PAUL’S OPPONENTS IN GALATIA

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Problems apparently solved sometimes have a way of returning with even more puzzling questions. Such is the case with the attempt to identify the occasion for Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Before the beginning of the present century, the problem was thought to be solved. A few fringe areas might still be debated, but it was generally agreed that Paul wrote the letter to the churches of Galatia because some “Judaizers” had appeared there in order to undo Paul’s effective preaching about a law-free gospel. The “Judaizers” had been preaching the necessity of circumcision and perhaps of keeping the entire Jewish Torah, and they had been discrediting Paul’s authority. It was not quite clear whether these “Judaizers” had any relationship to the apostles in Jerusalem, or whether they came from Palestine or Asia Minor, but that was secondary 1).

In 1919 Wilhelm Lügtert 2) reopened the problem by suggesting that Paul’s worst opponents in Galatia were not “Judaizers” but “Pneumatikoi”, who charged Paul with preaching circumcision and currying the favor of the apostles in Jerusalem. This was an anti-Jewish group which preached a radically law-free gospel and felt that Paul was too Jewish. Lügtert’s theory was substantially adopted in 1929 by J. H. Ropes 3) and has found its way into certain introductions and commentaries in English. M. S. Enslin 4) and R. T. Stamm 5) now find both a Judaizing and an anti-Jewish

1) This general approach was taken by A. Hilgenfeld (1875), H. A. Meyer (1884), F. Sieffert (1899), T. Zahn (1909), W. Bousset (1917), E. D. Burton (1921), et al.
2) Gesetz und Geist: eine Untersuchung zur Vorgeschichte des Galaterbriefes, 1919.
group in Galatia, with Paul trying to steer a middle course between them.

JOHANNES MUNCK ¹), whose anti-Tübingen bias is well-known, attempts to see a single group as the source of difficulty in Galatia. To MUNCK, the problem in Galatia was caused by Judaizing Gentile Christians, who discredited Paul and attempted to substitute the authority of the Jerusalem apostles for that of Paul and to establish Jewish practices as requirements for all Christians. The source of difficulty lay in Paul's own appreciation for the Jewish heritage and his efforts to have his converts think lovingly of the Jewish Christians and the earlier disciples. ²)

Hence, the problem lies before us once again. It is a problem which cannot be ignored, because the solution will have an effect upon our understanding of Paul's view of Torah and upon our understanding of Paul's effectiveness. If Paul was fighting "Judaizers", we would be able to see Paul as preacher and defender of a law-free gospel. If he is fighting "Pneumatikoi", then his view of Torah would be materially different. If he is fighting both "Judaizers" and "Pneumatikoi", Paul's position is a very narrow, qualified, and complex one.

If we are to come to some understanding of this problem, a clear methodology is a prime necessity. The need for such a methodology is demonstrated by the diverse conclusions reached by equally

¹) Paul and the Salvation of Mankind. Tr. Frank Clarke (Richmond, 1959).
²) W. SCHMITHALS, "Die Häretiker in Galatien", Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 47 (1956), 25-66, presents still another attempt to disassociate the opponents of Paul from the Jerusalem apostles. He identifies the opponents as Jewish Christian Gnostics. He feels that this identification of the sect as Gnostic is justified on the basis that they demanded circumcision (a fact borne out by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Epiphanius). They also assert that an apostle's authority must come directly from God. They observe stated festivals. They originated in Asia Minor.

Many of SCHMITHALS objections we would share. He seems to be unable, however, to think of "Judaizers" without identifying them with the Jerusalem apostles. Thus, he must find a group of "non-Judaizing" Christians who demand circumcision et al. That he is right in asserting that there was such a Gnostic group in the second century is not to be doubted, but he has not been able to show this for the first half of the first century. The quotations from the fathers which seem to do this are themselves dependent on the letter of Paul to the Galatians. At one point SCHMITHALS admits that the picture of this heresy is drawn largely from the Corinthian correspondence. The difference between the opponents in Corinth and those in Galatia is that the former did not use circumcision (p. 61 footnote)—a significant difference indeed, since circumcision is the most prominent matter dealt with in the Galatians letter.