Dissertation Summary


Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians is one of the most important books of the New Testament. As one of the earliest Christian documents to survive, Galatians is historically important because it contains the most extensive autobiographical section of any early Christian leader. Galatians is also theologically important because of its exposition of the role of the Torah in Christian life in the first century, which became a fundamental text for the doctrine of justification by faith during the Reformation. Due to its importance, therefore, both the historian and the theologian need to have a good idea of what Paul’s words to the Galatians were.

For example, in the first two chapters of this text, Paul details his dealings with the church in Jerusalem, the whole time asserting his own independence. In particular, Paul’s interaction with his fellow Christians came to a head in the famous Antioch incident (Gal 2:11–14). According to the current Nestle-Aland text, this incident was triggered by the arrival of certain people from James, who intimidated Cephas into publicly changing his mind and separating himself from the Gentiles (Gal 2:12 ὥστε δὲ ἦλθον ὑπέστελλεν, “but when they came, he withdrew”). The best and earliest manuscripts, however, tell a different story. A difference of a single letter—from ἦλθον (“they came”) to ἦλθεν (“he came”)—results in a markedly different understanding of the incident. Instead of being intimidated at Antioch into changing his mind, Cephas came to Antioch with no intention of eating with the Gentiles, and this is what Paul found objectionable.

As another example, Galatians has been central in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. By this term, was Paul talking about one’s faith in Christ or Christ’s own faithfulness? At Gal 2:20, the Nestle-Aland edition reads ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, and scholars dispute whether it should mean “I live by faith in the Son of God” (objective genitive) or “I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God” (subjective genitive). Here again, this argument would have a different cast if the reading attested by the two earliest witnesses and others is what Paul had written to the Galatians: τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ (“‘God and Christ’”) instead of τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (“‘the Son of God’”).

As textual critics have realized over the past couple decades, there is more to textual criticism than merely reconstructing the text of a presumed original.
The history of the text is also important. How did the text change during its transmission among the manuscripts? And can plausible reasons—especially theological motivations—be ascertained for these changes to the text? To this end, it is necessary to look at more than what the original text can provide. The Christian controversies that embroiled the scribes revolved around the texts of their day, not around the text of an original that had long since disappeared. The variants produced by these scribes thus provide a window into this past, even though in many cases these variants are the very details purged from the text by textual critics in their quests for the original.

This study of the text takes the need for understanding the history of the text seriously by being the first to propose a detailed *stemma codicum* (or “family tree”) of a significant number of the leading manuscripts and versions of Galatians. In specific, this study analyzed collations of 92 witnesses at 1,624 variation units. The analytical task was immense, so the initial shape of the stemma was constructed with the help of computer software programmed to implement “cladistic” algorithms devised by computational biologists to classify organisms based on their common descent. The choice of cladistics to devise a family tree for witnesses to the text is justified theoretical by deep philosophical similarities between cladistics and stemmatics and more practically by its success in editing the Canterbury Tales. After the initial shape of the stemma was produced, the stemma was oriented based on a detailed examination of the internal evidence of readings, using the recent advances in linguistic theory in the field of pragmatics to analyze the subtle nuances arising from changes in word order, the use of the article, and the role of conjunctive particles.

The result of this analysis of the history of the Galatian text broadly confirms and largely reconciles the previous investigations of F. J. A. Hort and Günther Zuntz. In particular, the stemma produced by this study contains a distinct branch of the textual transmission that corresponds to what has been regarded as the “Western” text. Its members include D, F, G, and the Old Latin witnesses b and d. The text of this branch is the most divergent in the transmission of Galatians, with more harmonizations and theologically significant variations, especially those with an anti-Judaic effect. An early relative of this group is Marcion, corroborating the views of some scholars that Marcion’s text is an early witness or precursor to the Western branch, which indicates that the Western branch began to diverge from its relatives no later than to the first half of the second century.

Outside of Marcion, the closest relative to the Western text is a cluster comprising the two oldest extant manuscripts of a substantial portion of Galatians: the early third-century papyrus P46 and the fourth-century Codex Vaticanus (B). The common ancestor of P46 and B, separated by unknown generations, must be earlier than P46 and probably goes back to somewhere in the second century. Its textual transmission is generally strict, and its most common errors are omissions of little words and harmonizations to the local context.
The largest branch of the tradition identified in this study and largely independent of P46-B and the Western branch is called, for want of a better term, the “Eastern” branch. Its leading manuscripts are Codex Sinaiticus (א) from the mid-fourth century and the “Queen of the Cursives 33” from the ninth century. Despite the lateness of these witnesses, their textual quality is very good and they constitute the earliest stratum of the Eastern branch. After this stage, the Eastern branch splits into two sub-branches. One sub-branch comprises the fifth-century manuscripts A and C as well as P and 1241s of the Middle Ages. The other sub-branch is a large collection of witnesses that includes family 1739, the Athos Codex Ψ, a “Syrian” group (comprising the text of John Chrysostom, the Peshitta, and Harklean witnesses), and the Byzantine text proper. As for the common ancestor of the Byzantine text, it has been found to be the result of a long process of transmission within the Eastern branch.\footnote{In this regard, this finding coheres with that of Klaus Wachtel, Der byzantinsiche Text der katholischen Briefe: Eine Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Koine des Neuen Testaments (ANTT 24; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), for the Catholic Epistles.} There is little evidence that the Byzantine text is the result of a recension aside from a small influx of Western readings into the common ancestor of the Syrian group and the Byzantine text. Unlike the Western branch, there is little evidence that theological concerns played an important role in the transmission of the text in the Eastern branch.

This study also proposes a new critical text that differs from the critical text of the Nestle-Aland edition in several important ways. There are two main reasons for this difference. First, the critical text of this study is edited based on an explicit history of the text, precisely depicted in the form of a *stemma codicum*. Second, this study relies on recent research on linguistic pragmatics of the Greek article, word order, and conjunctive particles to come to a theoretically informed decision about certain difficult variants.

One set of proposed changes to the Nestle-Aland critical text, however, is simply due to a difference in editorial philosophy. This study adopts the philosophy of the recent SBL edition of the New Testament that it is an editor’s duty to decide what the text says based on the evidence and the editor’s expertise, and thus brackets should be used sparingly, if at all. There are nine bracketed readings in the Nestle-Aland text. Of these nine bracketed readings, the longer reading is chosen eight times (1:6; 1:8; 1:15; 2:6; 2:13; 2:16; 3:21; and 5:7), and the shorter reading was chosen (5:24) once.

There are 10 other differences in the text involving nonbracketed readings. The most textually significant reading is the emendation at 4:25, relegating to the apparatus the statement that Sinai is a mountain in Arabia. This statement has long been seen as a marginal gloss that crept into the text, but the analysis in this study that the note does not belong in the main text of a critical edition is the fullest to date. Specifically, Gal 4:25a is both argumentatively and
structurally superfluous and its conception about Arabia is in tension with Arabia’s role in Gal 1:17. Even if one were to retain the note in the text and thereby avoid the use of conjecture, this study still argues for a form of the statement different from that of the Nestle-Aland text, namely, it would be the shorter version without the explicit reference to Hagar.

The most historically significant difference between this study’s critical text and the text of the Nestle-Aland edition is the change of a single letter at Gal 2:12. Rather than stating “when they came” (ἦλθον), referring to some people from James, the best attested reading states “when he came” (ἦλθον), referring to Cephas. This tiny difference in the text results in a markedly different understanding of the Antioch incident. With the reading of the Nestle-Aland text, on the one hand, Cephas came to Antioch, ate with the local Gentiles, but then was intimidated into changing his mind. With this study’s critical text, on the other hand, Cephas came to Antioch with no intention of eating with the Gentiles, and this is what Paul objected to.

Perhaps the most theologically significant difference between the critical text of this study and that of the Nestle-Aland is the variation unit in Gal 2:20, where Paul lives “by the faith of God and Christ” instead of “by the faith of the son of God” only. The presence of God in this formulation makes the genitive more amenable to a subjective interpretation because Paul elsewhere had no problem with the notion of God’s faithfulness (cf. Rom 3:3, τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ “the faithfulness of God”). This collocation of “God and Christ” at Gal 2:20 thus strengthens the exegetical evidentiary base for the subjective genitive.

Other textual differences involve more subtle theological issues. For example, the word order variant at 1:3 gives the opening greeting a somewhat stronger Christological cast to the greeting (“our Lord Jesus Christ”) than does the Nestle-Aland text (“God our Father”). A word order variant at 1:8 presupposes that preaching besides what Paul preaches is a distortion of the gospel of Christ (v.6). A different connective particle in 1:11 has a structural implication, namely, that v. 11, not v. 10, begins a major section of the letter. Moreover, a difference between “went away” (ἀπῆλθον) and “went up” (ἀνῆλθον) in 1:17 slightly strengthens Paul’s claim of independence from Jerusalem.

To be sure, other textual variants have barely any discernable difference. The difference in preposition at 1:4 between περί and ὑπέρ is virtually untranslatable into English. The difference between οὐδέ (“and not”) and οὔτε (“nor”) in 1:12 is almost imperceptible, but it might suggest that Paul received his traditions and teachings on difficult occasions, or it might suggest an afterthought on Paul’s part. The difference between ἀχρις and μέχρις in 4:19 is so small that this textual variation was not even included in the Nestle-Aland apparatus. Also virtually nonexistent is the distinction in meaning between the aorist subjunctive κληρονομήσῃ and the future κληρονομήσει in 4:30.

This study concludes that the text of Galatians in the Nestle-Aland edition is very good, but there remains room for improvement. Granted, almost all of
the textual differences hardly change our understanding of the letter except in very subtle ways, but they do provide insight on the thinking of the scribes who transmitted the text. Nonetheless, at least three of the earliest variant readings are historically and theologically significant. The results of this study suggest that there may also be room for improvement in other letters of Paul, especially where either P46 or B is supported by the witnesses in the Western branch. There will always be room for improvement, as we discover new manuscripts, develop new techniques for analyzing their history, and as we improve our understanding of the Greek language, allowing us to appreciate finer nuances in the different forms of the text to a degree never before possible.