
§1 Identification of the Senders and the Addressees and a Wish for Grace and Peace (Gal. 1:1–5)

1:1 / As in all of his letters **Paul** begins by identifying himself as the sender. In ancient times a letter typically began with the writer's self-identification, and the opening commonly continued by naming the addressees and wishing them good health.

In Paul's letters, this typical wish is replaced by a wish for grace and peace. In the opening of Paul's letter to the Galatian churches, as in most of his other letters, Paul identifies himself as an **apostle** (cf. Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; and, if Pauline authorship is accepted, Eph. 1:1 and Col. 1:1). In Galatians Paul places his name in direct relation to his self-designation as apostle and then immediately goes on to qualify what kind of apostle he is. Often at the beginning of a letter Paul qualifies his apostleship as being by the will of God. In Galatians Paul makes a similar point in a particularly graphic and emphatic way, by describing the means by which he became an apostle and the identity of the one who called him: the source of his life's work is Jesus Christ and God the Father. And so Paul stresses that he is an apostle **sent not from men nor by man**. Paul's inclusion of both the plural and singular emphasizes that his apostleship did not originate from either a human group or an individual.

Paul represents himself to the Galatian churches as an apostle who acts on the highest authority, that of the risen Jesus Christ and God the Father. Among Paul's letters, the emphasis that divine authority undergirds his apostleship is most pronounced in his Galatian letter, even in contrast to Romans, where Paul also takes pains to underscore his apostleship (Rom. 1:1–6). In Galatians he is concerned to present himself as one whose apostolic function has divine authentication. Paul is sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father—by those whose authority and power the Galatian believers have already accepted.

In Galatians, unlike the other letter openings, Paul says that the one who called him is not only God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1) but also **Jesus Christ**. This unusual reference to Jesus Christ in connection with the authentication of his apostleship suggests that Paul wants to prove to his readers that he has the authority to preach the gospel of Christ (cf. 1:7) to them and to shape their life of faith in accordance with that gospel. Paul maintains a focus on Jesus Christ in the following verses which continues to function to validate his apostleship. Furthermore, Paul's description of the one who called him—**God the Father, who raised [Jesus] from the dead**—stands out from Paul's other letter openings. Here Paul appeals to the current faith of the Galatians who worship God as Father (cf. 1:3 and 4:6) and believe that he raised Jesus. Throughout this letter Paul speaks little about the resurrected Jesus Christ, stressing instead that Jesus Christ is the crucified one. The reference to Christ's resurrection is to an aspect of the faith that Paul knows his hearers are convinced of. The one who sends Paul to preach is the one who has the highest authority in the Galatian community—God the Father who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

God was spoken of as a "Father" in both the Greek world in which Paul missionized (Zeus was referred to as "father") and the Jewish thought world that shaped his gospel (e.g., Isa. 63:16; Jer. 3:4; 31:9). Thus, the apostle seems to have found it a particularly useful appellation for God. He uses it in all of his opening addresses, usually in the context of his wish for peace (e.g., 2 Thess. 1:2; Phil. 1:2). At times Paul refers to the fatherhood of God in relation to Jesus (e.g., Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31), but in this case, since 1:3 refers to God as "our father," it appears that Paul means God as the father of those who believe in Jesus Christ. The emphasis on God as father at the opening of the letter (1:1, 3–4) signals that one of the concerns Paul will address is that of inheritance and sonship (3:15–4:7).

1:2 / In all Pauline letters except Romans Paul identifies co-senders. In Galatians Paul says that the letter comes from himself and **all the brothers with me**. Paul's reference to an anonymous but substantial group of co-senders emphasizes the credibility of his own voice; he wants to communicate that the letter has the endorsement of a significant number of believers (cf. 1:8).

The letter's address **to the churches in Galatia** is remarkably sparse. The addresses of Paul's other letters typically in-

clude an affirmative statement such as “to all God’s beloved at Rome” or “to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2, RSV). Rather than affirming his converts, Paul’s terse address helps to set the tone for his letter. Paul writes not warmly but reproachfully. He clearly cannot commend his converts’ faith. The absence of his usual commendation, combined with the stress in v. 1 on his apostolic credibility, suggests that Paul writes Galatians in an admonitory tone.

The letter’s address to “the churches” suggests that it was intended to be circulated among various groups of believers in the Roman province of Galatia. This sets it apart from Paul’s other letters, which are typically written to a single church. It also indicates that the problem that Paul is combatting has spread among his various Galatian churches.

1:3–5 / The wish for **grace and peace** is a standard feature of Paul’s letters. Unlike the address, this feature is usually quite straightforward, saying simply, as in Romans, “grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7b). In Galatians Paul expands the wish to include a reference to the work of Jesus Christ: Christ **gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age**. Before launching into the difficult task of persuading his converts that they are being tempted to believe a false gospel, Paul uses this portion of the letter opening to stress the common faith he shares with his readers.

While **Lord** is a standard designation for Jesus Christ in Paul’s opening wish for grace and peace (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:2), it may also have been particularly useful in the Galatian situation in which Paul is seeking to communicate with Gentile converts under the influence of Jewish Christian missionaries. Greek-speaking Jews referred to God as Lord (e.g., Deut. 6:4), but there is little evidence for Greek religion referring to God as Lord. This suggests that Paul here, as elsewhere (e.g., Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 7:22; 12:3; Phil. 2:11), refers to Jesus Christ’s divinity in a manner that originated in the earliest Jewish Christian communities. By initially describing the faith in terms with which his readers would feel comfortable—either because it is the way he introduced the faith to them or as a result of influences subsequent to his departure—Paul hopes to gain a hearing.

Several distinctive features of this passage can be attributed to Paul’s tactic to resonate with what he thinks his readers

accept. Only here in all of Paul's existing writings does he use the verb **rescue** (*exaireō*); only here does Paul directly apply the adjective "evil" to the present age; and the idea of the present age occurs only this once in Galatians. At this point Paul may be including or alluding to a confession of faith familiar to the Galatians. We see him doing something similar at the beginning of Romans (1:2–4).

It is difficult to determine whether this is a formulation of the faith that the Galatians received from Paul or whether it is one they had been taught by the rival evangelists. A strongly Jewish flavor might indicate that it originated with the rival evangelists.

The reference to sins on its own is not enough to suggest a Jewish provenance. Other ancients, apart from the Jews, recognized that human beings were caught in a struggle with what was commonly called their passions. Pagans turned to religion and philosophy in search of freedom from the passions. The challenge was to find a way to be freed from bondage to the passions and so to achieve god-like peace. Such a goal was understood as important for individuals and for society. Plutarch wrote:

a city without holy places and gods, without any observance of prayers, oaths, oracles . . . might rather be formed without the ground it stands on than a government, once you remove all religion from under it. . . . It is this belief [which is] the underpinning and base that holds all society and legislation together. (*Reply to Colotes in Defence of the Other Philosophers* 1125E [Einarson and DeLacy, LCL])

Nonetheless, the word "sins" occurs in the phrase "for our sins," which is a clear reference to the Jewish idea of atonement. Another Jewish concept in this passage is that of rescue from the present evil age. This appeals to Jewish apocalyptic categories in which there is a distinction between this age and the age to come. On balance this description of the faith has a Jewish texture.

The question is, does it reflect Paul the Jew's understanding of the faith or the Jewish rival evangelists'? Certainly Paul elsewhere uses the ideas of atonement and apocalyptic ages. Paul refers to Jesus as one who "was delivered over to death for our sins" (Rom. 4:25), and describes this age as transitory (1 Cor. 2:6) and characterized by blindness to God (1 Cor. 2:8). Yet the formulation in this passage differs both from Paul's normal allusions to these Jewish concepts (this is the only time Paul connects Christ's death, as opposed to his return at the last day, with believers' being rescued from the "present evil age"), and

from the rest of the letter, which does not refer overtly to apocalyptic concepts. The formulation thus appears to have originated with Paul's rivals in Galatia. Paul adopts some of the features of his opponents' formulation in order to gain an ear with those in Galatia who are convinced by the alternate gospel. He recognizes that unless he speaks something of their language they will not hear him.

The closing words of this affirmation of faith—**to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen**—suggest that Paul meant to convey a worship tone. His inclusion of the word “amen” is in effect an invitation to the Galatians to agree with him by responding “amen.”

Additional Notes §1

1:1 / For information on and examples of ancient Greek letters, see J. L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

It should be noted that Paul accepts the apostleship of those who were before him (1:17), for instance, Peter and James (1:18–19), who may have validated their apostolic commission on the basis of having known Jesus personally. Paul considers that apostles share in common a commitment to evangelize (2:8) and that in one way or another they have seen the Lord (1 Cor. 9:1).

1:5 / We might compare this passage with another in Paul—Rom. 11:36. We might also compare it to one in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where priests are worshiping the glorious acts of Hercules by saying “Oh, unconquerable! You are the slayer by your own might of those cloud-born creatures of two shapes in one, Hylaeus and Phlous, and also the monstrous Cretan Bull, and the gigantic lion under Nemea's rock. You shocked the lake of Styx into trembling” (7.293–94; trans. Jackson Knight, pp. 209–10). By inviting his readers to share in the atmosphere of worship, Paul fosters a sense of unity or shared experience before beginning his admonishments.