

GAL 2



PRAY

If you are visiting—or have missed the past two weeks of study, we began the BOOK of GALATIANS...

And where we began our discussion was with its...

I. BACKSTORY (author, recipients, date, occasion)

And here is what we have discovered thus far...

B1= The author is Paul, an apostle whose apostolic entourage and contribution to the Jerusalem church in making doctrinal decisions for the rest of the churches could not be ignored or excluded.

And that is exactly what was happening. Though he was an apostle (and therefore part of the leadership team at the Jerusalem church—the church responsible for making all the doctrinal decisions for the rest of the churches...And though he had previously confirmed with them the gospel he was preaching both in Antioch and on the mission field---things HAD changed since (then)...AND they had changed without his input—OR AGREEMENT!

The church was NOW requiring Gentiles to be circumcised to enter into a right relationship with GOD—IOW---in order to be justified (or clean) before Him. SO no longer was simply faith in Christ the requirement for those things to be true (or to get into a relationship w/God) –BUT also the observance of the OC clean laws (the old requirements to get in). They (too) we NOW deemed to still be necessary...

And (again) Paul was NOT happy NOR on board w/the decision...

He had neither been a part of the council that made that decision (which once more was a change from Jerusalem's previous position)---NOR was he in agreement with it...

And he wasn't the only ONE...

Barnabas and others in Antioch (those I am calling his apostolic entourage) felt the same way...

This was a HUGE HERETICAL ERROR which threatened to destroy the GOSPEL—and they WERE (therefore) NOT about to remain quiet about it...

THEIR VOICE would be heard---and that MOST especially since teams (known as the circumcision party) had already been sent out to the GENTILE churches enforcing these new rules...

AND THAT WAS as far AS WE GOT!

WE have come as far as understanding both PAUL and the soap opera behind HIS WRITING of this LETTER—but have NOT YET discussed any of the other BACKSTORY elements such as: its recipients, date and occasion---WHICH MEANS that THIS is where we are GOING today---we are going to FINISH the REMAINING elements of the BACKSTORY and then CLOSE by discussing ITS THEME...

SO with my BRIEF review and explanation of what was covered under the piece related to the AUTHOR—consider with me now its RECIPIENTS...

B2 = The recipients are the Galatian churches, who have been duped by the circumcision party and are therefore in danger of losing their relationship w/God.

(1:2)

Who (again) this includes: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Those he planted during his first missionary journey (Act 13-14).

Support for saying that they (too) had an encounter w/ the circumcision party--but rather than stand against them—had been duped by them:

(1:3-7)

Notice (he tells them—first of all --what God has done):

“Grace to you and peace from the Father” = God the Father has extended His grace and peace (in salvation) to you---meaning you as Gentiles –those at one time –without hope or the hope of having relationship with God (Eph 2:11-12).

(Then Paul tells them—how He did it)...

“...and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” = God’s will was that His grace and peace (i.e. salvation from sin and the power of sin in this present evil world) for all people (including Gentiles) would now be available exclusively through looking to Jesus and His work of giving Himself (i.e. His life) on the cross as that which makes us clean/righteous/justified before God.

(And all of this he says in contrast to what the Galatians are doing...)

(6-7)

IOW: They are rejecting God's offer of salvation ("grace and peace to you") exclusively through Jesus Christ (the very thing he again mentioned in the previous verses)---and (instead) are listening to people who are teaching a false and perverted gospel ("distort = pervert)—one which requires something more than just Christ in order to be clean/right/justified before God. And who these people are (who are "troubling" them) can be no other than the circumcision party since the additional things (being required) are the Jewish clean laws—most especially circumcision.

(5:1-2)

Support for saying they are in danger of losing their relationship w/God:

(5:3-4)

The million dollar question: Is this the same group that is now in Antioch (which has also convinced Peter)?

Probably not (though) Peter was probably aware of their presence in Galatia and therefore the one tipping off Paul after he is re-convinced back into his original position by the theological arguments of Paul (Act 15:7-11). This (BTW) demonstrates the incredible integrity of Peter (something rare today).

Support for this group being different and Peter as the tip-off man:

1. They seem to still be in Galatia when Paul writes (5:10-12).
2. (Since) the men in Antioch were coming from "James" (the sr. pastor at Jerusalem) (v12), it is (ML) that the same was true for those now in the Galatian churches. These were teams sent out to the Gentile churches to make sure that they were conforming to the "new" rules of observing the clean laws. Since (however) James denounces any direct involvement in their going out (and enforcing these things), it does further implicate Peter as the one most responsible for this new campaign to the Gentile churches (Act 15:24). This means that though they are a different group, they were nonetheless a product of Peter's new campaign (and therefore once convinced otherwise—he can tip off Paul about them).

B3 = The date of writing is 49 AD, on his way to Jerusalem to settle the requirements of the gospel once and for all.

Support:

1. It must be sometime after his second visit to Jerusalem and first missionary trip since his trip to Jerusalem is mentioned in the letter and he can't write to the Galatian churches until they have planted during his first missionary trip. Which means a time no earlier than 49 AD.

2. It is highly unlikely it would have been written after 49 AD since this was also the time of Jerusalem Council, which produced a letter regarding these same issues that therefore would surely be referenced in this letter if that were the case.

Why knowing that Paul wrote this in 49 AD is important:

1. B/C it reveals Galatians to be the first book (and subsequently Paul—the first author) of the NT.

Some have proposed James as the first book, yet if that was the case then NO DOUBT James would have mentioned something about the necessity of Gentiles being circumcised (since this was his position until Jerusalem Council and the theological persuasion of Paul). His silence on the issue, supports (therefore) his writing as after Paul (to the Galatians).

2. B/C it tells us something about the growth in theological confidence Paul had experienced between 49 AD and his first trip to Jerusalem in 46 AD. Remember he (then) was unsure of his “circumcision-free gospel” and “needed to make sure he was not running or had run in vain” (2:2). The fact that Paul could write this letter to the Galatians before he had received the verdict from Jerusalem Council demonstrates that Paul no longer carried any doubts—and was sure the Council would see it the same way. (BTW) this demands that the BIBLE be knowable to the degree that we can carry that kind of confidence—especially when it comes to the requirements of the Gospel (otherwise Paul was just being arrogant!). How often today, we are told we must practice “humble orthodoxy” when dealing with the doctrines of the Bible (including the gospel)---since “good men differ”. Good men differed in Antioch (Paul and Peter) and that didn't stop Paul from openly rejecting Peter's position and pressing dogmatically upon him (without “humble orthodoxy”) what he was confident was the truth (and could prove from the Scriptures). And remember, the practices of Paul we see in Scripture are to be imitated by us (Phi 4:9).

B4 = The occasion for writing is poor ecclesiology, bad biblical theology and damning soteriology, all which threaten to destroy the gospel and the church.

Regarding poor ecclesiology: The church cannot make doctrinal decisions for the church w/o the support of her leadership (example from Acts: church leadership always in agreement before decisions are made—especially doctrinal—Act 15). Yet this is what the church at Jerusalem failed to practice when returning back to the practice of circumcision (as necessary). They failed to get the support of apostles Paul and Barnabas. Paul’s actions in writing this letter reveal that (as well as) the fact that it is God’s will that all churches be in agreement on doctrinal matters—especially those directly related to the requirements of the gospel (and fight to get there—ex. 2:11; Act 15:2)—no “agree to disagree” in the Bible! (1Co1:10). Such maverick independence would have weakened the gospel and the churches if it were allowed (just as it has today). Why no attempts for doctrinal agreement? Don’t believe the Bible can present the truth clear enough to gain such agreement (i.e. that it is not knowable); don’t want the hassle and fighting which will surely happen (though fighting is more times than not the way God brings truth to light—1Co 10:19).

Regarding bad biblical theology: Both Peter and the circumcision party shared the correct belief that we cannot take away from God’s law (Deu 4:2)—which is why (in their minds the clean laws) needed to remain intact. The problem is they were failing to see that faith in Jesus was their replacement—which meant they were still being fulfilled (which also is why this is the word Jesus uses when speaking about the Law—Mat 5:17). Because their biblical theology was deficient (in relation to this aspect of fulfillment or replacement) they actually ended up violating the very principle they were attempting to uphold—since the same command which states we cannot take away from God’s law also states that we cannot add to it (which is what faith in Christ becomes—unless this new command somehow replaces an already existing law.). Paul’s theology in this letter to the Galatians preserves and protects this command by showing what faith in Christ replaces and why therefore (we cannot still have the clean laws on the books)—IOW: the BIBLE presents a “closed system” when it comes to the law and its requirements after that Law has been given (at Sinai). This is why God’s law is called “perfect” —Psa 19:7. To be perfect means there is nothing you can add or take away from it—since in so doing it would no longer be perfect. (Example of a closed system which follows the same rules: poker. In order to play each player must always have always 5 cards. The only way you can get rid of cards—or add cards is by replacing them with an equal number—so that what is in your hand (i.e. “system”) always totals the number 5).

Regarding damning soteriology: Here (again) the “closed system” of the Bible (and its laws/requirements) comes into to play. Since the circumcision party (and unfortunately the Jerusalem church) were pushing for circumcision (and the observance of the other clean laws-Act 15:5), this meant there was no place for “faith in Christ” (as another “marble”/clean law in the bag). Which is why Paul says what he does in (5:2). And why he says what he does in (5:4). If you can’t have Christ and circumcision—to keep circumcision (i.e. the clean laws as your way of being clean/right before God)—this means the forfeiture of “faith in Christ” which in turns means the forfeiture of justification (and subsequently salvation)—since the old clean (laws) cannot make you clean/right or justified (2:21, 3:21).

Which brings us to our last piece for discussion this morning....and that is the...

II. THEME

What is the central subject, main topic or over-arching idea which dictates and defines all of the instruction we find in the book of GALATIANS?

WHAT (IOW) is its THEME?

I would propose its THEME to be THIS:

A POLEMIC ON NEW COVENANT JUSTIFICATION

Polemic = a contentious refutation

Support:

1. As supported by the Backstory, the problem which motivates Paul to write this letter (in the first place) is the confusion surrounding how a person under the NC (established by Christ) is justified (i.e. gets “clean” or into a right relationship w/God).
2. The issue which is creating the problem and confusion (as again supported by what was discussed under the Backstory) is the fact that “faith in Christ alone” as the original NC requirement has now changed to “faith plus observance of the OC clean laws”. Which means that Paul’s whole focus in this letter is to defend that original NC understanding.
3. The language throughout the entire letter is polemical in nature (Ex. 1:6-11, 2:6, 11-14, 3:1-5, 4:9, 16, 19-21, 5:1-4, 10-12, 6:12-13, 17).

4. The language throughout the entire letter is either directly or indirectly related to the subject of justification under the NC versus the OC (2:16, 3:11, 5:4).

(Finally then) allow me to mention how this differs from the book of Romans (another book devoted to the subject of NC justification): Whereas Galatians is its polemic, Romans is its explanation. IOW: Galatians is NC justification defended...Romans...NC justification DEFINED.

This (then) Beloved concludes our discussion of the BACKSTORY and THEME to this incredible book (or letter to the GALATIANS)...

...a book which reflects NOT ONLY Paul's passionate conviction regarding God's circumcision free gospel BUT ALSO the theology that GOT HIM there...

...Theology which WAS produced through the intense fires of persecution, suffering and plenty of doctrinal debate and deep biblical reflection.

Which means Paul was not just a man on FIRE---HIS was a theology on fire...

AND it is (then) this TEHOLOGY that we WILL begin to encounter in this book (next week)...

A theology which (I believe) ultimately saved the CHURCH from losing the THING most precious to her--- and that is THE TRUE or SOUND GOSPEL message...

So plan on being (here) next week for that as we begin unpacking its INSTRUCTION to us...

Let's PRAY