

This monograph challenges the increasingly accepted notion that Galatians is either a sample of classical rhetoric or should be interpreted in light of Graeco-Roman rhetorical handbooks. It demonstrates that the handbooks of Aristotle, Cicero and other such writers, discuss a form of oratory which was limited with respect to subject, venue and style of communication, and that Galatians falls outside such boundaries. The inapplicability of ancient canons of rhetoric is reinforced by a detailed comparison of Galatians with the handbooks, a survey of patristic attitudes towards Paul's communicative technique, and interaction with twentieth-century discussions of the nature of New Testament Greek. Dr Kern concludes that rhetorical handbooks were never a tool of literary criticism and that they cannot assist the search for a distinctly Pauline rhetoric. Thus this study has implications not only for Galatians but also for other New Testament epistles.

PHILIP H. KERN is Lecturer in New Testament at Moore Theological College, Sydney.

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RHETORIC AND GALATIANS

Rhetoric and Galatians

Assessing an approach to Paul's epistle

PHILIP H. KERN



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For Amy

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PREFACE

I set out for Sheffield in late summer of 1990 to do an exegetical study of Galatians, especially 2.15–21. It became apparent, however, that much ground-clearing work was required before exegesis could begin. In the end, and because of the skilful prodding and questioning of my supervisor, Dr Loveday Alexander, these preliminary matters became the thesis, and the exegesis still lies just beyond the horizon. I thank Dr Alexander for broadening my perspective and introducing me to a world about which I knew little.

There are others without whom this work would have been impossible. Friends at Tyndale House who have encouraged and provoked me include Gerald Peterman, Andrew Warren (who constantly pointed out my abuse of the English language, and occasionally assisted with German too), Peter Bolt and Bruce and Lyn Winter. The church family at Lansdowne Chapel, Sheffield, made our two years there wonderful. Thanks also for warm friendship at Wauwatosa and Norwood. Stanley Porter, Philip Satterthwaite and Janet Fairweather of the Classics Faculty at Cambridge have interacted with the content of the book, been fine friends and fountains of information. Thanks go to Jack Fish and David MacLeod for drawing me to Pauline studies, and to Scot McKnight, Doug Moo and D. A. Carson for endeavouring to elevate me to the next level. The careful, critical reading offered by my examiners, Andrew Lincoln and Ian McDonald, has been much appreciated, as has the help of librarians at the universities of Sheffield and Cambridge, Trinity International University (Deerfield), Northwestern (Evanston), Macquarie (Sydney) and Tyndale House. Special thanks to Andrew Clarke for help both in the library and over tea – and again to Bruce Winter for too many things to mention.

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Grant, and was much facilitated by opportunities afforded at 'the House'. My thanks go to them for their assistance. The project would have been impossible without the support of my family, especially my wife to whom I dedicate this book.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations have been largely restricted to works directly related to biblical studies and follow the *NTS* (38.1, Jan. 1992) conventions. For papyri see E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An Introduction*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 156–71. The following is a supplement.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| <i>ANF</i> | <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989 |
| <i>ANRW</i> | <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i> , ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972–92. |
| BAGD | <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 4th edn., ed. W. Bauer, W. Arndt, T. Gingrich, and P. Danker, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957 |
| BETL | Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovanien-sium |
| <i>DDC</i> | <i>De Doctrina Christiana</i> |
| <i>EB</i> | <i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i> |
| ET | English Translation |
| <i>JAC</i> | <i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i> |
| <i>JSNT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> |
| JSNTS | Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supple-ments |
| <i>JSOT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> |
| JSOTS | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supple-ments |
| LCL | Loeb Classical Library |
| <i>LCM</i> | <i>Liverpool Classical Monthly</i> |
| LSJ | <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Liddell, Scott, Jones |
| LXX | Septuagint |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| NABPRDS | National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Dissertation Series |
| <i>NovT</i> | <i>Novum Testamentum</i> |
| <i>NPNF</i> | <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991 |
| <i>OCD</i> ² | <i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, Oxford: Clarendon Press, ² 1970. |
| <i>PEQ</i> | <i>Palestinean Exploration Quarterly</i> |
| PG | Patrologiae cursus completus, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, Series Graeca |
| PL | Patrologiae cursus completus, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, Series Latina |
| repr. | reprint |
| SBLDS | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series |

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INTRODUCTION

This inquiry concerns itself with the intersection of two interpretative methodologies. On the one hand we may speak of ‘rhetorical criticism’ as used in biblical studies to describe a text-centred approach, the purpose being to determine how the shape of that text, its innate strategic impulse, affects the reader. This in turn, depending on the stance of the practitioner, breaks down into two more channels. Either those impulses may inform the analyst’s recreation of the text’s tradition, travelling back to questions of the intent and strategy of the writer, or such questions may be bracketed off to allow the analyst to locate a text-immanent intent,¹ strategy and world of discourse. Either way this stream of scholarship attempts to deal with the text at hand and take its shape and content as primary.

On the other hand – and we will see that this approach is commonly identified with studies of Galatians – ‘rhetorical analysis’ may be a new and improved approach to form criticism, attempting to describe textual shape and content by measuring its conformity to classical handbooks on rhetoric. This approach is concerned with neither the shape nor prehistory of the text merely for their own sake; thus it side-steps some of the weaknesses of form criticism. But the question of what it can add to the discovery of meaning remains open, for it often addresses only matters peripheral to the text with any great effectiveness,² and even regarding these matters (primarily linked to sociology), it does little more than open new questions. Unfortunately, these questions often receive troubling answers because both the literary-critical and classical backgrounds of the interpretative scheme have been ignored.³

¹ That is, the intent of the text as opposed to that of its creator.

² Clines, *Pentateuch*, 7–15.

³ It will become clear that I do not question the use of Galatians as an artefact –

The educational system of the ancient world at once found its centre and pinnacle in rhetoric. Thus to credit Paul with producing a piece of refined oratory imputes certain qualities to him; for example, the rhetor necessarily depended upon a particular linguistic register reflecting the ‘oratorical domain’, discussed in this thesis in terms of levels of language. This use of language, as remains the case to some degree, reveals the speaker’s level of *paideia*.

Rhetoric has thus been used of late to refine our understanding of Paul’s backgrounds, providing the data to work back from a rhetorical discourse embedded within an epistle to the source of Paul’s ability.⁴ Manifold explanations for Paul’s oratorical prowess are proffered, ranging from prolonged higher education in the manner of his day to a rejection of the question altogether as irrelevant to the matter of his background. But conclusions concerning Paul’s backgrounds – social, educational, financial – affect too much of NT studies to be determined by excessively hypothetical propositions; it is imperative that we build on a solid foundation.

For evidence that literary conclusions control wide-ranging discussions, consult David Aune’s article in which he treats ‘Romans as a *Logos Protreptikos* in the context of Ancient Religious and Philosophical Propaganda’.⁵ He has five questions relating to (1) Jewish literary history; (2) Paul’s education and what it tells of Jewish proselytism; and (3) Paul’s view of leadership over against philosophical schools – all of which arise from Paul’s supposed employment of a particular letter/speech form. Joop Smit and C. K. Barrett feel that Paul’s writing permits us to speak of his ‘professional skill as a rhetorician’;⁶ while John Fitzgerald, also allowing the implications of his work to run their course, more cautiously observes: ‘Inasmuch as this instruction in epistolary style was provided by teachers of rhetoric, the correspondence of Paul’s letters to the styles and letter types given by Ps.-Demetrius and Ps.-Libanius

i.e. as a tool useful for understanding Paul’s social world. But wrongly identifying the epistle as a piece of classical rhetoric is as misleading as, say, confusing a first-century Jewish potsherd with a Greek one from four hundred years earlier.

⁴ The fault lies not with the logic of this move but with the inherent weakness of an edifice built without a foundation. Since the evidence opposes the suggestion that Paul wrote classical orations, it cannot support the conclusion that Paul reveals the *paideia* behind rhetoric.

⁵ Aune, ‘Romans as *Logos Protreptikos*’, 91–124.

⁶ Smit, ‘Deliberative Speech’, 24; Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, 32. Cf. also Fitzgerald ‘Ancient Epistolary Theorists’, 193; Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth*, especially 400.

is highly significant. It provides another piece of evidence that Paul's educational level was high and that he received training in rhetoric'.⁷ Christopher Forbes moves from 1 Corinthians via reference to Paul's tertiary education to 'a certain social standing'. Though his logic is sound, and his conclusions held tentatively, he builds, like the others, on the premise that Paul's means of expression are those of classical oratory.⁸ Thus certain elements coalesce, permitting a direct flow of logic from employment of rhetoric to the appropriate education (i.e. tertiary) to social standing.

For the second position, that the question holds little relevance, one may begin with the influential reflections of Kennedy:

It is not a necessary premise of this study that the evangelists or Saint Paul had formally studied Greek rhetoric. In the case of Paul the evidence is somewhat ambivalent . . . Even if he had not studied in a Greek school, there were many handbooks of rhetoric in common circulation which he could have seen. He and the evangelists as well would, indeed, have been hard put to escape an awareness of rhetoric as practised in the culture around them, for the rhetorical theory of the schools found its immediate application in almost every form of oral and written communication: in official documents and public letters, in private correspondence, in the lawcourts and assemblies, in speeches at festivals and commemorations, and in literary composition in both prose and verse.⁹

These words are heavy with implications for NT studies. While to Kennedy Paul's rhetorical awareness says more about his literary milieu than about his education, it is surely significant that, at least at some level, Paul and the evangelists are thought to stand in a similar relationship to rhetoric.

Burton Mack, occupying a middle ground, maintains (though undoubtedly he does not intend his absolute claims to be taken literally) that 'all people, whether formally trained or not, were *fully schooled* in the wily ways of the sophists, the eloquence required at civic festivals'.¹⁰ Hence he concludes that 'To be

⁷ Fitzgerald, 'Ancient Epistolary Theorists', 193. Fitzgerald then cites Betz, 'Problem'. Cf. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth*, 400; Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 59.

⁸ Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony', 22–4.

⁹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 9–10.

¹⁰ Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 31; emphasis added.

engulfed in the culture of Hellenism meant to have ears trained for the rhetoric of speech'.¹¹ Lest one think that Mack simply refers to a high gloss on one's natural ability to argue well – without implying a system of rhetoric – he goes on to label what was learned by these means 'the rules of discourse' and describes them as 'firm'.¹²

Perhaps the clearest expression of this position comes from Douglas Campbell, who explains that because Graeco-Roman society was so thoroughly immersed in it, rhetoric maintained some degree of influence over everyone. Paul would have been no different: his general education, continual travel and innate intelligence were sufficient for rhetoric to infuse his patterns of speech and thought.¹³

Betz avoids the question of Paul's status in his commentary – though he does betray an awareness of sociological implications when he refers to 'the myth of Paul the non-thinker' and the inseparable falsehood that 'he cannot have received a decent education'. His commentary attempts to show that Paul's carefully constructed epistle reflects his 'literary skills',¹⁴ undermining disparaging views of Paul by highlighting his sophistication.

Rhetoric relates more directly to Paul's background in the argument of Robert G. Hall, who insists that those who favour the biographical evidence of Galatians over that of Acts have a misplaced faith: rhetorical conventions allow for details in the narrative which, though not altogether reliable, pose no threat to the educated listener. Hence Paul presents no more reliable biographical data in Galatians than does Acts – meaning that we have very little evidence for his life except what we infer from the less direct statements of his letters.¹⁵ Gerd Lüdemann similarly argues that in a forensic dispute the most useful account of events is preferable to the most accurate, so Paul's narrative need not supply historical detail.¹⁶

Another question which rhetoric may help answer concerns the nature of the Galatian churches. To the tired discussion of who received the epistle Betz adds a fresh insight: 'The sophisticated

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ D. S. Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness*, 75–6.

¹⁴ Betz, *Galatians*, xiv.

¹⁵ Hall, 'Historical Inference', 308–20.

¹⁶ Lüdemann, *Paul*, 57–62.

character of Galatians as a literary and rhetorical product suggests that the Galatian churches were composed primarily of Hellenized and Romanized city dwellers, rather than the uneducated and the poor'.¹⁷ It is unclear how this observation correlates with his remark that 'The effectiveness of rhetoric depends primarily upon the naïveté of the hearer, rather than upon the soundness of the case',¹⁸ but such an assessment clearly opposes the tenor of Lightfoot's discussion: he described the Galatians as barbaric Celts who never completely gave up their rude and fiery ways, and found Paul's language to accord well with such a readership.¹⁹

Thus the concern underlying this thesis is significant because Paul's rhetorical abilities are being asked to enlighten our understanding of Paul the man, his background, and the churches to whom he writes. Bruce Winter, Duane Litfin and others, moreover, demonstrate that Paul's attitude towards rhetoric also says much about his theology.²⁰

At least some readers of the NT feel that we ought to combine the awareness of our inability to read as a member of Paul's society with the goal of trying to overcome whatever anachronism and displacement we *can* successfully identify. While this may not yield the only valid reading of the text, it does seem to such scholars a necessary exercise, and in light of methodological advances is thought to be overlooked at scholarship's peril. An example of such a path forward is the anthropological approach undertaken by, among others, Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey.²¹ Another approach, one that at times aims for the very heart of Paul's world of discourse, is rhetorical criticism.

This latter method claims a long history, and of late, a growing popularity. I aim to define and evaluate 'rhetorical criticism' in order to determine what it can contribute to understanding Galatians. Chapter 2 will therefore provide a mini-lexicon of the terminology heard in the world of rhetorical studies, though in the end one might conclude that this entire project is nothing more than an attempt to define an analytical mode.

Following matters of definition, chapter 3 will present and

¹⁷ Betz, *Galatians*, 2; cf. Aune, 'Review of Betz', 323–4.

¹⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, 24.

¹⁹ Lightfoot, *Galatians*, especially 13–14.

²⁰ Betz, 'Problem', 16–48; Winter, *Philo and Paul*; Kennedy, "'Truth" and "Rhetoric"', 195–202; Litfin, *Theology of Proclamation*.

²¹ See especially Malina, *Christian Origins*; Neyrey, *Paul*.

analyse the various methodologies which use rhetoric to explain Galatians. By overlooking the restrictions inherent within Graeco-Roman rhetoric, some scholars have applied categories which properly describe material from another sphere altogether. Chapters 4 and 5 will then test the claim that Galatians is a classical speech, arguing first that it does not conform to the structure of the classical oration. Often the sources depended upon to support a rhetorical approach are read in questionable ways. It is then argued that with regard to species, Galatians again conflicts with expectations created by readings of the oratorical handbooks. Chapters 6 and 7 will discuss Paul's language: first, by surveying the attitude of the church fathers and some later writers towards Paul's writing, it is shown that he was not thought to have produced Graeco-Roman oratory. This finds confirmation in the ongoing debate concerning NT Greek. Each attempt to classify Paul's language solidifies the position that he did not use the language of oratory. A brief conclusion reviews the argument that with regard to structure, species and level of language, Paul does not conform to Graeco-Roman oratory. Furthermore, to wrongly attribute such a procedure to him interferes with the attempt to understand the apostle's social and educational background.