



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: Galatians 1:1-5; 6:12-15, 18*

### 1. Galatians' Back-story

a. "Many...date...Galatians to the late [40s]...making [it]...one of the earliest of Paul's letters...In the course of Paul's missionary journeys he evangelized in the region of Galatia. The reason for Paul's preaching in this region was due to the happen-stance of an illness he suffered (Gal. 4:13)...The Galatians responded favorably to Paul's message. If Paul was hampered in his public speaking by his sickness, the Galatians responded favorably despite his ailments. To contemporary expectations, public speakers should perform well ...[Yet], Paul spoke a simple message of the gospel & credits...the Holy Spirit as the catalyst for the Galatians coming to faith (Gal. 3:2-3). In the due course of time, Paul leaves...Galatia, but a new group of ...[Jewish] Christian missionaries arrive. There's much intrigue as to who...these new missionaries are. Other than extrapolating... from Paul's letters & Luke's Acts...only a few facts...can be gleaned about them. What is certain is that Paul... [views them] as a rival mission that preached a false gospel...These rivals...were [probably] outsiders,...they fervently & legalistically obeyed the Torah [Law]...The main [goal] of the rivals' ministry was to Judaize Gentile Christians by forcing new converts to adopt the rules & regulations of the Torah. Their teaching would include the enforcement of circumcision, Sabbath, & purity [meal] regulations. In effect, their message would state that salvation in Jesus requires participation with the Torah [Law]. The evidence suggests that the Galatians [were] great[ly influenced by] the rivals. At the outset of Paul's letter, he...addresses this situation with emotionally-charged expressions of shock & anguish...The stakes are great...it's about the identity of the early church. If they continue to follow [Paul's] teachings...they would continue to experience the freedom of Christ & the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, if they now turn & follow the rival teachers...the 'agitators,' they'll have a different identity—as proselytized Jews. Galatians...[is] Paul's confrontation, rebuttal, & mandate...imploping the Galatian church back to the true gospel." [Keith Maynor, "Social & Cultural Texture in Gal. 1," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, Vol. 8, #1 (Fall 2018) pp. 227-8]

### 2. Paul's Opponents—Rival 'Influencers,' 'Agitators' (Gal. 1:7; 5:10; 6:12-13)

- a. "There are some who are troubling [Gk. tarasso; 'confusing' (NRSV)] you & want to distort the gospel of Christ." (Gal. 1:7 CSB)
- b. "...whoever it is that is confusing [Gk. tarasso; 'disturbing' (NASB)] you will pay the penalty." (Gal. 5:10 CSB)
- c. "Paul labels [the rival 'influencers' as] 'your troublers' (Gal. 1:7; cf. 5:10). It is not clear however how they themselves viewed Paul, & it may be only from his perspective that they are his 'opponents'." [John M. G.

Barclay, Paul & the Gift, p. 334]

d. Promoting Circumcision for (male) Gentile Christians (Gal. 6:12)

- a. "Whatever the actual course of events, a strong faction had come among or emerged within the churches in Galatia, claiming
- e. that in order to be recognized as believers in Messiah Jesus & to participate in Israel's heritage, the [male] Gentile believers had
- f. to go the whole way & become [Jewish] proselytes by being circumcised." [James DG. Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, p. 722]
- g. Jesus as an 'add-on, topping up' the old order—the Jewish Law-keeping lifestyle
  - a. "Paul responds rather furiously to an ethno-centric [law-keeping 'gospel'='another gospel'] whereby Christ is merely an add-on to the Sinai...covenant [of Moses], so that Christ 'tops up,' rather than displaces the saving function of the Torah [Law]...This effectively keeps salvation exclusively within the Jewish constituency, & Paul strenuously objects to the view that the gospel is the good news that the Greeks can be saved by becoming Jews." [Michael F. Bird & John A. Dunne, "Pastoring with a Big Stick," in B. Rosner (ed.) Paul as Pastor, p. ]

3. Paul's Letter-Introductions & Endings Hint at Tone & Themes (Gal. 1:1-5)

a. Paul's 'matter-of-fact' Tone (Gal. 1:1-2)

- a. "Paul's address in Galatians is exceedingly brief ['to the churches in Galatia' (Gal. 1:2b), compared to] all his other letters...This matter-of-fact address serves to signal Paul's agitation and indignation over the [Galatians'] situation... [There is] a powerful contrast...with his expansion of the sender formula ['Paul an apostle...'] (Gal. 1:1-2a) where] his apostleship has both divine authority...& widespread backing ('all the brothers who are with me' Gal. 1:2a)...This divine authority & broad...support...is set in sharp relief to 'the churches in Galatia' (Gal. 1:2b)." [Jeffrey A. D. Weima, Paul the Ancient Letter Writer, pp.]

b. Introduction—Hints of Major Themes (Gal. 1:1-5)

- a. In the ancient world "introductions [to letters] typically introduced a work's primary themes & Paul hints at some of these in this letter's opening [Rom. 1:1-7]." [Craig S. Keener, Romans, p.]
- b. Ephesians an exception: "In contrast to many of Paul's letters...Ephesians contains few hints of specific events & issues that have triggered its composition." [Michael D. Coogan (ed.) New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 2053]

c. Paul's 'masterful, 'striking' Letter-Ending (Gal. 6:11-18)

- a. "The most striking [ending among Paul's epistles] by far in Gal. 6:11-18...Of greatest significance...in the way...Paul recapitulates the main concerns...of the Galatian letter...Paul draws attention to the false motives of his opponents (Gal. 6:12-13)...The double reference to 'the cross of Christ' [Gal. 6:14, is] a direct link to...the centrality of the cross to the...gospel...The 'new creation' in Gal. 6:15...express[es] the new order brought about by Christ...against those... hanging on to the old order with its [law-keeping] lifestyle...[In a] masterful way Paul uses his closing to summarize the primary concerns [of]...the letter." [Jeffrey A. D. Weima, Neglected Endings...of the Pauline Letter, pp. 131-2]

4. Christ's Redemptive Death to Rescue us from the 'Present Evil Age' (Gal. 1:4)

a. Gal. 1:4 Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God & Father."

b. Redemption—Christ "gave himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:4a)

- a. "Paul's reference to the death of Christ ('who gave himself')...in the...letter opening foreshadows the central role that Christ's crucifixion plays in throughout Galatian[s]...[Paul] also highlights the cross in the...closing (Gal. 6:11-18)." [Jeffrey AD. Weima, Paul the Ancient Letter Writer, p. ]
- b. "Paul presented Christ's crucifixion in terms of a benefactor who poured himself out completely...to bring benefit to his clients. This terminology of 'giving oneself,' or 'pouring oneself out' is frequent in inscriptions honoring benefactors" [David A. DeSilva, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 497]

c. 'Rescue from the Present Evil Age'—Key to the whole letter

- a. "Paul's expansion of the greeting formula...foreshadows a key theme concerning Christ, [that he] 'gave himself...to rescue us from this present evil age' (Gal. 1:4)...Commentators recognize that this [statement]...
  - a. 'strikes the keynote of the epistle' (Lightfoot)
  - b. 'strikes the first chord in a theme that reappears...throughout the letter' (Dunn)
  - c. 'serves as one of the topic sentences for the whole...letter' (Martyn)
  - d. 'signals a central theme of the entire letter' (Schreiner)
  - e. 'anticipates the argument of the letter' (Moo)
  - f. 'highlights a[n]...important theme in the letter' (Longenecker)." [Jeffrey AD. Weima, Paul the Ancient Letter Writer, pp.]

- d. A Decisive Cosmic Shift—launching new age/new creation (Gal. 6:15)
- “The death and resurrection of Jesus was the climactic ‘turning point’ in...a cosmic [drama].”—N. T. Wright
  - “Jesus’...crucifixion wasn’t just the death of one human being. It was a cosmic shift in which those who believe in Jesus find themselves caught up.”—N. T. Wright Online
  - “Paul...place[s] himself & the churches within a narrative line & an experiential relationship: the grace that issues from ‘God & Christ’ has decisively altered the cosmos, effecting a ‘rescue from the present evil age’ that elicits...human[is giving] glory to God ...[Paul] & the Galatians...together...owe their existence to this transformative event.” [John Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*, pp. 351-2]
  - “What happened with the coming of Jesus was not just a pointer to the new age—but the actual launching of that new age. Christ’s death & resurrection launched the new age/creation’ (Gal 6:15); believers are part of that.”—N. T. Wright Online.
  - “Paul’s message [is] that when the Messiah ‘died for our sins’ this had the effect of ‘rescuing us from the present evil age’ and ushering in [a preliminary foretaste of] the long-awaited ‘age to come’ (Gal. 1:4).” [N. T. Wright, *Galatians*, p. 25]
- e. Living in the Overlap of the Ages (1 Cor. 10:11; Gal. 1:4)
- “God’s raising Jesus from the dead was the launching point of the ‘age to come’—with the result that ‘the present [evil] age’ & ‘the age to come’ were now continuing in an uneasy and uncomfortable parallel, generating the often confusing & difficult situations faced by Jesus’ followers.” [N. T. Wright, *Galatians*, p. 56]
  - “The resurrection of Jesus signals the inauguration of th[e] new age...The resurrection of...Jesus, was the first-fruits of the general resurrection – God’s great harvest – to follow (1 Cor. 15:20-22). Paul’s letters...reflect his awareness of living at the seam or the grating edge of these two ages, as the one receded...& the other began to emerge.” [David DeSilva, *Galatians*, p. 120]
  - “Paul believed the present [evil] age & the future age co-existed. ‘We are those,’ he reminds...[believers] ‘upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10:11)...His recipients are still living in ‘the present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4) of sin, even though it is passing away. [There’s] tension between the future age being ‘here’ & ‘not yet.’...For Paul [believers] live...‘between the times,’...[in] the overlap of the present & future ages [‘this age... & the one to come’ (Eph. 1:21; cf. Mt. 12:32)].” [J. A. Bertone, “7 Dispensations or 2-Age View of History,” in P. Althouse (ed.) *Perspectives in... Eschatologies*, p. 70]
  - “Paul’s solution to the Galatians’ dilemma is...placed within a rigorous [2 Ages—old/new age] framework. Paul imagines a battle raging between two ‘systems’...One system Paul identifies by the term ‘flesh’ (Gal. 5:17)...The other system...is defined by Jesus’ self-sacrifice replicated in [Jesus’] followers through the Spirit. The [age-turning] dimension of Jesus’ own [cross-shaped] life is highlighted at the start...where Paul writes in Gal. 1:4 of Jesus ‘who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.’ This present evil age is what some Jewish [2-age] writers imagined God would rescue the...Israel from [when God] would invade His own creation to redeem it from chaos...& set it in order—to set it ‘right,’ with righteousness pervading [all]...For Paul that in-breaking of God had already occurred in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus. In opposition to this invasion...stands the system of the ‘flesh.’ [Todd D. Still, *Thinking Through Paul: Survey...*, pp. ]
  - “According to [J. L. Martyn]...there are two ‘worlds’ since Christ’s crucifixion: the present evil age (Gal. 1:4) dominated by flesh [Gal. 5:16-18], & new creation (Gal. 6:15) dominated by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25). Life in the old fleshly world is characterized by pairs of opposites like law/non-law observance; [Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female, of] (Gal. 3:28)...[and] non-circumcision/ circumcision. New creation is characterized by...unity in Christ [Gal. 3:28], &...opposition to flesh (Gal. 5:16-18; 6:13). Because of the [age-turning arrival] of Christ and his Spirit the...[old] structures cannot remain unchanged.” [G. M. H. Loubser, “About Galatians, apocalyptic & switching of paradigms,” *Acta Theologica*, Vol.34, Suppl. #19 (2014) p. ]
- f. Rescue—Deliverance from the Present Evil Age (Gal. 1:4b)
- Not Rescued to ‘go to Heaven’
    - “He died that we might be forgiven, he died to make us good; that we might go at last to Heaven, saved by his precious blood.” [Hymn: “There is a Green Hill” by Mrs. C. F. Alexander (1818-95)]
    - An “ongoing problem in Western theology [is that] most modern Western Christians, if asked why Jesus died for our sins, would say ‘so that we may go to heaven.’ But—astonishingly...that is never the answer the NT gives.” [N. T. Wright, *Galatians*, pp. 57-8]
  - Delivered from Sin’s Power & Cosmic Powers
    - “Deliverance from evil here [Gal. 1:4] is noteworthy; Christ died not only to free us from sin’s penalty forensically, but also to liberate us from its dominion behaviourally.” [Craig Keener, *Galatians*, pp. ] Note: Here only ‘sin’s power,’ not cosmic powers
    - “Most scholars emphasize that Paul here evokes the...Jewish expectation of two (or...more) ages...Many Jews believed that the present age was under the dominion of evil forces, but that God would exalt his people in the age to come...Paul here declares that believers no longer belong to this age [with its] present world system...In Gal. 5:5...Paul emphasizes that the Spirit provides believers a foretaste...of the coming age...This means...believers no longer serve old laws, principles &

powers [of the 'present evil age']...They have died to the world because new creation has come [Gal. 6:15]." [Craig Keener, Galatians, pp. ]

g. The Christ Event—God's 'Invasion' of His Creation

a. The 'hinge-point'

- a. "The [coming] of Christ marks the hinge between the 2 ages as God's action creates a new reality—the old age is marked by the control of Death & the flesh, whereas the new age is marked by life & the Spirit." [B. Blackwell, Paul & the Apocalyptic..., p. 10]
- b. "Paul and his readers stand at the [end-time] hinge point where the old age and the new age have met." [Richard B. Hays, "Scripture Proclaimed the Gospel Beforehand:...Galatians," F. Wilk, M. Öhler (eds.) Pauline Writing, p. 146]

b. God's 'Invasion'

- a. "This present evil age is what...Jewish [2-age] writers imagined God would rescue the people of Israel from [when God] would invade His own creation to redeem it from chaos...&...to set it 'right,' with righteousness pervading [all]...For Paul, that in-breaking of God had already occurred in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus. In opposition to this invasion...stands the... 'flesh.' [Todd D. Still, Thinking Through Paul: Survey..., pp. ]
- b. "Galatians...reflects a [two age] perspective on time & human experience. In the opening Paul...declares that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Gal. 1:1) & that his death & resurrection took place to 'deliver us from the present evil age' (Gal. 1:4). Though both Jews & Gentiles were formerly in...slavery, everything has now changed. 'When the time came to completion, God sent his Son...5 to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.' (Gal. 4:4-5). Accordingly the power of the enslaving evil age is broken by Christ & at the fullness of time God sent the Spirit into his children's hearts, who are now 'heirs' of all God promised (Gal. 4:6-7). That's why Paul...speaks of having died to his old life (Gal. 2:19-20) and...urges readers to understand themselves as living within the in-breaking new creation (Gal. 6:15)...Those who live in the new age...will read Scripture with new eyes." [Richard B. Hays, "Scripture Proclaimed...", F. Wilk, M. Öhler (eds.) Pauline Writing, p. 139]

c. 'Invasion' in the context of Cosmic Warfare

- a. The [term] 'invasion' attempts to capture...the activity of God in Christ (& the Spirit)—[the coming of Christ & the Holy Spirit in human history (Gal. 4:4, 6)]. God's 'invasion' occurs in the context of a cosm[ic] battle between evil powers that have usurped God's authority. God's invasive action in Christ (& the Spirit) to [re-]establish his control is the [subject] of God's revelation.... God ['invades' his cosmos to rescue]...humans [from]...the subjection of...evil powers. Humans...are part of the disputed territory...&, until Christ liberates them, they remain under the control of evil powers—Sin, Death, Flesh, & (sometimes) Law [Gal. 3:23; 4:3]. The stress is...often on these personified...powers [Sin, Death, Flesh, & Law], but at times...[cosmic] beings — 'rulers & authorities'—come into view. Ultimately, God (through Christ & the Spirit)...[re-]establishes his control of the entire cosmos." [Ben C. Blackwell, Paul & the Apocalyptic Imagination, p. 9]
- b. "Galatians [details] an [age-turning] invasion of the future into the present...In his greeting...Paul refers to God the Father 'who raised...Christ from the dead' (Gal. 1:1) & to Jesus Christ 'who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age...' (Gal. 1:4). Here Paul...remarks about matters [of] utmost significance for...his theology...Resurrection is a divine act that invades the current order with the divine life...Resurrection, the great [age-turning] act that defeats death, set to transpire at the end of history...invades the present by the raising up of [God's] Son...God does for Jesus in the middle of history precisely what Jews thought he would do for Israel at the end of history...The [end-time] dualism [2 ages: present age/age to come] that Paul introduces in [Gal. 1:4] stresses a discontinuity between the ages...Paul declares that Jesus' death will bring deliverance from the cosmic powers...[in] Gal. 1:4...[Here] Jesus' atoning death is the [age-turning] event...purposed for achieving a rescue from the present evil age...from the predatory powers of the present age." [Michael F. Bird, An Anomalous Jew: Paul, pp. 125-7]

h. God's Disruptive Invasion—"A Fundamental Break" at "the Fullness of Time" (Gal. 4:4)

- a. "Paul's gospel...[which] came to him by revelation (Gal. 1:12, 16)...is predicated on...a 'crisis view' of history. It concerns the revelation of...our Lord Jesus Christ who 'gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age' (Gal. 1:14). Now a new dispensation in history has been inaugurated & this new age of the [end-time] Spirit of God represents a fundamental break with all that has gone before..." [Graham N. Stanton, Tolerance & Intolerance..., pp. 126-7]
- b. Gentile Christians were being pressured to get circumcised
  - a. Paul's response to Gentile believers: "If you get circumcised in order to be...part of the Jewish family, what you are doing is... joining the family of Abraham as it was in the pre-Messianic age [the 'old age,' the era before Christ]."—N. T. Wright Online.
  - b. "As Paul says...elsewhere, 'the old has passed away...see, the new has come!' (2 Cor. 5:17). To get circumcised would...be to deny ...that the new creation had really begun. It would...suck the life out of the new creation...[The Jesus]-believers... must not...be bullied into stepping back into the 'present age'...where Israel's [Law] still held sway." [N. T. Wright, Galatians, pp. 33-34, 40]
  - c. The 'Agitators' sought to (non-disruptively) add Messiah Jesus in order to augment their existing Jewish Law-based way-of-life. Do we seek to (non-disruptively) add Jesus' salvation to our 21st-century North-American way-of-life?
  - d. God "invaded & disrupted" the life of Saul the zealous Pharisee & abruptly caused him to become Paul the Apostle! (Gal. 1:15-16)
  - e. Christ died "to rescue us from this present evil age," & inaugurated "new creation" (the "already" of the "[new] age to come.")

5. Christ's Cross & New Creation (Gal. 6:12-15)

- a. "Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh are the ones...compel[ling] you to be circumcised... [They] don't keep the law themselves, & yet they want you to be circumcised in order to boast about your flesh. 14 But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world

has been crucified to me through the cross, & I to the world 15 For both circumcision & uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation..." (Gal. 6:12-15 CSB)

- b. Note: 'the world has been crucified to me' (Gal. 6:14) Paul is saying that the entire [old age] world system in all its glory, but in opposition to God, is dead or destroyed in its power to attract him; it has no influence or power over Paul, no appeal to him. '& I to the world' Paul is (similarly) dead to the desires & attractions of the world, for he serves Christ as his new master. [ESV]
- c. Note: 'New creation' (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17) The redeemed...people who now live for Christ by living for others, effected by the power of the Spirit & the death of Christ, [are] the beginning of the new creation [which has]...come amid this evil age." [ESV]
- d. "Since...Jesus' death & resurrection permeates...the cosmos, participation...in Christ...has a '[2 age—old/new]' dimension [for us]. Paul says...'I'll never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, & I to the world.' For Paul [this is where] the Galatians could find the solution to [their] problem; so he writes, 'both circumcision & uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation' (Gal. 6:15)." [Todd D. Still, Thinking Through Paul: Survey..., pp. ]
- e. "For [Paul], Jesus' death & resurrection serve as a turning point in cosmic history, here is where Christian formation comes in...participation in the messianic family involves 'a radical shift of lifestyle' so that Christians can, in the power of the Spirit, make a real difference in human lives & society (Wright, Gal., p. 381)." [Robert Cornwall, Review of N. T. Wright, Galatians]

## Questions

1. Gal. 1:1-5 is the introduction to Galatians. If we compare this intro. With that of 1 Cor. 1:1-3 or Colossians 1:1-2. What differences do you notice; how does Galatians' opening differ from Paul's other letter-openings? Think in terms of:
  - a. What Paul says about himself?
  - b. What Paul, says about the church(es)/saints'
  - c. What Paul says about what God/Christ have done?
  - d. What do these differences suggest about the Galatians' view of Paul & Paul's attitude toward them?
2. Commentators agree that Gal. 1:4 is a key/theme verse.
  - a. What does this verse say/imply about our 'sins'?
  - b. Read Gal. 2:21; with this (Gal. 1:4a) in mind...
    - a. How does Gal. 2:21b inform or expand your answer to (a.) above?
    - b. How is Gal. 2:21b "more personal"
    - c. How would you relate Gal. 1:4a & Gal. 2:21b to yourself (personally)?
3. According to Gal. 1:4 what was the overall goal/purpose of Christ 'giving himself'? What does this mean?
4. Scholars talk about believers currently "living at the overlap of the ages"—where the "present evil age" & the ('already' aspect of) the "age to come" co-exist in parallel. What do they mean by this? (Discuss)
5. The Galatian (Gentile) believers had received Christ & the Spirit; some Jewish-Christian missionaries were pressuring them to get circumcised to become full-members of God's family.
  - a. What (if anything) is wrong with this message/'gospel'? Discuss.
  - b. What is Paul's response to this Jewish-Christian message?
  - c. How does Paul's response relate to the idea of two ages—"present evil age" & the "age to come"?
  - d. Paul's says Christ's cross rescues us from the "present evil age;" how does this respond to the Jewish-Christian message?
6. Michael Bird says in the Jewish-Christian message "Christ is merely an add-on to the Sinai...covenant [of Moses], so that Christ 'tops up,'...the saving function of the [Law]."
  - a. What does he mean by this?

- b. Is it possible that for us today "Christ is merely an add-on...[who] 'tops up' their North American lifestyle? Discuss.