

An Introduction to Galatians

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – An introduction to the book of Galatians
2. aim – To cause us to understand the context of this letter and its importance to us today
3. passage – Galatians

b. outline

1. The Background of Galatians
2. The Purpose of Galatians
3. The Value of Galatians

c. opening

1. my **2005 visit** to the various Galatian locations in C Turkey

I. The Background of Galatians

Content

a. the author of the letter

1. there is *no* series dispute that Paul (Saul of Tarsus) actually wrote this letter:
 - a. the author identifies himself at the outset **(1:1)**
 - b. the author appeals to his own authority *as an apostle* **(1:1)**
 - c. the author signs the letter in his own hand **(6:11)**
 - d. the author contends that it was *he* that brought faith to the Galatians **(1:11-12)**
 - e. the author records his *pre*-conversion life of persecuting the church **(1:13-14)**
 - f. the author recounts a *post*-conversion biography of his time of training **(1:15-24)**
 - g. the author recounts an encounter with Cephas (Peter) as justification for his position **(2:11-14)**
 - h. **LOW:** *everything* about this letter *screams* that Saul of Tarsus wrote it after his conversion
2. a *brief* biography of Saul of Tarsus (later Paul after his conversion; **repeated** from **Colossians**)
 - a. date of birth unknown, although a “*young man*” in **Acts 7:58** (c. 4BC-10AD?)
 - b. born in Tarsus (SE Asia Minor) of Cilicia – a city of great importance (rivaling Athens)
 - c. his father was a Pharisee **(Acts 23:6)**, a Roman citizen, and (apparently) wealthy and influential
 1. Saul himself was a *natural-born* Roman citizen **(Acts 22:25-28)**
 - d. he was highly educated under the rabbi Gamaliel; fluent in Hebrew, Latin and Greek
 1. **note:** **Galatians** is “unlike” many of Paul’s other letters, in that it *does not* have the same “level” of rhetorical flourish, style, and **organization** – *i.e.* it appears to be written *quickly*
 2. but ... it is *clearly* written by a *devout Jewish* man who had been converted to faith in the risen Jesus *and* who had (now!) become *thoroughly convinced* that **faith alone in Christ alone** was the *only* means of justification before a holy God

b. the audience of the letter

1. the term *Galatia* refers to an area in C Asia Minor – it became a client kingdom of Rome under Pompey (c. 50BC), and was eventually converted to a Roman province (under a governor) c. 25BC
2. Paul and Barnabas travel into this area on their First Missionary Journey, c. 47-48AD
 - a. **note:** given that Saul was from Tarsus, he was *familiar* with this area during his childhood – thus, his desire to travel there *first* could be explained by this familiarity
 - b. in **Acts 13**, they are commissioned at Antioch (in Syria) and sent off, arriving on Cyprus, and then traveling N to Perga (S Galatia), eventually making it inland to Antioch of Pisidia (C Galatia)
 - c. in **Acts 14**, they then went to Iconium, Lystra (where Timothy was probably converted), and Derbe, returning to Antioch of Syria through Perga
 - d. in **Acts 15**, the Jerusalem Council (the First Ecumenical Council of the Church) convened, c. 48 or 49AD to address the “Gentile question” (*i.e.* must Gentiles be circumcised to be Christians?)
 - e. in **Acts 16**, Paul takes Silas (not Barnabas!) *back* into Galatia on the Second Missionary Journey (c. 49-52AD), where Timothy joins Paul at Lystra, the team then heading NW into Macedonia
3. **note:** Ephesus, the Seven Churches, and Colossae are located W of Galatia in Asia province
 - a. it is *possible* that Paul returned to *near* Galatia after his release from imprisonment in **Acts 28** – commissioning Titus on Crete (**Titus 1:5**) suggests he may have gone back there (c. 62-64AD)

4. **thus: Galatians** is an **encyclical letter** that Paul intended be read in “the churches of Galatia” (1:2b: Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, etc.)
- c. **the dating of the letter**
 1. Galatians was *probably* written **c. late 47 – mid 48AD** – as suggested from the following:
 - a. the letter *clearly* involves the “Gentile question” and the relationship of justification to acts of the Jewish law – **i.e.** do Gentile believers need to be circumcised to be justified?
 1. Paul is *adamant* that justification is *by faith alone*, and not by acts of the law
 2. **LOW:** *someone* has come to these churches and introduced teachings *contrary* to Paul’s
 - b. however ... there is *no mention* of the Jerusalem Council of **Acts 15**, which *addresses the question*
 1. **i.e.** given that Paul “won” the debate there, you would *assume* that Paul would use the Council as a *gigantic argument in his favor*, and clear support for justification *by faith alone*
 2. **thus:** the “deafening silence” re: the Council has a tendency to place this letter *after* Paul had been to Galatia, but *before* the Council was convened – **i.e. c. late 47 – mid 48AD**
 2. thus ... Galatians is **the first of the Pauline corpus** in the NT
 - a. written just after the First Missionary Journey completes (**i.e.** during the *initial* debate Paul and Barnabas had with the church at Antioch *before* they were sent to Jerusalem; **Acts 15:1-2**)
 - b. **note:** although Peter does give a stirring argument for the legitimacy of faith alone for salvation, it is *ultimately* James (the half-brother of Jesus) who declares the intention of the Council *after listening to Paul and Barnabas* testify (**i.e.** this is not a “Catholic Pope” leading; **Acts 15:13ff**)
 - c. the Council declares that Gentiles do *not* have to adhere to Jewish circumcision or customs to be saved, but they should *avoid* “offending” Jewish sensibilities re: some matters
- d. **the backdrop of the letter**
 1. the life of Saul/Paul *up to the First Missionary Journey*
 - a. Saul of Tarsus witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen c. 32AD (**Acts 8:1**)
 - b. he then persecutes members of The Way until he meets Jesus c. 34AD (**Acts 9:3ff**)
 - c. about three years after his conversion (**Galatians 1:18**), he goes to Jerusalem for a brief time and preaches to the Hellenists, who began to seek a way to kill him (**Acts 9:20ff**)
 1. probably because they considered him a *traitor* to Judaism via his conversion
 - d. so ... the church sends him home to Tarsus c. 37AD (**Acts 9:30**)
 1. to protect him from the Hellenists, but (in the providence of God) to glean more *training* on what it meant to be a follower of Christ (**i.e.** how does Jesus “fit” into monotheism and the *law*?)
 - e. Paul returns to Jerusalem c. 47AD, fourteen (14) years after his conversion (**Galatians 2:1**)
 2. **note:** it is *immediately after* this period of *intense, personal training* that Paul heads into Galatia
 - a. which explains the *vitriol* and *harshness* of the letter: if Paul had spent such a *lengthy* period studying the concept of *justification by faith alone* (**i.e.** over against justification under the law), and had delivered that **gospel** to the Galatians, it seems *entirely reasonable* that he would be *deeply disturbed* by someone coming to those churches and *upsetting his teachings*
 - b. and ... deeply angry that the Galatians *would accept such teachings* after he had been with them

II. The Purpose of Galatians

Content

a. the purpose of the letter

1. Paul is *deeply concerned* the Galatians were “so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (**Galatians 1:6**)
 - a. false teachers (referred to as “the circumcision party” in **Galatians 2:12**) had come into the church
 1. probably rather **brazenly** at this point – **remember:** Christianity *at this point* is a deeply Jewish sect, identified *almost completely* with the Jewish Jesus and made up of *mostly* Jews
 2. sometimes called “Judaizers” = those who insisted that any Gentiles had to be “converted” to Judaism through circumcision and the ritual keeping of the Jewish lifestyle/worship customs
 - b. even *Peter* (Paul claims!) *had* struggled with the issue at Antioch when Paul first came to faith
 1. Peter had his Gentile vision (**Acts 10:9ff**) while Saul was in Tarsus
 2. but Paul suggests that Peter was *still* struggling with this even as he and Barnabas were heading to Galatia (**Galatians 2:11ff**)
2. so ... Paul writes this letter as a *scathing rebuke* to set the churches back right on the issue of justification by faith alone, and *not* by the keeping of the Jewish ceremonial law
 - a. which is *why* Paul was so eager to return to C Asia Minor after the Council, as a *Second Missionary Journey* (**Acts 15:36**)
2. **a letter in which Paul confronts an “invasionary” force (like the Jewish shaman of Colossians)**

III. The Value of Galatians

Content

a. the centrality of the gospel

1. the subject of **Galatians** (the gospel) is central to the *mission* of Paul (**i.e.** in his letters)
 - a. in **Romans 1:16**, he says he is not “*ashamed*” of the gospel (the rest of the book *defines* it)
 - b. in **1 Cor. 1:17**, he says that his *primary* mission was to “*preach the gospel*”
 - c. in **2 Cor. 4:4**, he speaks of the gospel as the “*glory of Christ*,” which he boldly proclaimed
 - d. in **Eph. 3:7**, he speaks of being appointed a “*minister*” of the gospel as his purpose
 - e. in **Phil. 1:16**, he says that he was “*put here*” to defend the gospel
 - f. in **Col. 1:23**, (**again**) he mentions that he “*became a minister*” of the gospel
 - g. in **1 Thess. 2:4**, he says that he was “*entrusted*” with the gospel
 - h. in **2 Thess. 2:14**, he calls it “*our gospel*,” the *traditions* that he teaches to all
 - i. in **1 Tim. 1:11**, (**again**) he says that he has been “*entrusted*” with the gospel
 - j. in **2 Tim. 2:8**, he calls it “*my gospel*,” the message that he was *given* to preach
 - k. in **Titus** and **Philem.** he does not use the term “*gospel*,” but it is clearly a message to them *re:* the gospel and how that message is to govern the life of the church (and its members)
 - l. **IOW:** to understand the unfolding *mission* and *message* of Paul in Acts is to understand how he perceived the *gospel*
 - m. **thus:** in **Galatians**, Paul gives a strong *apologetic* for the gospel of justification by faith alone – what it means to *be righteous before God* (vs. *acting right before God*)
 1. the *value* of **Galatians** is how it defends the *propriety* of the message of which we have been entrusted – **the value of the gospel is the value of Galatians**

b. the attack upon the gospel

1. the *true* gospel is always under attack, as it is in our *very presence* even now
 - a. the *overt* forms of attack down through history:
 1. **past:** *Judaizers*: +circumcision; *medieval church*: +sacraments; *monks*: +asceticism
 2. **present:** *synergists*: +cooperation; *charismatics*: +miracles; *evangelicals*: +social justice
 - b. the *subtle* form of attack in our day: faith + moralism; moralism **as** the gospel
 - a. an example that helps explain the reality of this “gospel” *in the church*
 1. the popular belief that the gospel is a message *to the unsaved* – that *only* the unsaved need hear the gospel so they can “make their profession” – ignoring the *centrality* of the gospel message in all of the life *of the believer* (**i.e.** in *perseverance of faith*)
 2. **e.g.** from an *eschatological* perspective: does the gospel *only* convert the lost, or does the gospel *also* help to bring all of the nations of the world *under the Lordship of Christ*
 - c. **the gospel is the core of life for the Christian – the message of the gospel is the center of what it means to live as a follower of Jesus – the means to the goal of Christ: holiness**
 1. Paul wrote about the gospel *in all of the above examples* to **believers** (**i.e.** about their lives)
 2. **every distortion of the gospel leads to a distorted Christian life and a “broken” morality**
 - a. the danger of the “He Gets Us” campaign is not the *morality* expressed within it, but the *subterfuge* of the gospel *at its core* – a message that *Satan* loves because it is a “twisting” of the truth *re:* Jesus *and his message to the world*