

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Galatians 1: Paul's Defence of his Apostleship

Key Issues

Galatians 5:2: 'the crux of the matter'.

Does one have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian?

If the Torah is now superfluous, from where do Christians get their moral guidance?

The Form of Galatians

1: 1-5

Letter Prescript

1: 6-11

Introduction

1: 12-2:14

Narration of the facts at issue

2:15-21

Proposition (matters of agreement and disagreement; basic themes)

3:1-4:31

Confirmation (development of basic themes)

5:1-6:10

Exhortation

6:11-18

Letter Postscript

Galatians 1:1-5

[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 in 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.

Initial Greetings

Unusual for Paul, he offers an extended description of his apostolic credentials in the opening section of his letter. Why?

‘Mirror-reading’ of the text: were some opponents attempting to cast doubt on his claim to apostolic status?

Definition(s) of an Apostle

- One sent/commissioned (from the Greek verb *apostellô* - to send) to establish churches (cf. II Corinthians 8:23).
Rejection of Paul's mission to the Gentiles.
- One called or commissioned by the earthly Jesus, i.e., his disciples (cf. Acts 1:2, 26; 2:37, 42-43)
Paul had not been called by the earthly Jesus.
Paul's response: he received a direct commission from the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (see 1:1, 11-12).

Galatians 1:6-12

[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.

[11] For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; [12] for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul's Divine Calling (Gal 1:13-15)

[13] You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. [14] I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the tradition of my ancestors. [15] But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace....

Dramatic transformation of the zealous persecutor into a zealous missionary.

God called Paul from birth, echoing the call of the prophets of old (cf. Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5).

Paul's Independence of the Jerusalem Church (1:15-24)

[15] God called me through his grace and was pleased [16] to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, [17] nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. [18] Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; [19] but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. [20] In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! [21] Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, [22] and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; [23] they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." [24] And they glorified God because of me.

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Paul's Independence

Did not confer with a human being (1:16).

Spent three years in Arabia (1:16-17).

Only a brief meeting with Peter in Jerusalem (1:18-19).

Fourteen years pass before his next visit (2:1).

Seal of Approval by the Jerusalem Apostles (2:2-10)

[7] When they [the acknowledged leaders] saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised [8] (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles) [9] and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14)

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face; because he stood self-condemned; [12] for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. [13] And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'

Paul's Defence of the Gospel

Paul's central aim is to defend the validity of the gospel preached by him: he has been commissioned by the risen Jesus *to be an apostle to the Gentiles*.

The gospel, according to Paul, is a message of salvation to all who have faith in Jesus.