

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Introduction

Historical Evidence

The authenticity and authorship of this Epistle has been testified to since Apostolic times by a continuous succession of witnesses. Clement of Rome (late 1st century), Ignatius (late 1st century), Polycarp (late 1st -early 2nd centuries), Hermas (c. 88-98), Barnabas' Epistle (c130), Justin Martyr (100-165), Melito (c 194), Athenagoras (2nd century), Irenaeus (c. 120-200), Clement of Alexandria (died c.215), Tertullian (160-220) – all these either alluded to or quoted from the Epistle. It is listed in the 2nd century Muratorian Canon and the anti-Christian polemical writer, Celsus (175-180), quoted from it. With so much sound historical evidence the substantiation by so called 'Textual Criticism' should be given as additional evidence, but with so many modern commentators, clever analysis of the Greek text is considered to be the principal evidence of authenticity and Pauline authorship.

Reason for Writing

1. To defend his entitlement to the status of 'Apostle'

Paul had not been among Jesus' party during Jesus' lifetime nor had ever met Jesus. He was, therefore not an apostle since he had not been instructed by the Lord nor had been sent out by him. The Galatians questioned Paul's right to apostleship and inferred that he was inferior to the original Twelve. Paul's reply was that he had been called directly by God through revelation. The Galatian Churches had been infiltrated by Christians of Jewish origin who wished to be completely Jewish and completely Christian and these had opposed Paul. These Judaeizers seemed to follow Paul wherever he went and much of his subsequent epistles is concerned with mitigating the evil consequences of their influence.

2. To articulate his Doctrine of Justification through Faith, not by Works

In chapters 2 & 3 Paul compares the sterility of the strictly legalistic approach to justification via Mosaic Law with the vital teaching of a gospel of salvation through faith in a living Christ. He compares a Jew to the son of Hagar, which is just about the ultimate insult that can be levelled at a Jew.

3. To give practical instruction derived from the Gospel

Paul urges the Galatians to hold fast to the freedom (from the slavery of the Law), but not to confuse freedom with license. He exhorts them to bear each other's burdens, to test their own actions and that they should not become weary of doing good. He reminds them that what one sows one reaps and instructs them to do good to all people.

Where and when written

The epistle is addressed to 'The Churches in Galatia' and there is much debate whether or not the churches of North or South Galatia were being written to. The various suggestions for the place of writing include, Ephesus, Macedonia, Thessalonica and Corinth. And dates range from 49 – 58. All commentators present hypotheses and so there is no way to prove date or place of writing.