding of the details of the letter depends primarily upon first grasping the heart of apostleship and Gospel as set forth by the apostle.

Paul's apostleship claims are set forth not in a definition of meaning, something the apostle assumed his readers already clearly understood. Rather, the claims are made that although not a part of the original Twelve he nonetheless was called by direct revelation of God as an apostolic messenger on the same level as the Twelve: 1:1, 11-12. In the series of 'evidences' in chapters one and two, it becomes clear that not only was his calling directly from God and thus independent of any authorization by Peter or the Twelve in Jerusalem, but also that the validity of this calling was foundational to the validity of his Gospel message. Out of his encounter with the resurrected Christ on the Damascus road came a divine summons to preach the message of justification by faith apart of works of Law to not only Jews but non-Jews (cf. 1:15-17).

The heart of this message is set forth in the Salutatio expansion elements in 1: 4 as a divinely created opportunity for rescue from the clutches of Satan in this present evil age. It is based upon the crucifixion of Christ (1:4) and validated by His resurrection (1:1). It stands as an unchangeable and un-modifiable message (1:8-9). This message is for all humanity (2:15-21; 3:13-14).

In the Probatio section of chapters three and four especially, this rescue (1:4) is defined largely around the theme of liberation (ἐλευθερία). First and foremost, it stands as liberation from the Law which when taught as a means of salvation is a message of certain spiritual damnation (chapter three). The Law of God plays an important and valid role in preparing the individual to receive God's rescue through Christ (as παιδαγωγός) but in no way can it produce that rescue itself. Only Christ can accomplish this. Law defines sin against God for us but is helpless to liberate us from enslavement to sin (chapter four). It becomes the tool of Satan rather than of God when set forth as a means of salvation. But the Galatians were being pressured by the false teachers to re-establish Law as a means of salvation -- something utterly illogical and foolish.

It is only through Christ that ἐλευθερία, liberation, has come. What that means is not freedom to serve our

sinful passions but instead to serve others in the love and care of Christ (chapters five and six). The χάριτος Χριστοῦ (1:6) provides the parameters of this liberation (5:1-6) and Law as a supposed means of liberation falls outside the realm of the divine grace. For the Galatians to return to Law as a means of salvation would position them beyond the saving grace of God in Christ.

The believer's calling in this divine rescue is ἐπ' ἐλευθερία, to liberation (5:13). This does not, however, mean freedom from all restraint of our sinful nature (εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῆ σαρκί, 5:13). Instead, it means that through divine love we serve one another (διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις, 5:13). Ironically, it is the Law that sums this up for believers (5:14). Therefore, what was impossible through Law as a vehicle of salvation becomes possible through the grace of Christ. And this powerfully liberating grace is activated in our lives through the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit (5:16-6:10). In this divine presence, we serve others in our liberation.

The Judaizing opponents at Galatia completely missed this understanding of the apostolic Gospel. Instead, they sought to substitute it with an alternative message that spelled spiritual ruin. Paul recognized this and vigorously condemned their message.

One of the ongoing challenges of the letter to the Galatians is relevancy to today's world. From the time of the church father Augustine onward the focus on the Law of Moses in Judaism as understood to stand behind the Judaizers at Galatia have been interpreted as a symbol of religious legalism. But from the 1960s and Krister Stendahl's lecture, [The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West](#), this symbolism has been seriously questioned and established as a false understanding of Paul's view of Judaism in his time. Although divergent views of [religious legalism](#) abound, what Paul attacked in this letter was a gross misuse of the Law of God being set up as a vehicle of salvation. Obedience to the Law in the minds of his Judaizing opponents was an essential requirement for entrance into the grace of God. What God had revealed to Paul and what he had experienced from the Damascus road encounter onward made it clear to the apostle that this was a dangerous misuse of the sacred Law of God through Moses, and that adopting the Judaizing view would spell spiritual disaster for its adherents.

The relevancy of the letter to Galatians comes legitimately not in falsely associating the Judaizers as religious legalists. Rather, correct application comes from the signal given in 1:6-7. Anyone turning into an alternative version of the gospel message preached by Paul and the Twelve, whatever its nature, puts himself on the path to spiritual suicide. The Gospel revealed

from heaven to the apostles is an unchanging and an unchangeable message, and must be proclaimed accurately for God to be willing to work in salvation for those outside the Kingdom of God.

The danger of the Judaizers in this document is the ever present danger of compromise, not religious legalism. Depraved human nature does not like stringent demands made, which come as the core essence of the apostolic Gospel. The ongoing inclination is to water it down somehow in order to make it more comfortable. By attempting to modify it we fall prey to Paul's prayer wish ἀνάθεμα ἔστω, [let him be anathema!](#), in 1:8-9.

But in leaving it alone and just simply allowing it to guide our lives day by day, we discover the most wonderful liberation in living. We become free to be 'slaves' to others in loving ministry (5:1-6:10). This is genuine freedom at its best! Our human bent toward self centered egotism is broken. We enjoy a marvelous relationship with God through the guidance of His Spirit in our lives. The indescribable satisfaction of having real meaning on planet earth through service becomes uniquely ours as believers in Christ. Living rises to a level unimaginable otherwise.

The Judaizers in Galatia missed all this. What a pity! Unfortunately many professing Christians in our world are missing it as well. Paul passionately desired that those churches, which he and Barnabas had established, not miss these blessings from God as well and thus came this vigorous letter from the apostle to them.