

Galatians



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Contents



List of Figures	vii
Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
Abbreviations	xiii
Introduction	3
Galatians 1:1–10	Letter Opening 34
Galatians 1:11–24	Narrative 1: Of a Gospel Revealed by God, Not People 50
Galatians 2:1–10	Narrative 2: Of a Gospel Affirmed by Unity at Jerusalem 64
Galatians 2:11–21	Narrative 3: Of a Gospel Betrayed by Division at Antioch 75
Galatians 3:1–14	Argument 1: For Blessing in Christ through Trust 99
Galatians 3:15–29	Argument 2: For Unity in Christ 118
Galatians 4:1–11	Argument 3: Against Returning to Slavery 133
Galatians 4:12–20	Instructions with Argument 1: “Be like Me” 144
Galatians 4:21–5:13a	Instructions with Argument 2: “Do Not Be Subject Again to . . . Slavery” 153

Contents

Galatians 5:13b–6:10	Instructions with Argument 3: “Through Love Be Slaves to One Another”	167
Galatians 6:11–18	Letter Closing	185
Bibliography		195
Index of Subjects		205
Index of Modern Authors		209
Index of Scripture and Ancient Sources		213

Figures



1. View of the mountains along the highland route from Iconium to Pisidian Antioch 5
2. Atrium of craftworker's house in Pompeii 13
3. Galatia and neighboring provinces at the time of Paul's letter 17
4. Letter of Demarion and Irene 35
5. Dining room of the association of builders at Ostia 78
6. Powerful eyes 102
7. Ancient curse tablet 108
8. Site known as Lydia's Baptistry, near Philippi 131
9. Temple of the imperial cult at Ankara 140
10. Pax coin 177

Foreword



Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament is a series that sets out to comment on the final form of the New Testament text in a way that pays due attention both to the cultural, literary, and theological settings in which the text took form and to the interests of the contemporary readers to whom the commentaries are addressed. This series is aimed squarely at students—including MA students in religious and theological studies programs, seminarians, and upper-division undergraduates—who have theological interests in the biblical text. Thus, the didactic aim of the series is to enable students to understand each book of the New Testament as a literary whole rooted in a particular ancient setting and related to its context within the New Testament.

The name “*Paideia*” (Greek for “education”) reflects (1) the instructional aim of the series—giving contemporary students a basic grounding in academic New Testament studies by guiding their engagement with New Testament texts; (2) the fact that the New Testament texts as literary unities are shaped by the educational categories and ideas (rhetorical, narratological, etc.) of their ancient writers and readers; and (3) the pedagogical aims of the texts themselves—their central aim being not simply to impart information but to form the theological convictions and moral habits of their readers.

Each commentary deals with the text in terms of larger rhetorical units; these are not verse-by-verse commentaries. This series thus stands within the stream of recent commentaries that attend to the final form of the text. Such reader-centered literary approaches are inherently more accessible to liberal arts students without extensive linguistic and historical-critical preparation than older exegetical approaches, but within the reader-centered world the sanest practitioners have paid careful attention to the extratext of the original readers, including not only these readers’ knowledge of the geography, history, and other contextual elements reflected in the text but also their ability to respond

Foreword

correctly to the literary and rhetorical conventions used in the text. Paideia commentaries pay deliberate attention to this extratextual repertoire in order to highlight the ways in which the text is designed to persuade and move its readers. Each rhetorical unit is explored from three angles: (1) introductory matters; (2) tracing the train of thought or narrative or rhetorical flow of the argument; and (3) theological issues raised by the text that are of interest to the contemporary Christian. Thus, the primary focus remains on the text and not its historical context or its interpretation in the secondary literature.

Our authors represent a variety of confessional points of view: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox. What they share, beyond being New Testament scholars of national and international repute, is a commitment to reading the biblical text as theological documents within their ancient contexts. Working within the broad parameters described here, each author brings his or her own considerable exegetical talents and deep theological commitments to the task of laying bare the interpretation of Scripture for the faith and practice of God's people everywhere.

Mikeal C. Parsons
Charles H. Talbert
Bruce W. Longenecker

Preface



Unity in diversity in Christ. People of all kinds eating together through common relation to Christ. A trip to Jerusalem that finds unity. Unity broken at Antioch. An argument building to oneness in Christ. An ethic centered on love, the key virtue for unity.

At stake is the Galatians' *pistis*: their trust in Christ and, consequently, their fidelity to Christ. If these gentiles run off down the road toward dependence on Jewish law, they forget what Christ has done on their behalf on the cross.

Particular thanks are due to the following:

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Thanks are also due to the many great scholars whose published work has helped in understanding Galatians—above all to my former Manchester colleague, Martin de Boer,¹ whose commentary is now the benchmark for thorough work on the letter. The present commentary was essentially completed in 2013. I look forward to future opportunities to interact with many more recent works, especially that of N. T. Wright,² significant commentaries by Douglas Moo³ and by Andrew Das,⁴ and the important collection edited by Mark Elliott, Scott Hafemann, N. T. Wright, and John Frederick.⁵

Finally, my thanks go to all who have helped bring the commentary through to completion: to the series editors, especially Bruce Longenecker, and to the editorial committee, especially Loveday Alexander; to James Ernest, for repeated help over the several years it took to write; to Wells Turner, Rachel Klompmaker, Mason Slater, and the rest of the production and marketing teams at Baker Academic; above all, for endless work and support, to Janet.

1. *Galatians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011).
2. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).
3. *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).
4. *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014).
5. *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

Abbreviations



General

//	parallel to	m ²	square meters
§	section	NT	New Testament
AT	author's translation	OT	Old Testament
esp.	especially	trans.	translated by, translation (in)
frg.	fragment	x	when preceded by a numeral, designates how often an item occurs
lit.	literally		

Bible Texts, Editions, and Versions

LXX	Septuagint, the Greek Bible	NIV 1984	New International Version
MT	Masoretic Text: the Hebrew Bible	(1984 edition)	
NIV	New International Version (2011 edition)	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

Ancient Manuscripts and Papyri

¶	Codex Sinaiticus	𝔓 ⁴⁶	Papyrus 46
B	Codex Vaticanus	P.Brem.	<i>Die Bremer Papyri</i> . Edited by
ℳ	Majority Text		U. Wilcken. Berlin, 1936.

Ancient Corpora

OLD TESTAMENT		Jdt.	Judith
Gen.		1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
Exod.		Sir.	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
Lev.		Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon
Num.		NEW TESTAMENT	
Deut.		Matt.	Matthew
Josh.		Mark	Mark
Judg.		Luke	Luke
Ruth		John	John
1–2 Sam.		Acts	Acts
1–2 Kings		Rom.	Romans
1–2 Chron.		1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians
Ezra		Gal.	Galatians
Neh.		Eph.	Ephesians
Esther		Phil.	Philippians
Job		Col.	Colossians
Ps(s).		1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians
Prov.		1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy
Eccles.		Titus	Titus
Song		Philem.	Philemon
Isa.		Heb.	Hebrews
Jer.		James	James
Lam.		1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Ezek.		1–3 John	1–3 John
Dan.		Jude	Jude
Hosea		Rev.	Revelation
Joel		OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA	
Amos		<i>Apocr. Ezek.</i> <i>Apocryphon of Ezekiel</i>	
Obad.		<i>As. Mos.</i> <i>Assumption of Moses</i> (see <i>T. Mos.</i>)	
Jon.		2 Bar.	<i>2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>
Mic.		4 Bar.	<i>4 Baruch</i>
Nah.		4 Ezra	<i>4 Ezra</i>
Hab.		Jos. Asen.	<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>
Zeph.		Jub.	<i>Jubilees</i>
Hag.		Pss. Sol.	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
Zech.		T. Job	<i>Testament of Job</i>
Mal.		T. Mos.	<i>Testament of Moses</i>
DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS			
Add. Esth.			
1–2 Esd.			

DEAD SEA SCROLLS

4QMMT *Some Observances of the Law*
(4Q394–399)

RABBINIC WORKS

Letters preceding the names of Mishnaic tractates indicate sources: Mishnah (*m.*), Tosefta (*t.*), Babylonian Talmud (*b.*), and Jerusalem/Palestinian Talmud (*y.*).

'Abot R. Nat. 'Abot de Rabbi Nathan

Ber. Berakot

APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Ign. Eph. Ignatius, *To the Ephesians*

Ancient Authors

ARISTOTLE

Eth. Nic. *Nicomachean Ethics*

ATHENAEUS

Deipn. *Deipnosophistae*

CICERO

Amic. *De amicitia*
Inv. *De inventione rhetorica*
Nat. d. *De natura deorum*

EPICTETUS

Disc. *Discourses*

JOSEPHUS

Ant. *Antiquities of the Jews*
J.W. *Jewish War*

JUSTIN

1 Apol. *First Apology*
2 Apol. *Second Apology*

PHILO

Contempl. *On the Contemplative Life*
Post. *On the Posterity of Cain*

PLATO

Euthyd. *Euthydemus*
Gorg. *Gorgias*
Rep. *Republic*

PLUTARCH

Per. *Pericles*

SENECA (THE YOUNGER)

Clem. *De clementia*
Ep. *Moral Epistles*

STOBAEUS

Flor. *Florilegium*

TACITUS

Agr. *Agricola*

Reference Works

BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Edited by F. Blass and A. Debrunner. Translated and revised by Robert W. Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

LSJ

A Greek-English Lexicon. By H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, and R. McKenzie. 9th ed. with rev. supplement. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Galatians

Introduction



How should we prepare to study a text? What steps can we take to alert us to the range of issues that may be relevant? To help prepare us for analyzing Galatians, we will do four things. First, we will take an initial look at Galatians, together with relevant external evidence such as early use of Galatians, to give us a provisional idea of the nature of the text. This will provide the basis for a second step, consideration of what contexts (in the widest sense) are relevant for understanding the text. Our third step will be analysis of the structure of Galatians. Finally, we will give a brief overview of some ways in which people have interpreted and used Galatians.

The Nature of the Text

Our initial look at Galatians will be in three parts. We will begin by gathering basic data about its language, size, date, sender, and recipients. Then we will look at form and content, including, for instance, seeing what words are most frequent. Last, we will gather basic evidence about the situation for which the letter was written.

Basic Data about Text, Date, Sender, and Recipients

The work known as Paul's Letter to the Galatians is a text of about 2,230 words, written in a form of Greek differing somewhat from that of classical Athens but similar to that of other NT texts and some other writings of the late Hellenistic to Roman Imperial period. The earliest text of Galatians is found in the papyrus P^46 , dated about AD 200 (Gal. 1:1–6:10 is at the University of Michigan; 6:10–18 is in the Chester-Beatty Library, Dublin). The text of Galatians is extremely stable in the manuscript tradition. Of the limited

number of textual variants that raise significant questions, none extends to more than a few words.

The earliest really clear use of Galatians is by mid-second-century writers such as Marcion (see “Issues in the Reception of Galatians,” below). He and other writers of that period viewed Galatians as an authoritative text, coming from the hand of the apostle Paul. Galatians makes reference to events that extend, at the very least, to about sixteen years after the death of Christ (see esp. Gal. 2:1). Taking the earliest conventional date for the crucifixion, AD 30, this puts Galatians as dating from 46 or later. Taken together with the evidence of the earliest clear use of Galatians, this places the maximum possible year range as about 46–140.

We are probably safe in narrowing the range much further. There is general agreement that the text actually was written by Paul. Since Paul probably died in about 67, Galatians is now limited to about twenty years in the middle of the first century. We can take another five or so years off this because there is broad agreement that Paul wrote Galatians earlier than his imprisonment in Rome in the early 60s. This gives us a range of about 46–61, quite a specific historical context. To narrow the date range any further leads us into controversial areas, which we will examine in discussing “Contexts for Understanding Galatians.”

The text presents itself in the form of a Greek letter. The sender describes himself as “Paul, an emissary” (*apostolos*, traditionally “apostle”), adding that “all the brothers and sisters with me” (*hoi syn emoi pantes adelphoi*) are cosenders (1:1–2), although the letter has no obvious signs of communal authorship. Paul is a name on thirteen of the letters in the NT. He is also the main character in the second half of Acts of the Apostles.

The letter is addressed to “*the assemblies [ekklēsiai] of Galatia*” (1:2), and at one point Paul addresses the recipients, “*Oh, foolish Galatians!*” (3:1). Galatia was a Roman province in the center of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The Galatians, or Gauls, after whom the province was named, were Celtic tribes who had rather bizarrely ended up establishing sizable kingdoms in the upland heart of Asia Minor after arriving (en masse, with their families) as mercenaries involved in wars of the third century BC. The kingdoms were incorporated into a Roman province in 25 BC (Mitchell 1993a, 1, 14–16, 61). In Paul’s day, the boundaries of the province covered a much broader area than the original upland Gallic kingdoms. This leads to a debate about the letter’s destination, which is connected to questions of dating, discussed below. However, we can certainly say that, broadly, the geographic and political context of the recipients is central Asia Minor under Roman provincial governance.

Another key point about the recipients is that they are presented as having been brought to Christian faith by Paul (4:12–20). They are also presented as being gentile: Paul describes them as previously “not knowing God,” “enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods” (4:8), and as considering



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Figure 1. View of the mountains along the highland route from Iconium (modern-day Konya) to Pisidian Antioch (Yalvac).

undergoing circumcision (5:3). (On all this, see discussion on “Expected Hearers and the Implied Reader,” below.) The geographical context of the sender, Paul, is not specified.

Form and Content of the Text

In terms of form, Galatians is broadly in the style of many other Greek letters. However, the text includes autobiographical narration (1:11–2:14; 4:12–15), and much of the letter consists of argument. In several sections this takes the form of citation and application of Scripture. In 4:21–31, there is something like an allegory based on Scripture. There is also much exhortatory material. In Gal. 5:19–21 is a list of vices, followed by a positive list in 5:22–23, which largely consists of virtues. Hans Dieter Betz and other scholars argue that the form of Galatians follows the norms of Greco-Roman formal rhetoric, although others have questioned this (see below).

Unlike the case of letters such as 2 Corinthians and Philippians, few scholars have questioned whether Galatians is a single text rather than a composite formed from more than one earlier text. Exceptions include Joop Smit (2002), whose analysis in terms of formal rhetoric leads him to see 5:13–6:10 as a later addition that does not fit the main rhetorical structure, and Thomas Witulski (2000), who argues that 4:8–20 addresses a different situation (related to the imperial cult) from that of the rest of the letter (related to Jewish law). Witulski has some adherents (Pilhofer [2010, 292–95] supports the force of the idea).

However, there is a strong overall consensus that Galatians was written as a single letter.

An initial read-through of Galatians shows that the content includes two particularly prominent elements. The letter opening and narrative in Gal. 1 lay particular emphasis on the divine origin of Paul's authority and message, an emphasis linked to a rebuke of the recipients for turning away from this message at the instigation of third parties. The second element is an argument relating to Jewish law. This argument could be seen as the major topic of the letter from 2:15 to the end, coming to a practical focus in a warning against the recipients undergoing circumcision (5:3; cf. 6:12). Alternatively, one might see a third prominent topic emerging in 5:13–6:10, in the form of discussion of ethical issues.

To delve a bit deeper, we can analyze the content of the text in lexical (word choice) terms. The sidebar shows the number of occurrences of various Greek words or word groups (groups of words derived from the same stem, like the

Frequency of Some Lexical Groups in Galatians

<i>Christos</i>	Christ	38
<i>-nomos</i>	law	33
<i>theos</i>	God	31
<i>-angel-</i>	messenger, gospel, promise	29
<i>pist-</i>	faith, trust	27
<i>pneuma</i>	Spirit/spirit	19
<i>sark</i>	flesh	18
<i>Iēsous</i>	Jesus	17
<i>[euangel-</i>	gospel	15]
<i>anthrōpos</i>	human being	14
<i>huio-</i>	son, adoption	14
<i>dikaio-</i>	righteous, consider righteous	13
<i>perit-</i>	circumcision, circumcise	13
<i>-adelphos</i>	brother/sister	12
<i>-graph-</i>	write, Scripture	12
<i>-doul-</i>	slave, enslave	12
<i>-erg-</i>	work	12
<i>ethn-</i>	gentile	11
<i>eleuther-</i>	free, freedom	11
<i>zōē/zaō</i>	life/live	11
<i>[epangel-</i>	promise	11]
<i>loudai-</i>	Jew, Jewish	9
<i>chari-</i>	grace, give	9
<i>Abraam</i>	Abraham	9

English words “slave,” “enslave,” and “slavish”). Five groups are particularly frequent. The very high frequency of *Christos* (Christ) contributes to marking the letter as strongly Christian (some “Christian” texts have few distinctively Christian features). The frequency of *nomos* (law) shows how central the topic is. The *-angel-* word group is about announcement. In Galatians, this is mainly either *euangelion* (gospel) or *epangelia* (promise), indicated by brackets. The final very common word group is *pistis/pisteuō* (words relating to trust, or fidelity). The unusual frequency of both “law” and “faith” makes the relationship between them potentially a key point for study of the letter.

Among the moderately frequent word groups, a few combinations of related terms stand out clearly. There is a great deal of terminology about Jews and gentiles: *peritomē* (circumcision), *ethnē* (gentiles), *Ioudaios* (Jew),

Abraam (Abraham). Another interesting combination is *douleia* (slavery) and *eleutheria* (freedom). Another possible pair relates to the makeup of humans: *sarx* (flesh) and *anthrōpos* (human being). Readers with knowledge of Greek ideas about the person may also expect that *pneuma* (spirit) belongs here too. Most Christian readers will, on the other hand, expect to link it with *theos* (God) and maybe with *Christos*. We shall have to see what fits the text.

A logical further step would be to look at semantic groups, that is, sets of terms that are related in meaning even though they may be lexically different. For instance, the *douleia* (slavery) lexical group in Galatians forms part of a wider semantic group of terms relating to slavery and freedom. Along with the *-doul-* terms, this semantic group includes *paidiskē* (slave girl), *eleutheria* and related forms (freedom/free/set free), and probably *exagorazō* (redeem).

Consideration of semantic groups in Galatians, generally, further reinforces the areas of interest inferred from the lexical groups. One addition is the semantic field of life and death, which is expressed in various terms, including crucifixion. Another analytical approach would be to look for points that are highlighted by the structure of the letter. For instance, “There is no Jew or Greek” (Gal. 3:28) comes at a climax in Paul’s argument. However, these initial surveys alert us only to some, but not all, important aspects of the letter. In the exegesis of the text, we will argue that a key theme of the letter is concern for unity. This happens not to be expressed by frequent repetition of unity-related words, so it is not picked up by lexical surveys.

What the Letter Implies about Its Situation

Paul does not explicitly set out his purpose for writing. However, we can find quite a lot of evidence about the situation, as perceived by Paul, from what he writes about the three (human) parties who are primarily involved: his Galatian addressees, Paul himself, and those described with terms such as “some people who are harassing you” (1:7). This third group we will call “Paul’s opponents” (see below).

Paul addresses his audience as being in the process of going wrong in some way that involves departing from what he has taught them:

“turning away from the one who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel” (1:6)

“O foolish Galatians, who cast the evil eye on you?” (3:1)

“turning back again to the weak and poor elements, to which you are wanting to enslave yourselves again” (4:9)

“I fear about you, in case somehow it is in vain that I have labored for you” (4:11)

“I am in despair about you” (4:19–20)

“Who cut in on you to stop you from obeying the truth?” (5:7)

In 1:6 they are turning “to a different gospel.” This implies another message that they see as Christian. In 3:2, Paul demands to know whether they received the Spirit “by works of law . . . or by a message of trust.” The implication is that they are starting to adopt “works of law.” In 4:9–10, Paul wonders at their turning back “again to the weak and poor elements. . . . You are observing days and months and seasons and years.” Some sort of calendrical observances are involved in their changing behavior. In 5:2 he warns, “If you get circumcised, Christ will be of no use to you.” Paul sees at least some Galatians as inclining toward circumcision.

Some further, reasonably likely points about the situation can be derived by mirror reading from the imperatives in the letter. Mirror reading has to be done with due caution (Barclay 1987). However, Paul is very sparing in his use of instructional imperatives in Galatians, which makes his use of them quite marked. He instructs the Galatians to do the following: to be like him (4:12); to stand firm (in freedom) and not take on again a yoke of slavery (5:1); not to use freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but to serve one another in love (5:13); to watch out that they are not destroyed by one another, if they bite and devour one another (5:15); to walk by the Spirit (5:16); to restore (humbly) a person caught in a sin (6:1); to bear one another’s burdens (6:2); each to test their own work (6:4); to share good things with their instructor (6:6); not to give Paul trouble (6:17). Although the instructions in this list look rather varied, the one theme that does seem to emerge is a call for love and mutual support. This finds further reinforcement elsewhere in Gal. 5, where Paul several times gives love a central place in discourse and where his counsels point to a likely concern about their disunity (5:15, 20, 26).

Paul writes a considerable amount about himself in the letter. To some extent this is done (in classic rhetorical fashion) as narrative that sets up the argument. A clear instance is Paul taking Titus to Jerusalem, with Titus then not being compelled to be circumcised (2:1–5). To some extent Paul also presents himself as a model, as is clearest in the first direct instruction: “Be like me” (4:12). However, there is also a marked defensive tone in what Paul writes about himself:

“Am I now seeking to win favor from people or from God? Or am I seeking to please people?” (1:10)

“I did not see any of the other emissaries except James, the brother of the Lord. See, before God! I am not lying in the things I write to you!” (1:19–20)

“Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (4:16)

“Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body.” (6:17)

Paul perceives his reputation as having come under attack. In particular, he seems to feel the need to defend the idea that he did not learn his gospel message from the apostles at Jerusalem. Since an accusation in that area is not an obvious corollary of the issues, such as circumcision, that we have seen as directly affecting the Galatian Christians, it seems probable that accusations against Paul's reputation, and particularly about the origins of his message, are part of the situation of the letter.

The third group prominent in the situation is Paul's opponents. He writes less about them than we might expect. Paul describes them as "some people who are harassing you and wanting to pervert the gospel of Christ" (1:7; cf. 5:10, 12). They have possibly "cast the evil eye" on the Galatians (3:1). They are "zealous for" the Galatians, but "not in a good way. Instead, they want to exclude you, so that you will be zealous for them" (4:17).

They have "cut in on" the Galatians, so as to "stop you from obeying the truth" (5:7). They "want to make a good showing in flesh, . . . compelling you to be circumcised . . . so that they would not be persecuted. . . . They are wanting you to be circumcised so that they might boast in your flesh" (6:12–13). It is hard to be sure what circumstances Paul sees his opponents as being in that relate to "boasting" and to avoiding persecution (see comments on 6:13). However, it seems clear that a key part of the situation of Galatians, as Paul sees it, is that a number of Christian Jews (contra Nanos 2002) have spoken to gentile Galatian Christians, encouraging them to adopt circumcision.

Drawing these points together, the evidence from statements in Galatians that directly relate to the audience, to Paul, or to his opponents suggests that, as Paul sees it, the situation leading to the writing of the letter includes the following: some Christian Jews have encouraged gentile Galatian Christians to adopt circumcision; someone has also made accusations against Paul, especially about his gospel having come from other people; at least some of the Galatian Christians have given Paul the impression that they are inclined to be circumcised and to take on other practices based on Jewish law, including calendrical ones; there is probably some disunity among the Galatian Christians.

Naming the People Whom Paul Opposes

Scholars struggle to find a good term to describe the group whom Paul is opposing. Use of the term "Judaizers" (e.g., Bruce 1982, 25), is fraught with lexical and historical difficulty (see comments on 2:14). Reuse of Pauline terms such as "agitators" (e.g., Jewett 2002) is methodologically sensible but gives a pejorative impression. "Teachers" (e.g., Martyn 1997a, 13) is reasonable, although it is maybe too specific about their general role. We will use what appears the most neutral term, "Paul's opponents" (e.g., Dunn 1993, 9), that is, people whom Paul opposes. As Robert Jewett (2002, 343) argues, it is possible that they did not present themselves as opposing Paul. However, Paul certainly opposes them.

Contexts for Understanding Galatians

What contexts are relevant for understanding various aspects of the nature of Galatians, as analyzed above? We will offer a survey of some prominent ones, then discuss the controversial matter of the letter's specific geographical and chronological contexts.

Our first characteristic of the text is that it is in Greek: more specifically, “Hellenistic” or Koine (*koinē*, “common”) Greek. In our commentary on the text, we shall therefore need to consider word usage and syntax in ancient Greek texts, especially those in Koine Greek or, thinking chronologically, those from around the first century AD. Other NT texts are clearly crucial to this. Especially other texts written by Paul will help us understand his particular vocabulary and syntax. Of course, these may vary over time and may be affected by his general use of scribes (trained writers, not “the scribes” mentioned in the Gospels) to write down the letters (Rom. 16:22; cf. Gal. 6:11). However, linguistic use in other Pauline Letters is not (usually) the same as assuming that the ideas in each letter are the same. For instance, we can argue, lexically, that *nomos* (“law”) in Galatians and Romans usually refers to the Jewish law, but that does not mean that Paul necessarily takes the same attitude to the Jewish law in both letters. There is considerable disagreement among scholars about how many NT letters were written by Paul. For purposes of linguistic comparison, this commentary will assume a minimalist position, that Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon (the seven “undisputed” letters) are by Paul. Needless to say, discussion of whether some or all of the other six NT letters attributed to Paul were written by him is beyond the scope of this commentary.

Our second characteristic is that the text is drawn on by second-century Christian writers as being authoritative and that it is then carefully preserved in the extensive NT manuscript tradition. A significant context for understanding Galatians is the set of ways in which early Christian writers understood and used it. However, the amount of very early usage that gives us much help with interpretative decisions is extremely limited. The earliest major use is by Marcion, about a century later (available only through writings of his opponents, esp. Tertullian), involving a reading of Galatians radically at odds with that of most other Christians (see below). Beyond Marcion, the third- and fourth-century worlds of Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine involve situations for Christians so different from those of Paul that their interpretations shed much more light on their own ideas than on Paul’s. Yet their writings, especially those in Greek, do remain a significant, if problematic, context for understanding Galatians. A further point about early Christian reading of Galatians is that the letter was read as part of an emerging canonical collection of texts. The canon (beyond Paul’s Letters) comes into this commentary in three methodologically distinct ways: other NT texts offer linguistic

evidence of Koine Greek usage among first-century Christians; other NT texts offer evidence of the situation and ideas in the Jesus movement at the time of Galatians; readers of this commentary are assumed to be interested in the relationship between ideas in Galatians and those in other parts of the canon.

The third characteristic of the text is that it falls within the period AD 46–61. This places it in a certain period of the social, cultural, and political history of the region: preindustrial, Greco-Roman, Roman Imperial, in the reign of Claudius (to 54) or Nero (in his early period, which is usually seen in relatively positive terms), in the decades leading up to the Judean revolt against Rome (66–73). Each of these wider or narrower characterizations of the period points to a range of social, cultural, and political contexts. Among the social contexts are, for instance, the economic structures of first-century society and factors such as patronage. Among the cultural contexts are, for example, popular philosophical movements and the effects of classical Greek literature and philosophy. Among the political contexts are the structures of empire and their relation to the imperial cult.

The date range also relates to stages in the development of the Jesus movement. It has spread well beyond Judea and Galilee. It has drawn in significant numbers of gentiles, but the leading figures in the movement are still Christian Jews rather than gentiles. There has not yet been any organized state persecution of Christians. Other parts of the NT are clearly a particularly important source for understanding aspects of the context in the development of the Jesus movement.

Our fourth characteristic of Galatians is that it generally follows Greek letter form. This means that we will discuss the text in relation to the norms of writing seen in other literary and nonliterary ancient letters written in Greek.

Our fifth and sixth characteristics of the text are that it is addressed to “the assemblies of Galatia” and that it is sent by Paul. Here we reach the heart of the contextual issues. All the other contexts must themselves be contextualized and prioritized according to their relationships to the experiences of Paul and of the Galatians (as understood by Paul). Imperial context, linguistic context, and all the others need to be understood from the viewpoint of Paul and the Galatians—from within their worlds.

The shared world of Paul and the Galatians is the world of the house church. This exists at a certain type of social location in first-century life. It also exists at a location within the Jesus movement of its day. To help us think concretely about this, we can make use of a model house church (see sidebar “Pompeian Model of Craftworker’s House Church”). This model relates to house churches hosted by craftworkers, something we know to have happened in Rome (Rom. 16:5; probably, more precisely, an apartment church: Jewett 2007, 64–65) and that was probably common elsewhere (cf. Acts 18; 1 Thess. 2:9; 4:11).

There are other models of house-church social structure that could also be relevant for thinking about the Galatian assemblies. In Rom. 16 we have what

Pompeian Model of Craftworker's House Church

Forty people, such as these:

1. Householder (house ca. 300 m² ground plan including outside space), wife, children, a few (male) craft-working slaves, (female) domestic slave, dependent relative.
2. Several other householders (houses ca. 20–250 m²), some spouses, children, slaves, other dependents.
3. A few members of families with non-Christian householders.
4. A couple of slaves with non-Christian owners.
5. A couple of free or freed dependents of non-Christians.
6. A couple of homeless people.

Oakes 2009, table 3.6

This model was constructed by using the archaeological remains of a craftworker's house at Pompeii, of a size large enough to accommodate a substantial group meeting. The remains (and other Pompeian evidence) were used to consider the size of group that could meet there, the likely structure of the craft-working household, and the likely social profile of a group in which the craftworker's house was the largest domestic space available. (The numerical indicators in the model—"several," "a few," "a couple"—are rough representations of probabilities of such social types forming part of such a group; see Oakes 2009, 46–89.)

may well be two household churches: "those of the household of Aristobulus" (Rom. 16:10) and "those of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord" (16:11). Each of these sounds like a Christian group consisting of members of a single large household, probably mainly slaves. A model of such a household church would look somewhat different from our model craftworker-hosted house church. Also probably somewhat different would be a house church hosted by Gaius, mentioned in Rom. 16:23 as host to the whole assembly in Corinth. He might well be wealthier than a craftworker, although not necessarily a member of the town's social elite. A house church in his home might be larger than our model and begin higher up the social scale.

There are various possible model house churches and, in any case, the towns of Galatia are not Pompeii. However, the nature of Greco-Roman society means that the house churches of Galatia are almost certain to have consisted of the kind of innately hierarchical group of people seen in our model. This is, first, because of the hierarchy of the Greco-Roman household, which provides a key building block for a house church. Second, it is because Greco-Roman society centered on "vertical" social ties rather than "horizontal" ones. That is, the

most common and economically important links were between richer/more powerful and poorer/less powerful: patronage ties, landlord-tenant interactions, creditor-debtor interactions, owner-slave interactions. Socioeconomic solidarity among people of equal status tended to be weak. For instance, although workers in a particular trade might meet together in associations (e.g., the Roman *collegia*), these were primarily social rather than functioning at all like modern trade unions (Stevenson and Lintott 1996, 352). In fact, interactions between equals were often more characterized by competition, whether economic or in terms of competing for honor (see, e.g., Malina and Pilch 2006, 334–35).

The structural priority that Greco-Roman society gave to “vertical” relationships means that a group such as a house church, constructed by starting with a (whole or part) household, was usually bound to draw in a social range spreading downward, economically, from the level of the host householder—broadly the kind of social group in our Pompeian model craftworker house church. We might want sometimes to nudge the top end up in social status. We might occasionally want to build a model from a single household. However, at the level of detail useful for exegesis of a NT text addressed to Christian groups in Greco-Roman towns, the overall socioeconomic shape of an appropriate model house church is still going to look much like our model. So, for example, when a text implicitly encourages people to “remember the poor” (Gal. 2:10), it seems safe to use our model to suggest that fewer than one in five of the letter’s recipients are likely to be in control of a household’s finances. To take another example, even if a copy of texts from the Septuagint Greek



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Figure 2. Atrium of craftworker’s house in Pompeii (region I, block 10, house 7).

Expected Hearers and the Implied Reader

An important step in interpretation is to consider the audience that the author expects to be writing for. "Expected hearers" (or "expected readers," although this text would tend to be read aloud) are, in principle, a construct of the mind of the author. In practice, they will have much in common with actual people whom the author has encountered or heard of and for whom he or she is now writing. Extratextual evidence about those people, such as evidence from archaeology of the area where they lived, can therefore be valuable evidence to help interpretation, although with the caveat that the author might possibly have had limited awareness of the circumstances of the hearers. Another key source of evidence about the expected hearers is the text itself (intratextual evidence). If the text is coherent, it will be constructed in such a way that it implies a certain type, or types, of reader. This "implied reader" (a construct from the text) is useful evidence of the expected hearers (a construct in the mind of the author, yet normally with significant similarities to a particular group of real people).

The practical upshot of this argument is that because, in principle, understanding of the intended meaning of a text involves attention to the expected hearers of the text, interpreters with an interest in the intended meaning should draw on both extratextual evidence and intratextual evidence. A concern for the implied reader alone is not sufficient, or even sustainable, despite the way in which many scholars present their work. Extratextual evidence, whether it is, say, the meaning of Greek words in other texts or the range of social values common in first-century Mediterranean societies, is vital for understanding a text.

Another problem with focusing solely on the implied reader is that it unrealistically and problematically limits Paul's expected audience. The implied reader of Galatians is a free, male gentile inclined to adopt circumcision. This was probably only a limited minority of the people for whom Paul was writing. Probably at least about half were women. Some were probably slaves. Some may have been Christian Jews. Proper interpretation includes consideration of how we can fairly expect the text to have been heard by all the types of people for whom it was probably written.

translation of the Hebrew Bible were available to the recipients of Galatians, our model implies that only a few of the members of a house church would likely have had sufficient education to read it. These kinds of conclusions look reasonable to use for exegesis despite the range of differences that undoubtedly existed between any actual Galatian assembly and our model. Without using such a model, many key elements of the reality of the social situation of the Galatian Christians almost inevitably become neglected. As a result, exegesis will tend to miss significant issues.

That the letter is sent by Paul also brings in a range of more specific contexts. For understanding Paul, we have the help of his other letters, although

English Words for First-Century Realities

Several scholars have drawn attention to the pitfalls of using English words such as "Jew" and "Christian" to represent people and situations in the first century (e.g., Esler 2012; Horsley 2005; Mason 2007). There are two key problems. First, modern readers tend to conceive of these terms in relation to their experience of present-day Jews and Christians, with a possible overlay of a historic sense of how Judaism and Christianity have developed over the centuries. Second, biblical scholars have extensively used these terms in ways that do not correspond to the historical situation. Philip Esler (2012) cogently argues that the people referred to as *loudaioi* in Greek texts were essentially an ethnic group rather than a religious group, even though, as an ethnic group, they were strongly characterized by particular religious beliefs and practices. Richard Horsley (2005, 2) argues, also cogently, that the first-century followers of Jesus do not fall easily into the patterns that later came to constitute Christianity as an institutionalized religion. These scholars urge the abandonment of the terms "Jew" and "Christian" for study of the first century and favor words such as "Judean" and "Jesus-follower."

Esler's reading of the first-century situation and of the misuse of terms by scholars looks correct. However, I think that most readers of this commentary will think of the English word "Jews" as denoting an ethnic group (typically, but not always, with strongly religious characteristics). I also see the discontinuities between the religious practices of first-century Jews and Christians from those of today. However, there is also strong ethnic (in Hutchinson and Smith's sense [1996, 6–7]) continuity in Judaism: for instance, in seeing Jerusalem as in some sense home. There is also, for both Judaism and Christianity, a fair amount of continuity in some key religious beliefs and practices. Theologically and politically, there is often virtue in reform movements that hold current authorities to account by use of narratives of origins. This is one factor that makes me inclined to take a "glass-half-full" approach to the issue of terminology and keep the terms "Jew" and "Christian" for first-century study, albeit with the kind of needed provisos as are eloquently argued by Esler and Horsley. With great reluctance, I also use "Judaism" to translate *loudaïsmos* in 1:13–14—mainly because my alternative paraphrase runs to thirteen words! For this and discussion of Steve Mason's argument about *loudaïsmos*, see comments on 1:13. Some other terms will, however, be avoided. "Christianity" sounds too institutional for the first century. I tend to write "Jesus movement." "Church" too easily evokes a building or hierarchical institution, although the term "house church" is valuable in expressing the key setting for early meetings. I will use "assembly" to translate the Greek *ekklēsia*.

without assuming that he always expresses the same views. The six disputed letters that various scholars see either as by Paul or not by Paul will, respectively, either be further direct evidence of his ideas or indirect evidence from people seeking to write in his name and tradition. Similar points hold for the

portrait of Paul in Acts. More broadly, the world of ideas expressed in other first-century Christian texts gives some help in understanding him, as does, more broadly still, the corpus of early Jewish texts that express the views of his culture and of the Pharisaic party to which he belonged (Phil. 3:5).

Sources to help us understand the specifically Galatian audience are fairly scarce. However, Susan Elliott (2003) has done interesting work on the cult of the Magna Mater in the region, Thomas Witulski (2000) and Justin Hardin (2008) have considered the imperial cult in the province, and Clinton Arnold (2005) has discussed the significance of “confession stelae” from the western part of the region. It is noticeable that all this contextual evidence is cultic. That reflects the state of archaeological study in the region. There have been no discoveries of extensive, well-preserved, urban domestic remains from this period to help us understand more about living conditions.

The most prominent lexical and semantic content of the letter, as surveyed above, suggests various topics that could relevantly be explored within the range of contexts above. So we are interested in Jewish or Greco-Roman texts or material remains relating to topics such as law, the nature of a person, interaction with the divine, slavery and freedom, interactions between Jews and gentiles, *pistis* (“trust,” “fidelity”), inheritance, and crucifixion. Many more could be added.

What the letter implies about its situation reinforces the contextual significance of the development of Paul’s mission and, more broadly, of the Jesus movement, especially in Jerusalem. It also raises further topics to be considered in various contexts: topics such as loyalty to founding figures; desertion; boasting; modes of rebuke; modes of argument, possibly including formal rhetoric (see below).

All this sets an agenda that can be followed in only a limited way in the scope of a single commentary. However, the above, or something like it, is the real contextual agenda for studying a text such as Galatians. There is also a complex agenda of linguistic analysis. Other agendas could be added too. Although this commentary can tackle the agendas in only a limited way, the writing of a commentary does offer a strategic opportunity to set up the overall range of issues in the hope that other interpreters will pursue them even where this commentary does not manage to do so.

Specific Geographical and Chronological Contexts

Galatians offers three useful clues about its geographical destination. The clearest is that it is addressed to “the assemblies of Galatia” (1:2). In 3:1, Paul confronts his audience, O . . . *Galatai*. More subtly, in 2:1 he mentions Barnabas without introduction and in 2:13 implies that the audience would have expected good things of him.

The Greek word *Galatia* is simply a transliteration of the Latin name of the Roman province created in 25 BC by the absorption into the Roman Empire

of a group of areas, most of which were previously controlled by Celtic rulers allied to Rome (Mitchell 1993a, 61). In Paul's time this province covered a great area of central Asia Minor, running from Paphlagonia in the north to coastal Pamphylia in the south. As Paul tends to use names of provinces elsewhere (e.g., Gal. 1:21; 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:1), there would normally seem to be no difficulty in seeing Paul as addressing a range of Christian assemblies spread about in some parts of the province. Our knowledge of Paul's missionary practice elsewhere would suggest that the assemblies were probably mainly in towns, but some spread into surrounding villages would also be possible.

The Greek word *Galatai* (3:1) normally refers to Celts, Gauls, Galatians—all the same thing (e.g., Schmidt 1994, 15–16). This sounds as though it ought to help us narrow down the geographical destination of the letter. It sounds as though Paul is just addressing one ethnic group. Is there a part of the province in which the population essentially consisted of this ethnic group alone? Our best resource for helping to answer this is epigraphic evidence. Although inscriptions are not equally representative of all socioeconomic groups, they



Figure 3. Galatia and neighboring provinces at the time of Paul's letter. Drawn by the author, after Mitchell (1993a, map 3), with Zimmermann (2013; cf. Strobel 2013).

do provide useful data across quite a wide range. Let us consider two areas, one in the south of the province, the other in the north.

Although Cilliers Breytenbach is correct that Celtic political control and hence, to an extent, occupation had extended into substantial parts of the south of what became the province (1996, 152–67), inscriptions suggest that they only formed a small minority there. Bradley H. McLean's catalogue (2002, 87–96) of inscriptions from the museum at Konya—the site of the Roman colony of Iconium, one of the main centers in the region—contains hardly any Celtic names. In contrast, there are, for instance, large numbers of ethnically Phrygian names (cf. Mitchell 1993a, 175). The Phrygians were the predominant ethnic group in central Asia Minor when the Celts arrived in the third century BC (Mitchell 1993a, 175), and then Phrygians persisted in the population.

Moving to the north of the province, the list of “Galatian priests of the Divine Augustus and the Goddess Rome” shows that there were at least some Celtic members of the elite in the provincial capital, Ancyra. For instance, Albiorix was priest in AD 26/27 and his son, Aristocles, held the office in 34/35 (Mitchell 1993a, 108; spotting Celts becomes harder as time goes on, since they increasingly adopted Greek or Roman names). So what of the region around Ancyra? Was the population essentially Celtic? The inscriptions again tell us that the answer is no. Stephen Mitchell's catalogue of inscriptions from ancient villages around Ancyra does indeed contain more Celtic names than are found at Iconium, but they are still heavily outnumbered by, for instance, Phrygian names (Mitchell 1982, 377–95), even in this most Celtic part of Galatia. This point was made as long ago as 1994 by Karl H. Schmidt (1994, 28) and is discussed by Dieter Sänger (2010, 20) in an article symptomatic of a shift in German scholarship on this. As Peter Pilhofer (2010, 277) comments, “Even in the center of Galatia can we in no way talk of a pure Celtic population” (AT).¹

To see Paul in 3:1 as addressing Celts is to see him addressing what, in his day, was a minority ethnic group in any region of the province. This would be such an unusual proceeding for Paul that, if he were doing it, we would expect to see much more obvious signs of why his mission proceeded here along such *ethnically* specific lines—something radically at odds with his general religious ideas. Instead, the only possibility that appears reasonable is that Paul is using the term “Galatians” to mean “inhabitants of the province of Galatia.” The one conceivable ethnic angle is if this choice of term also somehow alludes to characteristics of the Celtic group that dominated the area politically before it became a province, with Paul somehow appealing to those characteristics.

1. The German original reads, “Selbst im Zentrum Galatiens kann keineswegs von einer rein keltischen Bevölkerung die Rede sein.”

The casual mention of Barnabas in 2:1 suggests that we should look to the account of Paul's mission in Acts 13–14 for the most likely area of Galatia in which the “assemblies” of Gal. 1:2 were located. According to Acts, that was the one mission in which Paul and Barnabas worked together (Acts 13:2; 15:39). There are serious difficulties in coordinating the chronology of Galatians with that of Acts, but it remains a major first-century piece of evidence about Paul's mission and weighs in favor of the assemblies of 1:2 being especially, although not necessarily exclusively, ones on the arc of the Acts 13–14 mission, along the main road system linking the Roman colonies and other towns of the more fertile southern inland region of the province, north of the mountains of Rough Cilicia but south of the more arid steppes of central Galatia. Martinus C. de Boer (2011, 4–5) argues the contrary, that the absence of Barnabas from the account of Paul's mission in 4:13–15 and the negative comment about him in 2:13 make it unlikely that the audience of Galatians was in the southern area, evangelized by Barnabas and Paul together. However, the topic of 4:13–15 relates to Paul's own visual appearance: mention of Barnabas would not be relevant. On 2:13, Paul makes it clear that Barnabas's behavior was unexpected—“even Barnabas”—as it would be if Barnabas was viewed positively by an audience who had been evangelized by him.

How did scholarship ever go down the rather curious road of the North Galatian hypothesis? A key factor is that the boundaries of the province changed, with the southern parts being reassigned to other provinces in a series of stages over the centuries after Paul. This meant that church fathers inevitably assumed that Paul was writing to the northern area around Ancyra (Sänger 2010, 13; Mitchell 1993b, 154–60). A second factor was that epigraphic evidence was quite hard to find, although much has actually been available since the turn of the twentieth century. A third factor, which heavily complicated scholarship in the past century, was that scholars generally entangled the geographical and chronological questions. Those defending the South Galatian hypothesis generally did so in order to defend the chronology of Acts. Conversely, those attacking Luke's chronology tended to make the North Galatian hypothesis a key plank in their platform. The move among some German scholars to support the “Province” hypothesis (rejecting the North Galatian idea), while advocating a very late date for Galatians (Pilhofer 2010, 271, 275–82), should hopefully free scholars from thinking that the geographical and chronological questions are necessarily intertwined.

Our initial consideration, above, of the date of Galatians placed it first between AD 46–140 (between the crucifixion plus sixteen years, and the period of first clear use of the text) and then 46–61 (up to Paul's imprisonment in Rome). The latter date is an argument from silence: Paul does not mention being a prisoner, despite doing this in other letters (e.g., Phil. 1:13; Philem. 9), and there probably would have been a rhetorical advantage in doing so in Galatians. In fact, we can probably move this from 61 back to 58. The chronology of Acts

Light from Acts on Galatians and Vice Versa

Acts sheds light on Galatians. Luke's narrative of the early mission offers historically likely evidence to fill in some gaps in Galatians. Conversely, at these same points of contact, Paul's discourse in Galatians offers evidence from a primary source to support, or sometimes to raise questions about, aspects of the narrative in Acts. Key points of contact are as follows:

- Gal. 1:1, 11–12, 15–16. Paul speaks of receiving his gospel via a revelation of Christ. Acts presents this as an encounter in a vision of the resurrected Jesus (9:3–6; 22:6–10; 26:13–18).
- Gal. 1:2; 3:1. Paul writes to Galatia. Acts describes a mission in South Galatia and journeys through other parts of the province (13:13–14:25; 16:1–7; 19:1).
- Gal. 1:6–7; 2:4; etc. These passages refer to some Christian Jews opposing the Pauline mission as being too lax in relation to Jewish law. Acts attests groups with such attitudes (11:2–3; 15:1, 5; 21:20–22).
- Gal. 1:13–14, 23. Paul's zealous persecution of Christians is described in Acts 8:1–3; 9:1–2; 22:3–5; 26:9–12.
- Gal. 1:17. This verse curiously mentions Paul returning to Damascus, assuming something like the narrative of Acts in which his encounter with Christ had happened in that vicinity.
- Gal. 1:18; 2:1. These verses mention visits to Jerusalem. Paul visits Jerusalem several times in Acts (9:23–29; 11:30 and 12:25; 15:4–30; 18:22–23; 21:17–23:30). Coordinating Gal. 1:18 and Acts 9:23–29 is not difficult chronologically, although there are questions in reconciling to whom Paul spoke. Coordinating Gal. 2:1 with any one visit in Acts is notoriously difficult. Conversion in the mid 30s, + 14 years, sits awkwardly with the death of Herod Agrippa in Acts 12:20–25, probably AD 44 (Josephus, *Ant.* 19.8.2) and possibly with Gallio as proconsul in Acts 18:12, dated epigraphically to around AD 51. Acts scholars have proposed various harmonizations or ways of understanding Luke's approach to chronology (e.g., Alexander 1993).

is probably correct in seeing Paul as imprisoned at Caesarea for two years up to the change of governor from Felix to Festus (Acts 24:27), which likely took place in AD 59/60 (Bruce 1983, 345–46). This takes us back prior to the date preferred by Werner Foerster, who argues for Galatians being written from Myra in Lycia, when the boat taking the imprisoned Paul to Rome stopped at this port near the south end of Galatia in AD 60 or 61. Foerster's argument (1964, 135) that the phrase "and all the brothers with me" (Gal. 1:2) fits the shipboard situation seems outweighed by the force of Paul's silence about his imprisonment. Another argument from silence suggests going back a couple of years earlier than 58, to at least 56 and probably further. The silence in question

Gal. 2:1, 10, 13. Here there is mention of Barnabas, who features in Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11–15, mainly as someone with whom Paul worked in mission, especially in southern Galatia.

Gal. 2:2. This verse refers to a revelation, which could be the prophecy of Acts 11:27–30 (irrespective of difficulties coordinating the chronologies).

Gal. 1:18–19; 2:6–9, 11–12, 14. These verses refer to Peter, John, and James “the brother of the Lord” as leaders of the Jerusalem Christians. The status of these three is narrated in Acts (Peter in chaps. 1–12; 15:7; James in 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; John in chaps. 3–4; 8:14, 17, 25).

Gal. 2:11. This verse refers to Antioch. We should probably rely on the narrative of Acts to take this as a reference to Antioch in Syria rather than Antioch in Pisidia (13:14; 14:19, 21), which was in Galatia. The depiction in Acts is of Syrian Antioch as the key early center of the gentile Jesus movement and Paul’s mission (11:19–29; 13:1; 14:26; 15:22–35; 18:22).

Gal. 3:2. This verse describes receiving the Spirit following preaching, as in Acts 2:38; 8:15–17; 9:17; 10:44–47; 11:15–16; 19:2–6.

More generally, Acts provides a narrative of the spread of the Jesus movement both from Jerusalem around the Mediterranean and from being a group of Jesus’s Jewish direct disciples to being a network of gentile and Jewish groups nurtured by mobile leaders such as Paul, Apollos, Prisca, and Aquila. The narrative of Acts has almost always been the framework within which Galatians has been interpreted. Taken in general terms, it makes good sense of the letter. In some cases it should make us think again about aspects of Paul’s narrative. For instance, although the pro-gentile-mission portrayal of Peter in Acts raises issues about Luke’s aims and so forth, it should also caution us against jumping to the conclusion from Galatians that Peter’s sympathies were with Paul’s opponents (see above). However, commentators who try to interpret passages in Galatians by tightly linking them to texts in Acts (e.g., Gal. 2:1–10 with Acts 15) are probably underestimating the complexities of assessing Luke’s specific knowledge and approach.

is about Paul’s collection for “the holy ones in Jerusalem” (Rom. 15:25–26). The contrast between Galatians and the letters written during the collection is particularly striking, given that Paul has an opening to write about it when he mentions “remember[ing] the poor” at 2:10. I am persuaded by Bruce Longenecker’s argument (2010, 157–206) that this is not, in itself, a direct reference to the Jerusalem collection. But even if it was (as most commentators claim), Galatians would still seem likely to be written at an earlier stage than 1 Cor. 16:1, when the collection in Galatia is under way (contra Schnelle 2005, 271).

The earliest possible date for Galatians is implied by the notes of the three-year and fourteen-year gaps between Paul’s revelation (or his leaving Damascus)

and his visits to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18; 2:1, although these periods could be reckoned by including the start and end years, so “three years” might be only slightly beyond twenty-four months). We then need to add further time after the second visit for the Antioch incident and whatever else happened between then and the writing of the letter. My initial mark of AD 46 came from the earliest likely date for the crucifixion (AD 30) and taking the three and fourteen years concurrently. Second Corinthians 11:32–33 offers a further chronological clue. Paul says he escaped by basket(!) when King Aretas was in charge at Damascus. We cannot be sure when Aretas took over there, but many scholars assume that it was when his friend Gaius Caligula became emperor in AD 37. Aretas died in 39, so Paul probably left Damascus between 37 and 39. If this is right, the earliest scenario is that Paul went to Jerusalem, for his first visit, directly from Damascus in 37, with the second visit ten or eleven years later, in 47 or 48 (de Boer 2011, 7–9). We then need to allow time for the Antioch incident and any other events between the second Jerusalem trip and the letter. It would be difficult to place Galatians earlier than AD 50. The composition of the letter appears to be some time in the early fifties, after 1 Thessalonians (and possibly 2 Thessalonians, if by Paul) but before 1 Corinthians.

The Structure of Galatians

One key to understanding a text is to look at its structure. This can be done in several ways. The reader can consult good examples in many commentaries (esp. Betz 1979, 14–25; R. Longenecker 1990, c–cxix; Martyn 1997a, 20–27; de Boer 2011, 11–15). The variety seen in these is partly an indication that texts have a complexity that means that no single structural scheme can show everything of structural interest.

In this section we will investigate structure at three levels. The most basic level will be discussed in epistolary terms: as opening, body, and closing of a Greek letter. We will see how these basic sections are marked, how the opening and closing relate to each other, and how they might help in interpretation of the body. The second level involves sections of the letter body. This will primarily be done by looking for indicators of genre, especially grammatical ones (this only works because of the specific shape of Galatians; the body of another text might be best seen as a series of sections differentiated by topic). We will also consider discourse markers signaling beginnings and ends of sections. Our conclusion will be to read the body in three sections: narrative, argument, and instructions with argument. The third level of analysis will be to consider the main structure of each of these three sections. In each case we will consider subsections relating to the genre of the section. We will conclude that each of the three sections can helpfully be seen as comprising three parts. Finally,

we will consider the extent to which this structure ought to be seen in terms of specific “rhetorical” genres, as quite a number of scholars have suggested.

The Basic Level of Epistolary Structure

Galatians presents itself as an ancient Greek letter. At the basic level this has three sections:

Letter Opening (1:1–10)	“Paul . . . to the assemblies of Galatia . . .”
Letter Body (1:11–6:10)	“I want you to know . . . that . . .”
Letter Closing (6:11–18)	“See with what large letters I write to you in my own hand . . .”

The genres of the first and third sections as opening and closing are marked by a range of formulas known from various letters. It would be possible to see the opening as stopping at 1:5 (Betz 1979, 16). The key choice is whether to see the expression of astonishment at 1:6 as the sudden beginning of the body of the letter, or to see the rebuke in 1:6–10 as an inverted replacement for the thanksgiving section that we usually find in Paul’s Letters. There are two advantages to making the second choice. One is that it then enables the letter body to begin at 1:11 with a “disclosure formula,” “*I want you to know . . .*” We see such a formula at the start of the body of Philippians (1:12) and many other Greek letters (e.g., Hunt and Edgar 1932, no. 113). The second is that it allows for an inclusio (a matching between start and end) between 1:1 and 1:10 (see below).

Both the opening and closing of Galatians are rather limited in the amount of formulaic material used. There are, for instance, no greetings at the end of the letter. However, the opening does include naming and description of the sender (1:1), naming of cosenders and recipients (1:2), and a grace wish (1:3). The closing includes a formula of Paul taking over use of the pen from the scribe who has written the rest of the letter (6:11), a blessing (6:16), and again a grace wish (6:18). Apart from the opening of the letter body, there is little in the body of Galatians that fits with formulaic elements in Greek letter bodies (e.g., common phrases recommending the bearer of the letter). As usual in Paul, there is no section giving general news about his current situation (Phil. 1:12–26 is an exception proving this rule by aiming at something different). One standard element that does occur in Galatians is an expression of desire to be with the Galatians (4:20). However, the tone of this is very different from that in most Greek letters.

How do the opening and closing of Galatians relate to each other (for the significance of such relationships, see Robbins 2013)? They do not have a close lexical relationship, but they do have a close semantic relationship. The only significant Greek word fairly frequent in both is *Christos* (5x in 1:1–10; 3x in 6:11–18). The key semantic link comes from a contrast between the realm

of the current world and the realm of God and Christ. This contrast is most strongly highlighted in the case of Paul. The opening is framed by an inclusio (1:1, 10) in which Paul's identity and actions are emphatically asserted not to be linked to the realm of the *anthrōpos* (human, 2x in v. 1; 3x in v. 10) but to the authorization of God and Christ. (Some might reasonably extend this inclusio to cover 1:11–12. However, it seems better to see these verses as beginning the letter body by resuming the topic of 1:1.) In the letter closing, the same contrast about Paul is made, but in different words. He will not boast in the flesh (*sarx*), as his opponents do, but only in the cross of Christ (6:13–14). Through Christ's cross the world (*kosmos*) has been crucified to Paul, and Paul to the world (6:14; cf. 6:17). Paul effectively presents himself here as an example of someone who has been taken out of "this present evil age" through Christ's rescue mission described in 1:4. In contrast, Paul's opponents are still wholly devoted to the realm of the flesh. They want to be able to boast in that realm and to avoid persecution on account of the cross (6:12–13).

In terms of progression from the opening to the closing of the letter, a notable feature is that Paul has shifted the weight of his attack. In the opening, he rebukes his audience (1:6) and is fairly unspecific as to the nature of the opponents and the issues they raise (1:7–9). In the closing, his fire is directed just at the opponents and focuses on their specific interest in circumcision (6:12–13). As a second element of progression, the closing presents motifs of persecution and the cross (6:12, 14, 17). A third is the lexical shift, noted above, in the terms used to denote the realm of "the present evil age."

The relationships between opening and closing put a focus on a number of issues as possible guides for reading the body of the letter. The first is the contrast between things attributed to the realm of "the world" and those attributed to the realm of God and Christ. A second is the role of Paul as a paradigm for this contrast. A third is the shifting of terminology for this contrast, moving from the relatively neutral *anthrōpos* to more loaded terms, especially *sark* ("flesh"). A fourth is the progression of Paul's rhetoric in repositioning the Galatians onto his side and away from the increasingly criticized opponents.

The Structure of the Body of the Letter (1:11–6:10)

Like Galatians as a whole, if we divide the letter body according to genre, it falls reasonably well into three parts:

Narrative (1:11–2:21)	"For you have heard about..."
Argument (3:1–4:11)	"For it is written that..."
Instructions with Argument (4:12–6:10)	"Be like me."

The three sections of the body are fairly clearly distinguished from one another grammatically. For instance, the main narrative section is sharply

marked by temporal indicators governing verbs describing past events (e.g., “then I went,” 1:21; “when Peter came,” 2:11). On my reckoning, these occur 13 times in the 27.5 verses of 1:11–2:14a (1 per 2.1 verses) and only 6 times in the 121.5 verses of the rest of the letter (1 per 20.3 verses). Of course, this grammatical clue only enables us to detect narrative up to 2:14a. From 2:14b–21 (or part of it), what we see is narrated argument: quotation or description of what Paul remembers arguing in speaking to Peter. In most grammatical terms, it looks like argument rather than narrative. To look unambiguously like narrated argument, it would need more expressions such as “I said” (2:14). One clue to it being narrated argument is that Paul uses “we” to link himself to Peter rather than to his gentile Galatian hearers, “We, who are by nature Jews . . .” (2:15).

Grammatically, one way of looking for sections that we could characterize as “argument” is to look at the frequency of conjunctions and adverbs that act as logical connectives (such as “therefore,” “because”). On my count, there are 5 of these in the 7.5 verses of 2:14b–21 (1 per 1.5 verses), 23 in the 40 verses of 3:1–4:11 (1 per 1.7 verses), and 28 in the 56 verses of 4:12–6:10 (1 per 2 verses). In contrast, there are only 12 (possibly 13) in the 45.5 verses other than 2:14b–6:10 (1 per 3.8 verses). The main directly narrative section of the letter, 1:13b–2:14a, only includes 3 (possibly 4) in 26 verses (1 per 8.7 verses). Although the frequency of logical connectives does not offer an overwhelming distinction between genres, it does help us characterize the sections.

The description of the third section of the body as “Instructions with Argument” is indicative of the overlap in genre between this and the argument section. However, there is a clear grammatical change at 4:12 with the introduction of the first Greek imperative that calls for action, “Be like me” (*ginesthe hōs egō*). There are no such imperatives prior to 4:12, but ten or eleven appear between 4:12 and 6:10 (with a further one or two after that). The only imperatives before 4:12 are probably *performative* ones; that is, they bring something about in the very writing and reading of them: “Let him be accursed!” (1:8, 9); “Know then that . . .” (3:7). These are probably not calling the Galatians to particular actions. In contrast, the imperatives from 4:12 onward give the Galatians a series of instructions, mixed in with elements of argument.

There are, of course, some complications apart from 2:14b–21 in the pattern of genres in the letter. There is a narrative aspect to several of the arguments. This includes some of those from Scripture: for instance, on Abraham in 3:6–8, and especially on his partners and sons in 4:21–31. This passage could also be put under another genre label as allegory (cf. 4:24). There is also a narrative aspect to the argument from the Galatians’ experience (3:2–5; 4:12–20). Another genre that dominates a subsection of the letter is listing of vices or virtues (5:19–23). However, this still fits under the overall section genre of Instructions with Argument.

As well as the three sections of the letter body being marked by a change of genre, they are signaled fairly well by discourse markers that indicate beginnings or endings. The break from 2:21 to 3:1 is strongly marked, with 2:21 giving a rhetorical flourish, an emphatic maxim that caps the argument. Then 3:1 changes gear sharply into an expression of despair or bewilderment. Moreover, this is a key transition in the text because Paul now turns directly to his hearers and addresses them. (In contrast, there are no clear discourse markers signaling a section break between 2:14a and 2:14b: despite Paul's shifting into argument, the text flows directly on from 2:14a into 2:14b–21.)

In chapters 3–4 are several places with sufficient rhetorical flourish to mark an ending. However, the break between 4:11 and 4:12 is particularly strongly marked. Here 4:11 forms an inclusio with 3:1, as Paul again expresses some despair over the Galatians. Then 4:12 shifts sharply by changing mode of address to the imperative and by switching topic from theological argument to issues of personal relationship between Paul and the Galatians. Having said that, this break is not as strongly marked as that at 3:1. One could instead see a break later. For instance, 4:19–20 is also an expression of despair about the Galatians and could be seen as forming an inclusio with 3:1. Alternatively, one could break the later part of the letter into more sections. For instance, Gal. 5:13 is frequently seen as the start of a new major section. However, in genre terms, it is 4:12 that sees the main change. From there to the end of the body, the letter centers on instructions to the Galatians.

The Structure of Each Section of the Letter Body

The three sections of the body of Galatians can each be seen as consisting of three subsections.

In the case of the narrative section (1:11–2:21), the subsections are three narrated sets of events. In 1:11–24, Paul tells of the origin of his gospel message. He uses a narrative of the events around his Damascus-road experience to demonstrate the nonhuman origin of what he teaches. In 2:1–10, rather surprisingly, he writes about a visit to Jerusalem to consult with Christian leaders there about his gospel. He narrates their acceptance of his message and their unity with him. However, in 2:11–21, a third set of events disrupt the unity, both between him and the Jerusalem leaders and between Christian Jews and Christian gentiles. He narrates the disruptive events at Antioch and his vigorous challenge to Peter.

The argument section (3:1–4:11) splits into three smaller arguments. After an initial exclamation (3:1), in 3:2–14 Paul builds an argument about how the Galatians have received the Spirit. He interprets their experience (esp. 3:2) as equating to the blessing of Abraham, conferred by God on gentiles in Christ on the basis of trust (esp. 3:14). A complex series of exegetical arguments carries Paul's case. In 3:15–29, he looks at this process from another angle, in which time becomes a significant factor. He sets up God's promise to Abraham as

being both for a single descendant, who is Christ (3:16) and, in due time, for all those made one in Christ (3:28–29). Paul uses the factor of time to present a valuable but limited role for the law (3:19–25). In 4:1–11, he again uses an argument based on time. He portrays a progress from slavery into freedom, which he turns around to use as an argument against current Galatian behavior, seen as a reversing of progress in a return to slavery.

The “Instructions with Argument” section (4:12–6:10) can be seen as centering on three instructions. In 4:12–20 Paul calls the Galatians to “be like me” (4:12) and to act in a way consistent with their first welcome of him (4:13–16). More discursively, in 4:21–5:13a he calls them to stand firm in their freedom (5:1). Paul makes his point from the contrast between the sons of the free and enslaved women who were mothers to Abraham’s children (4:21–31). Then Paul makes it clear that the Galatians’ danger of reenslavement lies in circumcision (5:2). After attacking those urging this (5:7–12), he reminds the Galatians again of their calling to freedom (5:13a). More loosely, in 5:13b–6:10—although we could arguably subdivide this further—Paul gives a series of instructions centered on love (5:13b–14, 22; 6:2, 10) and consequently against disunity (5:15, 20, 26). This loving behavior is seen as characteristic of the Spirit (5:16–18, 22–23) and in contrast to the “works of the flesh” (5:16–17, 19–21, 24). There are also some instructions without an obvious link to the topic of love.

Structure and Ancient Rhetoric

We have analyzed the body of Galatians mainly in terms of genre, understood as a broad analytical category. Beginning with the classic work of Hans Dieter Betz, quite a number of scholars look at the genre issue in a more specific way, by considering how the sections of the letter might fit patterns of expression used at different stages of speech delivery by a Greek or Roman orator (i.e., these scholars analyze the structure in terms of Greco-Roman rhetoric). Betz reads Galatians as an *apologetic* speech, primarily defending Paul and his gospel against accusations. This produces a structure for the body of the letter that is expressed in rhetorical terms: *exordium* (1:6–11), *narratio* (1:12–2:14), *propositio* (2:15–21), *probatio* (3:1–4:31), *exhortatio* (5:1–6:10), with the letter ending functioning as a *conclusio* (Betz 1979, 15–23). The shape is fairly similar to ours (*probatio* means a section of arguments proving the proposition expressed in the *propositio*), but the headings flag similarities to steps in Greco-Roman oratory in particular, rather than general genre terms such as “argument.”

Most scholars who analyze Galatians in formal rhetorical terms now do so not as *apologetic* rhetoric, as Betz did, but instead prefer to see it as *deliberative* rhetoric: a speech given in order to persuade a group (e.g., a citizen assembly) to a particular course of action. However, this difference in *species* of rhetoric tends not to cause a radical change in the suggested structure. Many of the sections essentially remain the same, although sometimes under

a different Latin term (e.g., the proof section being called *confirmatio* rather than *probatio*). The most significant difference between various suggested rhetorical structures tends to be in which passage is viewed as the *propositio* (or equivalent) of the letter. For instance, Betz sees it as 2:15–21, but Robert Hall (2002) sees it as 1:6–9, producing a structure that reads: Salutation/*exordium* (1:1–5); Proposition (1:6–9); Proof (1:10–6:10), consisting of Narration (1:10–2:21) and Further Headings (3:1–6:10); Epilogue (6:11–18). One of Hall’s arguments for Galatians being deliberative rather than apologetic rhetoric is that Galatians includes much exhortation, which is not something to be expected in the apologetic rhetoric used for defense speeches in court.

How valuable the formal rhetorical approach to structure is depends on the extent to which it sheds light on Paul’s discourse in ways that would not be seen by analyzing it in more general terms. Debate continues to go back and forth on this. My conclusion so far has been that we need to be aware of specific rhetorical moves that ancient orators tend to make, according to rhetorical handbooks and recorded speeches, but that there is not enough evidence to distinguish the structures of Paul’s letters as being ones specifically seen in rhetorical handbooks. We can spot grammatical evidence to show that Paul is narrating, and we can see that he is using the narration as a form of argument, but it is more difficult to see the specific evidence that this is *narratio* as such, that he is constructing the passage using the kind of specific techniques drawn from ancient rhetorical handbooks rather than general techniques of narratives intended to persuade. We must give attention to known ancient modes of persuasion, but it is not clear that the rhetorical handbooks give us enough to set out the whole structure of Galatians.

Issues in the Reception of Galatians

For surveys and collections of texts, see John Riches (2008, for all periods), Martin Meiser (2007, for antiquity), and Ian Levy (2011, for medieval times). The following simply offers a basic orientation to a few key topics.

The first is that of Jews, gentiles, and Jewish law. Marcion, as reported by Tertullian and others, splits the God of Jesus from the God of the OT. For Marcion, in Gal. 3:13 Christ’s cross frees us from the curse imposed by the bloodthirsty creator (Jerome, *Galatians* [Migne 1800–1875, 26:434]; Riches 2008, 13; Meiser 2007, 19). Other readers of Galatians have not gone to that extreme in dividing Paul from his Jewish roots, but the Lutheran tradition in particular has seen a very sharp disjunction between Paul’s gospel and ideas of salvation centered on Jewish law. In the nineteenth century, F. C. Baur and the Tübingen school saw Paul’s “law-free” gospel pitched against a Petrine and more conservatively Jewish gospel in a struggle that defined the shape of earliest Christianity (Riches 1993, 2–3). In the twentieth century, Ernst

Käsemann's reading of Paul saw "the devout Jew" as typifying the "religious" person, who misunderstands the law "as a means to a righteousness of one's own" (1969, 184–85). For Hans Hübner (1984), Galatians saw Paul at his most negative about the law, a view that Paul modified in later letters. For Heikki Räisänen (1983, 12–14, 264–65), Paul's view of the current redundancy of God's own law produced an inner tension that left Paul's writings riddled with inconsistencies.

Much post-Holocaust Pauline scholarship has seen extensive reevaluation of Paul's view of the law. E. P. Sanders (1977, 441–43, 489–90) presents first-century Judaism as a religion of grace and offers a rereading of Paul in which Gal. 2:21 is prominent: Paul has discovered that salvation comes through Christ's cross; it is essentially this, rather than something wrong with the law, that leaves Paul skeptical about any other potential source of salvation. James Dunn (1993, 135–37) endows Sanders's position with the name "the New Perspective on Paul" and nuances it by arguing that Paul opposes not the law itself but "works of the law," identity-marking actions (such as circumcision) that divide Jews from gentiles. Michael Bachmann (2010, 100–108) also considers this issue, arguing, for instance, that "works of the law" refers not to deeds done to fulfill the law but to the law's regulations themselves. Writers such as Stephen Westerholm (2004, 443) seek to push back toward the Lutheran line. He responds to Sanders's point—that first-century Jews did not see their religion as one of dependence on works—by arguing that in Galatians and elsewhere, we see Paul's specifically Christian analysis

Martin Luther on Galatians 2:16

"God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we may live through his merit. He was crucified and killed for us. By sacrificing his Son for us, God revealed Himself to us as a merciful Father who donates remission of sins, righteousness, and life everlasting for Christ's sake...."

"... faith apprehends Jesus Christ. Christian faith is not an inactive quality in the heart. If it is true faith, it will surely take Christ for its object. Christ, apprehended by faith and dwelling in the heart, constitutes Christian righteousness, for which God gives eternal life."

"... these three things, faith, Christ, and imputation of righteousness, are to be joined together. Faith takes hold of Christ. God accounts this faith for righteousness."

"... A Christian is not somebody who has no sin but somebody against whom God no longer chalks sin, because of his faith in Christ."

Luther 1949/1535, on Gal. 2:16, trans. T. Graebner 1949

of Judaism, rather than the view Paul would have had prior to Damascus. Others, such as Mark Nanos (2002, 77–85), push Paul further into the ongoing life of first-century Jews, relocating Paul’s Jesus-following communities within the life of synagogues.

The other great Lutheran concern has been with “justification.” Luther’s commentary on Galatians has been a most influential expression of this. His formulations have then been subject to refinement (and modification) by followers of this tradition, which many scholars continue to defend today (e.g., Schreiner 2010, 155–57). However, in the twentieth century this idea of justification, seen as the key component of Paul’s soteriology (ideas about salvation), repeatedly came under attack. Albert Schweitzer (1931, 225) relegated justification to being merely a “subsidiary crater” in Paul’s soteriological thought, which centered instead on mystical union with Christ. Sanders and other New Perspective scholars (see above) in effect question aspects of Lutheran ideas on justification, as does work by J. Louis Martyn and by Richard Hays (see below).

Douglas Campbell (2009) raised the temperature of the debate with an excoriating attack on what he sees as the negative effects of “Justification Theory” (renamed “Forward Theory” in 2011, 165). For Campbell, “forwardness” takes the idea of salvation as proceeding from an objective, evident problem to a solution (found in Christ). Campbell (2011, 168, 170) claims that this requires implausible history (e.g., first-century Judaism reckoned as evidently inadequate) and produces destructive theology. He sees Paul as primarily constructing his theology in a “backward” rather than “forward” manner: Paul begins from the revelation of Christ; Paul’s descriptions of the world are effects of that revelation, rather than objective assertions. An exegetical feature of Campbell’s reading is that at key points he takes negative assertions in the text as being about the teaching of Paul’s opponents: for instance, in Gal. 2:16 justification by works of the law is *their* idea, rather than a description of Judaism (2011, 173).

In 1985, J. Louis Martyn published a paper that switched the soteriology of Galatians, turning from a Lutheran focus on the cross as enabling the individual’s process of coming to salvation to the idea that the cross objectively changed the world. This event, which Martyn describes as being “apocalyptic,” produced a new set of circumstances for existence. In particular, the cross did away with the dualities of the old world, which Martyn calls “antinomies.” Martyn takes this a long way: the cross brings “the end of all religious differentiations such as the differentiation of holy, circumcised people from profane and uncircumcised people” (1997a, 561). The cross abolishes all these, although it does introduce some new antinomies, such as that between flesh and Spirit. Martyn sees Paul as arguing that if gentiles follow the way of circumcision, they misunderstand the realities of this new world (Martyn 1985, 412–21). Martyn’s view has had wide influence (including beyond NT studies), although

it has also attracted vigorous criticism (e.g., Wright 2012, 372–74). The major commentary on Galatians by Martinus de Boer (2011) offers a vigorous defense of an “apocalyptic” reading very close to that of Martyn.

Also in the 1980s, Richard Hays challenged the Lutheran reading of Galatians from another direction. He argues for an increased sensitivity to narrative elements in Paul’s theology and to poetic aspects of the way in which he presents it. Most prominently, Hays reconsiders Paul’s use of the phrase *pistis Christou*, suggesting that it means not “faith in Christ” but “faith of Christ.” Hays particularly means the “faithfulness of Christ” to God, especially as seen in Christ’s obedient death on the cross (2002, xxx). He sees this as reorienting the soteriology of the letter. Instead of primarily focusing on what people did—believing in Christ—it focuses on what God did, in Christ. Having said this, Hays is some distance from seeking to entirely overthrow Lutheran soteriology. He sees human faith as a response by which people participate in the faithfulness of Christ (2002, 211). Various scholars have further developed his ideas or suggested alternatives (e.g., Williams 1997). However, his reading has come under attack from scholars such as James Dunn (2002) and Barry Matlock (2000). Among Dunn’s arguments, a prominent strand involves analysis of uses of *pistis* without *Christou*, taking that to refer to human faith, and discussion of how that relates to what *pistis* means when with *Christou* (Dunn 2008). One radical counterresponse to this line of analysis comes from de Boer (2011, 192–93), who argues that almost all of the uses of *pistis* in Galatians refer primarily to the faithfulness of Christ.

One final broad scholarly approach that we will consider here is the use of Galatians in relation to various issues of social justice. This has centered on Gal. 3:28, “There is no Jew nor Greek. There is no slave nor free. There is no male and female.” Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1984, 205) made this programmatic for her vision of a gender-inclusive early Christianity. Among further gender-related work is the study by Tatha Wiley (2005) and analyses of Paul’s rhetoric by Beverly Roberts Gaventa (2007) and Susan Eastman (2007), who makes the Sarah-and-Hagar passage central to the letter. Brigitte Kahl (2010, 275, 281–84) argues more broadly that Paul’s message in Galatians is a call to unity in diversity. She sees this as particularly critiquing the structures of the Roman Empire. Indeed, she sees Paul’s opponents’ call to circumcision as subservience to an imperial strategy for keeping groups in order (Kahl 2010, 274). She is not alone in interpreting the letter in relation to the empire. Thomas Witulski (2000) interprets 4:8–20 as a response to the imperial cult. Justin Hardin (2008) goes further and sees this as the key issue in the letter as a whole.

Many other significant scholars cry out for attention. Some have been mentioned above in relation to the context of the letter or the structure of the letter. Others whose work relates to particular sections of the letter will be discussed at the appropriate point.

Outline of Galatians

Letter opening (1:1–10)

Paul's divine authorization (1:1–2)

Rescue from the present evil age (1:3–5)

Deserting the one who called them and the only gospel (1:6–10)

Letter body (1:11–6:10)

Narrative 1: Of a gospel revealed by God, not people (1:11–24)

Assertion of nonhuman origin of Paul's gospel (1:11–12)

Paul's previous behavior in Judaism (1:13–14)

Revelation to Paul and his avoidance of most contact with Jerusalem (1:15–22)

An effect of the change in Paul's behavior (1:23–24)

Narrative 2: Of a gospel affirmed by unity at Jerusalem (2:1–10)

Timing, origin, and purpose of a visit to Jerusalem (2:1–2)

Successful resistance to Titus being compelled to be circumcised (2:3–5)

God's lack of regard for people's reputation (2:6a–b)

Acceptance of Paul's gospel for the uncircumcised (2:6c–10)

Narrative 3: Of a gospel betrayed by division at Antioch (2:11–21)

Paul's opposition to Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship (2:11–14)

Paul to Peter about what Christian Jews know and have done (2:15–17)

Paul's dying and living (2:18–21)

Argument 1: For blessing in Christ through trust (3:1–14)

Paul's bemusement about the Galatians (3:1)

From the absurdity of not learning from experience of the Spirit (3:2–5)

From Abraham's receiving of righteousness by trust (3:6–9)

From texts about law, curse, righteousness, trust, and life (3:10–13)

The result: Abraham's blessing and the Spirit come to gentiles (3:14)

Argument 2: For unity in Christ (3:15–29)

From the nature of covenants and the wording of this one (3:15–18)

From the nature of the law (3:19–25)

From the nature of being in Christ (3:26–29)

Argument 3: Against returning to slavery (4:1–11)

From the slave-like nature of childhood and the liberating action of God (4:1–7)

From the absurdity of the Galatians returning to former slavery (4:8–10)

Paul's fear about the Galatians (4:11)

Instructions with argument 1: "Be like me" (4:12–20)

"Be like me, as I am like you" (4:12a)

Contrast between the Galatians' previous and current attitudes toward Paul (4:12b–16)

Contrast between the aims of Paul's opponents and his own (4:17–20)

Instructions with argument 2: "Do not be subject again to . . . slavery" (4:21–5:13a)

Allegory of freedom and call to stand firm in it (4:21–5:1)

Law and the danger of falling from grace (5:2–6)

"The one harassing you will bear the judgment" (5:7–13a)

**Instructions with argument 3:
"Through love be slaves to one another" (5:13b–6:10)**

Call to make freedom an opportunity not for the flesh but to love, which fulfills the law (5:13b–15)

The effects of Spirit and flesh (5:16–26)

Doing good (6:1–10)

Letter closing (6:11–18)

Paul's handwriting (6:11)

Contrast between the opponents and Paul about circumcision and the cross (6:12–15)

Final blessing, plea, and grace wish (6:16–18)

Galatians 1:1–10

Letter Opening



Introductory Matters

Paul begins his letter in a strange and striking way. To us, its strangeness partly lies in the fact that it is an ancient Greek letter, and such letters were written rather differently from our own. However, there is also a strangeness that would have struck the first hearers even more forcefully than it strikes us.

With today's letter-writing conventions, and with the typical rhetoric of letters between people who know each other, we might expect something like this:

Dear brothers and sisters in Galatia,

I hope you are all in good health. It seems so long since I was there, enjoying your generous hospitality. I have been keeping well, except for the usual ailments that you know about. The progress of the mission here has been encouraging. You may not know that, last month, Timothy went to . . .

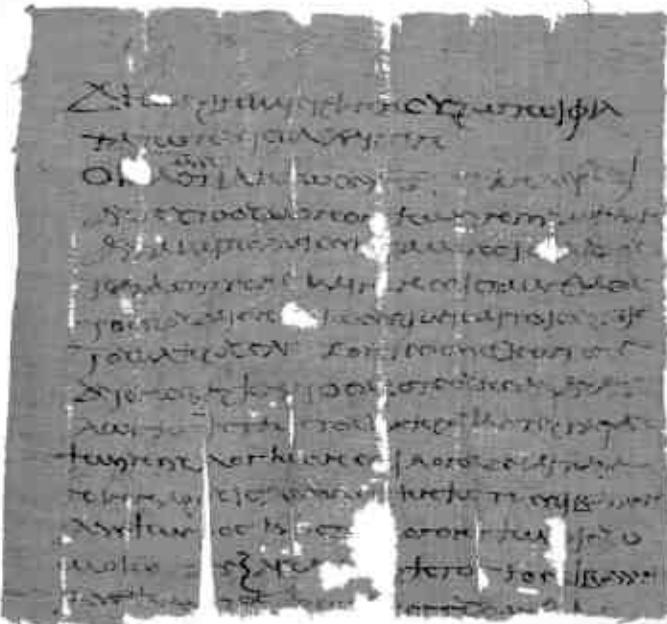
. . . with best wishes,

Paul

Instead, as you can see from the opening of Galatians, the structure and tone are different. Most obviously, the names of sender and recipients are the other way around, with sender named first: “Paul, an emissary . . . , and all the brothers and sisters with me, to the assemblies of Galatia.” Other NT letters follow the same pattern, which is typical of ancient Greek letters (Stirewalt 1993; Stowers 1986; White 1986). It gives the opportunity for the sender to characterize both sender (“Paul, an emissary”) and recipients (“the assemblies of Galatia”). In Paul’s other letters, he describes himself and his recipients in

Rylands Greek Papyrus 243, Letter of Demarion and Irene

"Demarion and Irene to their dearest Syrus, very many greetings. We know that you are distressed about the deficiency of water; this has happened not to us only but to many, and we know that nothing has occurred through any fault of yours. We now know your zeal and attentiveness to the work of the holding, and we hope that with God's help the field will be sown. Put down to our account everything you expend on the cultivation of the holding. Receive from Ninnarus for Irene's account the share belonging to her, and similarly from Hatres for Demarion's account the share belonging to her. We pray for your health."



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Figure 4. Letter of Demarion and Irene. Rylands Greek Papyrus 243, second century AD (image number: JRL022778tr). By permission of the John Rylands Library.

On reverse:

"To Syrus from Irene and Demarion"

trans. from Bagnall and Cribiore 2006, §350

a range of ways. These can help set the tone of the letter or relate to its main agenda. In opening Galatians, Paul emphasizes his divine commissioning and characterizes his hearers in the most unvarnished way possible, without

Galatians 1:1–10 in the Rhetorical Flow

► Letter opening (1:1–10)

Paul's divine authorization (1:1–2)

Rescue from the present evil age (1:3–5)

Deserting the one who called them and the only gospel (1:6–10)

positive terms such as “holy.” Grace wishes such as Gal. 1:3 are standard in Christian letters, but Paul unexpectedly expands this with a reference to Christ as rescuing Christians from “the present evil age.”

Even more unexpected is what happens in verse 6. One thing ancient and modern letters have in common is that, however problematic the issues to be addressed in the letter, the opening is almost always full of polite expressions. First Corinthians is a good example. In 1:1–9, Paul is warm in commending the Corinthians, even though later he will have severe things to say. (He starts subtly

by setting up some of the difficult issues, even in his warm comments: “I thank my God . . . because you have been enriched in every way in him, in every word and all knowledge” [1 Cor. 1:5–6; cf. 2:1–4; 4:8; 8:1].) Galatians bypasses politeness with the shocking verse 6 (shocking but not unprecedented: the “angry letter” was, unsurprisingly, a form known in antiquity [see comments on 1:6]). Something has made Paul desperately concerned and angry. He wants to shock his hearers into a radical reevaluation of their situation and actions.

Galatians 1:1–10 clearly falls into two halves. The structured sender-receiver-greetings section is 1:1–5. Paul then launches his attack in 1:6–9. His denial of being a flatterer (1:10) is somewhat freestanding. J. Louis Martyn (1997a, 136–37) sees it as a transition, attaching it to verses 11–12 and separating it from 1:1–9. Hans Dieter Betz (1979, 46) links 1:10 to 1:11, seeing them together as a transition that forms the end of the *exordium* (see introduction above). We will take 1:10 with verses 1–9. This is partly because, stylistically, it forms part of a series of emotional outbursts from 1:6 onward. Also, as Martyn (1997a, 140) in fact argues, 1:10 mirrors the “not people but God” pattern of 1:1. Verse 10 thus forms something of an inclusio with 1:1 (as the end of a passage corresponds to the beginning). Although 1:11 echoes the “not people but God” pattern, that verse begins with a *disclosure formula* (“I declare to you”). This works well as the opening of the narrative that follows, and disclosure formulas are used in a similar way to begin the main body of the letter in other correspondence from Paul (e.g., Phil. 1:12).

Tracing the Train of Thought

Three arguments are forcefully made in verses 1–10: Paul’s authority is of divine origin; salvation involves Christ’s self-sacrificial rescue from this evil age; and the Galatians are abandoning their founder and the only gospel.

Paul's Divine Authorization (1:1–2)

1:1–2. Paul makes full use of the opportunity provided by the standard Christian letter-opening pattern, “A to B, grace,” to describe A (himself) and to expand, theologically, on the “grace.” In contrast, he barely describes B (the Galatians) at all. In itself this somewhat sets the tone of what is to follow.

First A, the sender. To some extent, Paul takes a risk here. **Paul, an emissary not from people, nor through a person, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from among the dead (1:1).** To argue that you do not have authority from other humans, but from God instead, is a high-risk strategy. Your hearers might just see it as wild assertion. However, Paul has an advantage. His hearers have become Christians as a result of his preaching. Their identity as individuals and as a group is consequently tied rather strongly to the validity of Paul and his message. It will be difficult for other teachers to challenge his authority. He can push his argument about his divine authority quite hard. Indeed, he does so through most of 1:1–2:10. Almost all of this largely narrative section brings home the divine origin and authority of Paul’s calling and his message.

The Greek word that is here translated as “emissary” is *apostolos*. Of course, this gives us the term “apostle.” The word was already being commonly used to designate a particular set of early leaders (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:9). This means that translating *apostolos* here as “apostle” would have the advantage of indicating, rightly, that by using the term Paul is making a claim to belong to this particular, authoritative group. However, the translation “apostle” does not convey what the function of an *apostolos* was, and as Martyn (1997a, 82–83) argues, the prepositional phrases that follow in the verse show that here Paul particularly has in mind the idea of the *apostolos* as a person who is sent: the noun is derived from the verb *apostellō*, “I send” (for a general discussion of the term, see R. Longenecker 1990, 2–4). Early Christians used the term to cover a range of types of people sent by churches (e.g., Epaphroditus in Phil. 2:25). In Gal. 1:1, the translation “emissary” is useful particularly because Paul’s very first point is about his being sent: that he is not an emissary sent from a group of people—unlike, probably, the opponents whom he will attack in the letter.

Paul presumably implies that, instead, he is sent from God. However, he does not directly express this but instead jumps to the further point that not only was he not sent from people, neither was he sent “through a person.” This probably refers to his sense of commissioning, that it was not done by a human person but by “Jesus Christ and God.” Paul reinforces his divine commission in 1:15–16. God is the one who called Paul, by God’s grace, to proclaim him among the gentiles. (If we compare this with Acts 9 and 22, we can see there the role of a human agent, Ananias. However, even in Acts there is a strong sense of fairly direct divine commissioning of Paul, most notably in 26:16–18.)

Jesus Christ and God are bracketed together in Gal. 1:1 in the action of commissioning Paul. This happens again in 1:3, where both are the source of grace and peace to the Galatians. On the other hand, it is only to God, not Christ, that glory is given in 1:5. In the earlier verses, the very naming of Jesus alongside God the Father both links them together and suggests that Paul sees their identities as distinct. We might also wonder whether there is implicit docetism in 1:1 (the idea that Jesus only appeared to be human but was not really so). If Paul was commissioned not through a person but through Jesus, it sounds as though Jesus is not a person. However, in the letter, Paul is very clear about Jesus Christ's human birth (4:4) and death (2:21), so the christological implication of 1:1 is very unlikely to be that Paul saw Jesus as nonhuman. Instead, he seems to see Jesus, whom he knew to be human, as also occupying a status much higher than that of humans—a status that enabled Jesus to act alongside God.

The description of God in Gal. 1:1 is twofold. He is “Father,” and he is the one “who raised” Christ “from among the dead.” In fact, God is described as Father three times in the first five verses. This is more than in the equivalent opening segment of any other Pauline letter. We should not make too much of this. However, in a letter that so strongly involves issues of obedience to authority, it could be that Paul is stressing God’s role as a figure of authority, albeit a caring authority. The description of God as Father could also be beginning to lay the groundwork for the discussion of sonship later in the letter (3:26; 4:5–7; Hays 2000, 203).

More striking than the mention of God’s fatherhood is the introduction, in the first sentence of the letter, of Christ’s resurrection. Surprisingly, Christ’s resurrection is not mentioned directly anywhere else in the letter. The closest Paul comes is to talk about the Christian life by using a pattern implicitly drawn from Christ’s death and resurrection: “I have been crucified with Christ. I am no longer alive. Christ is alive in me” (2:19–20). The promise of Christian resurrection is also a key motivator at the end of the letter: “the one who sows to the Spirit will, from the Spirit, reap eternal life” (6:8). More broadly, the mention of the resurrection signals to us that this text has an apocalyptic worldview (although probably not Martyn’s particular version [see on 6:15]). The dead are raised. Ages of the world can be good or evil (1:4). Angels speak (1:8). This text works with assumptions very different from those of most twenty-first-century Western discourse.

In the next verse, Paul broadens the pool of senders: **and all the brothers and sisters with me** (1:2). Many scholars view Paul as a somewhat isolated figure as he writes Galatians, rejected by his “home church” of Antioch and largely abandoned by his own converts in Galatia (e.g., Elmer 2009). Whether or not this is the case, Paul presents the letter as coming from a substantial group. This lends their authority to the letter.

The verse ends with the recipients: **to the assemblies of Galatia** (1:2). The Greek word *ekklēsia* is Paul’s common designation of local Christian groups.

Translating *Adelphoi*

The inherent cultural difficulties of translation are neatly highlighted by the problem of handling *adelphoi*. The New Revised Standard Version renders *adelphoi* here as “members of God’s family.” In verse 11 it offers “brothers and sisters.” For *pseudadelphoi* in 2:4 it gives “false believers.” In 4:12, 28, 31, and 5:11 *adelphoi* is “friends.” In 5:13 we are back to “brothers and sisters.” Then 6:1 uses “friends,” and 6:18 uses “brothers and sisters.”

Traditionally, English translators have opted for “brothers.” Most translators are aware that Paul uses the term to refer to all Christians, male and female. In past centuries, translators viewed “brothers” as being, in this kind of use, an inclusive term, encompassing women as well as men. In the twentieth century, feminist scholars argued that the presence in a language of such masculine “inclusive” terms encoded and reinforced patriarchal assumptions. At the same time, English usage was moving away from hearing these masculine terms as inclusive: many women perceived themselves as excluded from such categories. The result of these arguments was that translators have tended toward renderings of *adelphoi* such as “brothers and sisters,” as in this commentary.

However, this does not entirely solve the problem. The word *adelphoi* is actually one of the masculine “inclusive” terms in question. Rendering it as “brothers and sisters” could, to an extent, mask a real patriarchal tendency in ancient Greek culture or in the Bible. Moreover, *adelphoi* may carry connotations of the activities of particular kinds of male groups, such as clubs or elite philosophical gatherings. It may also be that it was actually quite radical for Paul to use this term to designate the members of a gender-mixed and socially mixed group. He may effectively have been ascribing heightened status to some members who would not normally have moved in circles where they would have been addressed as *adelphoi* (see Oakes 2009, 107–10).

He also uses it of Christians more broadly in 1:13. Our “ecclesiastical” words derive from this term, and it has traditionally been translated as “church.” However, the word can be used of other kinds of assembly, such as meetings of town citizens (Acts 19:32; Louw and Nida 1988, 11.78). Translating the word as “church” is also potentially misleading. It suggests a degree of institutional organization, and of similarity to modern Christian groups, that is not warranted at this period.

In other letters, Paul uses the singular, “assembly,” in the address. That is because he is writing to Christians in a single town. Here he is addressing all the groups in a wide area, probably the Roman province (see introduction). In other letters, Paul always elaborates somewhat on the identity of the recipients. Their assembly is “in God” (1 Thess. 1:1), they are “made holy in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:2), and so forth. The Galatians just receive the unvarnished title “assemblies”—a sign of things to come.

Rescue from the Present Evil Age (1:3–5)

1:3–5. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory through all ages, amen. After a standard wish for grace and peace, Paul adds a surprising description of Christian salvation.

The description begins in a relatively common Pauline way. Christ “gave himself for our sins” (the Greek manuscripts are divided on whether Christ gave himself *hyper* [on behalf of] or *peri* [concerning] our sins, but the sense is similar in either case). Christ’s initiative in self-giving is also expressed in Gal. 2:20, “the Son of God, . . . who . . . gave himself for me,” which is in a context that speaks of Christ’s death (2:21; cf. 2:19). Christ’s death for our sins is an important point in Paul’s ideas about salvation (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3). The ways in which it comes into the argument of Galatians are, as we shall see, interesting and varied.

Christ’s giving of himself for our sins is an idea based on the OT practice of animal sacrifice for sins. For instance, on the annual Day of Atonement of Lev. 16 (in view esp. in Rom. 3:25), various animals represented the priests and people of Israel, with the animal’s death (or in one case, banishment) dealing in some way with consequences of people’s sins. In talking about Christ’s self-giving “for our sins,” Paul is presenting Christ’s death as an act of what theologians might call substitutionary atonement. This is not the only way in which Paul presents Christ’s death, but it is one of the most prominent ways in which he does so.

Hans Dieter Betz argues that the self-sacrificial element of Gal. 1:4 shows that the precedent for Paul’s view here is the idea that the death of righteous people, such as the Maccabean martyrs, could provide atonement for the sins of Israel (1979, 41–42, citing 2 Macc. 7:32, 37–38; etc.). Betz is right that this is a likely precedent. However, he sees self-sacrificial texts such as Gal. 1:4 as very distinct from those, such as Rom. 8:32, in which God gives Jesus over. It seems more likely that both kinds of text express a composite view held by Paul, modeled on the OT sacrificial system but adapted to the event of Christ’s death, in which both Christ sacrificed himself and God gave him over. For instance, the purposive “for our sins” in Gal. 1:4 suggests the OT sacrificial system, even though the OT animal victims did not act voluntarily. Moreover, as Martyn (1997a, 91) points out, Paul’s addition of the clause “according to the will of our God and Father” shows this to have been “a sacrifice enacted both by [Christ] and God.” In any case, the atoning aspect of Maccabean martyrdom suggests that the ideas of those texts were themselves based on the OT sacrificial system.

The description of salvation then turns in an unexpected direction. Where we might be expecting Paul to write that Christ’s self-giving for our sins was to reconcile us to God, he writes that it is “to rescue us from the present evil

The Golden Age of Nero

Seneca, Nero's adviser during the early part of his reign, wrote, at around the time when Galatians was composed, about the world as it had become under Nero's rule.

"Today your subjects one and all are constrained to confess that they are happy, and, too, that nothing further can be added to their blessings, except that these may last. Many facts force them to this confession, which more than any other a man is loath to make: a security deep and abounding, and justice enthroned above all injustice; before their eyes hovers the fairest vision of a state which lacks no element of complete liberty except the license of self-destruction."

Seneca, Clem. 1.1.8, trans. J. W. Basore 1928

age." Instead of salvation in terms of dealing with individual guilt, or dealing with a person's relationship with God, this verse presents a group salvation related to a particular view of the world. With the state of the world being viewed as evil, Paul sees Christ as having acted to take a group out of the bad situation. This clearly raises some difficult theological issues (see discussion below). It also implies a stark critique of society. This contrasted particularly with the view of the Mediterranean world held by its Roman rulers. For them, the current age was a golden one of peace and prosperity, brought about by the interethnic harmony enforced by Roman power. Scholars are divided on the extent to which Paul's gospel should be described as anti-imperial. For such as James R. Harrison (2002; writing on 1 Thessalonians), Paul's very un-Roman eschatology (ideas about the end) constitutes a challenge to the empire.

For many other scholars, Paul's eschatology has nothing to do with Rome. In Gal. 1:4, any anti-imperial message would be, at most, a relatively muted one. Paul's immediate aims lie elsewhere. However, whatever the aim of this particular text, we cannot avoid the conclusion that early Christians lived with an eschatology sharply different from the standard Roman one (Oakes 2005, 318). Non-Christian Jews also lived with an un-Roman eschatology, but they had always done so. Here Paul's mission was radical in drawing gentiles away from their traditional views of the progress of time and the nature of the ages.

Having said all this, F. F. Bruce's observation on this text makes a sharper point and plunges us into the heart of the letter's argument: it will turn out that "the present evil age" involves the Jewish law (Bruce 1982, 76). This astonishing idea is brought home in 4:1–10. In 4:9, Paul worries that the Galatians are returning "again to the weak and poor elements," to be reenslaved by them (4:9). They are doing so by observing "days and months" and so forth (4:10). This probably relates to Paul's main fear in the letter, that the Galatians are

accepting circumcision and other aspects of practice of torah (the Jewish law) (5:3; 6:12). Paul thinks that if the Galatian gentile Christians take on torah practice, this means a return to a slavery to the elements of the world from which Jesus has freed them, as expressed in 1:4.

More radically than this (and here we enter a very highly charged scholarly field), Paul sees Christ's self-giving as for "our" sins, to rescue "us," ostensibly including himself and fellow Jews. Similarly, in 4:3 Paul writes that "we . . . were enslaved under the elements of the world." Paul's pronouns are often hard to interpret, but although the "we" alone would not automatically indicate that Paul included himself and other Jews in this slavery to "the elements," 4:5 is explicit: God's Son was born "to redeem those under law." Christ came to set free (redeem) law-observant Israelites from slavery. Being under the law was equivalent to being enslaved to the elements of the world. In 1:4 we should take the "we" as including all people, Jew and gentile. All needed to be rescued from "the present evil age." Jesus's death for sins brought this about.

For many scholars, the inclusion of Jews in this need for salvation in Jesus is somewhat anathema (e.g., Stendahl 1976). This is understandable, given the way in which Paul's Letters have been co-opted by many Christians to support some appalling acts of oppression of Jews by Christians down through the centuries. Let there be no doubt. Paul would be horrified by such acts. In Galatians, however, he undoubtedly argues that Christ brings salvation to Jew and gentile, not just to gentile. It is true, as (e.g.) Lloyd Gaston (1987, 23) points out, that Galatians is written specifically for gentile Christians and that the key issue at stake is that they should not adopt circumcision and torah-practice. Yet in his argument to the Galatians, one of Paul's key moves is to evoke the figure of Peter and to present his challenge to Peter that even Christian Jews have found righteousness through faith in Jesus, not through works of torah: "We, Jews by nature . . . trusted in Christ Jesus, so that we would be considered righteous on the basis of trust in Christ and not on the basis of works of law" (2:15–16). Paul's challenge to Peter is that, if even Christian Jews are justified in this way, how can Christian Jews compel Christian gentiles to adopt Jewish practice (2:14)? There seems to be no reason in Galatians to exclude Jews from Paul's "our" and "us" in 1:4.

When does Jesus's rescue of people take place? Does Paul intend the Galatians to think of it as a past, present, or future event? Galatians offers precedents for any of these (e.g., 5:1; cf. 5:5), as do other Pauline texts. One exegetical factor to consider is the experience of Pauline house churches. In the model house church that we are using in this commentary (see introduction), there usually are enslaved persons. Their continuing enslavement makes it unlikely that they would consider Jesus's rescue to be complete. On the other hand, substantive changes that would probably have come about for slaves as they joined (or formed) Christian groups, such as change of religious practice or changes of social relationships (at least for the duration of assembly meetings),

mean that they would probably see a certain degree of rescuing from “the present evil age” as having already taken place. Paul’s understanding of the timing of rescue would probably have related, to some extent, to that of assembly members. He too would have had the experience of some change but with some hopes not yet fulfilled (cf. 5:5).

Deserting the One Who Called Them and the Only Gospel (1:6–10)

1:6–7. I am astonished that so rapidly you are turning away from the one who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel (1:6). As explained above, this sharp break from the polite conventions of letter writing would have shocked the hearers, a shock reinforced by Paul’s use of the word “astonished,” drawn from the repertoire of either angry letter writing or courtroom speeches in which the lawyer needs to bring about a radical change of attitude from an unsympathetic jury (Mullins 1972, 385; Betz 1979, 45, citing Cicero, *Inv.* 1.17.25).

Paul reinforces this effect by immediately charging the Galatians with flouting an important Greco-Roman moral convention, that of loyalty to a founding figure. Reverence for founders of a community was an extremely powerful motivator in the Greco-Roman world. Archaeological and literary evidence for this is widespread. Greek cities had cults devoted to their (usually mythical) founders (Spawforth 1996, 608). Roman colonies erected statues of their founding general or emperor and established cults to the founder’s patron deity. At Pompeii, for instance, a temple was erected to Sulla’s patron deity, Venus. Philosophical movements expressed reverence for founders—for instance, Zeno for the Stoics. In fact, the participle form (*ho metathemenos*) of the Greek verb translated here as “turning away” was a pejorative term used most famously of Dionysius of Heraclea, who deserted Stoic teaching in favor of Epicureanism (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 7.281 D–E; Betz 1979, 47). Irrespective of any other considerations, the Galatians should feel guilty about moving away from the teaching of their founder.

But which founder is Paul referring to here? In the context of the letter as a whole, the founder whom the Galatians are most obviously in danger of deserting is Paul. If Paul is referring to himself here, then “in the grace of Christ” is probably a statement of modesty (in effect, “I didn’t bring this about: Christ did”) tinged with a claim to authority for the process (“Christ did it, so it is important”). Paul often described his ministry in terms of grace (Gal. 1:15; 2:9; 1 Cor. 3:10; esp. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:12; Rom. 1:5; 12:3; 15:15).

However, most commentators focus on the word “call.” Elsewhere, when Paul writes about conversion, it is always God who “calls.” Paul never uses the word to describe his own evangelism. For this reason most commentators see Paul as accusing the Galatians of deserting God (e.g., R. Longenecker 1990, 15; Martyn 1997a, 48; Betz [1979, 46, 48] counts God as “the primary agent of calling” but sees the key issue here as desertion of Paul, who transmitted the

calling). The argument about Paul’s customary use of “call” is clearly strong. Yet it is not so easy to see how a reference to God fits the context, especially since the reference is only implicit. If Paul had wanted to shock the Galatians by characterizing their turning away from his message as a turning away from God himself, we might have expected a direct reference to “God” (*theos*) here.

A possible solution is to see the emphasis of the sentence as being on “grace,” rather than on the caller. The word “grace” gains a little emphasis by being repeated from verse 3. Certainly Paul sees the main issue of the letter as having a link to grace. When he finally speaks directly about circumcision, he writes that gentiles who get circumcised, who “are being considered righteous by means of law, . . . fell away from grace” (5:4). It is as he writes in Rom. 11:6 in relation to “the remnant”: “If it is by grace, it is not by works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” In Gal. 1:6, the Galatians are reminded that they have been called in “grace.” In pursuing circumcision, they are turning to “another gospel,” which is not of grace.

On a technical note, a number of early manuscripts (e.g., apparently P^46) and church writers (e.g., Tertullian) omit the word “Christ,” leaving the verse referring to “the one who called in grace.” This slightly opens up the possibility that Paul could be talking of Christ as “the one who called” (e.g., Luther 1949/1535, on 1:6). An accusation that the Galatians have been turning away from Christ would, like a stress on grace, fit Paul’s rhetoric about circumcision in 5:4. However, the limited range of textual support for the omission and the strong possibility of a reference to God or Paul, even with the omission, mean that a direct reference to desertion from Christ is unlikely here—although in any case, if the “grace” is “of Christ,” the Galatians are, in Paul’s eyes, implicitly deserting Christ too.

... to a different gospel—which is not actually another gospel. But rather, there are some people who are harassing you and wanting to pervert the gospel of Christ (1:6–7). Not only are the Galatians committing the crime of showing disrespect for their founder; they also are doing so by turning to a gospel that is not actually a gospel. As Paul makes clear by the curses of verses 8–9 (see below), he really does not think that any gospel other than his should be preached to the Galatians. We should probably take quite seriously the definite article in 2:7: Paul saw himself as having been entrusted with *the* gospel for the uncircumcised. In other letters, Paul indicates that he did not think he was the only person who could preach to gentiles (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:6–8; implicitly Romans as a whole, contra Klein 1991). However, he clearly expected that, in key essentials such as the lack of need for gentile circumcision, anyone else’s gospel should be in line with his.

These verses also give us Paul’s first characterization of his opponents. They are “some people [perhaps a dismissive term] who are harassing you.” No respect is shown to them. They are not called teachers (even “false” teachers).

No positive motive is ascribed to them. They are just disturbing the Galatians. This total lack of respect by Paul probably implies that they are not official representatives of the church in Jerusalem or Antioch (contra Elmer 2009). Negative as he is about “some people from James” in 2:12, they at least have some categorization in relation to the early Christian movement. In fact, even the “false brothers” of 2:4 are in some way characterized in relation to Christian life. Paul does not give his opponents in Galatia the dignity of anything positive. His rhetoric is of total dismissal. They have not an iota of positive contribution to make or any trace of validity (cf. Betz [1979, 44–45] on Paul discrediting them). All they do is “harass” and want “to pervert the gospel.” Yet they can only *want* to do that. Paul may be implying that the gospel is somehow inherently immune to actual perversion.

1:8–9. Paul reinforces the uniqueness of the gospel by raining down curses on the head of any being, himself and angels included, who would come to the Galatians and preach the gospel differently. **But even if we or an angel from heaven proclaimed a gospel to you, contrary to the gospel we proclaimed to you, let them be accursed!** As we have said before and I now say again, if someone proclaims a gospel to you contrary to what you received, let them be accursed! (1:8–9). Curses were a common part of life in the first century (cf. on 3:10, 13). Lead tablets and other objects with curses written on them are a particularly common find from antiquity (see, e.g., Meyer and Smith 1999). A conditional self curse, such as Paul’s here, is one of the strongest possible forms of denial. Paul also powerfully makes the point that what matters is the message, not the identity of the messenger. Credentials are irrelevant. He may imply a similar point in 2:6, where he heavily qualifies the value of some leaders being regarded as “pillars”—none of this matters to God. Paul’s opponents may be claiming credentials in terms of support from Jerusalem. Paul’s total disrespect for them suggests that he would disbelieve any such claims. However, even if they were true, he argues that any such credentials are irrelevant. Only the message matters.

Hans Dieter Betz (1979, 53, cautiously) and J. Louis Martyn (1997a, 113, confidently) both suggest that Paul’s reference to angels may (or does) relate to his opponents claiming revelations from such a source. However, the rhetoric of the main line of Paul’s response to the actions of his opponents (1:1, 11, etc.) seems to make it more likely that they claimed their authority based on commissioning and teaching from authoritative human sources.

A small oddity is the note in verse 9, “as we have said before.” This implies that Paul has had some engagement with the Galatians previously on the subject of false gospel preaching (Paul’s phraseology here seems unlikely merely to refer back to verse 8: contra Bruce 1982, 84). Scholars tend to see Galatians as Paul’s first response to the problems described in the letter. That may not be the case. As with the Corinthians, we might need to think in terms of a more complex history of interaction (see on 4:15–16, below).

1:10. Finally, Paul in verse 10 denies, with some vehement elaboration, that he is a flatterer (R. Longenecker 1990, 18). Am I now seeking to win favor from people or from God? Or am I seeking to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ (1:10). The flatterer was a stock character of Greco-Roman rhetoric. The flatterer was a type of hypocrite. They acted to please people rather than acting out of conviction. They were not sincere. This also meant that they would act one way when in a person’s presence, then differently when apart (Glad 1996, 55). Paul denies that he is a hypocrite of that kind (see on 2:13).

The phraseology of Paul’s first question is strange. Translated literally, it reads, “For am I now persuading [*peithō*] people or God?” Betz (1979, 54–55) argues that Plato provides possible explanations as he uses “persuading people” in a definition of rhetoric (*Gorg.* 352E) and “persuading gods” (to serve the persuaders themselves) as an activity of magicians (*Rep.* 364C). For Betz, Paul denies both. However, Martinus de Boer is probably right in seeing the whole verse as rebutting the charge of people-pleasing, and that Paul’s answer to the second half of his first question is yes, with “persuading . . . God” amounting to “trying to seek the approval . . . of God” (2011, 64–65; Schreiner 2010, 88–89). De Boer’s view fits the context better unless one accepts Betz’s general theory that the letter has a substantial magical aspect (1979, 25).

The charge against Paul was possibly that of relaxing the demands of law observance in order to please gentiles, who would dislike such observance (de Boer 2011, 64). Again, the possibility of Paul hearing of such a charge suggests that there may be a more complex backstory of interaction between the Galatians and Paul than scholars tend to expect. Another possible rhetorical aim of Paul’s prominent denial of flattery and hence hypocrisy is that he could be setting up his later move of using hypocrisy as a key charge against Peter (2:13) and ultimately against Paul’s opponents (6:12–13). Finally, we also need to recall that Paul’s orientation toward the “people”/“God” pairing of 1:10 recalls that in 1:1 (Martyn 1997a, 139). As we see elsewhere in the letter, both Paul and his gospel are oriented toward God and the new creation, rather than to the flesh and the present world. In this, there is something paradigmatic, as well as Paul defending himself against an accusation.

Theological Issues

The Theology of Authority

For some writers such as Elizabeth Castelli (1991) and Joseph Marchal (2006), much of the positive value of what Paul writes in his letters is offset or even outweighed by the negative effects of his introducing into the church a theology and practice based on domination: what Marchal calls *kyriarchy* (rule by a lord). In this pattern, God is a dominating figure, and in unison with

this, Paul and other church leaders are also dominating figures. For Castelli, Marchal, and others, a Pauline theology of authority, both divine and human, is problematic for the church and the world.

For the members of first-century house churches, the world was a complex network of authority. Slaves were dominated by their owners. The poor were dominated by the wealthy. Children were dominated by parents. Women were normally dominated by men. In Galatia, the patterns of civic authority varied somewhat, according to type of location. In the Roman colonies, such as Pisidian Antioch, the local non-Roman population would have been under the rule of Roman colonial authorities. This meant the local Roman elite, supplemented by any Greek elite landowners who had gained Roman citizenship (for the influence of some Greeks in the Roman colonies of Galatia, see Mitchell 1993a, 90). These elites were, in turn, lent authority by the distant power of Rome. In noncolonial parts of the province, other elites exercised control, but again, it was underwritten by Rome, whose grip on the empire was largely maintained by supporting local elites and broadly letting them control the rest of the local people, under the overall eye of the provincial Roman governor.

Paul's authority cut across the authority of family, town, or province. Such crosscutting authority figures can have important roles. Coming from outside the normal structures of a hearer's life, they can challenge existing patterns and open up new possibilities. Such people are central to religious innovation. The charismatic itinerant prophet, philosopher, or sage is a key agent of change. An essential element of the potential for effectiveness of change is the prophet's claim to have authority directly from God or the gods, rather than via the existing human religious or social structures, which are the very things that the prophet may be challenging in God's name (cf., more broadly, Brad Braxton's argument about the value of claims to revelation among people otherwise subject to oppressive control by other groups [2002, 61]).

For Christian theology, Paul occupies a specific kind of position with his claim to authority direct from Christ and God the Father. The early church, in accepting his claim, placed Paul as an apostle in the fullest sense, alongside Peter, Andrew, and the others who had their commission directly from Christ. Paul's claim to unmediated authority is essential to his stance in Galatians. This puts his message in a different category from that of other Christian teachers who were humanly commissioned, as the rival teachers who came to Galatia probably claimed to be. This also puts Paul's teaching in a different category from that of any later generation of Christian teachers, commissioned by people rather than directly by God. One implication of this is a theology of authority in which no present-day Christian teachers can claim an absolute authority on a level with the early apostles. This means that, paradoxically, a Pauline theology of authority limits the authority claims of any present-day leader.

Rescue from the Present Evil Age

Many Christians today have a very reasonable aversion to excessive dualism, such as a view that polarizes the world into a sphere of goodness, inhabited by Christians, and a sphere of wickedness, inhabited by everyone else. Such dualism has often led Christians to an intolerant detachment from the common life of society. It also seems to be a deeply unrealistic view. There clearly are many good things outside the church and many bad things within. The experience of conversion to Christianity is not one of sudden, sustained perfection.

And yet, many Christians who would vehemently oppose such dualism are also particularly aware that the present world needs to be subject to serious critique. The idea that the world is a benign place, ruled constructively for the benefit of the whole global population, is a rose-tinted myth that no one with access to a television or the streets of a city center could reasonably sustain. Our own present age is clearly full of trouble and unjust actions. Despite much goodness at work, the age has so many faults as to be undoubtedly worthy of some sort of negative evaluation.

The first century too was a place of structural injustice and cruelty. Many in the population were slaves, the property of other people. From Paul's Jewish-Christian perspective, there were many other widespread practices that struck him forcibly, such as idolatry, drunkenness, and sexual behavior contrary to Jewish norms. The members of Galatian house churches, who will have been mostly at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, were no doubt particularly aware of all kinds of structural injustice.

Paul announces that Christ's giving of himself for our sins results in rescue from the present evil age (1:4). At first sight this is mad, apparently denying the reality of the continuing experience of evil, injustice, and suffering. To some degree the resolution of this paradox lies in the rescue being, to an extent, proleptic: the idea that Christ's rescue is real but is only fully brought to fruition at some future time. This pattern is seen in Paul's adoption language in Rom. 8. Christians have been adopted by God (8:15–17), and yet adoption still requires future fulfillment (8:23).

However, Paul undoubtedly also thinks that, in Christ's rescue, something has happened that has actual, current effects on the Christian. Part of that presumably has to do with the socioreligious change that the convert has undergone. The convert has changed religious affiliation away from the Greco-Roman gods to the God of Israel. The convert has also become part of a group that is a house church and part of the wider network of such churches. That means a change in social identity and behavior (Crook 2004). There has been some movement of the convert out from what Paul would have seen as malevolent aspects of the social structures and behavior of his day. One of the key underlying arguments of Galatians is the startling one that Paul sees gentile Christian adoption of Jewish law as a move back in the direction of rejoining "the present evil age."

In the present day, although Christian groups are still, to quite an extent, caught up in the structures of “the present evil age,” again and again there are evidences, in many Christian communities, of ways in which some measure of freeing from these structures has taken place and is being lived out.

How Uniform Should the Gospel Be?

Does the gospel require adult baptism? Does it require papal authority? Does it require belief in scriptural inerrancy? At what points should Paul’s horror at people “perverting the gospel of Christ” be echoed today? As with the issue of dualism, many Christians are reasonably skeptical about attempts to draw boundaries around the gospel, with the consequent anathematizing of others who also claim that label for their message. However, the same Christians would be particularly critical of the claims of some kinds of messages to be representations of the gospel. The most obvious twentieth-century case was anti-Jewish church preaching during the Nazi era. Boundaries to the gospel do exist.

In Gal. 1:1–10, Paul does not tell us enough to show at what points he thinks boundaries to the gospel lie. As we go through the letter, he will make it progressively clearer.