

of wine to seal the contract made during the *Kiddushin* ceremony, Jesus drank a cup of wine at His final Passover Supper to seal the new covenant with the future church (Matt. 26:27-28). As the bridegroom gave a promissory gift to his betrothed in view of the upcoming wedding, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as a promissory gift to His betrothed in view of the future wedding (Eph. 1:13-14). As the bridegroom spent time preparing proper living quarters for his bride after the *Kiddushin* and before the *Nissu'in*, Jesus began preparing a place for His bride immediately after His ascension. Our home will be completed in time for the wedding feast when God, the Father, will give Jesus permission to bring His bride home (John 14:1-4). As the bride bathed in a special bath, symbolic of spiritual cleansing, prior to the wedding, the Church participates in a spiritually cleansing bath known as baptism (Acts 2:41; Rev. 7:14). As the bride spent time before the wedding ceremony preparing and storing household goods, the Church prepares and stores acts of righteousness (Matt. 6:20, Rev. 19:8).

As the bride did not know the hour of the groom's arrival, the Church does not know when Christ will return (Matt. 24:42). As the bridesmaids had wisely to stay alert for the groom's coming, the Church must wisely stay alert for Christ's coming (Matt. 25:1-13). As the groom's coming was heralded with a loud shout and a blast from the *shofar*, Christ's coming will be heralded with a loud shout and a trumpet blast (1 Thess. 4:16-18). As the wedding feast was held at the groom's home, the wedding feast of the Lamb will be held in heaven, the Groom's home. As the wedding was filled with joy, laughter and exuberant singing, the wedding feast of the Lamb will be filled with joy, laughter and exuberant singing (Rev. 19:6-7).¹⁶ As the bride's wedding clothing was made of a fine, beautiful fabric, the Church will wear the fine linen of righteous deeds (Rev. 19:7-8).¹⁷

What do all of these things mean to modern day believers? Most importantly, it means we have a future and a hope. As the Apostle Paul says, when we are "hard pressed on every side," when we are "perplexed," "persecuted," and "struck down," we still have a future and a hope (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Christ, our bridegroom, has pledged Himself to us, forever and ever. He finalized the contract of the new covenant with His blood. He is, even now, preparing a place for us and we will dwell there forever with Him. And, when all the preparations have been completed... when God, the Father, gives permission... Christ will come for us. We will feast at the table with Him... we will share a cup of celebratory wine... and we will finally know the meaning of true love.

Where Do You Come From? Cultural Confusion in Galatia and the United States— Galatians 1:18-24

Laura J. Hunt

An American soldier stationed in Europe tells the radio host, "I can't wait to get back to New York and have some *real* Italian pizza." An American tourist at Dover Castle negotiates a stone staircase worn by eight-hundred years of footsteps and whines, "They would never allow this back home." A Caucasian grandfather at his grandson's college graduation notices a group of African-American graduates and growls, "What are *they* doing here?" We are embedded in our culture. We are white, Hispanic or black. We are American, Chinese or Indian. We are man or woman. Each word represents a set of social expectations, norms that define how we think of ourselves and how we act with others. We interact within each of those cultures and then we 'shift gears' in order to communicate across social boundaries. But our identity defines those boundaries and gives us our place in our world.¹ The Galatians originally had a sense of identity as Greeks.² By becoming Christians, their boundaries changed.³ After Paul gave them the good news, he moved on. The Galatians were left to work out what their new identity might mean in practice. G. W. Hansen notes, "They may well have felt a loss of identity since their faith in Christ excluded them from both their pagan temples and from the Jewish synagogues." In this uncertain, undetermined state, they were vulnerable to anyone who offered them a more stable sense of identity. Hansen continues, "So they sought identification with the Jewish people to gain a sense of belonging to God's people."⁴ They thought, quite logically, that since Paul was a Jew and Jesus was a Jew, they should base their identity in Judaism.

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¹Erik Erikson describes identity as "a complex inner state that includes a sense of our individuality and uniqueness, as well as a sense of wholeness and continuity with the past and future"; cited in Jerry M. Burger, *Personality* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1997), p. 119.

²Scholars disagree on who exactly the Galatians were. The debate is summarized in Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), p. 189, n. 15.

³Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Early Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) writes, "Baptism is an initiation into an intentional community, a rite de passage that marks a transition from outsider to insider status" (p. 72); "In short, Christian baptism not only signaled passage from one population to another but generated a new form of identity" (p. 77).

⁴G. W. Hansen, "Letter to the Galatians," in *DPL*, p. 327.

¹⁶Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 671.

¹⁷G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 936.

Paul rebukes them for this shift in allegiance. The verses under consideration, Galatians 1:18–24, form part of Paul's autobiographical statements which he uses to prove his contention that the Galatians' new identity must be based not in Judaism, but in Christ.⁵

Paul Tells His Story:

¹⁹Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and I stayed with him for fifteen days; ¹⁹but I didn't see another of the apostles, except [I saw] James the brother of the Lord. ²⁰But the things I write to you, behold before God that I am not lying. ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²But I remained personally unknown to the communities of Judea [who are] in Christ; ²³but they only kept hearing, "Our former persecutor now proclaims the faith which he was once trying to destroy," ²⁴and they began to praise God because of me.

We begin our exegesis of the passage, listening midway through Paul's autobiographical details.⁶ He has already begun his argument and now continues by offering another proof that his identity (and therefore the Galatians' identity) was grounded primarily in Christ and not in Judaism.

The passage begins with the first of Paul's three uses of the word ἔπειτα, "then." This adverb separates his autobiography into three distinct sections and gives coherence to the narrative.⁷ He uses the constative aorist most of the time, conveying the idea of simple occurrence. He is just telling what happened.

He goes on in the rest of the verse to explain that the reason for his trip to Jerusalem was to meet with Peter. The meaning of the verb ἰσοροῦσα, a hapax legomena, is debated but is here translated "to meet with." This gives the sense that Paul and Peter conversed, but without strong implications of hierarchy of one over the other.

Paul describes the time spent with Peter as "fifteen days." It is interesting to note that whether this amount of time is considered long⁸ or short⁹ depends on the point the

⁵ B. R. Gaventa, "Galatians 1 and 2: Autobiography as Paradigm," *NovT* 28 (1986): 312 points out that "Paul is normally reluctant to discuss himself or his own experience, but here he enters into a 'deliberate and provoked retrospect' [quoting Paul W. Meyer] that is without parallel in his letters." Gaventa goes on to explain this anomaly as evidence that Paul is offering himself as an example of the kind of behavior that he expects from the Galatians. It seems to me that Paul was rather pointing out the Galatians that although he himself was a Jew, his behavior was no longer rooted in Judaism.

⁶ Although the timeline of Paul's life is disputed, there is general agreement that this passage refers to Paul's visit to Jerusalem in Acts 9:26–30; see Joe Morgado, Jr., "Paul in Jerusalem: A Comparison of His Visits in Acts and Galatians," *JETS* 37 (1994): 60; Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 90; Richard Longenecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 37.

⁷ According to James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), p. 71, "Then in verse 18 is the first of three (i. 18, 21; ii. 1), which are obviously intended to mark out in chronological sequence the most relevant events which followed his encounter with the risen Christ."

⁸ Certainly the implication of the next clause—and I stayed with him fifteen days—must be that the 'getting to know' was extensive" (Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 73).

⁹ Daniel C. Arichea, Jr. and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, UBS

commentator is making. I see it as short, in contrast with three years from verse 18, but agree with Dunn's conclusion: "The point is that it was long enough to get to know Peter well, but not long enough to be thoroughly instructed in his new faith."¹⁰

Paul goes on to deny that he saw any of the other apostles besides James, using the negative phrase οὐκ εἶδον ἐτ' μὴ, "I didn't see... except."¹¹ He continues to construct for the Galatians an identity which, although connected to Jerusalem, is not dependent on it. The concession in his account, seeing James, is minimized by the assemblage of negatives as well as the contrast of εἶδον with ἰσοροῦσα.¹²

Next, Paul uses an oath to ground the truth of his narration in God's witness.¹³ Whether this oath is evidence of Paul's opponents' argument is uncertain.¹⁴ We must be wary of the dangers of mirror-reading.¹⁵ But since his meetings with Peter and James would especially be subject to misunderstanding, one can imagine his strong desire to communicate clearly and be believed.

Handbook Series (New York: UBS, 1993), p. 24 insist that "The emphasis here is on the brevity of the visit; it would have been impossible for Paul to become a disciple of the Jerusalem apostles just by visiting Peter for such a short period of time."

¹⁰ Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 74.

¹¹ There is some disagreement over whether this construction includes James among the apostles. Dunn discusses the possibility that Paul is dropping "a hint of doubt regarding the apostleship of James, without being openly discourteous." But Dunn admits that he has no textual grounds for this position (*Galatians*, pp. 76–77).

¹² "He 'got to know' Peter; he did not even 'see' any of the other Jerusalem apostles" (Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 75).

¹³ Some see this as typical usage (Arichea and Nida, *Galatians*, p. 25) and others as surprising (Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 77–78). Samuel Ngewa, "Galatians," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. T. Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), p. 1416 sees it as an indication that "The fact that he was being misrepresented and the gospel distorted caused him pain." Paul does use oaths in some of his other letters to indicate the strength of his emotional involvement in the subject at hand (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23 and perhaps 11:31). But John Chrysostom sees it here as a type of judicial oath: "[Paul's] earnestness in his own vindication is as great as if he had to render an account of his deeds, and was pleading for his life in a court of justice" ("Homilies on Galatians," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. P. Schaff [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 13:13). There are other passages where Paul emphasizes his truthfulness on fairly unemotional topics (1 Tim. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:5).

¹⁴ As per Ngewa and Dunn, it is possible that Paul was passionate here because he was being misrepresented on this point. Even John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JNTS* 31 (1987): 87 believes that it is "virtually certain that the validity of his [Paul's] gospel and his apostleship was under attack." At the same time, however, Barclay goes on to note that "unfortunately it is difficult to be more precise about any particular 'charges' since, as we saw above, even quite detailed self-defense can be triggered off by a very few damaging innuendos."

¹⁵ There are many aspects of the opponents' message that we can know nothing about because Paul chose not to reply to them. There may also have been many points on which Paul and his opponents agreed but which are submerged by the polarizing effect of his polemic. Moreover... we must acknowledge the possibility that Paul's lengthy self-defense in Gal. 1–2 may not be a reply to a number of specific allegations (as is usually assumed), but may simply pick up almost incidental remarks about his personal credentials" (Barclay, "Mirror-Reading," p. 78).

The next *ἔπειτα* (“then”) introduces another event in Paul’s autobiography.¹⁶ His departure from Judea into Syria and Cilicia is Paul’s next proof that Christian identity is grounded in Christ rather than in Judaism. Here the important point is not so much where he went but that he did not stay in Judea. The result of his absence was that his relationships did not include the Judean Christians. He makes that point in verse 22, noting that the churches of Judea in Christ did not even personally know him. The translation “remained unknown” appropriately conveys the duration inherent in the periphrastic verb phrase.¹⁷ Dunn summarizes Paul’s thinking in this verse: “He could not have been dependent in any way (for his gospel or apostleship) on those who did not even know him personally.”¹⁸

The fact that Paul uses *ἐν Χριστῷ*, “in Christ,” here to describe these churches is particularly noteworthy. It is a phrase common to Paul and especially important in the book of Galatians. It is exactly here that Paul is rooting the Galatians’ identity in Christ. And the fact that the first time Paul uses the phrase is in conjunction with *ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Ἰουδαίας*, “the communities of Judea,” cannot be overlooked. Even the Jewish Christians have their new identity in Christ.

Paul now moves towards the conclusion of this section of his narration. In verse 23, he contrasts¹⁹ himself as persecutor and destroyer of the faith to himself as one who (as the churches keep hearing) now preaches it. The *μόνον ἀκούοντες ἤσαν*, “they only kept hearing,” emphasizes both the repetitiveness of the news, and, with *μόνον* at the beginning of the sentence, that knowledge of the change in Paul reached the Judean Christians only in reports.²⁰ He is not based in Jerusalem.

By beginning and ending this subordinate clause (*ὅτι*²¹ *Ὁ διώκων ἡμᾶς ποτε vūv εὐαγγελίζετα τὴν πίστιν ἢ ποτε ἐνόηθει*, “that, ‘Our former persecutor now proclaims the faith which he was once trying to destroy’”) with his persecution of the churches, Paul is drawing attention away from any righteousness that the Galatians (or the Jerusalem Christians) might be inclined to ascribe to him. Instead, he tells us that the result of the reports was that because of him²² the Judean Christians began to praise God.²³

¹⁶Paul moves back to the aorist, as he continues his narrative. Note also that here Paul uses *ἦλθον*, “went,” in contrast to his *ἀνῆλθον*, “went up,” in v. 18, the difference caused simply by geography. One goes *up* to Jerusalem, but simply goes to Syria and Cilicia.

¹⁷Translation is from J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 175.

¹⁸Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 80.

¹⁹The Greek allows him to emphasize this contrast by placing *ποτε vūv*, “formerly-now,” next to each other.

²⁰Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 83.

²¹There is some discussion about whether the *ὅτι* introduces a direct quotation. It seems likely, but it must then be, as F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 105 says, “not... the direct speech of those from whom the reports ultimately emanated, but the direct speech of those in Judea who received and disseminated the reports.”

²²Here the *ἐν ἐμοί* is translated as either a prepositional phrase indicating association or cause. Thus, they started to praise God *with me* (no examples found) or *because of me* (CEV, GNB, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NRSV, RSV). The ASV, KJV and NKJV all translate it *in me* which, although seemingly more literal, does not make a lot of sense. *Because of me* seems most likely since Paul has just given an elaboration of the reason for the praise in the previous verse.

²³The imperfect *ἔδοξαζον* could be translated in several ways, but given the nature of the story

Conclusion:

Paul uses this section of narration for his broader purpose in Galatians, to show that Judaism, although the source of some of the content of Christianity, is not the basis of a Christian’s identity. Paul is concerned with identity formation, the tension between indebtedness to and distance from Jerusalem, and the shared experience of Christ.²⁴

Unlike the Galatians, most of us have few problems detaching ourselves from Judaism. We may, however, have over-identified with our version of American Christianity. Are we so rooted in our culture that we forget to make choices that reflect our primary identity in Christ? When people interact with us, can they tell where we come from?

We must move away from our little bastions of American Christianity. We must learn how to reach cross-culturally, with an identity centered in Christ. I have to confess that I have no idea how to do this.

Hermas (2nd century) exhorts us,

So take care; as one living in a foreign land, do not prepare for yourself one thing more than is necessary to be self-sufficient... So instead of fields, buy souls that are in distress, as anyone is able, and visit widows and orphans... and spend your wealth and all your possessions, which you received from God, on fields and houses of this kind. For this is why the Master made you rich, so that you might perform these ministries for him.²⁵

A contemporary writer, Neil Cole, talks in *Organic Church* about an alcoholic who “accepts Jesus as a last desperate chance.... Within a short time, his wife and son come to Christ as well. What do you do next? You do *not* take him out of his community and add him to your church. You assume that a church is about to start here in this neighborhood.”²⁶

Are these some ways to apply Paul’s concerns here, today? Use our resources primarily to build God’s Kingdom? Plant churches in the culture in which they begin? Maybe—but I do not want to give up an identity centered in female white American Midwestern Christianity and trade it in for an identity founded on Hermas or Neil Cole. I do need to be open to ideas like these, however, as my church tries to reach out to our community. I must learn to reach across ethnic, racial and gender barriers to communicate with other Christians on the basis of our shared identity in Christ. And when I am moving outside of Christian circles I must avoid the extremes of imposing cultural Christianity on others, or adopting their culture in an effort to fit in.

So—where do you come from?

being told, ingressive imperfect seems best. As people heard about the change in Paul, they *began* (at that point) to praise God.

²⁴This... means that Paul replaces one bounded system (Judaism bounded by the law) with another (Christ); not a completely different one (Christ is the seed of Abraham), but one enlarged by relativizing the significance attached to the old boundary markers like circumcision.... Quite how he envisaged Christ’s own continuing personal existence is difficult for us to conceptualize, but the experiential note present in so many of his ‘in Christ’ formulations... implies at least a shared consciousness of Christ as a personal accepting presence which formed a primary bond for the first Christians and basis for their fellowship” (Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 82–83).

²⁵The Shepherd of Hermas, “*The Apostolic Fathers in English*,” trans. and ed. M. W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 243.

²⁶Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), p. 188.