

The Text of Galatians and Its History by Stephen Carlson

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HOW SIGNIFICANT are the textual variants of the New Testament? We know there are a lot of them, but how important are they really? It depends on who you ask. For textual critics, a lot of them are important; for translators, much fewer; and for exegetes, even less. Bart Ehrman's latest blog post points emphasizes that the enormity of the task: "How many differences are there in our surviving New Testament manuscripts? Thousands of differences; tens of thousands of differences; hundreds of thousands of differences." <https://ehrmanblog.org/new-testament-manuscripts-good-news-and-bad-news-2/>

He also notes that they don't all matter equally: "But there is more good news. The vast majority of these hundreds of thousands of differences are completely and utterly unimportant and insignificant and don't matter at all."

All is not roses: "But there is also some more bad news. There are lots of differences that do matter a lot." At a general level, "lots" and "matter a lot" are broad, vague terms that are hard to convey what textual critics are familiar with. So let's take a look at an example — In my doctoral work on Galatians, at Duke under Bart Ehrman's supervision, I looked at 92 witnesses of Galatians and found over 1500 units of variation. That's a lot for a text with 2300 words, and if I included more, I would have more variants than words. That's a lot! When we look at the external evidence, it turns out that there less than sixty (58) variants that cannot be decided by the consensus of the best and oldest manuscripts. Still a lot, much much more manageable. How significant are they in terms of what Galatians says? Let's look:

Gal 1:3 Did Paul offer grace and peace "from God the father and our Lord Jesus Christ (ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)" or "from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ (ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)"?

Gal 1:4 Did Paul say that Jesus Christ gave himself "for our sins (περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν)" or "for our sins (ὕπερ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν)"?

Gal 1:6 Was Paul so amazed at how quickly that the Galatians were turning away from the one called them "by Christ's grace (ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ)" or simply "by grace (ἐν χάριτι)"? (It is also possible to translate the first option as called "by grace to be of Christ.")

Gal 1:8 Was Paul talking about a hypothetical situation where an angel from heaven "might evangelize you (ὅμῃν εὐαγγελίζηται)", "might evangelize you (εὐαγγελίζηται ὑμῖν)" or "might evangelize you (εὐαγγελίσηται ὑμῖν)"?

Gal 1:11 Did Paul say "But (δὲ) I am letting you know" or "For (γάρ) I am letting you know"? Or in a couple of manuscripts, simply "I am letting you you"?

Gal 1:12 Did Paul say that he neither received "nor (οὐδέ)" was taught the gospel, or did he say that he neither received "nor (οὐτε)" was taught the gospel?

Gal 1:15 Did Paul say when "God, who (ὁ θεός ὁ)" or "the one who (ὁ)" separated him from his mother's womb and called him by his grace, was pleased?

Gal 1:17 Did Paul "go away (ἀπῆλθον)," "go up (ἀνῆλθον)," or simply "go (ἦλθον)" to Jerusalem?

Gal 1:18 Did Paul go up to Jerusalem after "three years (ἔτη τρία)" or "three years (τρία ἔτη)"?

Gal 1:19 Did Paul say that he "did not see any (οὐκ εἶδον)" or "saw no (εἶδον οὐδέν)" other one of the apostles?

Gal 2:6 Did Paul write that "God (ὁ θεός)" or "God (θεός)" does not receive a person's face?

Gal 2:9 Did Paul refer to "James and Cephas (Ἰάκωβος καὶ Κηφᾶς) and John" or to "Peter and James (Πέτρος καὶ Ἰάκωβος) and John"? This might be significant if Cephas and Peter were different people.

Gal 2:10 Did Paul say "that we remember the poor (τῶν πτωχῶν ἵνα μνημονεύωμεν)" or "that we remember the poor (ἵνα τῶν πτωχῶν μνημονεύωμεν)" or "that we remember the poor (ἵνα μνημονεύωμεν τῶν πτωχῶν)"?

Gal 2:12a Did Paul say before "some (τινας)" or "someone (τινα)" from James came? Singular vs. plural could be historically significant.

Gal 2:12b Did Paul say when "he came (ἦλθεν)" [presumably Peter] or when "then came" (ἦλθον) [presumably those from James]? This has the potential to be historically significant as it suggests a different instigation behind the Antioch incident.

Gal 2:13 Did Paul say "even the remaining Jews (καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι)" or simply "the remaining Jews (οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι)"?

Gal 2:16a Did Paul say "But (δέ) knowing that" or simply "Knowing that"?

Gal 2:16b Did Paul say "Christ Jesus (Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν)" or "Jesus Christ (Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν)"?

Gal 2:20 Did Paul say that he lives by the faith "of God and Christ (τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ)" or by the faith "of the son of the God (τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ)"?

Gal 3:3 Did Paul declaim "Are you so senseless? After getting started in the spirit, are you new getting finished (ἐπιτελεῖσθε) in the flesh?" or "Are you, who got started in the spirit, so senseless as to get finished (ἐπιτελεῖσθαί) now in the flesh?" The words sound alike.

Gal 3:7 Did Paul say "these sons are (υἱοὶ εἰσιν) of Abraham" or "these are sons (εἰσιν υἱοί) of Abraham"?

Gal 3:14 Did Paul refer to the "promise (ἐπαγγελίαν)" or the "blessing (εὐλογίαν)" of the spirit? The different nouns make this variant translatable but they focus on different facets of the same thing.

Gal 3:21a Did Paul refer to the promise "of God (τοῦ θεοῦ)" or simply the promise?

Gal 3:21b Did Paul say that righteousness "would really be from faith (ἐκ νόμου ἂν ᾔν)" or "would really be from faith (ἐκ νόμου ᾔν ἂν)" or "would really be from faith (ἂν ἐκ νόμου ᾔν)"?

Gal 3:24 Did Paul say that the law "has become (γέγονεν)" or "became (ἐγένετο)" our tutor?

Gal 4:3 Did Paul say "we were (ἦμεθα)" or "we were (ἦμεν)" enslaved by the elements of the world?

Gal 4:6 Did Paul simply say "because you are sons" or did he say "because you are sons of God (θεοῦ)"?

Gal 4:8 Did Paul tell the Galatians: "you were enslaved to those who by nature are not gods (ἐδουλεύσατε τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσιν θεοῖς)" or "you were enslaved to those who by nature are not gods (τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσιν θεοῖς ἐδουλεύσατε)"?

Gal 4:10 Did Paul talk about "months and seasons and years (καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς)" or "months and years and seasons (καὶ ἐνιαυτούς καὶ καιρούς)"?

Gal 4:18 Did Paul say "but it is good to be sought after (ζηλοῦσθαι) always in a good way" or "but you are properly being sought after (ζηλοῦσθε) always in a good way"? Again, these verb forms sounded alike shortly after Paul's time, if not during it.

Gal 4:19a Did Paul call the Galatians "my children (τέκνα μου)" or "my kids (τέκνια μου)"?

Gal 4:19b Did Paul say "until (ἄχρις) ..." or "until (μέχρις) ..." when Christ is formed in you"?

Gal 4:23 Did Paul say "on the one hand (μὲν)" or left it implied?

Gal 4:25 Does it say "for Sinai is a mount in Arabia (τὸ γὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ)", "but Sinai (τὸ δὲ Σινᾶ) ...", "but Hagar is Mt Sinai (τὸ δὲ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν) ...", or "for Hagar is Mt Sinai (τὸ γὰρ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ) ..."? Is it even Paul's?

Gal 4:28 Did Paul say, "you are (ὕμεῖς ... ἐστὲ)" or "we are (ἡμεῖς ... ἐσμέν)" children of the promise according to Isaac?

Gal 4:30 Did Paul say "will not inherit (οὐ μὴ κληρονομήσῃ)" or "will not inherit (οὐ μὴ κληρονομήσει)"?

Gal 5:1a Did Paul say "by the freedom (τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ)" or "by freedom (ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ)"?

Gal 5:1b Did Paul say "Christ freed us (ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν)" or "Christ freed us (Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἠλευθέρωσεν)"?

Gal 5:1c Did Paul say "yoke of slavery (ζυγῶ δουλείας)" or "slavery's yoke (δουλείας ζυγῶ)"?

Gal 5:7 Did Paul say "the truth (τῆ ἀληθείᾳ)" or "truth (ἀληθεία)"?

Gal 5:14a Is the whole law simply fulfilled or fulfilled "among you (ἐν ὑμῖν)"?

Gal 5:14b Is the whole law "fulfilled (πεπλήρωται)" or "being fulfilled (πληροῦται)"?

Gal 5:14c Did Paul introduce the quotation of Lev 19:18 with "in (ἐν τῷ)" or not?

Gal 5:17a Did Paul say "but (δέ)" or "for (γὰρ)" these things are opposed to one another"?

Gal 5:17b Did Paul say "whatever (ἃ ἐάν)" or "whatever (ἃ ἄν)"?

Gal 5:19 Did Paul add adultery (μοιχεία) to the beginning of his list of the deeds of the flesh?

Gal 5:20 Do the deeds of the flesh include "jealousy (ζῆλος)" or "jealousies (ζῆλοι)"?

Gal 5:21a Did Paul add "envies (φόνοι)" after "murders (φόνοι)" like he did in Rom 1:29 or not?

Gal 5:21b Did Paul say "I declared (προεῖπον)" or "I have declared (προεῖρηκα)"?

Gal 5:26 Did Paul say "being jealous for one another (ἀλλήλοισ)" or "... of one another (... ἀλλήλους)"?

Gal 6:2 After telling the Galatians to bear each other's burdens, did Paul predict (future indicative ἀναπληρώσατε) or tell (aorist imperative ἀναπληρώσατε) them to fulfill the law of Christ?

Gal 6:4 Did Paul command "let him examine (δοκιμαζέτω)" or "let each examine (δοκιμαζέτω ἕκαστος)"?

Gal 6:9 Did Paul say "we will reap (θερίσομεν)" or "let us reap (θερίσωμεν)"? These verb forms were probably pronounced the same in Paul's day.

Gal 6:10 Similarly, did Paul say "as we have (ἔχομεν) an opportunity" or "in order that we have (ἔχωμεν) an opportunity"?

Gal 6:11 Did Paul say "See how large (πηλίκους) are the letters ..." or "See what large (ἡλίκους) letters ..."?

Gal 6:12 Did Paul mention the cross of Christ (Χριστοῦ) or the cross of Christ Jesus (Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ)?

Gal 6:13 Did Paul refer to "those who are getting circumcised (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι)" or to "those who got circumcised (οἱ περιτετημένοι)"?

Gal 6:17 Did Paul talk about the marks of Jesus (Ἰησοῦ), of Christ (Χριστοῦ), of the Lord Jesus (κυρίου Ἰησοῦ), of the Lord Jesus Christ (κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), or "of our Lord Jesus Christ (κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)"?

All of these are important to establishing the text. Many of these are not translatable, and of those that are, many don't make a difference exegetically. Only in two tiny variants (Gal 2:12b and 6:13) would our understanding of what happened in Antioch and Galatia change. Theologically speaking, the variant reading in Gal 2:20 "faith of God and Christ" vs. "faith of the Son of God" adds an interesting wrinkle in the "pistis Christou" debate over whether the genitive is objective (faith in Christ) or subjective (Christ's faithfulness). Much more information about the variants in Galatians and how they are analyzed and resolved can be found in my monograph:

<https://www.amazon.com/Galatians-History-Wissenschaftliche-Untersuchungen-Testament/dp/3161533232>