

## Who Were Paul's Opponents in Galatia?

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### Why Is the Identity of Paul's Opponents an Issue?

Paul's opponents in Galatia are central to the argument of Galatians because the epistle is essentially a response to their threat to the churches of Galatia. Therefore it is not surprising to see that the opponents are mentioned in every chapter (1:6–9; 2:4–5; 3:1; 4:17; 5:10, 12; 6:12–13). Conservative scholars have historically assumed that these foes were Judaizers and have interpreted the text in that light. However, in the last 70 years a persistent critique now gaining widespread acceptance says that the Judaizer identity is totally inadequate in explaining crucial verses like Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

While Paul was apparently addressing some sort of Judaistic aberration in Galatians 3–4, these critics argue, he was also overtly attacking an antinomian aberration in Galatians 5–6, and the Judaistic identity cannot encompass this additional aberration. Therefore an increasing number of New Testament scholars are advocating a different identity for Paul's opponents in Galatia. Evangelicals should not blithely continue to assume the correctness of the Judaizer identity. They must see if their assumptions need revision and if this will aid in understanding the latter part of Galatians.

### The Three Major Views of the Opponents' Identity

Three major views of Paul's opponents in Galatia encompass numerous minor views. The *traditional view* is that the opponents were "Judaizers" pressuring Gentiles to live as if they were Jews.

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BSac 147:587 (Jul 90) p. 330

The *two-opponent view* holds that both Judaizers and libertine "pneumatics" plagued Paul in Galatia. The *Gnostic/syncretistic Jewish Christians view* is that there was one group of opponents with both Judaistic and libertine traits in some of the peripheral groups within Judaism and Asia Minor.

### The Traditional View: Judaizers

Since the second-century Marcioni...

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