



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

“But when God, who from my mother’s womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia & came back to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas [Peter] & I stayed with him 15 days. 19 But I didn’t see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. 20 I declare in the sight of God: I am not lying in what I write to you. 21 Afterward, I went to the regions of Syria & Cilicia. 22 I remained personally unknown to the Judean churches that are in Christ. 23 They simply kept hearing, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy.’ 24 And they glorified God because of me” (1:15-24)

I. Criticisms of Paul & His Gospel

A. Paul was an arrogant, egotistical, alpha-male

- “*Paul remains a mystery to most believers...He seems arrogant, self-assured, & judgmental.* This text [Gal. 1:11-19] provides an opportunity to dispel this view of Paul because it shows his self-assurance is rooted in the divine call that made him the Apostle to the Gentiles. He is not simply another evangelist; he is Christ’s Apostle, the one God has chosen to bring the circumcision-free gospel to the Gentiles. It was Paul who most clearly understood...the Christ-event and made it possible for Gentiles to share in the benefits of Israel’s Messiah. That’s why...[we] read his letters as inspired-Scripture and why we must wrestle with his thought rather than simply dismiss it.” [Frank Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul*, p. 133]

B. There’s an alternative (negative) narrative circulating

- “It’s difficult to avoid...inferring that Paul’s apostleship is being *defined unhelpfully by his opponents* in relationship to the early church’s Jerusalem leadership...Paul is apparently being

presented as the subordinate of [Peter], James, and other leaders of the early church, having been authorized by them during various visits to [Jerusalem, to]—some of which he was presumably summoned...Paul's opponents in Galatia [alleged that] his apostleship was subordinate to the mother-church in Jerusalem, which contained [Jesus'] original disciples...& family-members...It is likely...Paul's radical gospel is being portrayed by his enemies as the teaching of a renegade who...exceeded his authorization." [D Campbell, *Framing Paul*, p 159]

- "In Galatians [Paul] counters alternative versions of his own life, in which he was portrayed as a wayward delegate of Jerusalem, insufficiently subordinate to Peter, James, and John. In response [Paul] presents his own account of events, including the independence of his calling and the agreement of these 'so-called pillars' to the terms of his mission...He thus portrays himself as an embattled but triumphant warrior for 'freedom' & 'truth,' complete with the scars that represent 'the marks of Jesus branded on my body' (Gal. 6:17)." [John M. G. Barclay, *Paul: Very Brief History*, pp. 38-39]

C. He presented an incomplete (diluted) version of the true Gospel

- It's alleged Paul's gospel is *incomplete* because he left out the more challenging parts (circumcision, diet, Sabbath) to make it more palatable to the Gentiles
- Paul's Rebuttal: He made it clear that his Gospel to the Gentiles *was complete* because he is delivering to them what God gave to him directly (Gal. 1:12b, 16a)
- "How [could] Paul & the Galatians...be so certain that the gospel they originally received was the right one [?]...Paul was passing on what he received, and Paul *received this gospel directly from Christ* himself. ['The gospel preached by me... came *by a revelation of Jesus Christ*' Gal. 1:11-12]." [Craig Keener, *Galatians*, p.]

D. He has an indirect (second-hand) Gospel

- What Paul has was given was from the original Apostles – he needed to learn the basics of the Gospel from them
- Paul's Rebuttal:
 1. In the timeline Paul illustrates the impossibility of his depending on the Jerusalem Apostles (Gal. 1:16b, 17)
 2. Paul wasn't where he could have been instructed about the Gospel by any of the Apostles. So the accusation of him receiving his Gospel second-hand is faulty.
 3. Paul received his gospel directly via God's revelation
 - "The presumption behind the resurrected Christ's commission of Paul was that the apostle to the Gentiles would *know the gospel from the start* because he received it from God (Gal. 1:12...)." [David B. Capes, *Rediscovering Jesus*, p. 95]
 4. Paul underscores the seriousness of what he's saying by making a very strong oath before God (Gal. 1:20) – this indicates that another 'story' about him was circulating
 - "I declare in the sight of God: I'm not lying in what I write to you." (Gal. 1:20) "The implication [seems clear] Paul was denying what others said about him, that he derived his commission & his gospel from the Jerusalem apostles." [James Dunn, *Beginning in Jerusalem*, p. 362]
 - "The assertion [in Gal. 1:16-20 –Paul's chronology of events] was so important to Paul and [it was] so important to refute the alternative being circulated...that [Paul] takes a solemn oath on the point there & then (Gal 1:20)... [This] has the force of a sacred oath... Paul is willing to stake his whole standing before God on the veracity [accuracy] of what he has just written." [James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning in Jerusalem*, p. 363 & #187]

E. He is not one of the original Apostles (Gal. 1:17; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8)

- Paul didn't walk with Jesus for those 3 years, or hear him teaching, or see his miracles, or watch him suffer & die
- He isn't a top-tier Apostle
- Paul's Rebuttal: I'm an Apostle just like the rest (Gal. 1:17; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8)
- "Paul [expresses the] conviction that the central...claims of his *gospel* were *in direct continuity with the gospel already being preached* [by the apostles, Peter, etc.] before his conversion...He makes this point explicitly in 1 Cor. 15:1-3 that: 'I want to make clear for you, brothers & sisters, *the gospel I preached to you*, which you received, on which you have taken your stand & by which you are being saved...[is the gospel] *what I also received*...' (1 Cor. 15:1-3) The continuity & the authority behind [Paul's] gospel was not simply that of the Scriptures. It was also that of the earliest formulations of the common faith in Christ." [James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 176-7]
- "According to Gal. 1:12 the *gospel* came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. In Gal. 1:16 *Jesus himself* is revealed 'in' Paul. These 2 statements point to 1 revelatory moment—the *unveiling of the risen Jesus was the unveiling of the gospel*." [A. Boakye, *Death & Life*, p. 84]
- The gospel "came by a revelation of Jesus Christ"—that '*of Jesus Christ*' here is an objective genitive is rendered more probably by the wording of Gal. 1:15ff '[God] was pleased to reveal his Son in me'...It was Jesus Christ who was revealed, & in that revelation Paul received his gospel...*The gospel & the risen Christ are inseparable; both were revealed to Paul in the same moment*." [F. F. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 89]

II. Paul Went to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18-19)

? "Paul's account of his early travels (Gal. 1:16-24) indicates that he is not beholden to prior authorities ('I didn't consult with flesh & blood' Gal. 1:16) & even the authority associated with the mother-city, Jerusalem, was not determinative for him. When [Paul]...went up to Jerusalem, after many years, it was 'according to revelation' (Gal. 2:2; i.e., not by some human instruction [summons, command])." [John Barclay, *Paul & the Power of Grace*, pp. 44-45]

? "We should not romantically picture Paul, who had not known the earthly Jesus, as zealously inquiring of Peter what Jesus was 'really' like. This is the very point of view advocated by his opponents, against which [Paul] is defending himself. Paul's understanding of the Christian faith was not greatly concerned with the life & teachings of the earthly Jesus...[That] was not central to his theology which focused on God's act in the death & resurrection of Jesus." [Eugene Boring & Frederick Craddock, *People's New Testament Commentary*, p. 580]

? "A straightforward reading...of Gal. 1:15-20 is that Paul is providing an oath to emphasize that even at this *first opportunity to please people in Jerusalem, he did not do so*..."—Ben Witherington

A. Not as a student – not to be mentored or to get make-up history lessons

- "Paul went up [to Jerusalem], not as a schoolboy to be taught or corrected, but as a fellow apostle and preacher of the Gospel...Paul presents this visit as a meeting of equals..." [David DeSilva, *Galatians*, NICNT, p. 160]

B. "To get to know Peter" – a collegial visit between 2 people whom Christ has commissioned (Matt. 16:16-17; Acts 22:6-8)

- We have "Paul's own testimony that he spent a fortnight [15 days] in Jerusalem '*getting to know*' Cephas [Peter]' (Gal. 1:18) ...[That] must surely have included '*getting to know*' Peter's role as Jesus' leading disciple during Jesus' ministry in Galilee ... [So,] we can conclude with a high

degree of probability that *Paul must have known & cared about the ministry of Jesus* prior to Jesus' 'handing over' [betrayal] & death." [James Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 186]

C. The result wasn't him being under Peter or Jerusalem's authority (Gal. 1:21-24)

- "Whatever [Paul] was doing in Arabia, Damascus, Syria & Cilicia (Gal. 1:17, 21), what matters is that he was there & not in Jerusalem. Although it [Jerusalem] constituted the central locus of authority within Paul's 'ancestral tradition,' Jerusalem was no longer Paul's primary point of reference...His 'mother-city' is now the 'Jerusalem above' (Gal. 4:26)." [John Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*, p. 362]

III. Is Paul's Gospel Incomplete, Deficient? – because he didn't walk with Christ for 3 years

A. They "*added nothing to me*" (Gal. 2:6) – 'added' = contributed – the Apostles did NOT think his Gospel was deficient (not a lite-Gospel, diluted, compromised, palatable –

B. Rather, they endorsed & recognized Paul's Gospel, and mission (Gal. 2:7-9)

- "What Paul received & preached & echoed in his letters, was indeed the common Christian conviction that 'Christ died (for us) & was raised (from the dead).' That remained the shared confession...[of] the first Christian churches, despite all their diversity, in one gospel. *What Paul was convinced of on the Damascus road...was not simply this central confessional claim but also that this Jesus as now to be preached to the Gentiles*. It is this last point which Paul focuses on in his own most explicit reference to his conversion: '[God] was pleased to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles' (Gal. 1:15-16)...It was this interpretation of the shared gospel which Paul saw as his primary responsibility...The risen Christ had appointed him an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). That is, *not to some general apostleship, but specifically as 'apostle to the Gentiles'* (Rom. 11:13)." [James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 177-8]

IV. What Was the Essential Gospel for Paul?

A. God revealed the risen & enthroned Christ to Paul (Acts 22:6-8; Gal. 1:12b, 16a) – God revealed who Jesus really was (he didn't see it before) – it reshaped his understanding of the cross & why Jesus died, how his death & resurrection affects people, who was it for, & how we are to live now

B. Use of the term 'gospel' (Gk. *euangelion*) by Paul & others

1. Paul was the first

? "Paul is the first Greek writer since Homer [~750 BC] to use the singular, neuter, noun '*gospel*' (Gk., *euangelion*). [He's] also the first Greek writer to make significant use of 'gospel' as a verb (Gk. *euangelizo*) ['gospelize,' evangelize, preach]" [Graham Twelftree, *Gospel According to Paul*, pp. 79-80]

? "God...reveal[ed] his Son in me, so that I could euangelizo ['gospelize, preach] him among the Gentiles..." (Gal. 1:16)

2. Broadening—from (singular) 'gospel' to 'Gospels'

? “The evidence suggests that *it was Paul*, the earliest Christian writer known to us, *who baptized the noun ‘gospel’* (Greek: *euangelion*) *into Christian vocabulary*...The fact that *Mark* uses the same word... ‘The beginning of the *euangelion* of Jesus Christ...’ (Mk. 1:1) suggests that the term was *already shifting...to...an account of Jesus’* [whole] mission, beginning with John the Baptist and climaxing in his death and resurrection.” [James D. G. Dunn, *Oral Gospel Tradition*, p. 168]

? “The term *euangelion* [‘gospel’]...first appears in...Paul’s writings in reference to the orally proclaimed salv[ation] message about Jesus *centered on his death and resurrection*... [Significantly, decades(?) later...the term [is also applied, in a broader sense] to refer to the ‘Gospels,’—written narratives of Jesus’ life and teachings culminating in his death and resurrection [Matt., Mark, Luke, etc].” [Michael W. Pahl, “‘Gospel’ & the ‘Word’,” JSNT, V. 29.2 (2006) pp. 213]

3. Paul’s focused ‘gospel’ does not include Jesus tradition—his earthly life & ministry

? “In Paul’s writings [‘gospel’] refers to the orally proclaimed salv[ation] *message about Jesus centered on his death and resurrection*...There is no...clear evidence that pre-Easter Jesus tradition [his life & teaching] was an integral part of Paul’s gospel...*For Paul* the proclamation of *the gospel did not include Jesus tradition* [his earthly life & ministry].” [Michael W. Pahl, “‘Gospel’ & the ‘Word’,” JSNT, V. 29.2 (2006) pp. 213-4]

4. Four NT Gospels vs. Paul’s one gospel (Gal. 1:6-7)

? “The word ‘Gospel’ is often used...for the 4 NT ‘Gospels’ [Matt., to John, a use]...traced back to the 2nd century...[But,] the word ‘gospel’ [was] *used rather differently* by 1st-century Christians, notably *by Paul*...to refer to the Christian [proclamation] *centering on the death & resurrection of Jesus*...The noun [‘gospel’] & verb are often used by Paul...*with little to do explicitly with...Jesus’ pre-Easter life & ministry*...The ‘gospel,’ *for Paul*...is unique; there is & can be *only one gospel*...[So,] in moving from the 1st to 2nd century the word ‘gospel’ undergoes a significant semantic shift in meaning.” [Christopher M. Tuckett, *Introduction to the Gospels*, in J. Dunn (ed.) *Eerdman’s Commentary on the Bible*, p. 989]

C. What does Paul tell us about Jesus’ life & ministry in his letters?

- “The *gospel* for Paul was *pre-eminently the gospel of Christ* [his *death & Resurrection*]...When we search out what Paul actually...say[s] about Jesus’ [earthly] ministry the gleanings are...remarkably sparse...*Paul tells us next to nothing about the life & ministry of Jesus apart from its climactic finale*...the all-important record of his death [and rising].” [James Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 183-4]
- In Paul’s gospel “*Salvation takes place by the reality of God’s act in the man Jesus but is never explicated by particular stories & sayings from his life*. It is of supreme importance *that* it really happened, but there are a few details of *what* the earthly Jesus said and did or *how* believers should picture the earthly life of Jesus.” [E. Boring, *Hearing Paul’s Voice*, p.]
- “Except for statements that Jesus was born, that he lived a truly human life in obedience to God, and that he died a shameful death, the events of his earthly career are barely mentioned.” [Eugene Boring, *Hearing Paul’s Voice*, p.]
- “A major feature of Paul’s ‘characterization of the earthly [Jesus] is the extreme *concentration on the basic meaning of Jesus’ life*. Gone are the villages of Galilee, the lake of Gennesaret [Galilee], & Jerusalem, including temple and priesthood. Jesus does not speak as a teacher, nor does he accomplish individual deeds. He is not baptized by John [the Baptist] & calls no disciples into discipleship. There are no synagogues & no Passover, no Pharisees and no

opponents...[In Paul's writings] Jesus has no [detailed] 'biography'...We see only God's [salvation] plan [for him]...*The Pauline churches are not supposed to memorize and actualize Jesus' sayings but to practice being crucified with him.* That alone is sufficient...[Paul] did not draw on Synoptic [Matt., Mark, Luke] or other Jesus tradition..." [Jurgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles*, pp. 120-1]

- "Though Paul was not aware of the four Gospels as such [they are dated later] it is possible that written collections of [Jesus'] sayings & stories were already in existence during Paul's lifetime. However, *it is striking how little use Paul actually makes of Jesus' teachings.*" [J. Stanly Jones, *Study of Pauline Interpretation*, p. xvii]
- "...in the letters [of Paul], the story of *God's saving act in Jesus does not focus on what Jesus said & did in Galilee, Samaria, Decapolis, & Judea.*" [Eugene Boring, *Hearing Paul's Voice*, p.]
- Paul's Letters contain these 'bare-bones' basic facts about Jesus' earthly life & ministry:
 1. Jesus was a man (Rom. 5:15)
 2. Jesus was a Jew (Rom. 9:5)
 3. Jesus was born of a woman & under law (Gal. 4:14)
 4. Jesus was a descendant of Abraham & David (Gal. 3:16; Rom. 1:3)
 5. Jesus had brothers (1 Cor. 9:5) – one was called James (Gal. 1:19)
 6. Jesus ministered among Jews (Rom. 15:8)
 7. Jesus had 12 disciples (1 Cor. 15:5)
 8. Jesus was meek and gentle (2 Cor. 10:1)
 9. Jesus was obedient to God (2 Cor. 5:19; Phil. 2:8)
 - "The death of Christ can be characterized as *pistis* ['faithful', because]...Jesus Christ is the one human being who embodies *radical obedience by remaining faithful to God* to the painful end [Phil 2:8]. His fidelity overcomes Adam's rebellion & he constitutes...a new faithful humanity (Rom. 5:19)." [Richard B. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, p. xxx]
 10. Jesus possessed endurance and grace (2 Thess. 3:5; 2 Cor. 8:9)
 11. Jesus was delivered up (1 Cor. 11:23)
 12. Jesus celebrated a last supper with his disciples (1 Cor. 11:23-25)
 13. Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

D. The death and resurrection of Jesus were essential

- "For Paul Jesus is good news for us Gentiles not because of anything Jesus has said or done during his lifetime, but because *the event as a whole was the decisive act of God.*" [M. Eugene Boring, *Hearing Paul's Voice*, p. 46]
- "Paul's...letters...all confess their faith in...the grand narratives...*the mighty acts of God for the Salvation of the world*, of which *the story of Jesus Christ is the climax & center.*" [Eugene Boring, *Hearing Paul's Voice*, p.]

E. Paul recounts crucial events related to Jesus' death & resurrection—Last Supper & resurrection witnesses (1 Cor. 11, 15)

- "The earliest account of 'the Lord's supper' is recorded in Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians."—David Capes
- "I received from the Lord what I...passed on to you: On the night...he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread 24 When he'd given thanks, broke it, & said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' 25 In the same way...he took the cup, after supper, & said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance

of me.' 26 As often as you eat this bread & drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

- What's "described in 1 Cor. 11:23-26 is part of Paul's teaching to bring [the Corinthians] to act this way...Paul's stress here is that he received the tradition from the risen 'Lord'." [Elizabeth V. Dowling, "*Do this in Remembrance*," p. 226]

F. Paul's post-resurrection perspective

- There's a "difference of emphasis between Paul...many of his contemporaries. Paul's thought about Christ the person always moves *from Christ who lives to the Jesus who died*, always from the one known to the one remembered. It is the present living reality which comes first to his mind when he speaks of Christ...[Peter & Co] speak of Jesus '*whom God raised from the dead*' [Acts 4:10]; Paul speaks of '*Christ & him crucified*' [1 Cor. 2:2]...[Paul] is thinking first of all of the risen & exalted Christ & [then] his thought moved *backward* to the cross. Perhaps this... explains the [*lack*] of allusions to Jesus' earthly life in Paul's letters. His attention as it moves *backward* is arrested by the Crucifixion, which itself epitomizes...[Jesus'] whole earthly life [so] that he doesn't have to look beyond it..." [John Knox, *Chapters in the Life of Paul*, pp. 108-9]
- "There is no...clear evidence that pre-Easter Jesus tradition [about his earthly life, miracles, & teaching] was an integral part of Paul's gospel...For Paul the proclamation of *the gospel did not include Jesus tradition* [about his earthly life & ministry]." [Michael W. Pahl, "'Gospel' & the 'Word'," JSNT, Vol. 29.2 (2006) pp. 213-4]
- "Paul proclaims the Jesus of history through the lens of the OT Scriptures with one great historical reality: Jesus is now the resurrected Lord...*Paul's post-resurrection perspective must be an advance* on the pre-resurrection teaching of Jesus in the [Synoptic] gospels [Matt., Mark, & Luke]." [Stephen O. Stout, *The Man Christ Jesus*, p.]
- Paul wrote from a *post-resurrection perspective*. Jesus cannot be fully understood without his exalted reign now clearly in view (Rom. 1:3-4; Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16)...Jesus' resurrected glory puts everything...in a new light...Jesus' pre-exalted status & teachings are never forgotten but *Paul looks primarily to the crucified & exalted Jesus to guide, govern & sustain the churches* [he] addresses." [Gregory S. MaGee, *Studying Paul's Letters with Mind & Heart*, p. 152]
- "Paul is the first post-resurrection believer to articulate the Christian's aspiration & hope in light of Christ's person & work. He was called to be an apostle...after Jesus' Passion & ascension; ... he was one of the earliest...post-resurrection products of Jesus' person & work..." [R. Gregory Jenks, *Paul & His Mortality*, p. 179]

G. Pre- versus Post-resurrection followers of Jesus—'Disciples' vs. *Doulos*, 'in Christ'

- "Adherence to the risen Jesus was...*conceived of differently after the resurrection*...The term ['disciple'] is never used by Paul...*Paul did not see himself, or other Christians, simply as [disciples']* adherents of Jesus; other terms expressed their relationship to the risen Jesus much more adequately... 'Disciple' is connected in the Gospels with Jesus as [Teacher, a title] notably absent...for Jesus in [the rest of] the NT." [Paul Trebilco, *Self-designations...in the NT*, p. 230]
- "The apostle Paul did not follow the pre-resurrection Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. *Paul [is] like us in that he was saved after the resurrection & after...Pentecost*...Paul's perspective on what it means to be a follower of Jesus was drawn from this frame of reference & he was writing to others who had an experience similar to his own." [B. Ferriss, *Following Jesus*, p.]
- "For the Twelve [Apostles] Jesus taught them in person...& they listened & learned as [disciples]. Yet Christians after the ascension knew Jesus in a completely different way, not primarily as Teacher, but as Savior, Lord, & Messiah...For Christians today, Jesus is not

advisor...or mentor. He is King & Master, we are subjects & slaves [Gk. *doulos* Gal. 1:10b].”
[Nijay Gupta, “*Did Saint Paul Take Up the Great Commission?*” pp.]

V. Application

A. How do we begin our Christian life?

1. Christ is revealed in us as the crucified & resurrected Savior (Gal. 1:16a); it’s not just an objective fact. It must affect you.
2. Believe in Jesus’ death & resurrection (Rom. 10:9)
3. Baptized into Christ’s death & resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Acts 22:16) – something new begins within us & something old ends! Our past needs to be washed away, left in the grave – our opposition to God (even if it wasn’t as extreme as Paul’s – he was baptized), hurtful & damaging habits. Then we have the ability to live a new life

? “What caused Paul to reconfigure his biography, reverse his allegiances, and...proclaim... the good news in the face of deadly opposition...A ‘ferocious force’ seized [Paul] and turned him inside out, upside down and spun him around...The encounter with the risen Jesus had an enormous impact on his continuing...experience of God, his missionary drive and...his theological reflection about God, Israel, Torah [Law], and salvation. That grace-event killed Saul the Pharisee and birthed Paul the Apostle.” [Michael Bird, *Introducing Paul*, p. 37]

B. How do we live our Christian life? (Gal. 2:20) – I DIED! And I live by faith by entering into Christ’s death & resurrection

C. Mimicking (imitating) Jesus is not the Gospel – We can know all the stories about Jesus, memorize them, be impressed by him as a compassionate person & teacher, but that’s not the Gospel! That won’t save you! You can even attempt to live like he did & treat others as he did (WWJD–What Would Jesus Do?), but again, that’s not the Gospel and that will not save you! To be honest, that is ‘another gospel’ which is not really a gospel! Paul focused on the death & resurrection of Jesus & not the rest of Jesus’ life & ministry because it’s the death & resurrection of Jesus that saves us!