

Galatians Overview

- a. **Author**
- b. **Audience**
- c. **Date**

The Portrait of Jesus by Paul in Galatians

1. Images of Jesus in Galatians (Borchert, pp 89-95)

a. _____ **Bringer**

b. **One in Whom We** _____

2. Questions for Reflection (Borchert, pp 94-95)

- a. How well do Christians understand the portrait of Jesus Paul was painting? What was Paul saying to the Galatians? In what ways are we communicating this powerful message to others? How might we be charged with promoting rules and laws rather than freedom?
- b. How does “walking” with Jesus Christ and the Spirit make a difference in your life? How are you communicating that difference?
- c. How have we been promoting or eliminating distinctions among people? If you have been following the pattern Paul has advocated, how have others responded? If you have focused too much on distinctions, what can you do to change your pattern of living and communicating?

Homework

1. Read Colossians at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
2. Read Borchert chapter 5, pp 95-102.
3. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on p 102.
 - a. How does the portrait of Christ in Colossians impact you as a Christian? What aspects do you find most powerful? What aspects do you think may speak most powerfully to those in our growing biblically illiterate generation? How did the portrait of Christ affect the way Paul directed his message to the Colossians?
 - b. As you have reflected on the household codes in Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter, how might understanding their origins make a difference in the perspectives of our faith communities?
 - c. How is baptism viewed in your Christian fellowship? Could Paul’s model of understanding have any implications among your family of faith? Explain.

Portraits of Jesus

A Portrait of Jesus by Paul in Galatians

A. Galatians Overview

1. Author

- a. “Paul, an apostle . . .” (Gal 1:1) is identified as the writer in the letter’s salutation.
- b. “I, Paul” is an emphatic, personal reference found in Gal 5:2.
- c. Details of the writer’s life, conversion, and ministry shared in Galatians 1-2 agree generally with the details about Paul found in Acts.
- d. The letter contains an autographed conclusion in Gal 6:11-18.

2. Audience

- a. The ancient Roman province of Galatia stretched across the middle of Asia Minor (i.e., modern Turkey). A river of ink has been used in scholarly discussions concerning which specific group(s) in this diverse province Paul addressed in this letter.
- b. The north Galatian theory states that Paul was writing to true ethnic Galatians, a settlement of Celtic Gauls, who inhabited the northern plateau region.
- c. The south Galatian theory states that Paul wrote to those living in the Roman administrative area in the southern region where Hellenized Pisidians, Phrygians, Lycaonians, Jews, and Greeks lived in a mixed congregation.
- d. Arguments can be made for either group. Early church tradition supports the north Galatian view. This is also the view expressed by the modern scholar N.T. Wright in his recent book, *Paul: A Biography*. However, many students, including me, see the evidence more clearly squares with the south Galatian theory. Why?
 - 1) Churches in north Galatia appear late and have no apostolic founding tradition.
 - 2) Judaizers would be more likely to pursue Paul in south Galatia than the remote northern region, which had little to no Jewish population.
 - 3) Paul’s delegates bearing the Gentiles monetary gift to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4 – “Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. . .”) included representatives from south Galatia (Acts 20:4 – “. . . Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also . . .”) but none from the northern region.
 - 4) In general, Paul concentrated his ministry on heavily populated Hellenized areas that included Jews and Jewish proselytes. This was the case in south Galatia.

3. Date

- a. The dating of Galatians depends to a great extent on one’s view of its audience.
- b. The north Galatian theory requires a relatively late date (ca., CE 53-57) of writing perhaps from Ephesus or Macedonia during Paul’s third missionary journey. At the earliest it could not be written before his second missionary journey, which would have been his first opportunity (Acts 16:6) to visit the northern region during his travels from Asia Minor to Greece/Europe.
- c. The south Galatian theory does not require an early date but many students, including me, believe this letter was written from Syrian Antioch in CE 48-49 immediately after Paul’s first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. Others believe it was written after the Jerusalem Council in CE 51-53 from either Syrian Antioch or Corinth. The south Galatian view makes Galatians Paul’s first letter.

B. The Portrait of Jesus by Paul in Galatians

1. Images of Jesus in Galatians (Borchert, pp 89-95)

a. Freedom Bringer

- 1) What was Paul saying to the Galatians?
 - a) “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).
 - b) “The gospel was at stake! Christian freedom was at stake! . . . Galatians is one of the most crucial writings in the history of Christianity. . . . Galatians is a bold confrontation with slippery thinking and confused living concerning the coming of Jesus. Moreover, this letter is obviously intended to dismantle any attempt at adding human effort or status as a basic ingredient to the divine gift of salvation in Jesus Christ” (Borchert, 91).
- 2) Grace vs. Law: Christians are freed by faith in Christ from the bondage of works (i.e., the law) as a way to earn salvation. Each believer is saved by personal faith in what Christ has done rather than by that believer’s own diligence in keeping the law.
 - a) Paul defended his apostleship (i.e., authority to proclaim the gospel as given to him by Jesus) and the gospel that he had preached to the Galatians.
 - b) In lieu of a pastoral visit, Paul sent this letter to correct the Galatian’s misunderstanding of the gospel and/or misrepresentations of the gospel by false teachers (i.e., Judaizers).
 - c) Galatians was written by Paul to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ from legalistic perversions of Judaizers who were trying to add Jewish legal requirements to the gospel. Paul advocated for grace as the only means of receiving God’s salvation in Christ Jesus.
 - i. In what ways are we communicating this powerful message to others?
 - ii. How might we be charged with promoting rules and laws rather than freedom?
- 3) What is the purpose of the law?
 - a) Paul “takes on their whole understanding of the law and clarifies at least four important issues . . .” (Borchert, 92). (**Read Gal 3:1-25**)
 - i. “the giving of the law was a temporary solution to the problem of sin” (Gal 3:19a)
 - ii. “the law came much later than God’s great intention to redeem the world” (Gal 3:15-18)
 - iii. “the law is now basically passé” (Gal 3:25)
 - iv. “the law is powerless to provide the salvation that the Galatians are seeking (3:1-14)”
 - b) “The law was to be understood as kind of a substitute companion-custodian-instructor (*paidagogos*) to help humans understand their need for the Savior who was to come (3:23-24)” (Borchert, 93).
 - c) “[Paul] is opposed to using law (or any human effort by sinful humans) as a means of gaining a saving status with God. Instead the function of the law serves to indicate God’s expectations for humanity . . . Paul stresses that obedience to the law or rules does not mean that a person can thereby gain acceptance with God. Acceptance comes only through divine graciousness in Christ” (Borchert, 92).

b. **One in Whom We Walk**

- 1) How does “walking” with Jesus Christ and the Spirit make a difference in your life? How are you communicating that difference?
 - a) “What God wanted was for humans to walk (*halak*) with him in obedience . . . humans turned the response of walking (*halak*) with God into a set of prescriptive rules (*halakah*). . . . Humans consistently substitute a relationship with God for a set of rules . . . [Paul’s] entire life was transformed and he came to recognize the exciting reality of truly walking (*halak*) with God! . . . pay particular attention to how often he uses the holistic idea of ‘walking,’ that is, ‘living’ or conducting’ one’s life with God and the Spirit” (Borchert, 92-93).
 - b) **Read Gal 5:13-26.**
 - c) The Spirit that lives in us, produces fruit in us, and in whom we walk/live each day is the Holy Spirit of the Resurrected Christ.
 - d) “[Paul] reasserts his call to freedom and authentic living. Yet he carefully admonishes them not to use their freedom as an opportunity for self-serving purposes. Their mission in life is to love other people and accept their vocations as servants of Christ (5:13-15)” (Borchert, 94).
- 2) Through our shared faith in Jesus Christ, we are all children of God, his heirs, and brothers and sisters of Christ.
 - a) **Read Gal 3:26-29.**
 - b) The ground at the foot of the cross, where we all stand as sinners redeemed by the grace of God, is level—or at least it is supposed to be.
 - c) How have we been promoting or eliminating distinctions among people?
 - i. If you have been following the pattern Paul has advocated, how have others responded?
 - ii. If you have focused too much on distinctions, what can you do to change your pattern of living and communicating?

C. Homework

1. Read Colossians at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
2. Read Borchert chapter 5, pp 95-102.
3. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on p 102.
 - a. How does the portrait of Christ in Colossians impact you as a Christian? What aspects do you find most powerful? What aspects do you think may speak most powerfully to those in our growing biblically illiterate generation? How did the portrait of Christ affect the way Paul directed his message to the Colossians?
 - b. As you have reflected on the household codes in Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter, how might understanding their origins make a difference in the perspectives of our faith communities?
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