

Scripture and the Life of God

Session 2 - Galatians 1:11-2:14

Table Talk

How does the study of Scripture draw you closer to God's heart?

What are your thoughts about the authority of Scripture? How is it authoritative in your life?

What is your pattern for reading the Scriptures? How do you use the Scriptures for prayer, inspiration, or meditation?

Galatians: The Situation

A different sort of "gospel"

Galatians under pressure from these new missionaries to see salvation as connected to circumcision, a badge of membership in the people of God (old covenant)

Why is Paul opposed? If you get circumcised, you are joining the family of Abraham as it was in the pre-Messianic age

With Jesus, the age to come was launched - you are part of that new Exodus. Don't go back!

Galatians 1:1-4

v. 1 - Paul opens letter with commission - not human but from God

v. 2 - mentions those with him as "members of God's family" (inc. Jews & Gentiles - new humanity!)

v. 3 - greeting - from the Father and the Lord Christ

v. 4 - statement of the gospel

Paul's Gospel Statement

1:4

[Christ] gave himself for our sins (election)

to set us free from *the present evil age* (eschatology)

according to the will of God the Father (monotheism)

A Bookend "Inclusio"

6:14-15

Jesus crucifixion was a cosmic shift

At the beginning and end of the letter, Paul is talking about the new world inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus ("new creation")

The power of the present evil age has been dealt with - therefore, "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"

Paul's thesis

Celebrate! You get to be part of this new world, this new creation

Reject this other "gospel" which will only take you backward

What is at stake is the truth of the gospel itself

1:6-9 - There is only one gospel, one good news

1:10 - What matters to Paul is Jesus, and everything he says and does is grouped around that, not "pleasing people"

A Summary of Paul's Gospel

Christ gave himself for our sins

to enable us to live in God's new creation

which has been part of God's covenant plan

Galatians 1:11-24

A bit of Pauline biography

Paul talks about his conversion and early mission

Argues against getting the gospel secondhand

Appeals to the Galatians' friendship

Two things in balance

Paul is concerned to emphasize the shock of God's revelation of Jesus as the Messiah

Paul wants his life as a Christian missionary to be seen in light of biblical prophecy. He is not abandoning the Jewish tradition but fulfilling it. He is not leaving Judaism behind, but sees the new covenant in Jesus as the thing God had prepared and planned all along (also does this with Abraham in Romans 4)

Paul's Gospel Resume'

His basic claim: The gospel was given to him firsthand through a revelation of Christ (1:11-12)

Question: Lots of people claim revelation from God - how do you confirm that?

it will align with the Scriptures

it will be confirmed by the covenant community

A Charles Wesley Rhyme

What e'er the Spirit speaks in me,

Will with the written Word agree;

if not, I cast it all aside,

as Satan's voice or nature's pride.

Paul: A Zealous Jew

The Jewish prophetic background

Isaiah 40 - God coming back to rescue his people

Isaiah 52 - the messenger who brings good news -
"your God reigns"

This is the larger context from which Paul argues
(Monotheism, Election, Eschatology)

The Roman idea of "Gospel"

euangellion = good news

In Rome, *euangellion* meant that there was a new
emperor - justice and peace had come to the world
because Rome was in charge

But for Jews, the news of a new emperor was an echo of
exile and slavery

When Paul talks about the "gospel" of Jesus, it clashes
with the gospel of Caesar

Paul and "Gospel"

Paul reinterprets this word to talk about what Jesus
himself had given to Paul

"Good news" because it was the fulfillment of Jewish
covenant and Gentile hope

Galatians 1:13-14

Paul's "early life" in Judaism - persecuting the church.
Why? They were not sufficiently Jewish!

Pharisees: obedience to the law would pave way for
God's eschatological return and the end of exile

Paul had been urging Jews to obey this law with great
"zeal"

Jewish "zealot" tradition - Phineas, Elijah - powerful and
violent deeds preventing encroachment of paganism

"The Law"

Often seen as the moral and ethical code that had to be kept
perfectly for individuals to be "saved."

But that is a non-contextual reading!

The purpose of the Law in the Old Testament is to mark them
as God's covenant people, set apart for God's purpose

The Law marks the family boundaries (diet, circumcision,
clothing, marriage, etc)

It has a collectivist meaning, rather than an individualistic
one!

A New Covenant People

But Paul believed that, because of Jesus, a new humanity
had been formed around a new covenant in the death and
resurrection of Jesus

Whereas Paul was trying to get people to obey the law in
order to be part of the family, because of his encounter
with Christ he now believed that Christ had formed a new
community bounded by faith and participation in his
cross-bearing life and mission—a community that
included both Jews and Gentiles

Echoes of the Old Testament in 1:15-17

1:15 - an allusion to Isaiah 49:1 (always been looking for OT images in NT writings!) - the prophetic call of the servant

“The Lord called me before birth, called my name when I was in my mother’s womb” (Isaiah 49:1)

Paul sees himself in light of the mission of the servant in Isaiah 49:1-8

But also an echo of I Kings 19 - Elijah runs to Mount Sinai in Arabia; like him, Paul goes back to where it all began.

And like Elijah, he is called to go back to Damascus - this time to proclaim Jesus as Messiah

What is Paul claiming in his resume?

In his apostolic call to the Gentiles, God is fulfilling Israel’s Scriptures

Like the prophets, God has called Paul directly to this mission—the mission God has been playing out since the time of Abraham, revealed in the story of Israel’s Scriptures

Passage Questions

What does this passage tell you about God? About people? About peoples’ relationship to God?

What kind of resume’ does God value?

Why is understanding the Old Testament key to understanding the New Testament?

1:18-24

Draws us back to the events of the book of Acts

Paul's conversion - Acts 9; Jerusalem Council - Acts 15

Visited with Cephas (Aramaic for Peter) and James, Jesus' brother

Paul had not gone there to sit at the feet of the apostles, but talked with Peter and James about Jesus and the meaning of his death and resurrection

Paul's conversion was evidence of the greatness and power of God - an unlikely covert! Paul sees this as evidence of his apostolic authority. Only way this could have happened is by an encounter with Jesus.

Passage Questions

What does this passage say to you about conversion?

What is your own story of conversion to the way of Christ?

With whom did you/do you consult about what you are learning and experiencing?

Notice that Paul seeks out Christian community - his prophetic mission is not for himself alone

Galatians 2:1-14

The more recent story of what Paul has been up to

Continues to build toward the bigger event of the meeting in Antioch (even the early church had meetings!)

Visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus (Acts 11)

"14 years" - refers to visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion. If Council occurred in 48AD, that would put Paul's conversion at about 31AD, a year or so after Jesus' resurrection

The Visit to Jerusalem

The “famine visit”

Went because of divine revelation

Laid before apostles the gospel he was proclaiming to the Gentiles to he was not “running in vain” (confirmation by community)

For Paul, the whole point is that God has acted to create a single new family. If Paul had been pulling the family apart, his work would have been in vain

The Visit to Jerusalem

Paul didn't need official backing of Peter and James, but wanted to insure the doctrinal unity of the church

v. 4-6, Titus (a Gentile) not compelled to be circumcised, even after pressure from “false believers” - same thing false missionaries in Galatia were trying to do

Many saw Jerusalem as the center of the movement, but Paul sees Jesus as the center, not a geographical location

“Freedom and Truth” (2:4-5)

For Paul, God's new age sets people free from the slavery of the old world of sin and death

It is an Exodus image; they are free to truly be God's people

Truth - there is one Messiah, so no ethnic divisions in the church. That belongs to the old age.

Freedom and truth focused on the cross and resurrection of Jesus

Partnership (2:7-9)

Peter, James, and John saw what Paul was up to

A new fellowship and partnership - *koinonia* - sharing life in the Messiah together in the power of the Spirit

Division of mission, not message (Peter to Jews, Paul to Gentiles)

v. 9 - "we shook hands on it" - no additions to the gospel

v. 10 - remember the poor - signature of the early church, a sign of Jesus' own mission

Problem (2:11-14)

Peter initially happy to connect with Gentiles (Acts 10)

But strict Jews challenged eating with Gentiles (they are outside the family)

Peter broke that taboo until "some people came from James" - caused Peter to withdraw from Gentiles (as well as others like Barnabas)

Paul points out the hypocrisy - confronts this distortion of the gospel

By withdrawing, Peter was in effect compelling Gentiles to be circumcised

Paul's Point to the Galatian Churches

"What I said to Peter then is the same thing that I say to you Galatians now..."

Embrace the gospel and live as the new covenant community!

Passage Questions

How does Paul's account of this dispute enhance his argument about the gospel?

What other kinds of Christian disputes does it bring to mind?

What is the proper way to handle doctrinal issues in the church?

How would you articulate Paul's "gospel?"
