

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

He did not know the hour of the groom's arrival, the Church does not know when He will return (Matt. 24:42). As the bridesmaids had wisely to stay alert for the coming, the Church must wisely stay alert for Christ's coming (Matt. 25:1-13). As the groom was heralded with a loud shout and a blast from the *shofar*, Christ's coming was 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 the groom's home. As the wedding was filled with joy, laughter and exuberant wedding feast of the Lamb will be filled with joy, laughter and exuberant (Rev. 19:6-7).<sup>16</sup> As the bride's wedding clothing was made of a fine, beautiful material, the Church will wear the fine linen of righteous deeds (Rev. 19:7-8).<sup>17</sup> All of these things mean to modern day believers? Most importantly, it means hope and a hope. As the Apostle Paul says, when we are "hard pressed on every side we are not perplexed," "persecuted," and "struck down," we still have a future and ever (1 Cor. 4:8-9). Christ, our bridegroom, has pledged Himself to us, forever and ever. The contract of the new covenant with His blood. He is, even now, preparing us and we will dwell there forever with Him. And, when all the preparations are completed... when God, the Father, gives permission... Christ will come for us. At the table with Him... we will share a cup of celebratory wine... and we will have the meaning of true love.

<sup>16</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 671.  
<sup>17</sup> Sale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 936.

## 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.<sup>1</sup> The Galatians originally had a sense of identity as Greeks.<sup>2</sup> By becoming Christians, their boundaries changed.<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup>Erik 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.

<sup>2</sup>Scholars 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.

<sup>3</sup>Luke 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).

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



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.<sup>5</sup>

#### Paul Tells His Story:

<sup>18</sup>Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and I stayed with him for fifteen days; <sup>19</sup>but I didn't see another of the apostles, except [I saw] James the brother of the Lord. <sup>20</sup>But the things I write to you, behold before God that I am not lying. <sup>21</sup>Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup>But I remained personally unknown to the communities of Judea [who are] in Christ; <sup>23</sup>but they only kept hearings. "Our former persecutor now proclaims the faith which he was once trying to destroy," <sup>24</sup>and they began to praise God because of me.

We begin our exegesis of the passage, listening midway through Paul's autobiographical details.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 ἰστροπῆσαι, *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 long<sup>8</sup> or short<sup>9</sup> depends on the point the

<sup>5</sup> 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 to the Galatians that although he himself was a Jew, his behavior was no longer rooted in Judaism.

<sup>6</sup> 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: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 90; Richard Longenecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> 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."

<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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 14, 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."<sup>10</sup>

Paul goes on to deny that he saw any of the other apostles besides James, using the negative phrase οὐκ εἶδον ἐτι μη, 'I didn't see... except.'<sup>11</sup> 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 ἰστροπῆσαι.<sup>12</sup>

Next, Paul uses an oath to ground the truth of his narration in God's witness.<sup>13</sup> Whether this oath is evidence of Paul's opponents' argument is uncertain.<sup>14</sup> We must be wary of the dangers of mirror-reading.<sup>15</sup> 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."

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> 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).

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

<sup>13</sup> 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).

<sup>14</sup> 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."

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup>

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 contrasts<sup>19</sup> himself as persecutor and destroyer of the faith to himself as one who (as the churches keep hearing) now preaches it. The μόνον ἀκούοντες ἦσαν, "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.<sup>20</sup> He is not based in Jerusalem.

By beginning and ending this subordinate clause (ὅτι<sup>21</sup> ὁ δῶκων ἡμᾶς ποτε vῶν εὐαγγελίζεσθαι τὴν πίστιν ἢ ποτε ἐπόρευε, "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 him<sup>22</sup> the Judean Christians began to praise God.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Paul moves back to the aorist, as he continues his narrative. Note also that here Paul uses ἦλθον, "went," in contrast to his ἀνήλθον, "went up," in v. 18, the difference caused simply by geography. One goes up to Jerusalem, but simply goes to Syria and Cilicia.

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

<sup>18</sup>Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup>The Greek allows him to emphasize this contrast by placing ποτε vῶν, "formerly-now," next to each other.

<sup>20</sup>Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 83.

<sup>21</sup>There 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."

<sup>22</sup>Here 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.

<sup>23</sup>The imperfect ἐδοξάζον 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 Christian's identity. Paul is concerned with identity formation, the tension between indebtedness to and distance from Jerusalem, and the shared experience of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

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 (2<sup>nd</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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."<sup>26</sup>

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 *begin* (at that point) to praise God.

<sup>24</sup>This... 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).

<sup>25</sup>The Shepherd of Hermas, "The Apostolic Fathers in English," trans. and ed. M. W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 243.

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



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