

KEY THEMES

IN

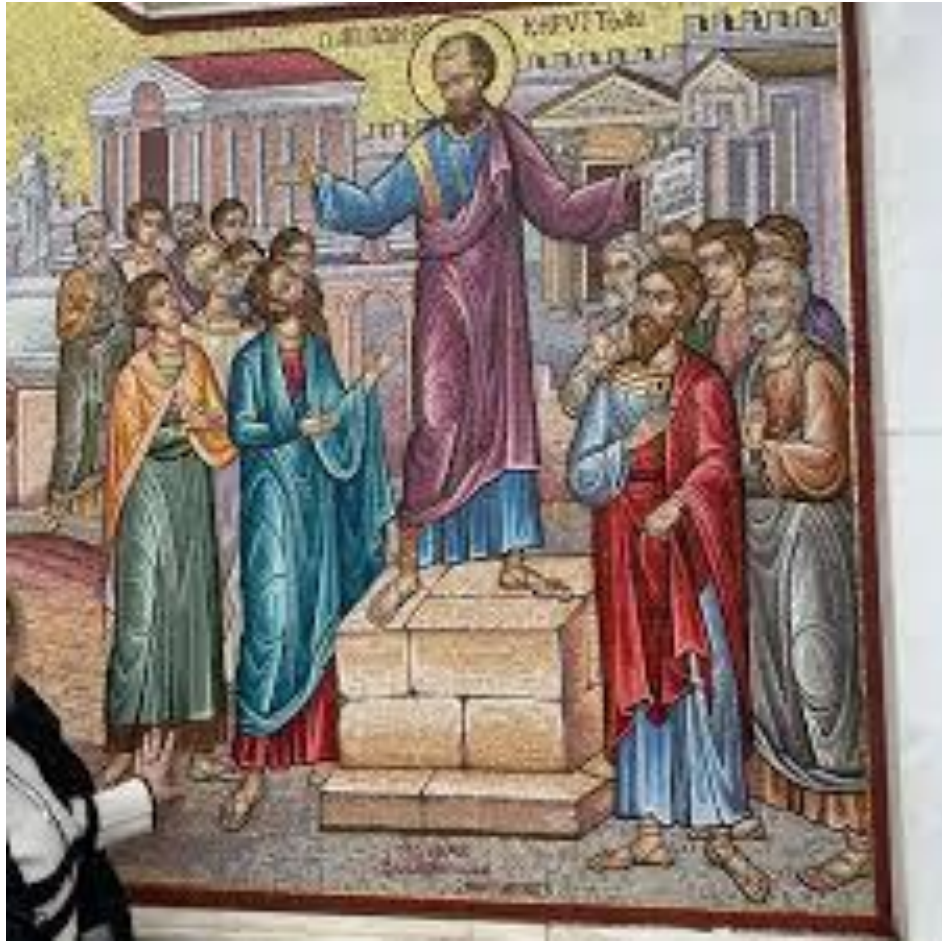
THE LETTERS OF

ST. PAUL











MIRROR READING (John Barclay)

Key guidelines:

1. Type of Utterance
2. Tone
3. Frequency
4. Clarity
5. Unfamiliarity
6. Consistency
7. Historical Plausibility

Warnings:

1. Consider reconstructions as probabilities not certainties.
2. Distinguish between what the text clearly says and what we infer lies behind it
3. Be careful if reconstructions become too elaborate when they rest on fragile clues



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE GALATIAN COMMUNITY

1. Gentiles.
2. Presence of 'false teachers.'
3. Welcomed Paul when he was unwell.
4. Paul preached the crucified Christ to them.
5. They received the Spirit.
6. Wanted circumcision. Why?
7. They are told off by Paul who sees this as going back to unfreedom.

Paul in this situation

1. He is very angry, particularly at the false teachers.
2. Extreme views on the Law written in anger.



WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT PAUL FROM GALATIANS:

- Steeped in Judaism
- Able to use Greek rhetoric
- Considers himself called to be an apostle (1:1, 12)
- Receives a revelation of Jesus Christ (1:17)
- Thinks he has received authority directly from God (1:11; 16-17)
- Missioned to the Gentiles
- Had been a persecutor of the church (1:13)
- Narrative of events after revelation (1:16 ff)
- Jerusalem council (2:1-10)
- Has an argument with Peter at Antioch but really angry with James (2:11 ff)
- Comes to the Galatians because of an illness



PAUL ON MISSION

- Preaches Christ Crucified (3:1)
- Discerns reception of the Spirit in those who believe his gospel (3:2)
- My little children for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ be formed in you (4:19)
- Can get angry (5:12)
- But also tender – nb change in tone 5:16-6.10

PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD:

- 'It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.' (2:19-20)
- 'May I never boast of anything except the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.' (6:14)
- 'I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body' (6:17)



CALL OR CONVERSION?

³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ⁵ He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (Acts 9: 3-5)

'But when God who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son *en emoi*, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not....' (Gal 1:15)

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
⁵ 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'
(Jer 1:4-5)



**What are the
implications?**

From other letters:

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.



⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, ^[e] the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ ^[f] and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil: 7-11)

‘But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters;^[e] ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. ²⁸ And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he for ever!) knows that I do not lie. ³² In Damascus, the governor^[f] under King Aretas set a guard on the city of Damascus in order to^[g] seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall,^[h] and escaped from his hands.’ (2 Cor 11: 21-33)

‘² I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. ³ And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. ⁵ On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. ⁶ But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷ even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep^[a] me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.^[b] ⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹ but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power^[c] is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.’

(2 Cor 12: 2-10)

‘But we were gentle^[b] among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

⁹ You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters;^[c] we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.’ (1 Thess 2:7-12)

¹⁴ I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. ¹⁵ For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶ I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷ For this reason I sent^[c] you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. ¹⁸ But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. ²¹ What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?’ (1 Cor 4: 14-21)

⁸ For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, ⁹ yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.^[e] ¹⁰ I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful^[f] both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³ I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. ¹⁵ Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ’

Philemon 1: 8-17)

