

ONE NEW MAN

A COMMENTARY ON
GALATIANS AND
EPHESIANS



DOUGLAS WILSON

CANON  PRESS

MOSCOW, IDAHO

Douglas Wilson, *One New Man: A Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians*
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Published by Canon Press
P. O. Box 8729, Moscow, Idaho 83843
800-488-2034 | www.canonpress.com

Cover design by James Engerbretson
Interior design by Valerie Anne Bost
Printed in the United States of America

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Wilson, Douglas, 1953- author.

One new man : a commentary on Galatians and Ephesians / Douglas Wilson.

Moscow, Idaho : Canon Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references.

LCCN 2022002188 | ISBN 9781954887169 (paperback)

LCSH: Bible. Galatians—Commentaries. | Bible. Ephesians—Commentaries.

Classification: LCC BS2685.53 .W5398 2022 | DDC 227/.407—dc23/eng
/20220528

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022002188>

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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For my mother, Bessie Wilson,
who loved the book of Ephesians.

INTRODUCTION



If the book of Ephesians is like a treasury of Pauline doctrine, containing shelf after shelf of priceless jewels and gems, the book of Galatians is like a firefight with the security team in the hallway outside. Certain false brethren had crept in in order to attempt the heist of the ages, but they were arrested by the great apostle. Not only so, but they were then tried and convicted by the Jerusalem Council shortly thereafter.

Galatians is made up of both heat and light, while Ephesians is simply light. This is not a criticism of either, obviously, as both are the Word of God, perfect for their respective situations. The doctrine contained in the two books

comes from the same mind, the same heart, the same man. It is obviously consistent. But in the former you have a husband, fighting to protect his wife from assailants, and in the latter you have a husband and wife sharing a quiet dinner together, talking about what is most important to them. If someone is important to you, and you love her, you will fight for her. And if someone is important to you, and you love her, you will also talk with her. There is no inconsistency.

If there had been no fight in Galatians, then all the words of Ephesians would have been meaningless. If there had been no treasures in Ephesians, there would have been nothing to fight for.

These books are presented to you together in the hope that you will be blessed and edified, learning when to fight and when to reflect.

DOUGLAS WILSON
Christ Church
July 2023

GALATIANS

GALATIANS 1



ENTERING THE REGENERATION

It is always fitting for Christians to take any opportunity to study the book of Galatians, that great charter of Christian freedom. We need to stand fast in the liberty Christ brought to us, and we must refuse every form of sinful bondage.

Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might

deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Gal. 1:1–5)

DATE AND LOCATION

The letter to the Galatians was written to a collection of churches in the Roman province of Galatia—churches such as Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe. Paul had gone through this area on his first missionary journey, but no sooner had he gotten back to Antioch than he discovered that false teachers were following in his wake and disrupting the churches there. Not only this, but Peter had capitulated to the same error at Antioch, causing a crisis there. All this occurred just before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), placing the writing of Galatians in the mid to late 40s. This is significant because it makes this classic Pauline statement of the gospel one of the *earliest* books of the New Testament. The view that Galatians was written to the believers of *ethnic* Galatia to the north cannot really be sustained.

THE DOCTRINAL RELEVANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

Some say it is “white hot.” Others, “explosive and fiery,” or “spiritual dynamite.” I prefer to call it “blistering,” but, whatever the description, the point remains the same—Paul’s letter to the Galatians uses *strong* language (Gal. 1:6; 3:1; 5:12; 6:12).

So why, in the midst of this hot epistle, does Paul suddenly insert a short post-conversion autobiography and travelogue? Given the tone of the book, the obvious answer is that Paul's history has a crucial significance to the doctrinal dispute in question. Thus, from Galatians 1:11–2:14, we find a personal history of Paul which directly bears on the doctrinal apostasy that was occurring in Galatia at the time.

The issue in the Galatian churches was that certain teachers were presenting a different “gospel” (Gal. 1:6–7), which in Paul's eyes was not a gospel at all. This “gospel” entailed an attempt to be “justified by law” (Gal. 5:4). More specifically, it taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation. The Galatians were apparently unaware that this would result in alienation from Christ and bondage to the Jewish law (Gal. 5:3).

Given this situation, it is easy to see that Paul's purpose is not to simply outline his travels. It is to defend himself against the accusation that he is not a true apostle directly sent by Christ (Gal. 1:1).

My understanding of Paul's travels as described here could be labeled “South Galatian.”¹ This is the view that the Galatian churches were located in the Roman province of Galatia, and not in the ethnic region of Galatia to the north. My main reason for adopting this approach is that in my view it requires the least amount of interpretation in the texts involved—in a South Galatian framework, the parallel

1. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 450–457.