

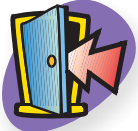


Galatians

Catholic Scripture Study

An Urgent Appeal

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church



Introduction

In the conversion story of St. Paul, studied in the previous lesson, we were able to recognize a man of great passion and decisiveness. Through a supernatural encounter with Jesus and through the administration of the infant Church, St. Paul's entire life was redirected. Upon his conversion, all his energy was poured into preaching the gospel and refuting the Jews who opposed it. Eventually, Paul was commissioned by the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3) to go out on missionary journeys throughout the Greco-Roman world and preach the Good News. His pattern was to establish churches, appoint elders to lead them, and then encourage the new Christians in their growth by follow-up visits or personal letters. The epistle to the Galatians is just such a letter, written about 20 years after his conversion. It was occasioned by the problem of the "Judaizers," Jewish Christians who were suggesting the need to circumcise Gentile converts and have them keep the Mosaic code.

In this first chapter of the epistle, St. Paul wastes no time in getting right to the heart of the matter that has him so agitated. This new teaching might look innocent, but St. Paul actually sees it as a threat to the gospel he had preached to them (1:1-9). Before he gets down to the business of showing the Galatians why this is such a false and dangerous teaching, he reminds them of the unique characteristics of his apostleship (1:10-end). It is important for them to recognize his authority in this issue.

Read this passage all the way through, at least once. Then answer the questions on the text that follow.



GALATIANS 1

1 Paul an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— 2 and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; 5 to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

10 Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; 14 and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the





GALATIANS 1 (cont.)

traditions of my fathers. 15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. 20 (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; 23 they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they glorified God because of me.



Questions on the Text

THE THREAT OF A DIFFERENT GOSPEL READ GAL. 1:1-10

1. *See how Paul introduces himself in vs. 1. What does he seem eager to do in the way he writes about himself?*
2. *What two words does Paul use in his greeting in vs. 3? Think about what they mean. Why does that simple greeting sum up all that is best in the Christian life?*
3. *In vs. 4, Paul writes about deliverance "from the present evil age." What do you think Paul is referring to there? His culture? The government? What's the distinction between an evil age and an evil world?*
4. *In order to compare the way Paul begins this letter to the Galatians with other letters he wrote to other churches, read I Cor. 1:4-6; Eph. 1:15; Phil. 1:3,4; Col. 1:3,4. What is missing from this letter? What does that tell you about what you can expect to find in it?*
5. *What problem is threatening the churches in Galatia, described in vss. 6,7?*
6. *What does Paul reveal to be of absolute, utmost importance when it comes to preaching the gospel (vss. 8,9)? How dramatically does he make his point?*
7. *The Judaizers were suggesting that Paul wasn't requiring circumcision of the Gentiles because he was trying to "please men," not wanting them to be turned away from the gospel by requiring something difficult of them. How does he answer that criticism, in vs. 10?*
8. *Read I Cor. 9:19-23. What explains Paul's willingness in this passage to become "all things to all men"? How can we make the distinction between what can be adapted to different people or cultures in the gospel and what cannot?*
9. *Is there anything in the tone of how Paul writes about the truth of the gospel that is still in the tone of the Church's teaching today?*





Questions on the Text (cont.)

PAUL'S UNIQUE APOSTLESHIP READ GAL. 1:10-END

10. *What does Paul say was unique about the way he received the gospel (vs. 12)?*
 11. *In recounting his conversion, Paul says he was set apart before he was born for preaching among the Gentiles. Do you know any other great figures from the Bible who were also chosen from the womb?*
 12. *If God chooses His servants while they are still in the womb, what does that teach us about the call of God?*
 13. *After Paul's conversion, he went to Arabia, not Jerusalem. He may have spent 3 years there, then he briefly returned to Damascus, before going to Jerusalem. What do you think happened out there in the Arabian desert (remember: Paul did not consult with "flesh and blood," vs. 16)?*
 14. *Why did Paul go straight to Jerusalem, after he returned from the desert?*
 15. *Look at vs. 20. Why do you think he makes that impassioned statement?*
 16. *Up to that point in his ministry, what was Paul's reputation?*
 17. *How has your understanding of St. Paul deepened as a result of this lesson?*
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Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text in the lesson. Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these:

1. *St. Paul very often used the greeting of "grace and peace" in his epistles (see Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:2). To have God's grace in our lives and to live in the peace that it brings is a simple way of living each day. Examine your life to see whether you are experiencing the interior peace that grace makes possible. Are you struggling against God over anything? Are you estranged from someone? Is anything threatening your peace? Ask for grace and make peace today.*
2. *St. Paul was full of urgency that the Galatians preserve the true gospel. Is there a gospel truth in your life that has somehow lost its urgency? Think of the gospel truths you know—the call to faith, to self-denial, to prayer, etc. Sit still before the Lord, asking Him to help you hear Him if there is urgency in His voice to you today.*





Opportunities for Additional Study

For the student who wishes to reflect more deeply on the passage in the lesson, consider these:

Points to Ponder

The conversion and ministry of St. Paul give us an excellent opportunity to understand how the early church understood the role of apostle. Because he had to defend himself against a variety of criticisms, his detailed explanation of why the Galatians should trust his authority is most instructive. He had to demonstrate that his mission to the Gentiles originated in the direct revelation of Jesus to him, but that his message, although received in an unusual way, was the same one preached by the Twelve. We can see from even the first chapter of this letter just how Catholic St. Paul was! It was not enough for him simply to have an experience of Jesus, as thrilling as that was. He also needed to square things with St. Peter in Jerusalem. St. Paul was adamant that the original body of teaching (“the gospel” or “good news”) must remain intact. This is a theme seen constantly throughout his epistles, and it is most prominent in the pastorals. They were written to Timothy and Titus, men who served as elders in their churches. He urged them always to guard carefully what they had received (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; Titus 1:9; 2:1).

Of course, this is simply the logical consequence of the statement Jesus made concerning the truth: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Truth is first a Person—the Divine Person of Jesus. If, as Scripture says, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then the Truth cannot do an about-face. It cannot be “yes” then “no” (2 Cor. 1:15-20). Truth is organic, and it must always remain essentially what it is. Surely truth will mature and develop through the ages, but the apostles must be the ones to decide whether something new is a true development and application of the Truth or a perversion and departure from it. This is a question we will examine more closely in the next lesson.

It is interesting to note that in Gal. 1:1, St. Paul says his call was through Jesus Christ and God the Father. This echoes the words of Jesus to God the Father concerning the Twelve, when He prayed, in John 17:6: “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours. You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.” The forming of the leadership of the Church was a work of the Trinity. Men will not be saved only as individuals; they will be saved through the family of God, the Church. This enables us to experience the deepest Divine Truth of God—that He is a communion of love, the Blessed Trinity.

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Gal. 1:1 – ‘The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the apostles, in three ways:

—she was and remains built on “the foundation of the Apostles,” the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself;

—with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching, the “good deposit,” the salutary words she has heard from the apostles;

—she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ’s return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, ‘assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church’s supreme pastor.’” (857)

Gal. 1:13 - “In Christian usage, the word ‘church’ designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. ‘The Church’ is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ’s Body.” (752)



Summary

Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. The gospel preached by the apostles is the only one the Church can preach. It is not open to additions or subtractions. Paul was anxious about the Galatians' willingness to believe a different gospel, which actually involves a turning away from the true God.
2. Paul's authority to properly interpret the gospel was being challenged among his friends. Some of his critics may have suggested he was watering it down. Others may have insinuated that since he wasn't one of the Twelve, his gospel was slightly less reliable. Paul had to firmly establish his credentials in two ways. First, he had to prove that he was willing to preach difficult truths, saying some things men don't want to hear, when the gospel requires it. His insistence on not requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised had nothing to do with fear of being unpopular. Second, he needed to show that even though he was not one of the Twelve, he was willing to submit to the authority of Peter and the others in Jerusalem.

A Message from the Authors

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God Bless,

Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

