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CONCORDIA SEMINARY

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF GALATIANS 1:1-12

**A SEMINAR PAPER SUBMITTED TO
THE SCHOOL FOR GRADUATE STUDIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
SACRED THEOLOGY**

BY

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An Exegetical Study of Galatians 1:1-12

The epistle to the Galatians is in itself very unique in the corpus of Paul's writing. No other epistle is quite like Galatians in its severity with which Paul deals with the ones who are perverting the gospel. This epistle, though relatively short, has been one of the Bible's most influential books on the subjects of freedom and faith, law and gospel, and justification by faith. Galatians certainly had a profound influence on Martin Luther who wrote and lectured extensively on the book. Luther found Galatians immediately relevant to the situation of the church in the sixteenth century. Indeed, some have suggested that Galatians was Luther's favorite book of the Bible. He even called it "my own epistle, to which I have pledged my troth, my Katie von Bora."¹

The passage under discussion, Galatians 1:1-12, serves as a prologue into this great epistle. It is itself unique in its own way. The first part of this paper is a translation of the passage with exegetical notes. Following is a discussion of its limits, structure, style, literary genre, and historical and literary setting.

¹Luther as quote by David S. Dockery. David S. Dockery, "Introduction to the Epistle and Paul's Defense of His Apostleship (Galatians 1:1 - 2:14)," *Review and Expositor* 91 (1994): 153.

I. Translation and Notes

- 1) Paul, an apostle² - not from men nor through man but through³ Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead,
- 2) And all the brothers with me - to the churches of Galatia,
- 3) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and (from) the Lord Jesus Christ
- 4) who gave Himself up for the sake of⁴ our sins, in order that⁵ He might deliver⁶ us from the present evil age⁷ according to the will of our God and Father,

²Παῦλος and ἀπόστολος are in apposition.

³By his use of ἀπο and διά, Paul covers source and agency in his denial of man's control of his apostleship. A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1914), 567.

⁴The variants P⁴⁶ ⋈* A D F G Ψ et al. read περί instead of ὑπέρ. In the New Testament the distinction between περί and ὑπέρ is not very marked in some usages, partly due to the affinity in sound and sense. Robertson, *Grammar*, 629. Since Paul often interchanges the use of these two words to mean "concerning" and "for the sake of/on behalf of," it is difficult to determine which is to be preferred. Preference probably should be given to ὑπέρ since it is paralleled by Gal. 3:13 and by the confession formula in 1 Cor. 15:3 (more on the confession formula in "Structure" section). Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 41, Galatians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 8.

BAGD suggests that in this verse, ὑπέρ is used with the genitive of thing, in which case it must be variously translated "in order to atone for (the) sins" or "to remove them." (cf. Heb. 7:27; 10:12) Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 838.

⁵Purpose clause.

⁶The verb ἐξαιρέω is only found here in the Paul's letters. Silva suggests that this verb was chosen (over σώζω or ῥύομαι) to express the idea of "rescuing someone from a place." It has a more natural "syntagmatic" relation with αἰών. Moises Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 171.

⁷Literally, "the evil age having come"

- 5) to whom⁸ (be) glory forever and ever. Amen.
- 6) I am amazed⁹ that you are turning away¹⁰ so quickly from the one who called you by the grace of Christ¹¹ to another¹² gospel,

⁸Dative of possession.

⁹Progressive present (also known as descriptive present). See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 518-519. Also Robertson, *Grammar*, 879.

¹⁰μετατίθημι in this verse is a *hapax legomena* in the Pauline corpus. BAGD translates μετατίθημι here as "turn away." Other synonyms given are "change one's mind," "desert," and "turn apostate." BAGD, *Lexicon*, 513. Martyn adds that in the Hellenistic world, μετατίθημι was used to describe when one moved one's allegiance from one school of thought to another. That person had "defected from" (μετατίθημι) the first school of thought in favor of the second. The term reflects a "conversion consciousness" which would have colored the Galatians' understanding of the word. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 108.

¹¹ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ is taken as a dative of means with a possessive genitive. See Longenecker, *Galatians*, 15.

¹²There is considerable debate over whether or not there is much semantic difference between ἕτερος and ἄλλος. Lightfoot proposes that ἕτερον implies a difference of kind which is not involved in ἄλλος (vs. 7). Therefore, the primary distinction between the words would appear to be that ἄλλος is another as "one besides," ἕτερος is another as "one of two." J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 76. Burton agrees that there is a difference between the words in Pauline usage stating that ἕτερος suggests difference of kind and ἄλλος signifies numerical non-identity. Ernest de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 422. Robertson also insists that there is a difference in meaning between the two words (at least here in Gal. 1:6,7). Robertson, *Grammar*, 747. See also Trench's discussion on the distinction. Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 375-377.

However, I concur with those who stand on the other side of the argument. Martyn states that these two words are virtual synonyms in Paul's vocabulary. Martyn, *Galatians*, 110. BDF asserts that ἕτερος and ἄλλος are sometimes combined only for the sake of variety (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4; 1 Cor. 12:9f.). They also observe that ἄλλος is used pleonastically to a certain extent in order to introduce εἰ μὴ. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 306.4. BAGD adds that ἕτερος and ἄλλος are used interchangeably. The words are

- 7) which is not another (gospel), except some are confusing¹³ you and wishing to pervert¹⁴ the Gospel of Christ.
- 8) But even if we¹⁵ or an angel from heaven would preach a gospel to you contrary to¹⁶ that which we preached to you, let him be cursed.¹⁷
- 9) As we have said previously even now I say again, if anyone preaches a gospel to you contrary to that which you have received, let him be cursed.¹⁸

felt to be equivalent (Gal. 1:6; 2 Cor. 11:4). BAGD, *Lexicon*, 315. See also Silva, *Explorations*, 54-56. Even Lightfoot and Robertson admit that in some verses ἕτερος and ἄλλος are used interchangeably.

¹³BAGD suggests that here παράσσουντες has the sense of mental confusion caused by false teachings (cf. Acts 15:24; Gal. 5:10). BAGD, *Lexicon*, 805.

¹⁴μεταστρέφω is another *hapax* for Paul and is very rare in the New Testament (only used two other times: Acts 2:20; James 4:9). Martyn adds the nuance, "to change something into its opposite." Paul means that the false teachers are turning the gospel around 180 degree (not making mere moderate changes to it), changing it into the not-gospel. Martyn, *Galatians*, 112.

¹⁵Literary plural. Perhaps Paul is also thinking of his "brethren" in verse 2. See Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), 49, no. 14. Also Martyn, *Galatians*, 113. Lenski disagrees with the assumption that this is a literary plural. See R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 39.

¹⁶Here παρ' ὃ has the idea of "beyond" and so "contrary to." To exceed instructions is often to go contrary to them. Cf. Rom. 11:24; 12:3; 16:17. See Robertson, *Grammar*, 616., also BDF, *Grammar*, 236.3. Betz also concurs and labels παρ' ὃ adversative (cf. Rom. 16:17; Acts 18:13; Rom. 1:25,26; *et al.*). Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 52, no. 80. Moule disagrees and simply translates παρ' ὃ as "other than." C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 51.

¹⁷Present general conditional sentence.

¹⁸Particular conditional sentence. Note the shift from general (vs. 8) to specific (vs. 9) conditional clauses.

- 10) For¹⁹ am I now persuading²⁰ men or God? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were still striving to please men, (then) I would not be a servant of Christ.²¹
- 11) For²² I am making known to you²³, brothers, that²⁴ the gospel which has been

¹⁹There is a debate among scholars over what to do with γάρ. Martyn suggests that verse 10 is an instance in which γάρ is little more than an emphatic particle or a loose connective. Therefore, he states, it plays no role in the translation. Martyn, *Galatians*, 137. Betz in effect agrees with Martyn and states that γάρ is not so much connected with the preceding, but introduces another matter. Betz, *Galatians*, 54.100. Neither Martyn nor Betz give other Biblical evidence for this interpretation of γάρ.

I agree with Brian J. Dodd's assertion that the γάρ of verse 10 establishes a logical connection between verse 10 and verses 6-9. The strong claims that Paul makes for the his gospel in verses 6-9 are supported by his character claim in verse 10. Brian J. Dodd, "Christ's Slave, People Pleasers and Galatians 1:10," *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996): 93. See also Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 79.

²⁰BAGD suggests that πείθω can be either translated "persuade" (cf. Acts 18:4; 19:8; 28:23; 2 Cor. 5:11) or "strive to please" (cf. Matt. 28:14; Acts 12:20; 14:19; 2 Macc. 4:45). BAGD, *Lexicon*, 639. Burton holds the later translation to be true here. He states that the present tense, by reason simply of the meaning of the word and the idea of action in progress suggested by the tense, has the meaning, "to seek the favor of." Burton, *Galatians*, 30-31.

I, however, hold the former translation ("persuade") to be true in this verse in agreement with Rudolf Bultmann in his discussion of the word in TDNT. The two questions in verse 10 are not parallels (as Burton says they are). The first question is in reference to authentic apostolic preaching. Thus, the answer to the first question, "whom am I trying to persuade?" must be "men." The second question, not parallel to the first, answers the different objection that Paul speaks to please men. Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume VI (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 2.

²¹Present contrary to fact conditional sentence. Dodd proposes that the word order of Χριστοῦ δοῦλος is emphatic, unique in Paul (elsewhere the words are transposed: cf. Rom. 1:1; 14:18; 1 Cor. 7:22; Phil. 1:1), and probably polemical. Thus the phrase should be understood as, "Christ is my master and I am controlled by no one or nothing else." Dodd, "Christ's Slave," 98-99.

²²There is considerable debate over whether to read γάρ or the variant δέ. Longenecker argues that the variant reading, δέ, is the better reading. It is supported by P⁴⁶ &* A Byzantine syr cop^{bo}. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 20,22. Hans Dieter Betz adds that the δέ would certainly be correct Pauline style (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1; 2 Cor. 8:1). Betz, *Galatians*, 56.122. Charles Ellicott also concurs that the δέ should be read instead of the γάρ because Paul is here carrying out further his previous remarks. He is not explaining them or proving them (which would

preached by me is not from man;

- 12) For²⁵ I²⁶ did not receive it from man nor was I taught (it); rather (I received it) through the revelation of Jesus Christ²⁷.

necessitate the use of γάρ). Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859), 11-12.

However, there is stronger evidence contextually (not internally, unfortunately) to keep the γάρ as it appears in the text. Burton maintains that the γάρ is probably resumptive in force, marking a return to the main thought of the superhuman authority of the gospel after the partial digression of verse 10. Burton, *Galatians*, 36. Lightfoot also gives this as a plausible answer to the problem. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 79-80. Dodd suggests that the γάρ further grounds the gospel and adds to Paul's character assertion (verse 10) the divine origin of his message. Dodd, "Christ's Slave," 93. Martyn adds that γάρ has its usual force as an inferential conjunction. Paul's freedom from the need to please his audience and his new identity as the slave of Christ, has its ground in the gospel itself. Martyn, *Galatians*, 141. It also seems odd to me to "break the string" of γάρ's in verses 10-13 by the replacement of γάρ with δέ here in verse 11. Paul is linguistically building here.

KJV follows the former (δέ) suggestion. RSV and NRSV translate the γάρ as "for." NIV and God's Word simply ignore and do not translate either γάρ nor δέ.

²³The clause γνωρίζω ὑμῖν, or a comparable expression, is used elsewhere by Paul to introduce new and important points (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1). Silva, *Explorations*, 152, no. 23. Here, the important point introduced is the thesis statement for Paul's epistle.

²⁴Prolepsis has occurred here. One would expect the ὅτι at the beginning of the phrase, but τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ is placed before it for emphasis.

²⁵Again, the γάρ acts as a grounding conjunction. Paul now states the ground on which he knows (and also wishes the Galatians to know) that his gospel is not to be measured by human norms of what might constitute "gospel." Martyn, *Galatians*, 142-143.

²⁶Emphatic use of the personal pronoun.

²⁷There is much debate among scholars as to whether to take Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as a subjective or an objective genitive. In other words, the question is, is Jesus Christ the revealer (subjective genitive) or is He the revealed (objective genitive)? Longenecker maintains that δι' ἀποκαλύψεως should be understood in the sense of means and Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive. He states that R. Bring also takes this view. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 24. Taking "Jesus Christ" as a subjective genitive would naturally stress the divine origin of Paul's gospel.

Longenecker and Bring are in the minority, however, for most scholars assert (as do I)

II. Limits, Structure, and Style of the Unit

A. Limits

Galatians 1:1-12 is what can be referred to as the "prologue" of the epistle to the Galatians.²⁸ The prologue can be divided into three sections: 1. The salutation (1:1-5). 2. The occasion for writing/issues at stake (*Exordium*) (1:6-10). 3. The thesis statement (1:11-12).²⁹ Each section will be discussed individually below.

The salutation in Paul's epistle is in line with the conventional letter-writing style of the day. The salutation is set apart from the rest of the letter by several obvious characteristics. Paul begins the letter with his name (vs. 1), an identification of his addressees (vs. 2), and a greeting (vs. 3)³⁰. Paul also refers to those who are in support of him writing the letter (vs. 2), expands

that Jesus Christ is the One who is revealed, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ being an objective genitive. A great clue which supports Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive is the context. In Gal. 1:16, Paul says that God was pleased "to reveal His Son in me." Paul seems to be explaining verse 12 more clearly here in verse 16. Paul explicitly states that Jesus Christ is the object of God's act of revealing. Paul's receipt of the gospel is the result of God's act.

In addition, elsewhere in Paul's writing, he views God the Father as the source of revelation. When Paul expresses the subject of the verb ἀποκαλύπτω, it is always God (1 Cor. 2:10; Gal. 1:16; Phil. 3:15). Paul also uses the phrase ἀποκάλυψις κυρίου two times (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7). In these two passages, the reference is not to a message from Jesus but rather to the Second Coming, when Jesus Himself is revealed. Silva, *Explorations*, 64-68. Burton, *Galatians*, 41-42. Martyn, *Galatians*, 144.

²⁸See John Bligh, *Galatians: A Discussion of St. Paul's Epistle* (London: St. Paul Publications, 1969), 39.

²⁹See divisions proposed by Longenecker. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 1-25.

³⁰Letters in Near Eastern antiquity were regularly introduced by the formula: 'X to Y: greetings.' The introductions to the various New Testament letters show the same pattern, including the letters of Paul. One or more of the three elements (the author, the addressee, the greetings) were at times variously amplified as was appropriate to the occasion. Here Paul amplifies the first and the third elements of the salutation. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1982), 71.

the greeting by the insertion of an early Christian confession (vs. 4), and even adds a doxology (vs. 5).³¹ This is one of Paul's longer salutations due to his emphasis on his apostleship and the salvific work of Jesus Christ. With these two emphases, Paul, at the very beginning, highlights the central theme of his letter.³²

The section which follows the salutation is the occasion for writing/issues at stake, also called the *exordium* by Longenecker³³ (1:6-10). An *exordium* is the introduction of a speech in which the speaker tries to make his audience well-disposed, attentive and receptive. Cicero's *De inventione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* give the following rules for the *exordium*:

A speaker can win the goodwill of his listeners by referring to his own acts and services without arrogance. He can also arouse hostility against his opponents by accusing them of criminal activities. Further he can praise the wisdom and courage of his audience without excessive flattery. The attention of the audience is raised by emphasizing the great weight of the case. The willingness to listen is won by briefly and clearly explaining the essence of the case.

An *exordium* should not be too general, but should be adapted to the occasion and be clearly connected with the other parts of the speech, first of all with the *narratio*, which immediately follows.³⁴

³¹The doxology itself is unique among the salutations of Paul. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 1,10.

³²Normally Paul includes a "thanksgiving" in his salutations. David Cook proposes that perhaps Paul included the doxology as a substitute for the thanksgiving. In any case, the regular thanksgiving is omitted because the specific epistolary situation did not permit it. David Cook, "Notes and Studies: The Prescript as Programme in Galatians," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992), 511-512. Martyn adds that Paul was unable to thank God for the Galatian churches due to the situation, so he caused *them* to thank God for their deliverance in Jesus Christ with the doxology climactically bringing them into God's presence by inviting them to utter the word "Amen!" Martyn, *Galatians*, 106.

³³Longenecker, *Galatians*, 12.

³⁴Joop Smit, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: A Deliberative Speech," *New Testament Studies* 35 (January 1989), 2,9.

Galatians 1:6-10 precisely fits Cicero's description and rules for the *exordium*. In verses 6-7a, Paul first brings his audience to a state of alarm by informing them that they are deserting God. At the same time, Paul states his subject: the gospel. In verses 7b-9 Paul arouses hostility against his opponents by accusing them of subverting the gospel of Christ. He further specifies his subject in a negative way by saying that their preaching runs counter to the true gospel and emphasizes this with the use of a double curse. In verse 10 Paul refers to his own acts and services without arrogance ("If I were still striving to please men, then I would not be a servant of Christ." The implied message is: I am *not* striving to please men because I am a servant of Christ.)³⁵

The final section of the prologue is the thesis statement (1:11-12). There are dissenting opinions among scholars as to whether 1:11-12 stands by itself as a thesis statement or whether it is part of a larger section which continues to 2:21. The latter view is held by Joachim Jeremias³⁶. He (as does J. Christiaan Beker³⁷) views 1:11-12 as the first part of an extended chiasmus that runs throughout the entire body of Galatians. I agree with Longenecker who holds the former view. Longenecker states that there are, of course, common themes that run throughout 1:11-2:21. But the structure of this material seems better highlighted by the two epistolary disclosure formulae of 1:11 and 1:13, and better described by rhetorical argumentative modes of *narratio* (1:11-2:14) and *propositio* (2:15-21). Therefore, he concludes that 1:11-12

³⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

³⁶Longenecker, *Galatians*, 21.

³⁷*Ibid.*

functions as the thesis statement for the autobiographical elaboration that follows in 1:13-2:14.³⁸ Galatians 1:11-12 also serves as a transition from the prologue to the following section of the epistle.

B. Structure

The structure of the salutation (1:1-5), as stated above, is quite similar to the usual structure of the letters written during New Testament times. However, aspects of the structure of the salutation in 1:1-5 are different than any other salutation that Paul wrote. What is highly noticeable is the absence of any type of commendation of the churches or thanksgiving to God for them (cf. Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Phil. 1:3-8; Col. 1:1-8; et al.).³⁹ Also noticeable is the addition of the doxology into the salutation (1:5) which is the only such occurrence in a salutation by Paul.⁴⁰

It is here in the salutation that Paul begins his defense of his apostleship. In fact, the theme of the first part of Galatians is Paul's strong assertion that he had been immediately called

³⁸*Ibid.*, 21-22.

³⁹J.B. Lightfoot states that the abrupt language in 1:2 is remarkable. Elsewhere Paul adds some words of commendation (eg. 1 Thess 1:1: "...in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."). The omission of any expression of praise in addressing the Galatians shows the extent of their apostasy. Paul is dealing with a wayward people. They have erred like children and must be chastised like children. Rebuke may prevail where reason will be powerless. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 64,73.

It is interesting to note, however, that Luther in his lectures on Galatians in 1535 takes Paul's words to be a paternal or even maternal gentle rebuke. He sees no harsh language or attack--just a mild rebuke. I do not agree with Luther in his assessment. The tone and context of Galatians does not support him. Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works, Volume 26, Lectures on Galatians, 1535* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 43-44.

⁴⁰In fact, this is the only appearance of the word δόξα in Galatians. Cook, "Notes and Studies," 518.

by Jesus Himself to his apostleship, a calling which included his equally immediate entrusting with the gospel.⁴¹ In the very first sentence of his epistle Paul is expanding the normal structure common to epistles in a peculiar way. First of all, the designation ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, as discussed above, is very abrupt. Secondly, Galatians is one of only two epistles (the other being Romans) where Paul mentions the Resurrection in the greeting of a letter.⁴² At the outset, Paul is reminding his readers of the central event in redemptive history.⁴³ Third, the ἀπόστολος title is qualified in unusual fullness:

οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
καὶ Θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.⁴⁴

Paul denies that his apostleship had a human source or that it had come to him by human agency. Rather, Paul is an apostle through Jesus Christ and God the Father. It is interesting to note Paul's use of the second διὰ in 1:1. He includes both Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ and Θεοῦ πατρὸς under the same preposition. In doing this, Paul expresses with greater emphasis the directness of his divine commission. The channel of his authority (διὰ) coincides with its source (ἀπό).⁴⁵

Paul not only expands on his apostleship in the salutation of Galatians. In verse 4 Paul expands also on who Jesus Christ is and what He has done:

⁴¹Cook, "Notes and Studies," 513. See Acts 9:1-9

⁴²Paul does not mention the Resurrection again in Galatians. Martyn suggests that perhaps either the false teachers in Galatia had left intact the doctrine of the Resurrection or Paul is shifting the center of his apocalyptic perspective almost totally to the cross. Martyn, *Galatians*, 85.

⁴³Silva, *Explorations*, 170-171.

⁴⁴Cook, "Notes and Studies," 512-513.

⁴⁵Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 72.

τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέληται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Here Paul expands his customary bestowal of grace and peace (verse 3) with a two-fold pronouncement about Jesus' act (He gave Himself up...) and intention (in order that He might deliver us from the present evil age...). In his reference to the "present evil age,"⁴⁶ Paul is implying that there is another age, and indeed, from writings and traditions of his time, we know that there was a conceptual frame of reference positing two ages. It is a scheme which is fundamental to apocalyptic thought.⁴⁷ Hans Dieter Betz adds that the concept of τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ stems from Jewish apocalypticism, where we have the juxtaposition of "this age" (ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος) and the "age to come" (ὁ αἰὼν μέλλων).⁴⁸ The hallmark of "the present evil age" is the demonic power of sin which enslaves man. Christ gave Himself up so that we would indeed be delivered from this age of sin so that we can be ushered into the "age which is to come." It is undeniable that the cross of Christ stands at the heart of the epistle to the Galatians. Here, the crucifixion is presented as Christ's handing over of himself.⁴⁹

Thus we see in the salutation of Galatians Paul setting out the two main issues that he will deal with in the letter: the nature of his apostleship and the nature of the Christian gospel.

⁴⁶ὁ αἰῶν οὗτος is the equivalent to Paul's τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ and always has a negative sense in Paul's writings (cf. Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6,8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4)

⁴⁷Martyn, *Galatians*, 97-98. He goes on to draw on rabbis of a slightly later time than Paul who spoke explicitly of "this age" and of "the coming age." Both of these expressions are also found in the synoptic gospels (cf. Matt. 12:32).

⁴⁸Betz, *Galatians*, 42, no. 58.

⁴⁹Cook, "Notes and Studies," 515-516.

Against the ones who were stirring up his converts to think otherwise, Paul enlists the support of, first, "all the brothers with me" (verse 2), and then a confession drawn from the liturgy of the early church (verse 4).⁵⁰

Seemingly, Paul could not find anything to commend the Galatians for or any reason to thank God for them, so he moves, quite abruptly and quickly, into the *exordium* or his occasion for writing/issues at stake. Paul begins with a conventional expression of rebuke (verse 6a, θαυμάζω ὅτι)⁵¹ which is followed by a statement stating the cause for the rebuke (verse 6b). Ciampa puts it nicely: "Paul gives his Galatian readers a rhetorical slap on the face the moment he finishes the ἀμῆν of his doxology."⁵² Paul then disassociates the gospel from the message of the errorists (verses 6b-7a) and defines the true gospel in terms of its relational uniqueness (verses 7b-9). In the process, Paul pronounces a double curse on anyone who would preach otherwise (verses 8-9). Finally, he disclaims any attempt to seek merely human approval in this matter and insists that as a servant of Christ his only desire is to please not man, but God (verse

⁵⁰Longenecker, *Galatians*, 10. Martyn also writes concerning this early Christian confession. "From the use of similar formulas by Paul (Rom. 4:25; 8:32; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25) it is evident that the confession has two basic elements: an affirmation of Christ's death and a prepositional phrase pointing to the significance of that death or to the persons for whom it was enacted. Another piece of evidence that shows that this is a confessional formula is Paul's use of the plural "sins." He frequently uses the word "sin," but it occurs only four times in the plural: the first is in a sentence Paul explicitly identifies as an early Christian confession (1 Cor. 15:3), the second is in the context of that confession (1 Cor. 15:17), the third functions as a plural adjective modifying a plural noun (Rom. 7:5), and the fourth is in the text under discussion (Gal. 1:4). Paul only speaks of Jesus as having died for *sins* when he is quoting traditional formulas." Martyn, *Galatians*, 89.

⁵¹The rebuke section of Galatians conforms quite closely in its epistolary structure to the θαυμάζω sections of Greek letters of the day. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 11.

⁵²Roy E. Ciampa, *The Presence and Function of Scripture in Galatians 1 and 2* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 317.

10).⁵³

In the *exordium* (1:6-10), as in the salutation, the two main themes of Galatians once more arise: the apostleship of Paul and the gospel of Christ. Here Paul states his astonishment that the Galatians are going against both! They are abandoning God and they are deserting Him⁵⁴ for a so-called gospel that does not even exist; Paul calls it "another gospel, which is not another gospel." By saying that there neither is nor can be any other gospel, Paul prepared his readers for the next logical step taken at the end of verse 7: any different message can only be a perversion of the one real gospel. This statement both introduces and justifies the subsequent curse.⁵⁵

Paul's opponents were definitely succeeding in causing trouble (ταράσσοντες); however, they would pay the price for it--they would have ἀνάθεμα upon them. Stressing the importance of the matter, Paul expresses a double curse. After this twice-repeated curse, Paul rather emotionally interjects two somewhat defiant questions: Am I now persuading men or God? The answer is "men." Paul has been speaking of the gospel of Christ which he and his brothers preached to the Galatians. He was persuading them with the words of the Gospel. The second question was aimed at those accusing Paul of being a people pleaser: Am I seeking to

⁵³Longenecker, *Galatians*, 13.

⁵⁴That is, God (not Paul). In Paul's letters, the Greek participle ὁ καλῶν, "he who calls," virtually functions as a name for God (1 Thess. 2:12; 5:24; Rom. 9:12). Paul never uses καλέω with himself or any other person as the subject. In Paul's vocabulary, this verb does not mean "to speak to someone directly, so as to summon him." It refers consistently to God's creative act of summoning into existence things that have previously not existed. Martyn, *Galatians*, 108-109. Also Burton, *Galatians*, 20.

⁵⁵Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994), 29-30.

please men? Paul gives the answer: No way! There is no way that the apostle Paul, the servant of Christ, could be a "man pleaser."

Finally, in the thesis statement (1:11-12) the two themes of Galatians come together once again. The gospel which he is preaching is not from man, nor was it a product of his own imagination. It came by means of the revelation of Jesus Christ, through the personal appearance to him of the risen and ascended Jesus (Acts 9:1-9).⁵⁶ If Jesus Christ had thus revealed Himself to Paul, this seals his argument that he is a true apostle of Jesus Christ. Yet this is not quite enough for Paul. He goes on (through 2:14) to give a rather large autobiographical sketch to argue his point even further.

John Bligh gives an interesting explanation of the structure of the prologue of Galatians. He proposes that the structure is built symmetrically (chiastically) and centers upon the doxology in verse 5:

⁵⁶There is much debate among scholars regarding the revelation that Paul received and the apparent discrepancy between the verse under discussion, where Paul says that he received the gospel not through teaching, but by revelation, and 1 Cor. 15:1-3, where Paul states that he received his gospel from tradition. Betz simply states that the parallels (Acts 9, 22, and 26 as well as 1 Cor. 15) cannot be harmonized with Galatians 1. Betz, *Galatians*, 63.

Silva offers a better solution. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul appeals to those central events of the gospel (the death and resurrection of Christ) that he would have heard about even before his conversion. Even the basic Christian understanding of those events, that they happened "for our sins," was shared by all believers, and it would not make much sense if Paul would deny that he was a recipient of tradition with regard to that understanding. These elements, Silva maintains, were not in dispute among the Galatians. The debate was rather on how those features affected the Gentiles' relationship to Judaism. What is in view in Galatians is the Pauline message of what the truth of the gospel means for Gentiles, namely, that they are not to be circumcised or otherwise come under the tutelage of the Mosaic economy. This was the aspect of the gospel message that Paul could not have received from human teaching. It was revealed to him directly by God Himself through Christ's personal appearance to him. Silva, *Explorations*, 157-158.

- A Paul is an apostle of Christ, sent not by men but by God (1:1-2)
- B A blessing for the Galatians (1:3)
- C Summary of the gospel of Christ (1:4)
- D Doxology: *Glory be to God* (1:5)
- C¹ Warning against defection from the gospel of Christ. There is no other gospel (1:6-7)
- B¹ A curse upon false teachers, however exalted (1:8-9)
- A¹ Paul is a servant of Christ, taught the gospel by Christ himself; he pleases not man but God (1:10-12)⁵⁷

Bligh defends the structure he proposes by explaining that in this introductory section, Paul introduces the main themes that will be elaborated on in the following chapters. In A and A¹ Paul affirms the authenticity of his apostolic commission and of the gospel which he has preached. He received from God, not from men, the office and duty of preaching this particular gospel and no other. He does not seek his own glory in his apostolic ministry. To emphasize this, Paul attributes all glory to God in the center of the section (D). In B and B¹ he uses his apostolic authority to bless the Galatians and to curse anyone who attempts to overturn their faith. Finally, in C and C¹ Paul repeats in summary form the gospel of Christ and warns the Galatians not to go over to any other "gospel."⁵⁸

It would be nice if the structure of Galatians 1:1-12 fit so nicely into a chiasmic package such as Bligh claims. However, A and A¹ are the only strong match. Bligh is stretching with the remaining two pairs. What Bligh calls a blessing in verse 3 is not really a blessing at all.

⁵⁷Bligh, *Galatians*, 49.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 49-50.

It is the normal greeting of an epistle written in that day. It was not meant to bless but to greet. C and C¹ similarly do not match well. A summary of the gospel and a warning against defection from the gospel are not exactly opposites. Unfortunately, the chiasm simply does not work.

C. Style

The style of writing that Paul uses in 1:1-12 is both apologetic and polemical. Paul defends himself against accusations (1:10), but he also takes the offensive in accusing his opponents in Galatia of perverting the gospel (1:7).⁵⁹ Paul continually defends his apostolic authority in this section (1:1,11-12), yet he also strikes out against those who would preach another gospel (1:8-9).

Paul's style is also characterized by an element of haste. From the very outset, Paul throws us into the main thought of the epistle. This reflects the extreme urgency and vital importance of the subject matter. It is almost as if Paul simply could not wait any longer to say what he had in mind. We see Paul's sense of urgency again in verses 6-7. Paul dives right into the issues at hand: the gospel is being perverted, you Galatians are falling away from God. As Paul Nadim Tarazi states, "What we sensed in the greeting formula regarding the urgency and vital importance of the topic dealt with in this letter is thus strikingly confirmed by the fact that Paul literally encapsules his entire message to the Galatians in these five verses (verses 6-10)."⁶⁰ Indeed time was of the essence since the Galatians were "turning away *so quickly*" from God and His gospel (verse 6).

⁵⁹Longenecker, *Galatians*, 11-12.

⁶⁰Tarazi, *Galatians*, 19,27.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul also reveals the strong emotions he feels toward the believers in Galatia and the situation that they had gotten themselves into (not only here in 1:1-12 but in the whole epistle). Paul does not hide his feelings of frustration for his readers, nor does he hide his anger toward his opponents (especially later in the epistle). Yet, the letter is written in an orderly way. The epistle is written with intense feeling but as an objective and factual exposition of faith in Christ in opposition to the "gospel perverters."⁶¹

III. Genre and Settings

A. Genre

There is considerable debate in scholarly circles regarding the literary genre of Paul's epistle to the Galatians. Longenecker, Fung, and especially Brinsmead all give extensive accounts of the arguments.⁶² One view that several recent studies have proposed is that Galatians is to be viewed as belonging to the "apologetic letter" genre. Hans Dieter Betz is the main proponent of this view. He states,

The apologetic letter, such as Galatians, presupposes the real or fictitious situation of the court of law, with jury, accuser, and defendant. In the case of Galatians, the addressees are identical with the jury, with Paul being the defendant, and his opponents the accusers. This situation makes Paul's Galatian letter a self-apology, delivered not in person but in a written form.⁶³

⁶¹Ragnar Bring, *Commentary on Galatians* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 7.

⁶²See Longenecker, *Galatians*, ci-cv; Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 28-32; Bernard Hungerford Brinsmead, *Galatians--Dialogical Response To Opponents* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 37-56.

⁶³Betz, *Galatians*, 24.

The main problem with Betz's theory that Galatians is a part of the apologetic letter genre, as Fung points out, is that there is no evidence of this type of letter from antiquity.⁶⁴ There are also other points of criticism which argue that the whole epistle to the Galatians cannot be part of the apologetic letter genre. However, Fung quotes W.A. Meeks in saying that "apologetic letter" is a designation which can only be applied to Galatians 1-2. The whole of the epistle to the Galatians does not fit one rhetorical genre.⁶⁵ I concur with Meeks and his assessment of Galatian's literary genre. Galatians 1-2 (which includes the passage under discussion) does read as part of an apologetical letter, at least in the technical sense.

The obvious question, then, must be raised: So what? Does the view that Galatians 1:1-12 is part of an apologetical letter genre affect the way one interprets the passage? Certainly knowledge of the genre of a passage will affect the interpretation since it is part of the overall context. There is no exception here in Galatians 1:1-12. The apologetic tone is noticeable throughout the passage as noted above.

It is interesting to note that the nature of the direct references to the opponents, the defensive statements, and references to the Galatians themselves indicates that the letter confronts the opponents' theology, though the letter as a whole is also written to the Galatians.⁶⁶ There are also particular phrases in Galatians, and specifically in the passage under discussion, that suggest that Paul is presenting a case and demanding a decision in his favor. Galatians 1:8,9 use a

⁶⁴Fung, *Galatians*, 30.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 32, no. 27.

⁶⁶Brinsmead, *Galatians*, 46-47.

double curse--a known rhetorical feature in "apologetic speech."⁶⁷

B. Historical Setting

It is very difficult to give a clear definition as to where the recipients of the letter lived. I will not delve into the different theories of Galatian recipients. However, it is possible to reconstruct the relationship that Paul had with the churches of Galatia prior to the writing of the epistle. His initial stay in the area was in part connected with a physical ailment, the details of which are rather obscure. The Galatians warmly received Paul and accepted him as an "angel of God, as Christ Jesus." They were prepared to make great sacrifices to tend to his needs (4:13-15). During that initial stay Paul preached the gospel to them and they responded with much enthusiasm.⁶⁸ Additional information that we have from Acts 13:14-14:23 makes it likely that the churches were located in some of the cities in the southern part of the Galatian province, such as, perhaps, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch.

Sometime after his first visit to Galatia, others arrived in Galatia and began to advocate a different message. In addition to preaching Jesus Christ, they urged that the predominantly Gentile congregations to adopt the Jewish practice of circumcision in order to secure themselves a place among the people of God. There is also some word of the observance of special days, presumably those of the Jewish sacred calendar (4:10). Perhaps even food-restrictions would also have figured in the new teaching.⁶⁹ Many Galatians obviously responded in a positive manner

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁸See historical data given by Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 4.

⁶⁹F.F. Bruce, *Galatians*, 19.

to these "infiltrators."

There is considerable debate as to whom these "infiltrators" really were. Charles Cousar gives a helpful, concise listing of the most prominent arguments:

1. They were Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, representatives of a circumcision party within that church and claiming the support of James. They argued that the ceremonial laws were still in force and attacked Paul's renegade tendencies in preaching a radical message of freedom.
2. They were Jewish Christians, but with no specific support from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Paul's preaching was adequate as far as it went, but needed supplementing by the requirement of circumcision. By gaining converts from otherwise uncircumcised Christians, they avoided harassment from zealous fellow-Jews.
3. They were Jewish Christians of gnostic persuasion, who did not care about the law as such and operated in total independence of the Jerusalem church. The advocacy of circumcision and calendar observances (4:10) developed out of the syncretistic character of their religion.
4. They were not Jews at all, but Gentile Christians. They felt that Paul's preaching, in line with the practice of the church at Jerusalem, had initially included circumcision. But under pressure Paul had changed his message. Thus they had to take up the cause of Judaism out of loyalty to the Jerusalem leaders.
5. The opposition was composed of two groups. One group included judaizing activists who urged submission to the law; the other was made up of radicals of the opposite stripe, spiritualists who felt themselves exempt from moral issues. Paul addressed the former group in the first four-and-a-half chapters of the letter and the latter group in the final chapter-and-a-half.⁷⁰

Each theory proposed above derives its data from some clues in the text of Galatians yet depends (sometimes heavily) on speculation. Each theory also has difficulty explaining all the data. Historically, theories one or two have been viewed as correct by the church. Cousar agrees with theory two above. Fung does not find any of the above interpretations as really convincing

⁷⁰Cousar, *Galatians*, 5.

so he simply states that the Galatian heretics were Judaizers (no further explanation given).⁷¹ Finally, one must simply state that it is unknown exactly who the "trouble makers" that Paul refers to in Galatians were. We do know at least portions of what they were teaching: that those who followed Paul's teaching didn't have the "full" gospel. They stressed that other requirements (circumcision, observance of Jewish special days, etc.) needed to be followed to become a member of God's elect. It was a perversion of the gospel, in any sense, and such teaching was indeed apostasy from Christ. Hence, no matter whom its propagator might be, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.⁷²

Herman Ridderbos gives further data on the historical setting of the epistle to the Galatians. He correctly proposes that these churches were among the first that Paul formed. This explains, then, why they retained his love and care in a special sense (as seen in the epistle). That the Galatians were especially vulnerable to the Jewish danger, and therefore were easily affected by Judaizing influences, is evident from the account of their establishment. Further, even taking into account the severe tone of the letter, there is a very cordial relationship between the apostle and the churches. (cf. 4:12ff.)⁷³

C. Literary Setting

Much has already been said regarding the literary setting of Galatians 1:1-12. A few additional comments will be discussed here.

⁷¹Fung, *Galatians*, 7.

⁷²Bruce, *Galatians*, 32.

⁷³Ridderbos, *Galatians*, 31.

From the prologue (1:1-12), the rest of the epistle flows quite naturally. It is here in each of the three "sub-sections" of the prologue (salutation, *exordium*, and thesis statement) that the two themes of Galatians are continually brought up and discussed. Paul extends the normal form of the salutation by focusing on his own apostleship and on who Jesus Christ was and what He did. The *exordium* tells of Paul's problem with the Galatians with force and abruptness. The Galatians are departing from his teaching and hence from the gospel of Christ. It is a serious problem that needs to be faced. The thesis statement acts as the "transition" into the body of the letter, connecting with the autobiographical material in 1:13-2:14. Once again, Paul's apostleship and Christ's gospel go "hand-in-hand."

Longenecker also points out that it cannot be denied that chiasmus is a factor in Galatians and must be treated seriously in the exegesis of at least some portions of the letter. One of those portions is the very first verse (1:1) and *perhaps* also the prologue itself as discussed above. Chiasmus was just one of the many rhetorical devices which were available to Paul. Longenecker warns, however, that the chiasmus must not be treated in too hamfisted a manner and cannot be understood in any scholastic or rigid fashion.⁷⁴

One further literary characteristic that should be discussed is Paul's insistence in 1:1-12 and in the rest of the epistle of the singularity of the gospel. The salutation immediately focuses on Jesus Christ and Paul's apostleship (which has its source in "Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead"). As Beverly Roberts Gaventa states, the common "story" to which Paul refers is one about Jesus Christ and His actions, in accordance with God's will and

⁷⁴Longenecker, *Galatians*, cxiii-cxiv.

as a result of God's power, as Savior.⁷⁵ Paul's focus on the singularity of the gospel becomes more focused in 1:6-10. The Galatians have turned away to "another" gospel, yet this is not another gospel at all because there is no gospel but the gospel of Jesus Christ! Finally, 1:11-12 also insist on the singular and exclusive nature of the gospel's claims. Paul reiterates his conviction that the gospel comes from God alone and that it demands singular and exclusive response. Paul illustrates his own singular response to the gospel in 1:16b-2:21.⁷⁶

IV. Concluding Thoughts

It is evident in the reading of Galatians 1:1-12 what Paul is stressing. Over and over it has been stated above the two themes of Galatians rising out of the prologue: the apostleship of Paul and the gospel of Jesus Christ. These themes Paul strikes in each of the three "sub-sections" of the prologue. These subjects are of intense importance to Paul. He cannot be moved from the truth--and the Galatians should not be moved either (and Paul is astonished that they were moved). Paul goes so far as to apply a curse to himself (and anyone else) if he ever spoke a "gospel" contrary to the true gospel that he had formerly given to them.

The effect that Paul intended in these verses was one of alarm. It is almost as if Paul is grabbing the Galatians and shaking them with his words. The same effect is felt by the modern reader of these words and can be reiterated in a sermon on the text. The gospel of Christ is not something to be taken lightly--it is salvation. It cannot be changed, neglected or ignored. We

⁷⁵Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Singularity of the Gospel: A Reading of Galatians," *Pauline Theology, Volume 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 154.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 154-155.

must fight for it (especially in our incredibly "anti-gospel" society today) and use it--not only as a defense against Satan's attempts to get us to fall, but also as a comfort of the hope that we have in Christ--the hope of eternal life and the deliverance from this present evil age.

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