

I've long been intrigued by the fact — I think it's a fact — that the people we get in the BIGGEST fights with are those closest to us: spouses, siblings, parents, good friends. Sometimes we fight with others, of course. But it's those closest to us that really seem to annoy us. Which of us has not had situations get completely out of hand?

That has made some people wonder about the New Testament. For example, Jesus' main opponents during his ministry are with the Pharisees. Is that because he was particularly close with them in some way?

Five years ago today (I checked) I posted on an interesting parallel situation from the life of Paul. As you know, Paul can be a bit, uh, vitriolic at times. And never more than in the letter to the Galatians, written to a group of churches with which he was really peeved. This is one fierce letter (many people don't see that because they simply aren't expecting it; the fierceness is even more pronounced when you read it in the original).

Paul had fierce enemies there. They didn't like each other and thought the views of the other were, literally, damnable. We know Paul's view of the situation. But we wish we had the *enemies'* view. Would they have anything to say for themselves? Of course. But what? That's what I posted about. Here 'tis.

Among the lost writings of early Christianity, one batch that I would especially like to see discovered would be those produced by Paul's enemies among the Christians. I don't know how many of his opponents were writing-literate, but possibly some of them were, and their own attacks on him and defenses of their own positions would be fascinating and eye-opening. Among these, I would especially love to see what his opponents in Galatia had to say for themselves. My hunch is that they were every bit as aggressive and confident in their views as Paul was in his.

I've always found the letter to the Galatians to be one of the most forceful, intriguing, and difficult letters of Paul. I've studied it for over forty years, and there are still verses that I don't understand. My view is that most scholars don't understand them either — even the scholars who think they do! It is a packed and theologically dense letter in places.

But the basic point is clear. A person is made right with God by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, not by observing the Jewish law. Gentiles who believe in Jesus must not think that they have to follow the law in order to be fully justified before God. Anyone who thinks so - who, for example, decides that he needs to be circumcised - has completely (not just kind-a) misunderstood the gospel and is in danger of losing his salvation.

Paul's opponents among the Galatians think just the opposite.

As with all of Paul's letters, the only way to make sense of Galatians is...

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