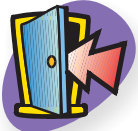


Galatians



“Let Us Not Grow Weary in Well-doing”

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
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Introduction

In the previous lesson, St. Paul’s deeply pastoral concern for the Galatians moved his attention beyond the circumcision controversy to what always, in all of his epistles, mattered very much to him. He always wanted his Christian friends to know the truth and then to live it, to grow in grace. After making sure the Galatians understood what a terrible mistake it would be to return to the Mosaic law to be justified, he began to concentrate on their progress in the spiritual life. The focus of that life is to be “faith working through love.” Belief in the gospel has to be translated into how one lives. In their particular situation, because of the division of opinion among them over circumcision, they faced the temptation to indulge certain “passions of the flesh.” That is, although they had been baptized into Christ, they needed to *grow* in the grace of that new life. Such growth requires determination. It calls for a recognition that to *begin* the Christian life is good and necessary, but it is not enough. One must consciously put his faith to work, turning away from the kind of behavior that comes so easily and habitually, and choosing to live according to a new law—the law of love. In this, of course, he is not alone. The Holy Spirit is his companion, enabling him to overcome the weaknesses of the flesh and to live in an entirely new way. St. Paul made it clear to the Galatians, as he had from the first time he preached the gospel to them, that living a life that was under the control of the flesh would lead to the loss of their inheritance, the kingdom of God. Every Christian faces a tension caused by the pull of the old way of life away from the new. He urged them to “walk by the Spirit,” a choice they had to make with self-examination and with faith.

As we noted in that lesson, it is inevitable that questions will arise over exactly how justification works. St. Paul was not writing a catechism in this epistle; he was writing a fervent, impassioned message of warning to his beloved Christian friends. Yet we are able to understand from what he wrote answers to some of our questions. If we want to know whether one act of faith, accompanied by baptism, is enough to make a person pleasing in God’s sight forever, what can we say? The best way to answer that question is to ask another one: Was St. Paul worried about the Galatians, that somehow they were in great danger? If the answer to that question is “yes,” then we have to conclude that since the Galatians had put their faith in the gospel, been baptized, and had experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, one act of faith is actually the *start* and not the end of the Christian life. When a person receives the great gift of having his sins washed away and the new life of Christ that comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit, it is a blessing that he must preserve. Just as Adam needed to preserve the blessedness of the Garden through obedience to God, we need to preserve our divine sonship by behaving as members of the royal family. We must remain true to the family. If we depart from the family code of conduct, which is simply the law of love of God and man, we run the risk of losing our inheritance. The danger is real, but, because of the Spirit’s presence in us, we do have the heart to obey.

In this final chapter of Galatians, St. Paul seems to anticipate the question that should be uppermost in our minds at this point in the epistle. What if someone falls? What if a Christian does something that severs him from Christ or that is clearly a “work of the flesh”? Is there any hope for him? Is the Christian life to be a life of fear or of hope? (6:1-10) As he closes his epistle, St. Paul discerns what really lies at the heart of this circumcision controversy. He expects that his apostolic authority will exert an influence on his friends to stay the course that has been charted for them (6:11-end).

Read through the chapter all at once, then answer the questions that follow.





GALATIANS 6

1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each man will have to bear his own load.

6 Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches.

7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. **8 For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.** 9 And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. 14 But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. 17 Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

Questions on the Text



LOVING GUIDANCE READ GAL. 6:1-10

In **vss. 1-3**, Paul addresses the “what if” question directly. These verses have truly profound meaning for Catholic teaching on justification. We will do well to think carefully about them.

1. **What does the phrase “overtaken in any trespass” suggest about the relationship between a Christian believer and sin in his life?**
2. **If a man sins, is it a private, personal issue that affects only God and himself?**
3. **What does the word “restore” suggest to you?**
4. **How is this restoration to be handled? Why?**
5. **Why do you think Paul speaks of “bearing one another’s burden” in regard to restoring a sinner?**

In answering these questions, you should have been able to observe in this passage evidence of the seed that blossomed into the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in the Church today. It is worth reading directly from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on this subject. Read **paragraphs 1446-1448**.

6. **Why is bearing another’s burden a fulfillment of “the law of Christ” (vss. 2-3)?**





Questions on the Text (cont.)

7. *What deception is a person susceptible to in the context of these verses (vss. 3-4)?*
8. *Look at what Paul says in vs. 5. Is he contradicting what he just said in vs. 2? What does he mean?*
9. *In the Christian community, what responsibility do those who are taught have towards their teachers (vs. 6)?*
10. *In vss. 7-8, Paul gives a clear warning: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked." Why do you suppose Paul is worried about the possibility that the Galatians might be deceived into mocking God?*
11. *In these same verses, what two ways of life does Paul contrast? Where else in his letter has he spoken like this? Read also Rom. 2:6-11.*
12. *Look at vs. 9. What is the threat Paul anticipates to the work of sowing to the Spirit, mentioned in vs. 8?*
13. *In vs. 10, Paul urges the Galatians to "do good to all men." Earlier he has said not to grow weary in "well-doing." If this kind of doing good is necessary to reap the harvest of eternal life, what light does this passage shed on the traditional way Catholics speak of salvation coming through faith and "good works"?*
14. *Look over again vss. 1-10. They confirm what Paul has said, directly or indirectly, in many parts of this epistle. That is, the grace of new life in Christ that comes through faith and baptism can actually be weakened and lost through sin. But do these verses give us any reason to be terrified by that fact? Do they deliver us up to despair over our falling into sin after baptism? How would you describe the tone of this part of Paul's letter?*

A FINAL EXHORTATION

READ GAL. 6:11-END

15. *In vs. 11, we have an indication that up to this point, a scribe has been writing the letter as Paul dictated it. This was a very common practice in Paul's day. Now in vs. 11, he seems to have taken the pen in his own hand and written his name in large letters. Why do you think he did that? What do you know about Paul from earlier in this letter that might explain why the letters were so big?*
16. *What does Paul suspect is the reason the Judaizers are so eager for the Gentiles to be circumcised (vss. 12-13)?*
17. *In vs. 14, Paul says he will only boast in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. What kind of boasting can one do about the Crucifixion?*
18. *Compare 6:15-16 to 5:6. Are they both saying the same thing? Why or why not (Hint: Figure out what "this rule" means in vs. 16)?*
19. *When Paul wishes "peace and mercy" (vs. 16) to the "Israel of God," to whom is he referring?*
20. *In vs. 17, why should "the marks of Jesus" on Paul's body serve to silence his opponents?*





Questions on the Text (cont.)

21. Read over vs. 11-18 and think back to the account of Paul's conversion that we read in Acts 9. Picture Paul going from house to house, dragging out the Christians to turn them into the authorities. Recall his fury to stamp out this new movement that claimed Jesus was Israel's Messiah. Remember the answer Jesus gave when Paul asked Him Who He was: "I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting." What are your reflections?

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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. Think about the sinners you know, especially those who go by the name of Christian. Examine your heart and mind in light of 6:1-5. Respond to the Lord accordingly. If you feel weak in this area, ask St. Paul to pray for you.**
- 2. Is there any place in your life where you have grown weary of well-doing? Be specific. Is there anything in this lesson that can refresh you on your journey?**
- 3. St. Paul's life is an example of how God directs our personalities towards His purposes when we surrender to Him. Is there evidence of that in your life? Are there places in your life that still need re-direction? Can you surrender them 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

Have you noticed that throughout this epistle, St. Paul has repeatedly brought to his readers' attention the death of Jesus on the Cross? Beginning in **chapter 2**, he frequently makes reference to the close identification every believer has with the actual, historical event of the Crucifixion. In **2:19-21**, he writes "For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose." As he begins **chapter 3**, he makes an allusion to a public portrayal of the Crucifixion that the Galatians had all seen (**3:1**). Using an Old Testament quote to defend his argument against circumcision, he writes "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree'—that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (**3:13-14**). When, in **chapter 5**, he urges his friends to resist the works of the flesh and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, he reminds them that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (**5:24**). And at the very end of his epistle, when he exposes the circumcision crowd to be more interested in human pride than spiritual truth, he says, "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (**6:14**). What explains this?

It is important to recognize that St. Paul's pervasive reference to the Cross in Galatians reveals it to be absolutely central to what transformed him from Saul of Tarsus, a Jew determined to wipe out Christianity, to the great Apostle to the Gentiles, who would one day write, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." In the contexts of his references to it in the epistle, we can find clues about why the Cross—with Jesus' Body on it—had such significance for St. Paul's life and teaching:

The Cross proves God's love for men (2:19-21). The Crucifixion is first an unequivocal demonstration of God's personal love for sinners. St. Paul recognized in it the deepest gesture of love possible between God and man. He understood it to mean that God loved him enough to do whatever it took to win him back from the power and condemnation of sin.

The Cross demonstrates what is true in the universe (3:1). St. Paul could only call "foolish" and "bewitched" anyone who could look at Jesus on the Cross and not recognize the meaning of all human history. All men everywhere, in every age and culture, have comprehended that the world we inhabit is a *moral* universe. That is, every human being has a sense that there is that which is "right" and that which is "wrong." We all have consciences. We all know we have violated our consciences. And buried way down deep in us is the expectation that somehow, someday, the "wrongs" in us deserve to be punished. More often we recognize that the "wrongs" of others should be punished. No matter. The Cross shows us that our sneaking suspicions are absolutely right. In the end, doing what is wrong cannot go unpunished. In the Cross, it doesn't.

The Cross reveals how justice and mercy meet (3:13-14). Once we know for sure that this is a moral universe, one in which we can speak of "right" and "wrong," then we must wonder what will become of us. Mingled in with our guilt for our failings is a desperate hope that somehow, someday they can be patched up, fixed, forgiven. In other words, we hope for mercy to come with justice. What we see in the Cross is beyond our wildest hopes, beyond the bounds anything humans would have dared to invent. There we see the innocent willingly suffer for the guilty. The *justice* of God is satisfied (which should give us peace in our souls, since not one of us would want to live for even a second in a universe where wrong is not punished), but it is met with God's *mercy*. God sent Jesus to take our place to redeem us so that He could *bless* us with the blessing He promised long ago to Abraham. Unthinkable treasure!

The Cross grants the power to live free (5:24). With the death of Jesus comes the end of sin's reign of terror.





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

As His Body was lifeless on the Tree, so are all bodies of those incorporated into Him. His dead Body means a death for us, too—death to original sin, death which the Law of Moses requires, death to the power of the Devil over us, death to the fear of death itself. His Resurrection guarantees us a brand new life—literally. The new life that comes after the death is the life of our grandest dreams—it is a life of love. No matter how frail and feeble that new life is as it begins, it is lived in *freedom*. It is won through the Cross.

The Cross is the glory of God (6:14). Combining man’s most violent, rebellious assault against God with man’s most dreaded suffering, God turns the tables on all evil on the Cross. It is the everlasting demonstration that the worst thing that can possibly happen in the world *already has*, and instead of meaning defeat, it broke the chains of slavery, vanquished God’s enemy, and flung open the doors of heaven. Is it any wonder that St. Paul makes the Cross the centerpoint of his life? And is it any wonder that Catholic piety has retained the physical representation of “Jesus Christ crucified” as the focus of its love and adoration throughout the centuries? As St. Clement of Rome wrote, “Let us fix our eyes on Christ’s blood and understand how precious it is to His Father, for, poured out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance” (*Ad Cor.* 7,4: PG 1,224).

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Gal. 6:2 – “It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfills his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of ‘the law of Christ.’ From the Church he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustains him on the ‘way.’ From the Church he learns the example of holiness and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary; he discerns it in the authentic witness of those who live it; he discovers it in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before him and whom the liturgy celebrates in the rhythms of the sanctoral cycle.” (2030)

Gal. 6:15 – “This sacrament is called Baptism, after the central rite by which it is carried out: to baptize (Greek baptizein) means to ‘plunge’ or ‘immerse’; the ‘plunge’ into the water symbolizes the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as a ‘new creature.’” (1214)

Rome to Home

“It must be recalled that...this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren who he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation.” (John Paul II, RP 31, 5)



Summary

Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

- 1. St. Paul expected that the Galatian Christians would have among them those who stumbled, who were “overtaken” by sin. These were to be gently restored to fellowship with God and man. There was to be no pride or self-righteousness when a brother fell. Instead, there was to be a willingness to “bear one another’s burdens,” since all are part of one Body. The occasion of a brother’s fall was to be a time of self-examination and humility.**
- 2. A fruitful Christian life requires perseverance. It also requires honesty, because God cannot be mocked. St. Paul wanted the Galatians to resist the impulses of the flesh and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, even though there would not be an immediate reward. He wanted them to be energetic and patient. He encouraged them with the reminder of the harvest of eternal life that makes all the work worthwhile, even an occasion for love.**
- 3. St. Paul discerned that those who were trying to win converts to circumcision among the Galatians were insincere. Their motives were less than pure. They wanted to avoid persecution, and they wanted to create a “following.” St. Paul lifted the focus of the Christian far above circumcision or uncircumcision. It was an entirely new kind of life, a “new creation.”**
- 4. As St. Paul had begun his letter with an account of his persecution of the Church of Jesus, he ended with another mention of persecution, but this time it is in reference to his own persecution for the sake of Jesus. He counted on his authentic witness and apostolic authority to convince his friends to stay true to the “rule” of new life in Christ, observed among those who are “the Israel of God.”**

A Message from the Authors

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God Bless,

Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

