



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Galatians 1:11 - 17; Acts 9:1 - 6

1. Paul's Gospel was Not of Human Origin (Gal. 1:11-12a)
 - a. "Both the commission and the message have a divine, not a human, origin [Gal. 1:1, 11]...He did not 'receive' it in the manner of receiving human traditions passed on from teacher to disciple; he was not taught it from such human masters. Rather...Paul's message came 'through a revelation of Jesus Christ.'" [David DeSilva, Galatians, pp. 139-140]
 - b. "It was not a merely human gospel that Paul had received secondhand from the mouths of other human beings...nor was it the result of Paul's compromising of God's message on the basis of his own human impulses to accommodate people & win them over." [David DeSilva, Galatians, NICNT, p. 139]
 - c. "In [Gal.] 1:11-12, Paul articulates the thesis that he'll elaborate...[that] the 'good news announced by me... isn't a human idea'...Paul received this gospel through a revelation of Christ narrated in 1:13-16a, & he did not depend on human sources for it, as shown in 1:16-21." [Craig Keener, Galatians, p. 71]
2. It Came By a Revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12b)
 - a. "The gospel preached by me is not of human origin...it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:12)
 - b. "Although [the Galatians] received the gospel from Paul (1:9), Paul himself received it through Christ rather than human agents (1:12)." [Craig Keener, Galatians, p. 72]
 - c. "Revelation describes something made known by God to humans...that would otherwise not be known or accessible.
 - d. Revelation thus stands in glaring contrast to passing on sacred traditions." [Scot McKnight, Galatians, p. 64]
 - e. "I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ'...Surely Paul is describing here his Damascus road encounter with the risen Lord, in which...he was both converted & received his call to evangelize the Gentile world (Acts 9:1-9)... The most important description of Paul's gospel is that it is a direct revelation from Jesus Christ, & therefore, not an indirect gospel that had come to him through the Jerusalem authorities. If...indirect...it would [then] need to be confirmed by Jerusalem." [Scot McKnight, Galatians, pp. 64-65]
 - f. "The first & best reason [the Galatian believers] should resist the leading of the rival teachers is that Paul brought them exactly & fully the message God had for them (1:11-12)." [David DeSilva, Galatians, NICNT, p. 138]

3. Paul's Life Before Meeting Jesus (Galatians 1:13-14)

- a. "My former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church & tried to destroy it. 14 I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries...because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors." (Gal. 1:13-14)
- b. Paul's "life in Judaism" "Paul, by birth, was 'in the possession' of Judaism (Gal. 1:13)...a [phrase] with double significance... Judaism's possession of Paul and Paul's possession of Judaism empowered his life: he excelled onward and upward and he persecuted those who compromised Jewish monotheism." [Carey C. Newman, Paul's Glory-Christology, pp. 198-9]
- c. "Paul had lived enthusiastically & well, within the norms & values of his tradition." [J. Barclay, Paul Power of Grace, p. 44]
- d. "Paul had clearly come to see the Jesus movement as a threat to the nation's fidelity to the covenant...that might lead to... God's punishing the nation through some foreign power...Paul was seeking to protect Israel's place in God's favor by punishing those who threaten to violate that covenant bond & incur God's wrath against the whole people." [David DeSilva, Galatians, NICNT, p. 143]
- e. "Such was [Paul's] state...before his conversion. He was a bigot & a fanatic, wholehearted in his devotion to Judaism & his persecution of Christ & the church. Now a man in that mental & emotional state is in no mood to change his mind, or even to have it changed for him by men...Only God could reach him – & God did." [John Stott, Only One Way, pp. 31-32]
- f. "The tense of the verb... 'I was persecuting' & 'I was engaged in tearing down' denotes habitual action: attacking the fledgling Christian Movement was Paul's regular practice...prior to God's intervention..." [David DeSilva, Gal., p. 142]
- g. "[In] his former life within the Jewish tradition...[Paul] was virulently opposed to 'the assembly of God' & tried to destroy it. On these grounds, he was the last person you'd expect to be given the favor of God...What happened next was an event that bore no relation to the worth of his previous identity & conduct. It was not another stage in his development, a further step in his progress of zeal, but the effect of a divine decision: 'When God was pleased...to reveal' (1:15-16)." [John Barclay, Paul & the Power of Grace, pp. 42-43]
 - a. Intensely persecuting God's church (Gal. 1:13; Acts 22:4; 26:9-10; Phil. 3:6)
 - a. In Paul's estimation, Jesus was a false Messiah who was cursed by God (Dt. 21:23)
 - b. In Paul's estimation, Christians were a threat to the nation of Israel & deserved to be punished (Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1-2)
 - c. Paul saw himself as following earlier Jewish defenders of the nation's purity (Num. 25:1-13; 1 Kings 18:40)
 - d. Only God could reach him in this state
 - b. Wholeheartedly devoted to the traditions of his ancestors (Gal. 1:14; Ac. 22:3; 26:4-5; Phil. 3:5)
 - a. "Paul's portrait of his former life 'in Judaism' allows 2 relevant inferences. [1.] No one, including the rival teachers, can pretend to know more about the Torah than Paul. If anyone is in a position to speak authoritatively about that way of life & about its relative value via-a-vis the Spirit-driven life, it is he. [2.] Only God's personal intervention... could explain his transformation from such a person into a preacher of a Torah-free gospel." [D. DeSilva, Gal., p. 145]
 - c. A Counter to the Rival Teachers promoting Judaism
 - a. "Paul begins his autobiography...describing his...intense zeal for the Torah [Law] &...the traditions of his forefathers. [Paul was] so fanatical ...he was driven to 'persecute & destroy God's church' (Gal. 1:13). He...advanced [in Judaism] beyond his contemporaries in the Jewish faith (Gal. 1:14)...Paul's [account of] conversion & calling on his way to Damascus...serves as an apt countermeasure to dismiss the Judaizing rival teachers...Paul is saying, 'I was beyond the rivals in my passion & practice for the Torah, but God transformed me entirely, & I became a preacher of a Torah-free gospel.' By sharing his personal story & how God challenged his former way of life—the very life that rival teachers are enforcing on the Galatians—Paul clearly shows the bankruptcy of the rivals' teaching." [Keith Maynor, "Social & Cultural Texture in Gal. 1," Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership, Vol. 8, #1 (Fall 2018) pp. 230-1]

4. Paul's Life Was Suddenly & Completely Changed (Acts 9:1-6; Gal. 1:15-16a)

- a. "But when God...was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me..." (Gal. 1:15-16)
- b. "I [was] 5 circumcised the 8th day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; 6 regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that's in the law, blameless. 7 But everything that was a gain to me, I've considered to be a loss because of Christ." (Phil. 3:5-7)
 - a. Paul's 'Damascus Road Experience'
 - a. "Damascus [Road] experiences' are [when] a person has a sudden insight that radically changes their beliefs... Originally used in a spiritual context, the phrase also refers to other types of sudden conversion." ["D is for Road to Damascus Experiences"]

- b. "En route to Damascus...to persecute the church, Paul encountered the risen Christ. This pivotal event is sparingly spoken of in Paul's letters (1 Cor. 15:8-11; Gal 1:11-17), which is not surprising given that the letters are occasional, pastoral, & are written around 15 years after the event...Paul refers to it as an appearance or revelation, he mentions he was persecuting the church prior to this event; he connects it with his call to be an apostle; & he emphasizes it was God's gracious initiative." [Bruce W. Longenecker, Todd D. Still, Thinking through Paul (Instructors' Manual) p.]
 - c. "A strong visionary and subjective element is not to be denied. The key factor, however, is that Paul experienced the encounter as a seeing of Jesus." [James D. G. Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, p. 350]
 - d. "Somewhere near Damascus...Paul had an experience that led to a radical reassessment of...Jesus & a thorough going reconfiguration of his foundational convictions...Paul understood this experience as an encounter with the risen Christ ('Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?') 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-9)...Paul sees no gap...between his experience & the interpretation...For him, the subjective experience {God 'reveal[ed] his Son in me...' (Gal. 1:15-16)} & the objective reality {'Last of all...he [Christ] ... appeared to me' (1 Cor. 15:8)} were a seamless reality." [John Muddiman, Pauline Epistles, p. 38]
- b. When least expected
- a. "When Paul's zeal for Torah was at its most fevered pitch & his opposition to the Jewish Christian movement in its full strength, the inexplicable happened (1:15-16)." [David DeSilva, Galatians, NICNT, p. 145]
- c. Because Paul met the resurrected Jesus (Acts 9:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8)
- a. "...Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1)
 - b. "Christ died for our sins...he was buried...he was raised on the 3rd day...he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the Twelve [disciples]...Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me [Paul]." (1 Cor. 15:3-5, 8)
 - c. What Paul may have expected to hear from God: "Well done! Thank you!"
 - a. What really happened: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"
 - b. The outward things that God does do not lead to lasting life-change
 - a. "The meaning of 'a revelation of Jesus Christ' (Gal. 1:12c) has been much debated...[Was it] a subjective, internal hallucination, simply a 'product of the human soul' or...an objective, external event in which Paul (actually) 'saw' Jesus[?]" [Carey C. Newman, Paul's Glory-Christology, p. 200]
 - c. The inward revelation of Jesus in Paul—"God...reveal[ed] his Son in me" (Gal. 1:15-16a)
 - a. Was Jesus crucified? Yes!
 - b. Was Jesus cursed by God on the cross? Yes!
 - c. But, Jesus is alive!
 - d. God has vindicated him
 - d. Paul is called, commissioned as apostle to preach to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:16b; Acts 26:17b-18; 2 Cor. 4:1-6)
 - a. Paul's "conviction was clear: the risen Lord had commissioned Saul [Paul] to be his missionary/apostle to the Gentiles when he encountered Saul [Paul] on the Damascus road." [James D. G. Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, pp. 352-3]
 - b. "Paul's Damascus Road experience was...a call to be an apostle...Despite the chronological gap, Paul claims it constitutes him an apostle on an equal basis with the others...[Despite some] Jerusalem followers [seeing him as a] 'Johnny-come-lately'." [John Muddiman, Pauline Epistles, pp. 38-39]
 - c. "Paul traces the origin of his calling & [apostolic] commissioning to his encounter with the risen Christ. Most [scholars] would agree that Paul believed he had seen the risen Christ & that the genesis of Paul's mission as an apostle can be traced back to this experience. This...[vision of Christ] thus marks the starting point of Paul's ministry, a point Paul himself makes known in his letters (Gal. 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8)." [Tony Costa, "Is Saul of Tarsus also among the Prophets?—Paul's Calling..." in Christian Origins & Hellenistic Judaism, Vol. 10, p. 203]
 - d. "God revealed his Son in Paul not primarily for Paul's sake, but so that he might announce the good news about him among the Gentiles...Proclaiming Jesus to Gentiles was Paul's commission; it was not what the Jerusalem apostles were doing, so there was no need to consult them (1:16-17)." [Craig Keener, Galatians, p. 88]
 - e. "What was different about Paul's gospel was his conviction that it was open also to Gentiles...That was why Paul was such an uncomfortable bedfellow with his fellow apostles: he saw himself as first & foremost 'apostle to the Gentiles;' & that had been the case from his commissioning itself." [James D. G. Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem p. 354]
 - e. A divine act of grace
 - a. "[Gal. 1:15-16] indicate that what has reconstituted Paul's life is a divine act of grace without regard to his ethnicity, his tradition, or his excellence within it – & also without regard to his former opposition to God...His transformation was neither occasioned by his own action nor conditioned by his previous worth: it resulted from the unconditioned gift of God." [John Barclay, Paul & the Power of Grace, pp. 43-44]
 - b. "Paul was...called through God's abundant generosity, or grace (1:15), by God's initiative rather than by Paul's prior zeal for his people's traditions (1:14)." [Craig Keener, Galatians, p. 87]
 - f. A Radical Change—"Conversion"
 - a. "Several scholars...contend that Paul's Damascus Road experience should not be understood as a conversion. They argue that the language used is best understood in terms of God calling Paul to proclaim a message (cf. Is. 49:1-6; Jer. 1:5). While the language used is more reflective of a call, the kind of transformation that this event brought about in Paul's life could be easily understood in terms of a conversion (Phil 3:7-14). Paul's conversion/call is also described in Acts...which...include...details not found in Paul's letters." [B. W. Longenecker, T. D. Still, Thinking through Paul, p.]
 - b. "What [Paul] experienced...near Damascus was, he says, a 'revelation'...of the risen Jesus (Gal. 1:15-16)...Paul later...describe[s] it...[as] a 'calling' effected by the grace of God (Gal. 1:15)...'Calling' in Paul means more than commission: it is the word he uses for what we term 'conversion'...[i.e.,] the start of a new relation to God." [John Barclay, Paul, p. 7]

- c. "Paul's radical change of allegiance & behavior is the effect that demonstrates the cause, namely, God's direct intervention in his life, which became the source of the Gospel he proclaimed." [David DeSilva, Galatians, p. 140]
- d. "Most telling...is Paul's changed attitude toward that which centrally defined his pre-encounter life...Paul underwent a paradigm shift of such magnitude as cannot be otherwise described than 'conversion.'" [David DeSilva, Gal., p. 146]
- e. "Paul's...life has an entirely new focus [as a result of] the revelation [(Gal. 1:16) which] becomes the new organizing center of Paul's existence that drives him to preach God's Son to the Gentiles. He is answerable now not to his ancestors [Gal. 1:14] or his contemporaries & compatriots but to God (or Christ) alone; hence a wedge is driven between 'pleasing human beings' & fulfilling his duties as 'the slave of Christ' (Gal. 1:10)...The thread of...continuity in Gal. 1-2 is not Paul as such...but Paul's story as it represents the experiences & crises of...the gospel." [John M. G. Barclay, "Paul's Story: Theology as Testimony," in B. W. Longenecker (ed.) Narrative Dynamics in Paul, p. 141]

5. Paul's Life As A Result of Meeting Jesus (Galatians 1:16b-18a)

- a. Driven to bring the gospel revealed to him to everyone he met, especially non-Jews
- b. Not immediately consulting with anyone (Gal. 1:16b)
 - a. "Many interpreters read Gal. 1:17b, 'I went into Arabia & then returned to Damascus', as...Paul's obedience to God's call to preach the gospel. But this works against the shap[e] of the text. Paul first highlights 2 things he didn't do following his conversion ['I did not immediately consult with anyone. 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to [the]...apostles (Gal. 1:16b17a)]; only then does he speak of going to Arabia and Damascus. He mentions neither preaching nor Gentiles in connection with those locations." [Timothy Wiarda, "Plot...in Galatians 1 & 2," Tyndale Bulletin, V. 55.2 (2004) p. 240]
- c. Not going up to Jerusalem to the other apostles (Gal. 1:17a)
 - a. "Paul's chief point is that, after this life-changing experience, he did not present himself to the Jerusalem apostles as a pupil or ministry candidate, nor...to any other 'flesh-&-blood' body of Christians, who could then claim ownership of & authority over him. What he understood to be the significance of the Christ event & the nature of the message he was to proclaim...took shape independently of the Jerusalem-based Jesus movement." [David DeSilva, Gal., p. 145]
- d. Going into Arabia (Gal. 1:17b)
 - a. Roman Arabia included much of what is modern Saudi Arabia, Jordan, & southern Syria. Therefore, while Paul may not have traveled far from Damascus here, he can also speak of distant Mount Sinai as being in Arabia [ESV]
 - b. "Whatever [Paul] was doing in Arabia, Damascus, Syria & Cilicia (Gal. 1:17, 21), what matters is that he was there and not in Jerusalem." [John Barclay, Paul & the Gift, p. 362]
 - c. Paul "says God was pleased 'to reveal his Son in me' (Gal. 1:16)...The ['in me']...is not meant [to]...indicat[e] that this was a 'private,' 'merely subjective,' or 'purely spiritual' appearance...Paul's other mentions...make it clear that he saw Jesus with his own physical eyes, just as the other apostles had done [1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8]... 'In'...suggests that Paul saw himself...as a paradigm of the gospel. It wasn't just...what Paul said that expressed the truth of the gospel; it was to be what he was [that expressed the gospel's truth]. That's...the point of this autobiography[y...that] becomes clearer at Gal. 2:19-21." [N. T. Wright, Galatians, pp. 78-79]
 - d. "[Paul's] purpose [in verse 17] is not to arouse the reader's curiosity about what he 'did' do in Arabia & Damascus... but to establish what he did 'not' do by remaining in those regions after his conversion. Paul did not present himself to the authorities in Jerusalem church for their 'orders,' nor did he present himself to them as their student & disciple. Paul's goal is thus simply to stress his independence from the Jerusalem apostles in regard both to his commission & to his understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ." [David DeSilva, Galatians, NICNT, p. 157]
- e. Returning to Damascus (Gal. 1:17c)
 - a. "What's the...effect of this broken plot structure? The abrupt jump to Paul's travels...emphasi[z]es his minimal contact with the Jerusalem church, calls...attention to this distance-from-Jerusalem theme, & strongly suggests...this is what Paul is most concerned to communicate...When he might [have] highlight[ed his]...miraculous transformation...Paul turns away to emphasize something quite different—that he didn't consult with human teachers." [T. Wiarda, "Plot," Tyndale Bulletin, V. 55.2, pp. 240-1]
- f. Then after 3 years going to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18a)
 - a. "In the crucial first episode...the broken story structure reveals [Paul's] particular concern to describe his post conversion independence from human teachers & his absence [distance] from Jerusalem...The broken story of Gal. 1:13-24 highlights Paul's lack of extensive contact with the Jerusalem apostles, thus underlining the point he...made in Gal. 1:11-12 about the origin of his gospel." [Tim Wiarda, "Plot & Character in Gal. 1-2," Tyndale Bull., V. 55.2, p. 245]

6. Application

- a. We aren't Paul
 - a. "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?...Last of all...he also appeared to me" (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8)
 - b. "What we need to realize is that [Paul's conversion] is simply one person's conversion; there is no justification for the notion that everyone's conversion or calling must take place as Paul's did...Paul does not teach that every Christian

must have a call before they begin to serve Christ..." [Scot McKnight, Galatians, p. 75]

- c. Saul (Paul) saw Jesus Christ in resurrection "Last of all...he appeared also to me." (1 Cor. 15:8)
 - d. Paul was appointed Apostle directly by Christ in resurrection: "The Lord said, 'I am Jesus...I have appeared to you... to appoint you as a servant & witness to the things in which you have seen me...'" (Acts 26:16)
 - e. Paul laid the foundation, others build upon it—"like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, & others build upon it" (1 Cor. 3:10) "...being built on the foundation of the apostles & prophets..." (Eph. 2:20)
 - f. Paul wrote the New Testament; it is a "closed canon"—"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book" (Rev. 22:18)
- b. Yet Paul is a paradigm for us
- a. "Paul used his narrative to offer himself as a paradigm of the power of the gospel (Gal. 4:12)." [Beverley R. Gaventa, "Gal. 1 & 2: Autobiography as Paradigm," NovT., Vol. 26 (1986), p. 326]
 - b. "Paul...offers a paradigm—not that the Galatians could imitate his story as a Jew or as an apostle, but because Paul's biography...model[s] the reorientation effected by an encounter with Christ...God's 'calling in grace' has transformed his identity...He walks to a different drumbeat, on a path...oriented to 'the truth of the [gospel]'" [John M. G. Barclay, Paul & the Gift, pp. 356-7]
 - c. "Paul understood his own call—the zealous Pharisee summoned to become an apostle to the pagans—as... paradigmatic. The gospel that was turning the world inside out had turned him inside out as well." [N. T. Wright, Galatians, p. 52]
 - d. "Paul spends a lot of time recounting his own biography...providing a self-portrait that should serve paradigmatically for the Galatians to imitate (Gal. 1:10-2:14; cf. 4:12 ['I beg you, brothers & sisters: Become as I am, for I have become as you are.']). [Michael F. Bird & John A. Dunne, "Pastoring with a Big Stick," in B. Rosner (ed.) Paul as Pastor, p.]
 - e. "The fact that Paul was a chief enemy of God's mission must never be overlooked, but he was also radically transformed ...by God's plan and grace. This personal transformation may hold the most appealing fact for the Galatians...These [Galatian] Christians were seeking transformation. Paul implores them to listen to him and follow his leadership for the very fact that he has experienced the transformative power of the gospel...Galatians 1 promotes the...leadership principle: In order to transform the followers, the leader must first experience transformation & be willing to share that experience." [Keith Maynor, "Social & Cultural Texture in Gal. 1," Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership, V. 8, #1 (Fall 2018) p. 231]
- c. Seeing visions outwardly won't change you (2 Cor. 12:1-4)
- a. "Boasting is necessary. It is not profitable, but I will move on to visions & revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who was caught up to the 3rd heaven 14 years ago...[He] 4 was caught up into paradise & heard inexpressible words, which a human being is not allowed to speak." (2 Cor. 12:1-4)
 - b. Note: "Perhaps Paul's rival [teachers, preachers] in Corinth did [boast of visions, revelations, etc.]...Paul's approach is different: for one thing he was not at liberty to tell others the content of his visions [as a general principle]." [Robert E. Picirilli, 1st, 2nd Corinthians, p. 410]
 - c. Note: Apparently "The rival apostles [in Corinth] claimed to have visionary experiences in which the risen Lord spoke to them & revealed secrets of the heavenly world...Paul too had such visionary experiences, but considered them personal & private..." [M. Eugene Boring, F. B. Craddock, People's NT Commentary, p. 572]
- d. Has Jesus Christ revealed himself "in" you?
- a. "Paul came to an insight on the true identity of Jesus and his role in God's plan, not on the basis of common sense or historical research, but as a matter of God's revelation; this is true of every Christian, even though Paul's direct encounter with the risen Lord is not a model for us." [M. E. Boring, F. B. Craddock, People's NT Commentary, p. 579]
 - b. Paul "says God was pleased 'to reveal his Son in me' (Gal. 1:16)...The ['in me']...is not meant [to]...indicat[e] that this was a 'private,' 'merely subjective,' or 'purely spiritual' appearance...Paul's other mentions...make it clear that he saw Jesus with his own physical eyes, just as the other apostles had done [1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8]... 'In'...suggests that Paul saw himself...as a paradigm of the gospel. It wasn't just...what Paul said that expressed the truth of the gospel; it was to be what he was [that expressed the gospel's truth]. That's...the point of this autobiography[y...that] becomes clearer at Gal. 2:19-21." [N. T. Wright, Galatians, pp. 78-79]
- e. Being faithful to reach others with the good news of Jesus Christ