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New Testament
Bible Survey

Galatians, Ephesians, & Colossians

Last Week Review

- Acts of the Apostles recounts the stories of the early church from its founding in Jerusalem and its spread to the whole world through the power of the Spirit
- Like his gospel, Luke is writing with a variety of sources in the common mode of the time (don’t apply modern categories to ancient history)
- Acts fulfills the command of Jesus to take the gospel to the “ends of the earth” (Rome)



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What Did It Mean to Be Jewish?



Ezra 10:17-18 (JPS) –

"By the first day of the first month **they were done** with all the men who had **brought home foreign women**. Among the priestly families who were found to have brought home foreign women were…"

Genesis 42:50 (JPS) –

"Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Aseneth **daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On**, bore to him."

Genesis 48:5 (JPS) –

"Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, **shall be mine**; Ephraim and Manasseh **shall be mine no less than** Reuben and Simeon."

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What Did It Mean to Be Jewish?

***Joseph and Aseneth* 8.5 (1st c. BCE) –**

"And Joseph said, "It is not fitting for a man who worships God…to **kiss a strange [foreign] woman** who will **bless** with her mouth **dead and dumb idols** and **eat** from their table **bread of strangulation** and **drink** from their libation **a cup of insidiousness** and **anoint** herself with **ointment of destruction**."

***Joseph and Aseneth* 10.12 -**

"And Aseneth … took all her gods that were in her chamber, the ones of gold and silver **who were without number** … and threw all the idols of the Egyptians through the window facing north... And Aseneth took **her royal dinner** and the fatlings and the fish and the flesh of the heifer and **all the sacrifices** of her gods and **the vessels of their wine of libation** and threw everything through the window looking north and gave everything to the strange [foreign] dogs."

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What Did It Mean to Be Jewish?

***Joseph and Aseneth* 12.3 – 6, 8 – 10 (1st c. BCE)**

"With you I take refuge, Lord,
and to you I will shout, Lord,
to you I will pour out my supplication,
to you **I will confess my sins**,
and to you I will reveal my lawless deeds.
Spare me, Lord,
Because I have sinned much before you,
I have committed **lawlessness** and **irreverence**,
and have said wicked and unspeakable things
before you.
My mouth is **defiled** from the **sacrifices of the idols** and from **the tables** of the Egyptians.

I have sinned, Lord,
before you I have sinned in much ignorance,
and have worshipped dead and dumb idols….
With you **I take refuge**, Lord,
and to you I bring my supplication,
And to you I will shout.
For just as **a little child** who is afraid flees to **his father**, and the father, stretching out his arms, snatches him off the ground and puts his arms around him…
likewise, you too, Lord, **stretch out your hands** upon me as **a child-loving father**, and **snatch me off the earth**."

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Letters in the NT

- Beyond the four gospels, the majority of the New Testament was written by the Apostle Paul in the form of letters to the early churches.
- Many of the churches who received letters were founded by Paul on his ministry journeys.
- These letters would be carried by a trusted emissary such as Timothy or Phoebe.
- These letters were kept and then shared with other churches as well.
- We do know there were letters written by Paul that have not survived such as a letter in between 1st and 2nd Corinthians.



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Letters in the NT

Paul's letters reveal a 1st century church that was diverse in terms of:

- Ethnic background
- Religious background
- Socio-economic status
- Multiple types of churches
- Many different types of leaders: men and women

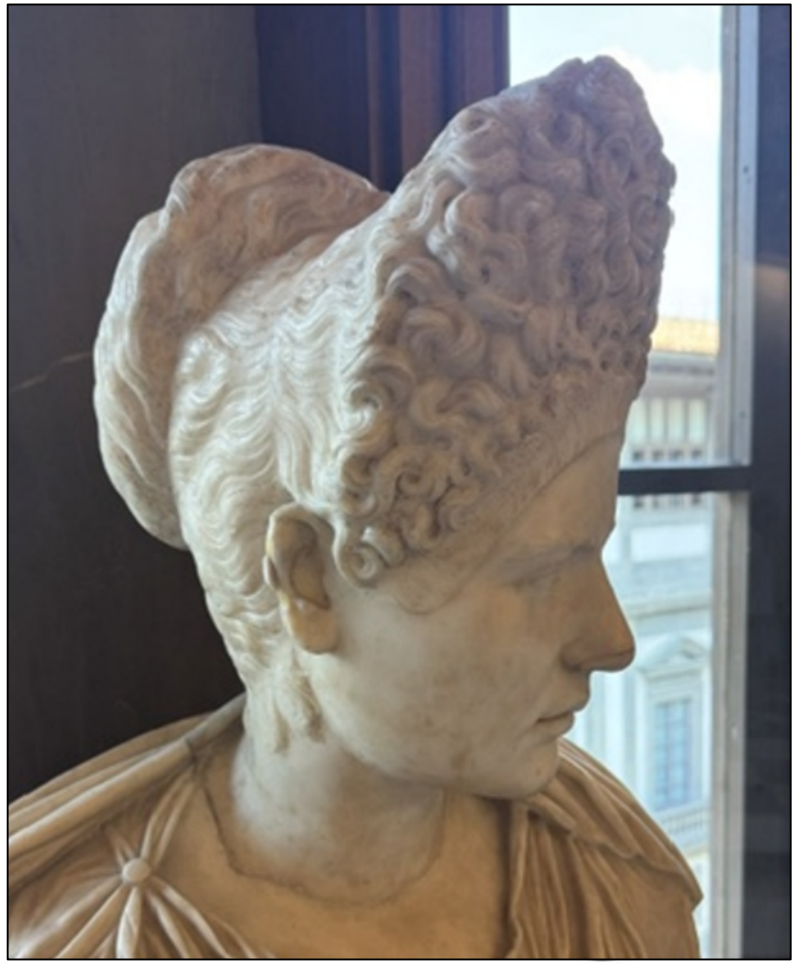


- Paul's letters often deal with common themes:
  - Doctrine
  - Unity
  - Prayer
  - Orderly worship and church discipline
  - Thanks and encouragement

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Letters in the NT

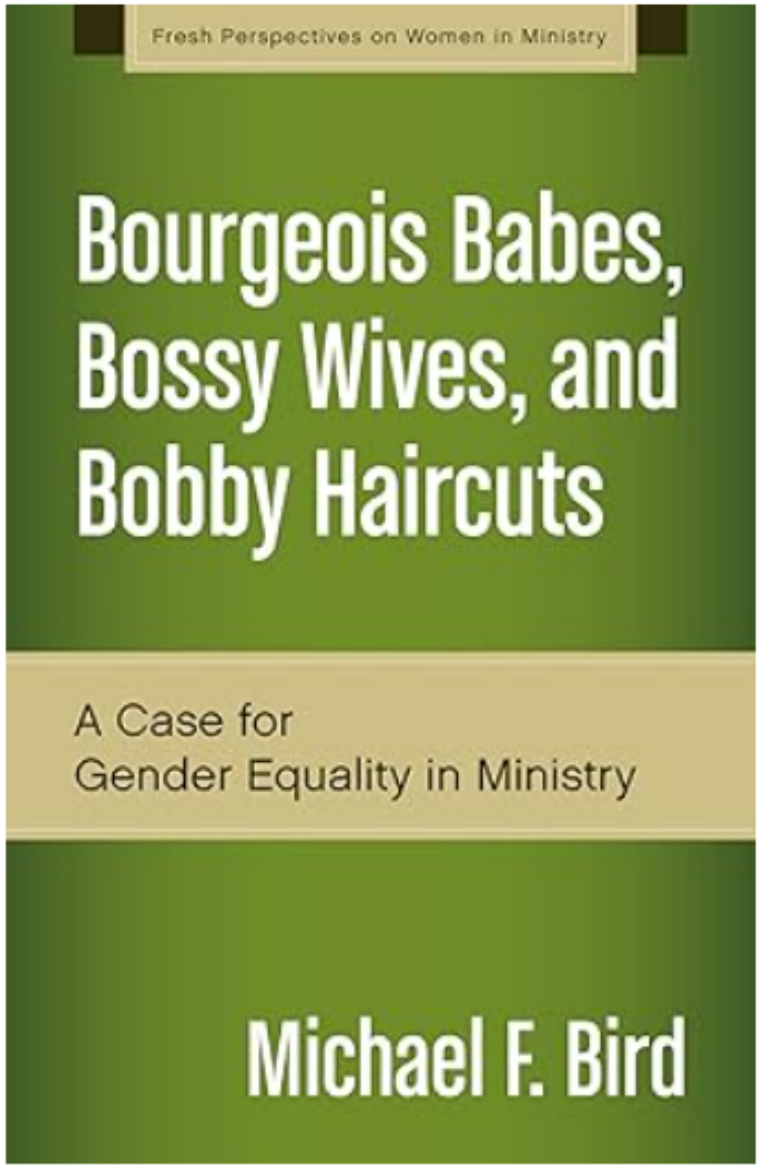
- The Pauline Epistles are written in a specific historical context and should always be read with that in mind. Some specific guidelines:
- The issues discussed are driven by what's happening in the churches
  - The letters are task-driven theology, not full-fledged theological treatises (although Romans could be an exception)
- Interpretation must take into account the historical context
  - When Paul tells Timothy women shouldn't braid their hair, what did that signify in the 1st century?



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Letters in the NT

- Group exercise at your table:
  - Read each of the 6 passages listed on your sheet and decide if the passage applies:
    - **ONLY** to the first century
    - For **ALL** time
    - Only in **PRINCIPLE** to today



Letters in the NT

- The literary context is important - follow Paul's argument through the whole paragraph or passage.
  - Refuse to "proof text" aka "text-jacking" by pulling something out of context.
- Follow interpretive rule #1 – a text can't mean for us today what it didn't mean to the original audience.
  - This helps us understand what a text CAN'T mean.

  Why is it important to rule OUT certain interpretations of Scripture?
- Follow interpretive rule #2 – where we share similar life situations with the 1st century, the Bible's message is the same to us as to them

  What are some issues you see in the Pauline Epistles that are relevant to the social and cultural debates today?



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Two Letter Types: Galatians, Colossians & Ephesians

- Galatians & Colossians are an issue-driven letters
  - Paul responds to specific incidents and issues for the churches in Galatia
  - Meant for a specific audience, but applicable to others depending on their situation
  - Can use Paul's thoughts to build larger theological points
- Ephesians is an encyclical letter meant to be widely circulated
  - Much different tone than Galatians
  - Comments more general but some specific issues addressed and widely applicable ideas
  - More theological treatise than Galatians – seen in the incorporation of hymns



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Galatians: Purpose for Writing

- The book of Galatians was written by Paul and addresses the conflict between non-Jewish Christians and the Judaizers
- "Judaizers" were a movement within the Christian church that believed following Jewish ethnic identity was required for Christians
- This group, described as "believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees," argue against Paul at the great council in Acts 15
- See multiple examples in the NT where people would come behind Paul and sabotage his work (cf. 2 Cor.)



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Why is Circumcision an Issue?

- Throughout the Intertestamental Period, the question of defending the Jewish faith had been critical
- Circumcision was one of the key fundamental tenets of Jewish belief that defined the boundaries of their faith:

  Jubilees 15:25-27 (2nd c BCE):

  "And all the sons of Beliar will leave their sons without circumcision just as they were born. And great wrath from the LORD will be upon the sons of Israel because they have left his covenant and have turned aside from his words."

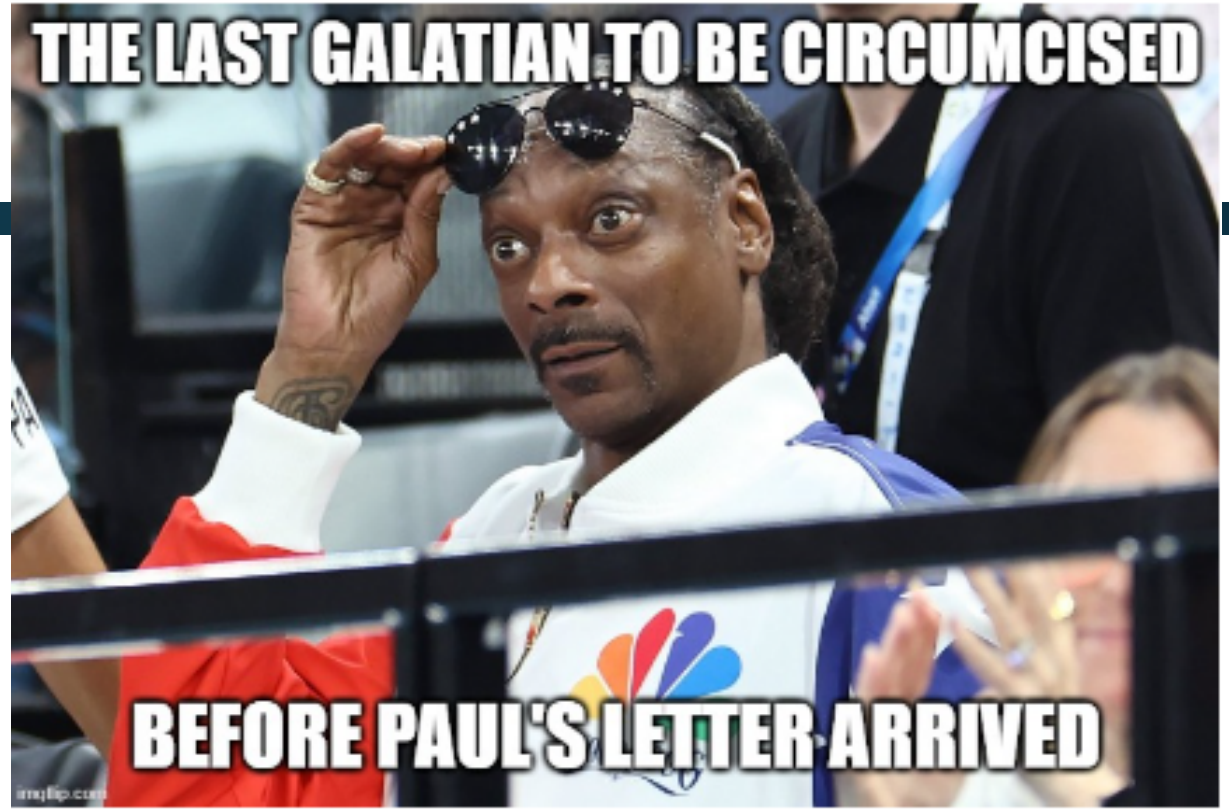
- The Judaizers believed that the Christian faith was a continuation of their faith commitments, thus circumcision was absolutely a part of practicing the Christian faith.

  Why would Gentile believers of Galatia be attracted to adopting the Jewish lifestyle?



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Galatians at a Glance



- Exordium – 1:6-10
  - Accusation of Paul
  - Curse for those if true
- Narratio 1:11-2:14
- Justification of message – (1:11-12)
- Section 1 – early apostleship
- Section 2 – conference in Jerusalem (2:1-10) – cf Acts 15 or earlier conference?
- Section 3 – conflict between Paul and Peter in Antioch over table fellowship with Gentiles and separation from Barnabas (2:11-14)

What should disagreement look like between Christians?

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Galatians at a Glance

- Propositio (2:15 – 21)
- This summarizes Paul's argument and seeks to find agreement while also acknowledging differences.
  - Agreement –
    - Gentiles and Jews justified by faith not Torah
  - Disagreement
    - Building up the Torah (previously torn down) shows them to be a "transgressor"
    - Once you die to Torah Christ lives in you
  - Summary
    - If Torah means anything, then Christ died for nothing

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Galatians at a Glance

- Probatio (3:1 – 4:31)
- 6 proofs for Paul's argument:
  - #1 (3:1-5) – their faith was received on the basis of Christ's work, not Torah
  - #2 (3:6-14) – All who justified by faith are blessed by God in the same way as Abraham including Gentiles – this did not come through the Torah
  - #3 (3:15 – 29) – an example from inheritance
  - #4 (4:1-11) – uses adoption and birth metaphors to demonstrate that they were once enslaved by "elemental spirits" but now are a child in the Son
  - #5 (4:12-20) – appeals to their friendship to their past relationship to continue to follow the message he gave them; think of their past and continue in that same way!
  - #6 (4:21-31) – an allegory of Hagar and Sarah to explain the two covenants – Torah and Christ; they are like Isaac, the son of promise, not born of the flesh like the other



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Galatians at a Glance

- Exhortatio (5:1 – 6:10)
- Paul uses this section in 3 sections to encourage them to live in a way that honors their freedom in Christ
- Section 1 (5:1-12) – don't follow Torah
  - 5:12 – I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves!
- Section 2 (5:13 – 24) – don't follow the desires of the flesh
- Section 3 (5:25 – 6:10) – follow the Spirit instead

- Peroratio (6:11-18)
  - Summarizes his arguments, final greetings

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Colossians: The Cosmic Christ

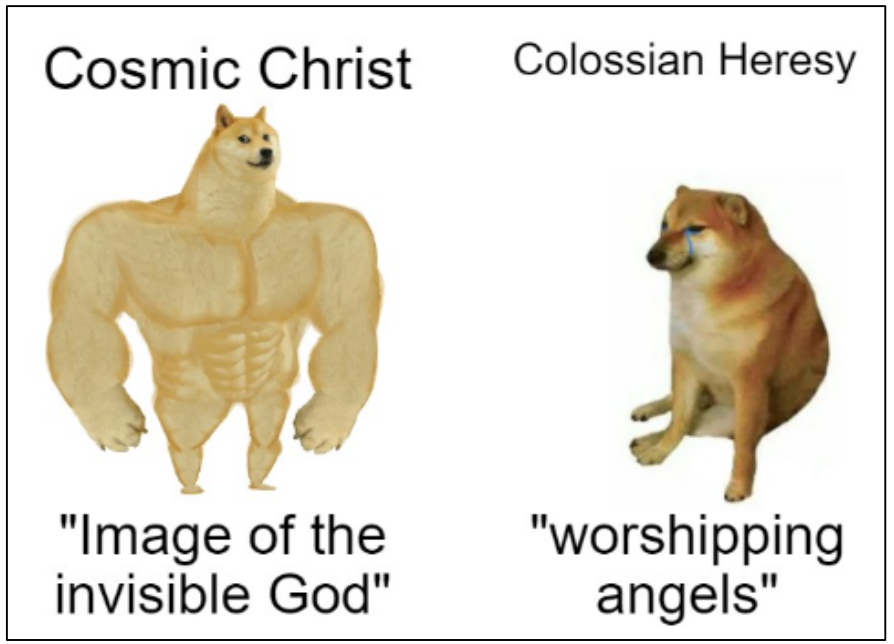
- The book of Colossians is written by Paul to the city of Colosse, a city of GENTILES, in order to engage the church specifically on the doctrine of Christ's DEITY and the consequences of that doctrine on the life of the believer.
- The church of Colosse had not been established by Paul personally but by Epaphrus, who had possibly been sent by Paul to the city.
- The letter must have been written before 61 CE, when an earthquake destroyed most of the city.
- Paul instructs the church to share this letter with the Laodiceans and for Colossae to read the letter from the Laodiceans (4:16)



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Colossians: The Cosmic Christ

- It is unclear what the heresy Paul reacts against actually is:
  - Hellenistic?
    - Focus on divine “wisdom and knowledge”
    - Asceticism
    - “Elemental spirits”
    - “Hollow and deceptive philosophy”
  - Jewish?
    - Reference to circumcision
    - “Worship of angels”
    - Sabbath observance and various festivals



- Seems to be highly syncretistic, taking in aspects of various parts of religions and larger culture
- At the end, ends up degrading Christ’s divinity

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Colossians: The Cosmic Christ

- Paul's response is unequivocal:

  *"He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn of all creation**. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things were created through him and for him**. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (1:15-20)*

- The concept of firstborn does not necessarily indicate "first-ness" or "born-ness." Instead, it is a title that indicates authority and preeminence.

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Colossians: The Cosmic Christ

- Colossians, like Ephesians, also explores the impact of the deity of Christ on relationships in the church.

- The “Household Codes” throughout the New Testament express the way Christians should understand their horizontal relationships (human to human) in light of their vertical relationship (human to God).

- Paul is undermining the Roman cultural values of hierarchy and social stability as secondary to those of Christ.

- Paul ends the section by reminding the readers to conduct themselves “wisely toward outsiders” with “gracious speech.”



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Colossians: The Cosmic Christ

- How does Paul see these relationships in the church?

- Compare Col. 3:8-10 to Gal. 5:19-21
- Compare Col. 3:11 to Gal. 3:28
- Compare Col. 3:12 to Gal. 5:25

- How would you describe the way of life Paul is prescribing here?



Ephesians: An Encyclical Letter

- The book of Ephesians is unique among the Pauline Epistles because it is believed to be an encyclical letter, meaning it was meant to be circulated widely to many churches.
- Ephesians contains many unique features that set it apart from Paul's other letters:
  - Its elevated style of composition
    - 1:3-14 is a SINGLE SENTENCE IN GREEK
  - The depth and scope of its theology
  - A fully developed ethical and administrative view of church matters
  - Several passages are thought to be hymns



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Ephesians: Intro Comments

- The “first and greatest city of Asia”
- Very closely related to Colossians
- Written from Rome while imprisoned – early 60s
- The authorship of Paul is heavily debated





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Ephesians: Themes

- 1st half: Jesus as the "cosmic Christ" (cf. Colossians)
  - Exalted over the spiritual forces of the universe
  - Providing salvation
  - Bringing unity to both Jews and Gentiles as the head of the church.
- Paul says that this reconciliation makes the church into:
  - A "household of God " (2:19)
  - A "holy temple in the Lord" (2:21)
  - A "dwelling place" for God (2:22)
- In describing the church this way, Paul is taking direct aim at the pagan (and Jewish!) culture surrounding them.



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Ephesians: Themes

- This picture of Christ as victorious over spiritual forces was especially poignant to believers in Ephesus:
  - Lived in a culture dominated by the worship of the goddess Artemis, the queen of the underworld (cf. Acts 19).
  - The region was known for its belief in (and fear of) magic and cultic practices.
  - Paul holds up Christ as the one who allows them to resist this evil and overcome the "powers" (a word mentioned in Ephesians more than any other book).
  - Paul ends the major sections of the entire book on this theme (6:10-17).

When we talk about overcoming spiritual darkness today, what comes to mind?



Ephesians: Themes

- The second half of Ephesians explores the implications of the unity of the church in various areas:
- The gifts of God allow the church to build up the body in love (4:16).
- They are to give up their old life before knowing Christ which was defined by its “futility” in their minds (4:16), “corrupt” (4:22), and “deluded by its lust” (4:22).
- Instead, they are to be a new self “created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24).

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Ephesians: Themes

- Paul describes the actions necessary to live in this holy way in a large section of ethical instructions.
- These gifts also allow believers to put away the old life and "live as children of light" (5:8).
- This new way of living extends to how Christians should wield authority (5:21ff).
- In the Household Codes, Paul uses the Graeco-Roman hierarchical social order to emphasize the need for deference in the church among all relationships as reflected in the example of Christ who served.

What are the hallmarks of unity in our church? What does that actually look like?



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Today's Application

- We must be careful of adding cultural baggage to our definitions of Christianity:
  - Social
  - Political
  - Economic
  - Other

  How do we keep ourselves from doing this – intentionally or unintentionally?
- It is impossible for the church to be unified if we aren't expressing/using our spiritual gifts

  What is it like for your personally to use/express your spiritual gifts?

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Today's Takeaways

- The issue of circumcision was a foundational idea to identity of Judaism
- Paul in Galatians rejects the practice of adding cultural baggage and other qualifiers to salvation
- Ephesians and Colossians describe Jesus as the cosmic ruler of the universe, more powerful than any local deity
- Because of Jesus' status, the church can be unified in living out his will through the gifts of the Holy Spirit



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Preparation for Next Week

- Reading:
  - Philippians, I & II Corinthians, I & II Thessalonians
  - Burge / Green – Chapters 15, 16, 17
- Writing:
  - Theological ditty topic: “How would you describe Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church? Is it positive, negative, or something else?”

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