

Galatians and the *περὶ ἰδεῶν λόγου* of Hermogenes: A rhetoric of severity in Galatians 5–6

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Severe style in Galatians 5–6 is investigated from the perspective of the *περὶ ἰδεῶν λόγου* of Hermogenes. Galatians 5:7–12 is an extreme example of what Hermogenes would categorise as vehemence. At the same time, it signifies a turning point: Harshness against the opposition peaks and is relentlessly sustained, whilst severity against Paul's Galatian recipients is slackening, but only up to a point. A résumé of the twofold trajectory of severity in Galatians is presented. Hermogenes can significantly help us appreciate the sustained presence, form and functioning of severe language in Galatians; much better than any or a combination of the three classical genres of speech topics. In view of the correspondences between Galatians and Hermogenes, it may even be asked whether Paul was familiar with traditional rhetorical material that in some form eventually also reached Hermogenes.

Introduction

Second major section (continued): Appeal to re-embrace Paul's gospel (Gl 4:12–5:12)

Galatians 5:1–6¹

In Hermogenic terms, verses 2–4 of this passage should probably be classified as *vehement*. The direct address, staccato-like sentences, harsh, critical language without any toning down, undergirded by two solemn affirmations (5:2, 3) and three grave warnings (5:2, 3, 4) point in this direction (cf. Hermogenes *Per Id* p. 260 l. 17–18; p. 262 l. 3–7).

Galatians 5:7–12

This passage concludes Paul's appeal to his Galatian addressees to re-embrace his gospel. Once again, the apostle makes ample use of forceful language. In fact, severity escalates significantly. Betz (1979:265) speaks of its 'acid rhetoric', whilst Dunn (1993:273) views it as a 'make or break appeal ... the tension is at its sharpest and most nerve-racking'. The short, unconnected sentences are 'a series of abrupt expostulations, like snorts of indignation, betraying Paul's extreme anxiety that (as at Antioch – Gl 2:11–14), he might lose in Galatia also'.

The typical features of Hermogenic *vehemence* are again evident: direct address (5:7), salvo-like, asyndetic² sentences (5:7–10a), the lack of rhythm and harmony, impatient questions (5:7b,11a) containing assertions that cannot be contradicted, biting irony (5:8), the use of metaphors (5:7, 9), as well as the course joke of 5:12, (cf. Hermogenes *Per Id* p. 260 l. 15–18; p. 262 l. 3–7, 15–20; p. 258 l. 7–18).

However, we should differentiate. Galatians 5:7–12 signifies a turning point in the sense that, whilst *vehemence* against the Judaizers reaches a peak, criticism of the Galatians slackens. Paul is increasingly shifting the blame towards the Judaizers, whilst exonerating his convertees. The positive remark in 5:7a (*ἐτρέχετε καλῶς*) is a reconciliatory move towards the latter. In Hermogenic terms, we could say that Paul is now introducing a touch of *vigour* (*ἀκμῆ*). In Hermogenes' opinion, *vigour* is still vehement, but its harshness is lessened by *brilliance* (*λαμπρότης*) (cf. *Per Id* p. 269 l. 10; p. 277 l. 20; see also Wooten 1987:xiv). In discussing *brilliance*, he (*Per Id* p. 265 l. 1–5) states that a passage is brilliant:

when the speaker has some confidence in what he is saying, either because what he is saying is generally approved or because he has acted honourably or because his audience is pleased with what he is saying. (cf. also his examples on p. 265 l. 5ff.)

1. Galatians 5:1 could either be seen as the conclusion of the Sarah-Hagar passage (*pace* the *UBS* text) or as the beginning of the next passage (*pace* *NA*). The second option seems preferable.

2. Hermogenes does not specifically mention *asyndeton* as characteristic of *asperity* or *vehemence*, but it is implied, as some of his Demosthenes examples clearly show, for example: 'Will we not embark? Will we not set forth? Will we not sail to his land?' (*Per Id* p. 259 l. 13–15). Also: 'Why, then, you wretch, do you spread slanders? Why do you compose speeches? Why do you not take a dose of hellebore?' (*Per Id* p. 261 l. 14–15). The piling up of short, unconnected sentences reflects agitation.

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This combination of *vehemence* and *vigour* would fit in well with Hermogenes' insistence that styles should be mixed. Paul's rebukes against his addressees have also become more indirect, as shown in the question of 5:7b, where his rancour is shifting from the Galatians to the τῖς figure. This is also true of the ironic remark in 5:8: 'This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.' The expression of confidence in 5:10a that the Galatians will be of one mind with him (οὐδὲν ἄλλο φρονήσετε), is an even stronger move in the positive direction.

Harshness against the Judaisers is building up. The stratagem of sketching the opposition as shady is applied once more: The secretive τῖς figure 'cut in' (ἐνέκοψεν) on the Galatians, obstructing them in their good race. The ironic sneer in 5:8 is also directed against the opposition. They are a bad influence, corrupting everything (5:9). The one who is 'confusing' the Galatian Christians (5:10b – cf. 1:7) will pay the penalty! Paul is driving in the wedge between the Galatians and his adversaries. He is rallying his flock. They have been victimised; the real blame rests with the agitators. The apostle is now poised to deal the latter the finishing blow. The macabre joke of 5:12 should sever them once and for all from the Galatians.³ Translations tend to soften the rudeness of the ὄφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται wish, but it is indeed, in the words of Longenecker (1990:234), 'the crudest and rudest of all Paul's extant statements'.⁴ Severity is here at its peak. The concluding participle (ἀνασαιτοῦντες) further denigrates the opponents as 'agitators' or 'rabble-rowsers' (Betz 1979:270). Nobody would want to be associated with such characters, the more so after the joke at their cost!

Third major section: Exhortation to a life of freedom in love (Gal 5:13–6:10)

Severity is absent in Galatians 5:13–6:10. It consists of brotherly *paraenesis*. One observation will therefore suffice: The positive movement towards Paul's addressees is continued. Both the two main subsections (5:13–26 and 6:1–10) begin with an affectionate ἀδελφοί (5:13 and 6:1). Also, both conclude with inclusive 'we'-language (5:25–26; 6:9–10).

Letter-closing (Gal 6:11–18)

By drawing attention to his 'large letters' (6:11) Paul probably wanted to underscore the importance of his concluding remarks.⁵ In terms of severity he is preparing

3. Galatians 5:12 not only forms the climax of 5:1–12, it also concludes the foregoing major section of Galatians. Its strategic position shows that this was intended as a knockout blow. People's sexuality has always been a most sensitive issue and to be made a public laughing stock would be devastating.

4. Hermogenes (*Per Id* p. 340 l. 14 – p. 342 l. 2) warns against using a joke which may be ingenious, but exhibits ψυχρότης. Theophrastus defined ψύγρος as the overstepping of 'normal diction' (τὴν οἰκείαν ἀπαγγελίαν) (cf. Demetrius *Eloc.* 114; also Lausberg 1989:§1076). Would that include the crossing of social caveats? *LSJ* describes a ψύγρος person as one 'without life, taste or feeling'. Wooten (1987) translates ψυχρότης here as 'frigidly or bad taste'. Should his second option be correct, Hermogenes may have rejected this Pauline joke as being in bad taste.

5. So Burton ([1921] 1948:348–349); Schlier (1965:280): '... Buchstaben in einem grösseren Duktus, die auffallen und den Inhalt der Worte unterstreichen sollen'; Betz (1979:314); Rohde (1989:271–272); Longenecker (1990:290); Dunn (1993:335).

for his parting salvo. In 6:12–13 he sets out to expose what he views as the hidden agenda of the agitators. The impatient tone and *vituperatio* may correspond to the Hermogenic category of *vehemence*. The opposition are harbouring false motives. Under the pretence of bringing the authentic gospel, their intentions are, in fact, quite different: Firstly, by 'trying to force'⁶ the Galatians to have themselves circumcised, thus creating the positive impression that they are meeting Jewish ἐπυροσωπῆσαι (ἐπυροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί), the antagonists hope to avoid persecution for the sake of the cross of Christ (6:12).⁷ Secondly, in wanting to have the Galatians circumcised, their real intention is not the fulfilment of the law; it is rather that they could boast about their success (Du Toit 1994). Contrary to the agitators who boast in the flesh, Paul boasts in the cross (6:13–14). The qualification of the cross as being that 'of our Lord Jesus Christ' 'adds weight and poignancy to the expression, reflecting the emotion with which Paul made the statement' (Longenecker 1990:294).

The peace blessing of Galatians 6:16 is restricted to 'those who shall live according to this norm'.⁸ The demonstrative pronoun (τούτῳ) refers back to the previous verse where the primacy of being a new creation is posed over against 'such externals as circumcision or uncircumcision' (Burton [1921]1948:357). The proponents of circumcision are once again under fire: They are excluded. The mercy benediction on the 'Israel of God' may also be polemical, but the meaning of this phrase is highly disputed (cf. e.g. Burton [1921] 1948:357–358; Rohde 1989:278; Longenecker 1990:298–299; Dunn 1993:343–346; Eastman 2010).

Galatians 6:17a is half a plea, half a sigh. The agitators and their followers caused Paul much toil; they wore him out, mentally and physically. Within this context, 6:17b may contain an implied warning: Through his personal suffering the apostle has become *solidaire* with the crucified Jesus and all those causing him to suffer should realise the consequences of their behaviour.

Does the letter-closing show signs of continued severity against the Galatians? As noted already, severity has been impressively slackened, but still contains a measure of reserve that distinguishes it from Paul's other postscripts. No greetings are conveyed (*contra* Rm 16:1–16, 21–23; 1 Cor 16:19–20;

6. Ἀναγκάζουσιν is here a conative.

7. Given that the Galatian Christians would then be seen as having joined the Jewish nation, these propagandists would avoid the suspicion of being anti-Jewish.

8. The understanding of Galatians 6:16, including the linguistic and semantic interconnection of its different parts, has been discussed endlessly. I can only outline my own position: (1) Linguistically, there is a natural break between ἐπ' αὐτοῦς and καὶ ἔλεος. The peace blessing comes to a natural conclusion with ἐπ' αὐτοῦς. What follows, is like an afterthought, though an important one, and should be understood separately. One should not simply combine peace and mercy, as is usually done, as if ἐπ' αὐτοῦς does not intervene. (2) If Paul really wanted to closely combine peace and mercy, one would have expected mercy to precede peace. This is the usual order when these two concepts are combined (cf. the examples by Bultmann 1935:481, n. 101). The Jewish examples quoted in Billerbeck ([1926] 1954:579) are misleading, as these two concepts do not immediately follow on each other. In the one instance in *Shemoneh Esreh* 19 where they are combined, mercy precedes peace. The translation should therefore rather be: 'And whoever shall live according to this norm – peace on them, and mercy also on the Israel of God' (cf. *BDR* §442.8).

2 Cor 13:12; Phlp 4:21–22; 1 Th 5:26; Phlm 23–24)⁹; there is no call for a brotherly kiss (*contra* Rm 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Th 5:26); no mentioning of mutual prayers (*contra* 2 Cor 13:7,9; 1 Th 5:25; cf. Rm 15:30–31); no indication of appreciation (*contra* Rm 16, especially 16:3–4, 5b–10, 12–13, 19; cf. Phlp 4:10, 14). Contrary to the peace blessings of other letter-closings (2 Cor 13:11; 1 Th 5:23; cf. Rm 15:33; 16:20; Phlp 4:7, 9) the peace and mercy blessings (6:16) are qualified.

However, there is a flip side to the coin. In three previous passages (4:12–20; 5:7–12; 5:13–6:10) we found indications of the author's wish to bond again with his addressees. Additionally, the postscript contains positives: Paul is protectively siding with the Galatians against the Judaisers (6:12–13). As is his custom, he blesses them with 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' (6:18); but then, contrary to any of his other benedictions, he adds an affectionate ἀδελφοί,¹⁰ endorsed by an ἀμήν, which is also unusual in his undisputed letters – a last, passionate appeal to his family in Christ.

Severity in Galatians: A twofold trajectory

In following the footprints of severity through Galatians, it has become evident that we should distinguish between two trajectories, depending on the target group. The first group would be Paul's Galatian addressees, his direct recipients. His severity towards them is intended to convince them to re-associate with the gospel of freedom and with him as their founder apostle. The second group is Paul's Judaising adversaries. He does not address them directly, but they are nevertheless objects of severity. His harshness against them is intended to convince the Galatian Christians of the necessity to dissociate themselves from the agitators.

Initially, these two trajectories run closely together. In Galatians 1:1–5 implicit severity is directed at Paul's Galatian addressees, but in 1:6–10 both trajectories surface. In Hermogenic terms, the very harsh style of *vehemence* is applied, although an element of *indignation* may be present. Severity in the form of the oath of Galatians 1:20 is directed towards the Galatians. In 3:1–5, Paul's invective against the Galatians reaches its climax.

Hereafter the intensity of severity begins to divert. Harshness against the Galatians still occasionally flares up (cf. 4:8–11, 21 and 5:2–4), but its sharpness is on the decline. In spite of the *indignation* functioning in 4:12–20, the common spiritual bond between author and addressees comes increasingly into focus: they are brothers in Christ (4:12), friends (4:12–18); he is their spiritual mother, now pleading with them (4:19–20). The move towards reconciliation continues in 5:7–12, as indicated by the compliment of 5:7, the note of confidence in 5:10, the ἀδελφοί appellation in 5:11. In addition, the Galatians are

9. Dunn (1993:335) saw the absence of any personal greetings as 'presumably an indication of Paul's irritation at the news from Galatia'.

10. Bengel, cited by Dunn (1993:348), remarked about this: '[7]he severity of the whole epistle is thus softened.'

increasingly portrayed as victims, rather than culprits. In 5:13–6:10 severity is entirely absent and indications of closeness are apparent: the affectionate ἀδελφοί of 5:13 and 6:1, the inclusive 'we'-language of 5:25–26 and 6:9–10. In the letter-closing Paul is protectively siding with his recipients (6:12–13). He blesses them with 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' (6:18) and then, unexpectedly, adds ἀδελφοί and ἀμήν, asserting their familial bond in Christ.

However, as we have seen, some reticence remains. Paul is walking on a tightrope: he must sustain the delicate balance between rapprochement and severity. Staying too severe could ruin relationships forever.¹¹ He must draw the Galatians closer to him; but becoming too friendly could obscure the seriousness of the situation.

In contrast to the diminishing curve of severity on the first trajectory, harshness towards the Judaisers is relentlessly sustained. After it surfaced dramatically for the first time in Galatians 1:6–9, it is repeated in 2:4–5, 11–14 and 4:30. It flares up in 5:7–12, reaching its weird climax in 5:12. Even afterwards its intensity remains (cf. particularly 6:12–13). To slacken severity against them would have been fatal.

Conclusion

From our identification of harsh passages in Galatians it became clear that severity is not a mere appendix (see Appendix 1) to this letter; it is integral to the whole document.

What Hermogenes would most probably have characterised as *vehemence*, is especially prominent and well spread over the bulk of the letter. Galatians 1:6–10; 2:4–5, 11–14; 3:1–5; 4:21; 5:2–4, 7–12 and (perhaps) 6:12–13, were identified as such passages. Galatians 1:20 could be assigned to *sincerity*, whilst 4:8–11 may be either *vehement* or *sincere*, or a combination of both. *Indignation* may be present in 1:6, and functions prominently in 4:12–20 where it solves an exegetical riddle. Galatians 4:21 may reflect *vehemence* or *indignation*, or may be a combination of both. In addition to *vehemence*, 5:7–12 may also exhibit *vigour*, the mixing of styles being a preference of Hermogenes. There were also a few harsh passages that could not clearly be associated with Hermogenic categories: 1:1–6, 11–12; 4:30 (extremely harsh); 6:16–17.¹² The probable reason for that would be their implicit character, whilst Hermogenes requires of a harsh passage to be explicit and directly confrontational (*Per Id* p. 262 l. 4–5).

11. Hermogenes quotes a Homeric saying that the orator should 'prod' his audience in a way suitable to the situation, 'one with gentle words, another with harsh words' (*Per Id* p. 371 l. 25). But to overdo the 'prodding' would invoke negativity.

12. The awkwardly added soteriological statement in Galatians 1:4, which receives additional weight given that it contains traditional material (e.g. Bieringer 1992:222–242; Wengst 1967:50–72) may also contain an implicit rebuke: Paul's 'readers were forgetting the significance of Christ's death' (Dunn 1993:34). Galatians 2:20–21 may imply an even stronger rebuke. The statement: 'I do not nullify the grace of God' (2:21) may ironically infer that others were nullifying, or were on the verge of nullifying, the grace of God. That was the situation in Antioch and may now be happening in Galatia. In that case Christ would have died 'in vain' (δωρεάν). It would have been 'a useless tragedy' (Burton [1921] 1948:143). The grace of God and the cross of Christ formed the most sensitive inner nerve of Paul's convictions. To make light of these would border on the unthinkable (cf. Heb 6:6; 10:29).

The importance of the theological component of Galatians can never be over-emphasised. However, Paul's passion for the integrity of the gospel and his pastoral care for the well-being of his congregations as manifested in his stern, but nevertheless sensitive, handling of the Galatian controversy is not without theological importance.

Looking back at our investigation, the conclusion seems justified that the model of Hermogenes has helped us considerably towards understanding the sustained presence, form, characteristics and functioning of severe language in Galatians. Additionally, in doing so, we were enabled to better appreciate Galatians as an integrated, confrontational document, written in a critical ecclesiastical situation which required drastic measures.

The prolonged discussions about whether Galatians belongs to the judicial, deliberative or epideictic genre have reached a stalemate.¹³ Galatians stubbornly refused to be forced into these inadequate categories. Heuristically, they could not significantly improve our insight into the character of Galatians, and particularly its severe language. Although Hermogenes still paid some lip-service to this age-old and revered distinction,¹⁴ he had in fact already moved on. He invites us to do the same. He may also help us in a more positive direction.

As stated in the introductory remarks of my previous article, the validity of using a second century writer such as Hermogenes to improve our understanding of Galatians does not depend on chronological sequence. As an example, I referred to the so-called New Rhetoric developed by Chaïm Perelman (in cooperation with Lucie Olbrechts-Tyceta) only roundabout the middle of the previous century, but is still widely used in studies of biblical rhetoric.

Nonetheless, at this stage, it would not be out of order to repeat the chronological question. Did Paul know traditional rhetorical elements approximating those which eventually reached Hermogenes? In view of the striking points of convergence between Galatians and Hermogenes that we have identified,¹⁵ such a possibility cannot categorically be ruled out, especially since Dionysius of Halicarnassus, on whom Hermogenes may have been dependent, lived already before Paul (working c. 29–7 BCE in Rome). Tarsian intellectuals and teachers could therefore have been familiar with the teachings

13. Many overviews of the problems, frustrations and failed expectations of this debate have appeared (Anderson 1996:166–167; Nanos 2002:323–331; Tolmie 2005:1–19, etc.).

14. In his *περὶ λόγου πολιτικοῦ* (known as 'Practical Oratory') he explains at length how his styles would comply with these 'three kinds of practical oratory', as he calls them (see *Per Pol* p. 384 l.14 – 395 l.15).

15. See particularly my comments with regard to Galatians 1:6–10; 1:20; 2:11–14; 3:1–5; 4:12–20 and 5:7–12.

of Dionysius even before Paul went to school.¹⁶ Did the young Paul, in writing his *progymnasmata*, also try his hand at *vehemence* (σφοδρότης) or *indignation* (βαρύτης)?

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Competing interest

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16. Due to the lively cultural, social and academic interchange between the prominent centres of the Roman Empire, including Rome and Tarsus, Strabo informs us that young philosophers from Tarsus 'went around from city to city and conducted schools in an able manner' and that Rome was 'full of Tarsians' (*Geogr VI* 14.5.15 – LCL). Although most of those young teachers, who went abroad and presumably found teaching positions there, did not return to Tarsus, some certainly did. A shining example of the latter was the highly respected philosopher Athenodorus, tutor and close friend of the emperor Augustus, whose period in Rome overlapped for over 20 years with that of Dionysius. At a late stage of his life Athenodorus returned to Tarsus, where he was greatly influential and brought about a much needed reform of the Tarsian constitution (Strabo, *ibidem*; cf. also Ramsay [1907] 1963:216–228). Interestingly enough, Strabo also informs us that the city of Tarsus had 'all kinds of schools of rhetoric' (*Geogr VI* 14.5.13).

Appendix 1 starts on the next page →

Appendix 1

Excursus: Was Paul really angry?

Ever since Plato questioned certain practices of the Sophists, the integrity of the orator remained a bone of contention (cf. especially Kennedy 1980:25–60). Was Paul really angry¹ or was his harshness a mere rhetorical stance? Theoretically there seems to be two possibilities:

1. Paul in fact did what any good public speaker, such as an advocate at court, would do. He planned his rhetorical approach; part of it was to find the right words and to work himself into the appropriate emotional state of mind to sound convincing.² We could call that ‘professional pathos’.
2. Paul was really existentially upset, but managed to control his anger to such an extent that he could still write a well-organised letter.

The documentary material in Paul’s other letters and in Acts suggests that Paul’s personality was all but phlegmatic. His passionate, uncompromising nature drove him to fanatically persecute the church (Ac 9:1; Gl 1:13; Phlp 3:6), and even after his Damascus experience it brought him into conflict and altercations

1.Thurén (1999:309) is sceptical that we really can answer this question. Irrespective of Paul’s state of mind, we can only say with confidence that Paul presents himself rhetorically as impassioned. ‘There is, however, reason to doubt whether *the author himself* is overwhelmed by emotions.’ Yet, in a later article (Thurén 2001:106–107) he concedes that Paul’s personality may have played a role, and even sees Paul’s ‘heavy style’ in Galatians as an indication ‘that the Christian Paul was no more gentle than the Jewish Paul’.

2.A skilled speaker would have had no problem in doing this. Cf. Dionysius’s description of the mastering of rhetoric: ‘[S]kill in it grows, beginning with the learning of small and petty rules, which are easily mastered with time, until we choose our words instantaneously and practice the art with unfaltering assurance’ (*Dem* 52, transl. by Usher 1974).

(Ac 15:36–41; 23:3; Gl 2:11–14). Originally he was fiercely loyal to the Jewish faith (Phlp 3:6; Gl 1:14); and afterwards he was equally committed to his new faith. In Philippians 3:8, he emphatically declared³ that, compared to knowing Christ, he regarded everything else as rubbish (σκύβαλα). This reflects a passionate personality that knows no half-measures. The famous diction of Martin Dibelius (1964:36) remains valid: ‘*Er (Paulus) würde nie mit solcher Radikalität Christus verkündet haben, wenn er nicht erst mit solchem Ernst Jude gewesen wäre.*’ The agitated ‘implied author’ of Galatians and the real life Paul were not two different persons. His *pathos* and the severity with which he addressed the Galatians were genuine and spontaneous expressions of his commitment. His emotions occasionally threatened to get out of hand (Gl 1:8–9; 5:12) but he nevertheless managed to present his recipients with a rhetorically forceful letter.

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- 3.Cf. the proliferation of particles (ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ) to accentuate his statement; also BAGD s.v. μενοῦνγε.