

Dr. Tim Gombis, Galatians, Session 6, Galatians 4:1-5:1 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Gombis, Galatians, Session 6, Galatians 4:1-5:1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Tim Gombis's lecture, the sixth session on Galatians, specifically examines chapters 4, verse 1 through chapter 5, verse 1. Gombis explains Paul's exhortation to the Galatian Gentiles not to revert to slavery, emphasizing the apocalyptic context of Paul's theology, which encompasses both earthly and spiritual realms. He interprets Paul's reference to "elemental things of the world" (stoicheia) as rebellious cosmic powers overseeing the present evil age. Gombis clarifies that Paul's critique of turning back to these elements is not a denigration of Judaism itself, but rather a concern about Gentile Christians adopting Jewish identity as a requirement for salvation. The lecture further explores Paul's personal appeals and his allegorical interpretation of Sarah and Hagar to illustrate the contrast between slavery and the freedom found in Christ. Ultimately, Gombis argues that Christian freedom lies in embracing a multi-ethnic identity in Christ, free from the pressures of externally imposed expectations, and experiencing the transformative power of the Spirit.

**2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Gombis, Galatians, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]
Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament →
Pauline Epistles → Galatians).**



Gombis_Galatians_
Session06.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Gombis, Galatians, Session 6, Galatians 4:1-5:1

Briefing Document: Dr. Tim Gombis on Galatians 4:1-5:1

Source: Excerpts from "Gombis_Galatians_EN_Session06.pdf" (Dr. Tim Gombis, Galatians, Session 6)

Date: October 26, 2024

Overview: This session by Dr. Tim Gombis focuses on Galatians 4:1-5:1, where Paul exhorts the Galatian Gentile Christians not to return to slavery by adopting Jewish practices. Gombis emphasizes the apocalyptic context of Paul's theology, highlighting the cosmic struggle between the "present evil age" overseen by rebellious spiritual entities ("elemental things of the world" or *stoicheia*) and the "new creation" inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection. Paul argues that adhering to the demand for Gentile conversion to Judaism represents a return to the enslaving forces of the old age, while true freedom lies in the new reality established in Christ, fostering a multi-ethnic and multi-national people of God.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Exhortation Against Returning to Slavery (4:1-11):

- Paul urges the Galatian Gentiles not to revert to a state of "slavery" (4:8-9), which he connects to the "elemental things of the world" (*stoicheia*) (4:3, 9).
- Gombis explains that Paul's argument is rooted in his "apocalyptic theology," which views history as a cosmic struggle between the "old age" and the "new age."
- The "elemental things of the world" are identified as powerful spiritual entities, "angels of the nations" or "gods of the nations" (Old Testament concept), who oversee the present evil age and have rebelled against God. These entities influence cultural patterns and assumptions at a macro level, not individual demonic possession.
- God appointed these figures, but in Jewish tradition, many have become rebellious, holding creation enslaved. Nations following idols are seen as being led astray by these figures.

- The Mosaic Law and the nation of Israel were given by God within this enslaved cosmic context as good gifts, but the "genius of evil" twisted their purpose, leading to animosity between Israel and the nations instead of a pathway for shared blessing.
- Paul argues that the demand for Gentile conversion to Judaism is akin to becoming enslaved to the spiritual entities that oversee the "present evil age" (4:9), as it implies that God is only accessible through a particular ethnicity. He uses an analogy of a Western American Christian telling a Portuguese person they need an American passport to inherit salvation (5).
- Observing Jewish days, months, seasons, and years is not inherently enslaving for Jews (Paul himself did so - Acts 21), but for Gentile Christians to adopt these as a requirement for salvation is a step back into the old, enslaving era. They should celebrate their own cultural expressions of faith (7).

1. **Personal Appeal and Reflection on Past Relationship (4:12-20):**

- Paul makes a personal plea: "I beg of you, brothers, become as I am, for I have become as you are" (4:12). Gombis interprets this as Paul having moved beyond the exclusivist Jewish perspective to embrace the new creation reality that includes both Jews and Gentiles in Christ. He is urging the Galatians to join him in this inclusive reality.
- He reminds them of their initial warm reception of him despite his "bodily illness" (likely related to his stoning), recalling their extraordinary care: "You received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself. What has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me" (4:14-15).
- Paul questions if he has become their enemy for speaking the truth (4:16).
- He criticizes the motives of the Jerusalem missionaries, accusing them of manipulative tactics to exclude the Galatians so they would seek the missionaries instead ("They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may be zealous for them" 4:17).
- Paul expresses his deep concern and ongoing spiritual labor for them: "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" (4:19).

1. Allegory of Sarah and Hagar (4:21-5:1):

- Paul presents an allegory of Sarah and Hagar, stating, "Now this may be interpreted allegorically" (4:24). Gombis clarifies that Paul is not necessarily providing a grammatical-historical interpretation of Genesis but rather a "theological reading" or analogy to shape the Galatians' understanding.
- He draws associations: Hagar (the slave woman) represents Mount Sinai, the present Jerusalem, and those who are under the law, leading to bondage. Ishmael is associated with the flesh (9).
- Sarah (the free woman) represents the Jerusalem above (heavenly reality), the promise, the Spirit, and those who are children of the promise, leading to freedom. Isaac is associated with the Spirit (9).
- Paul connects this allegory to the situation in Galatia, implying that the Jewish missionaries pushing for adherence to the law are like the children of the slave woman persecuting the children of the free woman (the Galatian Gentile Christians who are children of the promise through the Spirit).
- He quotes Isaiah 54:1 ("Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear...") to depict the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's promises.
- He concludes with the exhortation: "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman" (4:30). This is applied to the rejection of the idea that Gentile Christians need to become Jewish to be part of God's inheritance.
- Paul emphasizes that "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1).

1. The Nature of Christian Freedom:

- Gombis clarifies that the freedom Paul speaks of is not modern Western libertarianism (doing whatever one wants).
- Instead, it is "freedom from falsely constructed identities," freedom from having Christian identity tied to any specific ethnicity, freedom from socially imposed expectations, and freedom from condemnation from other Christians for not conforming to certain packages of Christian living (10).

- True freedom allows for the full participation in God's multi-ethnic and multi-national family, experiencing the "liberating power of the Spirit" in ways that might be "counterintuitive" to cultural norms (11).
- Christian identity should be a journey of discovering the diverse ways of inhabiting faith within God's global family.
- Social ethics for Christians are not about simply mirroring or leading current cultural trends but about embodying the reality of God's family in a radically different way, leading to more of God's presence, Spirit, and renewing power, ultimately glorifying God in Christ.

Key Quotes:

- "Don't return to slavery." (referring to the central exhortation in 4:1-11) (1)
- "...while we were children were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world." (Galatians 4:3) (2)
- "...how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?" (Galatians 4:9) (2)
- "...when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are no gods." (Galatians 4:8) (2)
- "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1) (10)
- "Now this may be interpreted allegorically..." (Galatians 4:24) (8)
- "I beg of you, brothers, become as I am, for I have become as you are." (Galatians 4:12) (7)
- "You received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself." (Galatians 4:14) (7)
- "They want to shut you out, that you may be zealous for them." (Galatians 4:17) (8)
- "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." (Galatians 4:30) (10)

Conclusion:

Dr. Gombis provides a rich understanding of Galatians 4:1-5:1 by situating Paul's arguments within an apocalyptic theological framework. He emphasizes that the call for Gentile Christians to adopt Jewish practices represents a regression to the enslaving powers of the old age. True freedom in Christ lies in embracing the new creation, which transcends ethnic boundaries and fosters a diverse family of God united by faith. The allegory of Sarah and Hagar serves as a powerful illustration of this contrast between bondage under the law and freedom through the promise in Christ. Ultimately, Paul's message is a passionate plea for the Galatians to stand firm in their freedom and embrace their identity as children of the promise, liberated from the expectations of a particular ethnicity and empowered by the Spirit to live lives of self-sacrificial love within God's multi-national family.

4. Study Guide: Gombis, Galatians, Session 6, Galatians 4:1-5:1

Galatians 4:1-5:1 Study Guide

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Dr. Gombis, what is the main exhortation Paul gives to the Galatian Gentiles in Galatians 4:1-11?
2. What does Paul mean by the "elemental things of the world" (stoicheia) in the context of his apocalyptic theology?
3. How does Dr. Gombis explain the Old Testament concept of the "gods of the nations" and their role in the present evil age?
4. According to Dr. Gombis, what was the intended purpose of the Mosaic Law and the creation of Israel in God's plan?
5. Why does Paul say that the Galatian Gentiles turning towards Jewish identity is a form of enslavement, even though he doesn't see Jewish practices as inherently enslaving for Jews?
6. What does Paul mean when he says, "Become as I am, for I have become as you are" (Galatians 4:12)?
7. What does Dr. Gombis suggest is Paul's purpose in recalling his initial visit to Galatia and the Galatians' positive reception of him?
8. How does Dr. Gombis interpret Paul's allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4:21-5:1?
9. What are some of the associations Paul makes with Hagar and Sarah in his allegory, and what do these associations represent in the context of the Galatian churches?
10. What kind of freedom is Paul talking about in Galatians, according to Dr. Gombis, and how does it differ from modern Western libertarian freedom?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Paul exhorts the Galatian Gentiles not to return to slavery. He argues that by adopting Jewish practices and submitting to the Jerusalem missionaries' demands, they would be returning to the bondage of the "elemental things of the world" that characterized the present evil age before Christ.
2. The "elemental things of the world" (stoicheia) refer to spiritual entities, also understood in a Jewish perspective as the "angels of the nations" or "gods of the nations." These powerful figures were believed to oversee the lives of nations in the present evil age and, according to Jewish tradition, had largely rebelled against God.
3. The Old Testament conception, as explained by Dr. Gombis, suggests that God appointed these archangelic ruler figures to oversee the various nations, while God himself directly oversaw Israel. However, in the present evil age, many of these figures have rebelled and now hold creation in enslavement by leading nations astray through idolatry.
4. The Mosaic Law and the creation of Israel were good gifts from God, intended to create a distinct people through whom God could eventually reach out to the nations and bring them into his love. However, the present evil age twisted this intention, leading to animosity between Israel and the nations.
5. Paul argues that for Gentiles to adopt Jewish identity as a prerequisite for God's blessing is to return to the era overseen by the enslaving "elemental things." He emphasizes that God is glorified by a multi-ethnic people of God, not by requiring all to conform to a single ethnicity.
6. Paul means that he, a Jew, has embraced fellowship with both Jewish and Gentile Christians in the new creation reality established by Christ. He is urging the Galatian Gentiles, who are considering returning to Jewish practices, to instead embrace their Gentile identity within this new reality, just as he has embraced them.
7. Dr. Gombis believes Paul recalls his initial visit to remind the Galatians of their former positive relationship and the spiritual blessings they experienced. He uses this personal appeal to question why their attitude has changed and to highlight the manipulative tactics of the Jerusalem missionaries.
8. Dr. Gombis interprets Paul's allegory not as a literal interpretation of the Old Testament text, but as a theological reading or analogy. Paul uses the narrative of

Sarah and Hagar to configure the situation in Galatia, drawing associations to shape the Galatians' understanding of their predicament.

9. Paul associates Hagar, the slave woman, with Ishmael, the flesh, Mount Sinai, and the present Jerusalem, representing slavery under the law. He associates Sarah, the free woman, with Isaac, the promise, the spirit, and Jerusalem above, representing freedom in Christ and the new creation.
10. The freedom Paul discusses is not a license to do whatever one wants, but rather freedom from falsely constructed identities, social expectations that determine one's standing with God, and condemnation from other Christians. It is the freedom to fully participate in God's multi-ethnic family and experience the counterintuitive liberating power of the Spirit.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of Paul's apocalyptic theology, as explained by Dr. Gombis, in understanding his argument against the Galatian believers returning to Jewish practices in Galatians 4:1-11.
2. Analyze Paul's use of the Old Testament, specifically Deuteronomy 32 and the narrative of Sarah and Hagar, in Galatians 4:1-5:1, considering Dr. Gombis' perspective on theological interpretation versus grammatical-historical exegesis.
3. Explain the contrast Paul draws between slavery and freedom in Galatians 4:1-5:1, according to Dr. Gombis' lecture, and discuss the implications of this contrast for the identity and practices of Gentile Christians.
4. Evaluate Dr. Gombis' interpretation of Paul's personal appeal to the Galatians in 4:12-20, considering the role of his past relationship with them and his accusations against the opposing missionaries.
5. Based on Dr. Gombis' teaching on Galatians 4:1-5:1, discuss the nature of Christian identity in a multi-ethnic context and how it challenges traditional cultural and social boundaries.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalyptic Theology:** A theological framework that understands history and salvation in terms of cosmic ages, the present evil age and the new age inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection.
- **Stoicheia:** A Greek term translated as "elemental things of the world." In the context of Paul's apocalyptic theology and Jewish thought, it refers to powerful spiritual entities, often understood as the "angels of the nations" or "gods of the nations," that oversaw the world in the present evil age.
- **Present Evil Age:** The current era, understood in Paul's theology as being under the influence of cosmic powers opposed to God's purposes, leading to enslavement.
- **New Creation:** The reality inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit, which transcends ethnic and legalistic boundaries.
- **Gods of the Nations (Angels of the Nations):** Spiritual entities believed in Jewish tradition to have been appointed by God to oversee individual nations, some of whom had rebelled against God.
- **Mosaic Law:** The body of laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, which served a specific purpose for Israel in the time before Christ.
- **Allegory:** A literary device where abstract or spiritual meanings are expressed through concrete or material forms. Dr. Gombis suggests Paul's use in Galatians is more of a theological analogy than a strict interpretation.
- **Theological Interpretation:** An approach to biblical texts that seeks to understand the ways of God with his people by seeing patterns and God's logic across Scripture, sometimes collapsing the distance between contemporary situations and biblical narratives.
- **Grammatical-Historical Exegesis:** A method of interpreting biblical texts that focuses on the literal meaning of the words in their historical and literary context.
- **Freedom in Christ:** In Galatians, this refers to liberation from the obligation to adhere to Jewish Law for salvation, freedom from ethnic and social barriers within the Christian community, and the freedom to live by the Spirit.

5. FAQs on Gombis, Galatians, Session 6, Galatians 4:1-5:1, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Galatians 4:1-5:1 Based on Dr. Gombis' Teaching

1. What is the main exhortation Paul gives to the Galatian Gentiles in Galatians 4:1-11?

Paul's central exhortation is "Don't return to slavery." He urges the Galatian Gentiles not to revert to a state of bondage by adopting Jewish practices as a requirement for salvation in Christ. He argues that they can be saved through faith in Christ alone, without needing to change their ethnicity or adhere to Jewish customs.

2. What does Dr. Gombis mean by the "apocalyptic context" of Galatians and how does it relate to Paul's argument in this passage?

By "apocalyptic context," Dr. Gombis refers to Paul's theological understanding of the cosmos as being divided into the "present evil age" and the "new age." This framework involves cosmic forces like sin, death, and spiritual entities ("elemental things of the world" or *stoicheia*) that hold the world in a form of enslavement during the present evil age. Paul argues that through Christ's death and resurrection and the sending of the Spirit, God has inaugurated the new creation, breaking the power of these enslaving forces. Therefore, for Gentile Christians to turn back to practices associated with the present evil age (in Paul's view, represented by the insistence on adopting Jewish identity for salvation) would be to return to that very enslavement from which Christ has delivered them.

3. What are the "elemental things of the world" (*stoicheia*) that Paul mentions, and what role do they play in his theology?

The "elemental things of the world" (*stoicheia*) are understood from a Jewish perspective as powerful spiritual entities, sometimes referred to as "angels of the nations" or "gods of the nations" in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Dr. Gombis explains that these figures were initially appointed by God to oversee the nations but many have rebelled and now hold creation enslaved, influencing cultural patterns and leading nations astray through idolatry. In Paul's apocalyptic theology, the present evil age is overseen by these rebellious *stoicheia*. He argues that by seeking to adopt Jewish practices as a means of salvation, the Gentile Galatians would be returning to the dominion of these very powers that Christ came to overcome.

4. How does Paul view the Mosaic Law and Jewish identity in the context of his argument against the Galatian teachers? Dr. Gombis emphasizes that Paul is not denigrating the Mosaic Law or Jewish identity in themselves. Paul sees the Law as a gift from God, given within the context of an enslaved cosmic situation to the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. Israel's distinction was intended to be a means through which God could reach the nations. However, due to the influence of the present evil age, this distinction became a source of division rather than a bridge. Paul argues that the Law and the creation of Israel could not ultimately fix the cosmic issue of enslavement; only the new creation brought about by Christ's death and resurrection could achieve that. Therefore, insisting that Gentiles must adopt Jewish identity to be saved is to align with the limitations of the old age rather than the freedom of the new creation in Christ.

5. What is the significance of Paul's personal appeal to the Galatians in Galatians 4:12-20? In this section, Paul makes a passionate personal appeal, reminding the Galatians of their initial warm reception of him despite his physical suffering. He urges them to "become as I am," meaning to embrace the new reality where ethnic distinctions are no longer the basis of fellowship in Christ. Paul, a Jew, has joined the Gentiles in this new creation. He criticizes the motives of the Jerusalem missionaries, suggesting they are trying to create an exclusive group where the Galatians would be dependent on them. His personal tone underscores the deep disappointment he feels that the Galatians are turning away from the gospel he preached and the unity they once shared.

6. How does Dr. Gombis explain Paul's use of allegory in Galatians 4:21-5:1 regarding Sarah and Hagar? Dr. Gombis suggests that Paul is not providing a traditional grammatical-historical interpretation of the Genesis narrative of Sarah and Hagar. Instead, he is engaging in a form of "theological interpretation" or using the story as an analogy to configure the situation in Galatia according to God's logic. Paul associates Hagar and her son Ishmael with slavery, the flesh, Mount Sinai, and the present Jerusalem, representing the old covenant and the idea of earning righteousness through works of the law. Sarah and her son Isaac are associated with freedom, the promise, the Spirit, and the "Jerusalem above," representing the new covenant and salvation through faith. By drawing these associations, Paul aims to shape the Galatians' imagination, urging them to cast off the bondage represented by Hagar and embrace the freedom of Sarah's lineage.

7. What does Paul mean by "freedom" in Galatians, and how does it differ from modern Western concepts of freedom? According to Dr. Gombis' interpretation, the freedom Paul speaks of is not the modern Western idea of libertarian freedom to do whatever one wants. Instead, it is freedom from falsely constructed identities based on ethnicity, freedom from socially imposed expectations as a prerequisite for pleasing God, and freedom from condemnation within the Christian community based on adherence to certain external practices. It is the freedom to fully participate in what God is doing in creating a multi-ethnic family, experiencing the liberating power of the Spirit in unity with diverse believers, and living a life of faith characterized by self-sacrificial love.

8. How does understanding Paul's message in Galatians about freedom and identity impact the way Christians should relate to one another and to the broader culture today? Understanding Paul's message encourages Christians to move beyond ethnic and cultural barriers, recognizing their primary identity in Christ. It challenges the tendency to create in-groups and out-groups based on adherence to specific cultural or behavioral norms within Christianity. Instead, it calls for a celebration of the multi-ethnic nature of God's people and a recognition that God's glory is displayed through this diversity. Regarding the broader culture, Christians are called to embody the unity and love of God's family in a way that is distinct from the prevailing cultural norms, focusing on building a community that reflects God's kingdom rather than simply mirroring or leading secular trends.