

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

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A. Historical Background

1. The churches: the only ones we know of Paul founding in the area of Galatia are the ones on the first missionary journey: Lystra, Iconium, Derbe, Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14-14:28; all of the first journey except for Cyprus). Furthermore, this is the only correspondence we have with these churches.
2. The Judaizing movement
See Acts 15:1 for the issue: need to be circumcised to be saved.
3. The issues
 - a) The gospel--are we saved by keeping the law, or by believing in Christ?
 - 1) OT: Salvation by faith.
 - 2) First century Judaism: by works. Deviation from the true OT faith, just as the RCC has deviated from the true Christian teaching.
 - 3) So Paul's gospel, though true to the OT, is at odds with the Jewish teaching of his time.
 - b) Paul's authority--their way of attacking his gospel. He was different from the other apostles, therefore some felt he was inferior:
 - 1) not sent out by Christ during his earthly sojourn, as were the eleven;
 - 2) nor ordained by the Jerusalem church, as was Matthias (Acts 1).
4. The date: perhaps the earliest of Paul's epistles. The first two chapters seem to relate a list of visits by Paul to Jerusalem; and only two are there. Thus before Acts 15. (But the chronology is very tight.)

B. Overall Structure

1. 1:1-5 Letter opening
2. 1:6-10 The conflict: "another gospel"
3. 1:11-5:1 Doctrine
 - a) 1:11-2:14, Paul's *Authority*
 - 1) 1:15-2:10, independent of Jerusalem
 - 2) 2:11-14, authoritative over a Jerusalem apostle
 - b) 2:15-21, transition
 - c) 3:1-5:1, Paul's *Teaching*
 - 1) 3:5-4:11, Salvation: by law or faith?
 - 2) 4:12-5:1, Growth: by flesh or spirit?

4. 5:2-6:10 Application
 - a) 5:2-12, the false brethren
 - b) 5:13-6:10, the true brethren
5. 6:11-17, The Conflict: circumcision
6. 6:18, Letter closing

C. Analysis of the Opening, 1:1-5

Six standard parts--only Eph. has all six. What is included or left out; and the way the included pieces are developed, tells us a lot about the tone of the letter. I did a detailed collation of all thirteen openings, and here will highlight what is distinctive about Galatians.

1. From

- a) Apostle: one sent out. Three kinds in the NT, depending on who does the sending.
 - 1) God the Father sent the Lord Jesus, Heb. 3:1
 - 2) God the Son sent out the twelve plus Paul on the road to Damascus
 - 3) God the Spirit sent out missionaries through the churches; cf. Acts 13, and Phil. 2:25 (Epaphroditus).

- b) Paul emphasizes that he writes as the second category, equal with the twelve.
 - 1) "By the will of God" in 1,2 Cor, Eph, Col, 2 Tim.
 - 2) "By the commandment of God and Christ" in 1 Tim.
 - 3) Gal has the most developed defense!

c) Details:

- 1) "Not of men nor by man."
 - a> Envisions a group chartering someone, and then the leader laying hands on him and sending him out. Cf. Acts 1:14ff. Paul was in fact sent out thus from Antioch, but he is not referring to that apostleship here.
 - b> His adversaries probably complained that he did not have adequate human credentials: Jerusalem had not recognized him (as they had Matthias in Acts 1). Paul replies that indeed they did not--his authority has a higher source and flows through a higher channel.
- 2) "But by Jesus Christ and God the Father"
 - a> It is Christ, not Peter or someone else at Jerusalem, who has sent him.
 - b> Note the contrast, "not by man ... but by Jesus Christ." Shows that Paul conceives of Christ as far more than a man.

- c> Expect "of God the Father" to show that God is the source; and this is certainly true, but he places God with Christ as the channel as well. His authority is divine and unmediated.
 - d> "Who raised him from the dead." The other apostles were sent by Christ during his earthly life of humiliation; Paul, by the risen and glorified Christ. If anything, his apostleship is greater than theirs!
- d) "and all the brethren which are with me." This is the only epistle in which the cosenders are mentioned only as a group, but not named.
- 1) Not to deemphasize them--Rom, 1 Cor, Eph. have no others at all. Paul could have written without mentioning others. That he does mention them means there is some reason for it.
 - 2) Indicates that he has discussed the case with the others where he presently is (Antioch?), and they unanimously support his position on the matter. Motives:
 - a> He does not need their authority, but does want to filter his rebuke through the wisdom of others.
 - b> Because of the dual issue (not just the gospel, but also Paul's apostolic authority), he wants to let them know that correction on the issue of the gospel is not just reaction to their rejection of his authority.
2. To "the churches of Galatia." To every other church, he writes that they are "saints", or that the church is "in God and the LJC." There is no such assurance here. He is sorely fearful for their spiritual well-being. NB: Just because someone professes to be a believer is no reason to assume that they are. What does their life say? cf. 4:20.
3. Greeting--This is the only epistle to go beyond the basic "Grace [to you/mercy] and peace, from God our Father and the LJC." The expansion develops the basic ideas of the gospel:
- a) *...our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins.*--The substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, the saving act.
 - 1) "Gave himself." More forceful than just "died," as in 1 Cor. 15:3. This emphasizes his purposeful choice. It was not an accident; he did not submit reluctantly.
 - 2) "for ... sins." Not just as an example, or to show the wickedness of men, but to deal with our sin as a sacrifice.
 - 3) Note the "first person of faith." This is true of all who can include themselves with Paul in saying, "for our sins."
 - b) *that he might deliver us from this present evil age.*--The result of Christ's sacrifice.

- 1) The "present age" is characterized by sin and "vanity." Two great ages, Eph. 1:21: the present age and the age to come, separated by the Lord's return.
 - 2) "Deliver us." Rescue. He has died for us so that he can take us out of this system. Happens both now (in the new life and deliverance from sin that he gives us) and at his coming, when the new age comes.
- c) *according to the will of God and our Father.*--The cause of Christ's sacrifice.
- 1) Not making up for some failing in God's plan, but according to is.
 - 2) The thought here is of God's electing love. Note, "will of our God and Father." That is, the will of God in his capacity as our Father.
4. Doxology--Appears in Gal. and 2 Cor., the only letters to churches without thanksgiving sections, and containing the strongest rebukes of his church letters. He will praise God, but must do it for God's own attributes, since he sees no fruit in their lives.
 5. Thanks--none here. There is nothing he can thank God for in their case. Cf. 2 Cor, 1 Tim, which also exclude thanks.
 6. Request--None here (or in 2 Cor, 1 Tim--the other two "rebuke" letters).