

Paul

Outline of the Letter to the Galatians

Introduction (1: 1-11)

Praescriptio: opening formula, inc. Paul's credentials as true Apostle (1: 1-5)

Exordium: Amazement (1: 6-7) Anathema (1: 8-9) Transition (1:10-11)

Narratio (1: 12 - 2:14) Paul's Historic Call To Preach The Gospel

Paul's Gospel is not of human origin (1: 12-24)

Paul's Gospel is approved by leaders of the Jerusalem Church (2: 1-10)

Paul's Gospel challenged Peter's inconsistency at Antioch (2: 11-14)

Propositio (2: 15-21) Paul's Gospel Set Forth

Probatio (3: 1 - 4:31) In God's Plan Humanity Is Saved By Faith, Not Law

Proof 1: The Galatians' experience of first receiving the Spirit (3: 1-5)

Proof 2: Abraham's experience, & God's promises to him (3: 6-26)

Proof 3: Experience of Christians in baptism (3: 27-29)

Proof 4: Experience of Christians as children of God (4: 1-11)

Proof 5: Experience of Galatians in relationship with Paul (4:12-20)

Proof 6: The Allegory of Sarah and Hagar (4: 21-31)

Exhortatio (5: 1 - 6: 10)

Counsel: Preserve the freedom you have in Christ (5: 1-12)

Warning: Walk according to Spirit, not flesh (5: 13-26)

Advice: the right way to use Christian freedom (6: 1-10)

Postscriptio (6: 11-18)

Paul's signature, résumé, and farewell blessing

The Letter to the Galatians is an extremely vehement document, and you will have done well if, in your reading of it and the background to it, you have apprehended the reason for the urgent and committed tone of the writing.

As students of the New Testament, we labour under a recurring difficulty; we find ourselves unable to go back imaginatively to the time of its composition. Constantly we insert anachronisms into our thinking, and it is easy to see why: the very words we read and use have become the vehicles of developments never dreamed-of when the New Testament was writing. The certainties of Nicaea and Ephesus, let alone those of the First Vatican Council, were not there for Paul. In order to read him properly, we must return to a period before they were uttered. Paul ventures upon an unprecedented path in his Christian commitment. We must not read into his mind the thoughts of subsequent generations (many of which have been built on his faltering foundations) or take as given theories and formulae which will never be voiced for three, or fifteen, centuries after Paul's death. We are so sure that there is only one true way of saying things. Embarrassingly, it has to be our own way. But this is an illusion! Like us, Paul is struggling with the impossible task of saying the unsayable in merely human words. His words, and our reading of them, merely participate in this impossible enterprise. Finally, the only word that adequately expresses God is the Word.

Some Books

The most useful companion to the reading of the Pauline epistles is, in my humble opinion, a little paperback, less than 140 pages long: *Paul* by E P Sanders, in the series *Past Masters*, Oxford Paperbacks, ISBN 0-19-287679-1. The analysis of Paul's thoughts is cogent and easy to follow. I would recommend that you get hold of it, and read it aloud to someone else.

The same author gives you his controversial study in large SCM paperbacks, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* and *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. (You will perhaps have already consulted in theology his work *Jesus and Judaism*; you might also have taken note of the excellent workbook he produced with his wife Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, and the analysis of Jewish religion *Judaism, Practice and Belief 63BCE - 66CE*.)

For a fine full-scale commentary on Romans, Paul's principal work, John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* is another SCM paperback. The same author has an excellent small paperback in the Oxford Bible series, *Pauline Christianity*.

You might like to look at the short *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* by Krister Stendahl (Fortress Press) which is stimulating and easy to read; and an interesting sociologist's view is *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* by Gerd Theissen (T & T Clark).

Essay

“What precisely did Paul wish to establish in writing the *Letter to the Galatians*?”

I would point you before you begin to 1 Cor 7: 17-24 (read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest!) and Gal 6: 15, so that you don't waste time on trivial misconceptions or generalised statements which may well not be true. Marks, prizes, and favour will be abstracted from anyone who regurgitates tired and simplistic versions of Reformation Protestantism.

PS I am getting bad vibes from the use some of you are giving to the internet. I would remind you that an hour spent with a book recommended by your teachers is worth a great deal longer dogging out unsubstantiated sentences from unheard-of webbed personages.