

GALATIANS: RF HANDOUT #2

Chronology of Events in the Growth of Belief in Jesus

(Dates are approximate; what is important for our purposes is the sequence of events, not the calendar year.)

1. ~ 28 A.D. > Pentecost
2. ~ 28 A.D. > Healing of lame man @ beautiful gate in temple; arrest of Peter and John
3. ~ 28 A.D. > Arrest of the Apostles / Gamaliel [28 A.D.]
4. ~ 29 A.D. > The stoning of Stephen / Paul [Saul] was involved / began a great persecution in Judaea and surrounding regions / persecution caused a dispersion of believing Jews to safer areas beyond the regions of Judaea and Samaria
5. ~ 32 A.D. > Paul's conversion / Paul a few days in Damascus
6. ~ 32-34 A.D. > Paul in Arabia
7. ~ 34 A.D. > Paul in Damascus again
8. ~ 35 A.D. > Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, a brief 15 days [interacted briefly with Barnabas, Peter, and James]
9. ~ 35 A.D. > Paul flees from plot to kill him; goes to Tarsus via Caesarea
10. ~ 35-40 A. D. > Peter evangelizes the Gentile God-fearer, Cornelius, a Roman centurion
11. ~ 35-44 A.D. > Paul (presumably) studies, teaches, and proclaims the gospel in Tarsus
12. ~ 35-42 A.D. > Jewish converts from Cyprus and Cyrene (who have themselves been evangelized by believing Jews fleeing the persecution in Judaea) come to Antioch in Syria and begin to evangelize Gentiles there.
13. ~ 43-44 A.D. > Barnabas goes to Antioch in Syria to teach and oversee the belief of the mixed Jewish-Gentile believing community in Antioch
14. ~ 44 A.D. > Paul is enlisted by Barnabas to come to Antioch in Syria to help teach in that community
15. ~ 46 A.D. > Paul's second post-conversion visit to Jerusalem / the famine relief visit / Titus was not required by apostles to be circumcised [14 years after Paul's conversion]
16. ~ 46 A.D. > Paul embarks on second missionary journey w/ Barnabas and John Mark / goes across Cyprus and then into the Roman province of Galatia / founded the "Galatian" churches to whom he will eventually write his letter
17. ~ 46-47 A.D. > Paul returns to Antioch and reports on his journey
18. ~ 48 A.D. > Jewish believers from Jerusalem come to Antioch / they precipitate an energetic dispute with Paul and Barnabas over whether Gentile Jesus-believers need to "live like Jews"
19. ~ 48 A.D. > During the dispute between Paul and the Jewish believers from Jerusalem, Paul rebukes Peter for his choices and behavior, accusing him of not being straightforward about the implications of the gospel
20. ~ 48 A.D. > Some of the same Jewish believers from Jerusalem make their way to the Galatian communities of believers and begin to "disturb" them with their alternate understanding of the implications of the gospel.
21. ~ 49 A.D. > Paul gets word back from the Galatian communities that many Gentiles among them are being persuaded by these Jewish believers and are beginning to live like Jews. Paul, in exasperation, writes the letter to the Galatians.
22. ~ 49 A.D. > Council of Jerusalem [later in the year, 49 A.D., after Paul has written his letter to the Galatians] {Acts 15}

Further Miscellaneous Notes

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To what faction was Paul responding when he wrote his letter to the Galatians?

A faction of the believing community in Jerusalem—due to the power and influence of their own personal and cultural experience—found it unthinkable that anyone could be a sincere and authentic follower of Jesus if he was not seeking to keep the Mosaic Covenant, and, hence, was not living the same lifestyle as Jews did.

These individuals rightly understood that Jesus expected his followers to live lives that were pleasing to God. But due to the power and influence of their own personal experience (namely, that the only believers they knew were Jews who routinely engaged in Jewish religious practices), these believers found it unthinkable that anyone could be pleasing to God if he did not live like a Jew. Hence, it seemed indubitable to them that Jesus expected any and all of his followers (including Gentiles) to engage in the religious practices of the Jews.

What the individuals who made up this faction of believers in Jerusalem were NOT:

1. They were NOT unbelieving Jews; rather they were Jewish believers in Jesus.
2. They were NOT people who believed that you must earn your salvation through works; they were NOT people who believed that it was impossible to receive divine salvation purely as a gift of God's mercy.
3. They were NOT advocates of an entirely different set of beliefs and doctrines from those taught by the apostles.
 - a. There was no obvious, explicit difference between what these individuals believed and taught with respect to Jesus and what Peter and James believed and taught with respect to Jesus.
4. They were NOT individuals who obviously and explicitly rejected the gospel as proclaimed by Paul and the other apostles.
5. They were NOT individuals who obviously and explicitly rejected the significance of Jesus' death on the cross.

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Presumably, every Jewish Jesus-believer who had been immersed in the milieu of first-century Judaism would have been tempted to adopt essentially the same mindset: namely, to find it unthinkable to believe that anyone could be an authentic follower of Jesus if he did not seek to obey the Mosaic Covenant, and, hence, to live like Jews do.

Paul had nothing but understanding and sympathy for Jewish believers who found themselves tempted to adopt this mindset. (The one whom Paul calls a "weaker brother" in Romans 14 is just such a Jew.) What, then, is the difference between the "weaker brother" of Romans 14 and the proponent of "another gospel" in Paul's letter to the Galatians?

The difference between the faction of Jewish Jesus-believers whom Paul opposed in the book of Galatians and the Jewish Jesus-believers whom Paul calls "weaker brothers" in Romans 14:

1. Paul's Jewish Jesus-believing opponents wanted to actively impose their scruples and obligations on new Gentile believers. The weaker brothers of Romans 14 were being tempted to "condemn" new Gentile believers for not living like Jews, but they were *not* ac-

tively promoting Law-obedience among the Gentile believers. They were not overtly seeking to impose their scruples and obligations on their Gentile brothers.

2. More importantly, but related to the above, while they were troubled by Gentiles living in transgression of the Mosaic Covenant, the Jewish Jesus-believers whom Paul calls “weaker brothers” in Romans 14 did **not** take the position that Gentiles living in transgression of the Mosaic Covenant were, therefore, *unquestionably* condemned for doing so. These individuals seemed to have a greater degree of confidence in the MERCY of God underlying the truth of the gospel than did the individuals whom Paul opposed in the book of *Galatians*. The “weaker brothers” of *Romans* 14 were characterized by a confidence in the MERCY of God that lay in tension with their temptation to condemn Gentile believers who did not keep the Law. As a result, while they were tempted to stand in judgment over the uncircumcision and lawlessness of Jesus-believing Gentiles, yet—unlike Paul’s opponents in *Galatians*—they did not and could not confidently dismiss such Gentiles as unquestionably condemned.
 - a. The Jewish Jesus-believers whom Paul opposed in the book of *Galatians* had adopted a self-righteous, censorious, condemning posture toward any Jesus-believer [Jew or Gentile] who did not follow the Mosaic Law. They took this posture with inflexible assurance that they were right to do so. Apparently, it did not occur to them as even a possibility that the MERCY of God was more fundamental, more powerful, and more important to God than a Gentile’s not living in conformity to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. It was this self-righteous, censorious posture within his opponents to which Paul was responding in the book of *Galatians*. He feared—perhaps even suspected—that their belief was not authentic. He did so because of their self-righteous, censorious posture, not because of the mistake they had made with regard to what the gospel entailed—specifically, that the gospel entailed that Gentiles, no less than Jews, should strive to obey the Mosaic Covenant.

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What Galatians does *NOT* teach:

That are a number of doctrines or beliefs that *Galatians* has been taken to teach that, in fact, *Galatians* does not teach. Here are a few of the more important such doctrines or beliefs:

1. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: The reason that we cannot be justified by keeping the Law is because no one is capable of keeping the Law. That is, because it is impossible for a sinful human being to “keep” the Law. {Gal. 3:10, 21-22}
2. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: Being “free” from the Law means that we ought never to seek to please God by obeying the distinctively Jewish religious practices commanded by the Law. We live by faith in Jesus now, not by the Law. Hence, we are condemned if now we seek to please God by obeying the religious elements in the Law. We violate the gospel to do so. {Gal. 5:1}
3. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: Being “free” from the Law means that we ought never to seek to please God by obeying the commands that require us to pursue moral goodness. We live by faith in Jesus now, not by the Law. Hence, we are condemned if now we seek to please God by obeying the moral elements in the Law. We violate the gospel to do so. {Gal. 5:1}

- a. Any discussion of being "free" from the Law in *Galatians* does, in fact, pertain only to our relationship to the **uniquely Jewish elements** of the Law. That is, it pertains to the non-moral aspects of the Law. It does *not* pertain to the moral aspects of the Law.
 - (1) That every human being is under obligation to be godly and morally good *is a given* for Paul. That the believer is under obligation to pursue godliness is never up for debate.
- b. For Paul, being not "under Law" *does* pertain to the **whole** Law, including the moral aspects of the Law. However, being not "under Law" pertains to *how a person attains mercy and Life*. It does *not* pertain to what one is under obligation to do.
 - (1) According to the gospel, we qualify for mercy from God if we authentically embrace the truth about Jesus (and its implications). We do not qualify for mercy by keeping the Law (including the moral aspects of the Law). At least, that is **NO LONGER** how we qualify for mercy. Jesus (particularly his death and intercession), and not Law-keeping, is the *basis* upon which we receive mercy (it always was the true basis for mercy). Furthermore, belief in Jesus, not Law-keeping, is the *condition* upon which mercy is granted. All of this is true with regard to the **WHOLE LAW**, the moral elements included.
4. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: We violate the gospel if we teach that a person's salvation is in any way whatsoever contingent on a person's actions and choices. [*a la* Zane Hodges] {Gal. 5:1}
5. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: The jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law over us was put to death in and by Jesus's death on the cross. In other words, the Law's relevance to us "died" when Jesus died on the cross. Because of Jesus's death, no one is any longer under obligation to keep and obey the Law. {Gal. 2:19}
6. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: Jesus's death on the cross put our sinfulness to death. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, sin no longer has any power over and hold on us. {Gal. 2:19-20}
7. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: Jesus's death on the cross exhausted the curse of God upon Israel and magically ushered in an entirely new created order. Jesus's death transformed reality into a new creation in which we can, by faith, now live. {Gal. 6:15}
8. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: When Paul maintains that we are not justified by works of the Law, what he intends to maintain is that we are not justified by our efforts to seek to obey the Law out of our own internal resources rather than out of the divine resources supplied by the Spirit of God. Once one has come to believe in and follow Jesus, he can now obey the Law out of divine resources supplied by the Spirit of God. So, strictly speaking, one can be and is justified by obedience to the Law. But he is not justified by his self-empowered obedience to the Law. He is justified only by Spirit-empowered obedience to the Law. For only the latter is *true* obedience. {Gal. 5:13-16}
9. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: By my faith in Jesus, what is true of Jesus becomes true of me. (Because, through my faith in Jesus, I am identified with him.) Hence, since Jesus was perfectly righteous, then, by my faith, I am rendered perfectly righteous. If Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Torah, then, by my faith, I have fulfilled the requirements of the Torah. {Gal. 2:20}

10. *Galatians* does **not** teach the following: Jesus was the TRUE representative Israelite who kept the Torah and fulfilled all the requirements of the Law. Therefore, the fact of having fulfilled all the requirements of the Law is transmitted to me by my faith in Jesus. {Gal. 3:19}
- a. The claim that the belief that Jesus is *the true Israel* (or the true Israelite who represents Israel as a whole before God) underlies everything Paul believes and teaches is a popular *ad hoc* hypothesis on the part of certain modern New Testament scholars. Such a belief is never articulated anywhere in the book of *Galatians*, nor is it ever articulated anywhere else in the New Testament.

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For more on the teaching of the book of *Galatians*, see my paper entitled "Understanding the book of *Galatians*," available for download at soundinterp.wordpress.com.