

Galatians



St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

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 to Galatians

Galatians is a letter St. Paul wrote in about 54 A.D. to churches in Galatia (modern day Turkey) which he had established on an earlier missionary journey. St. Paul, being the Apostle to the Gentiles (anyone who isn't a Jew), had announced to these pagan people the Good News that through the work of the Lord Jesus, God calls all men, Jews and pagans alike, into a family relationship with Himself. They had eagerly received this gospel, been baptized, and had begun bearing the fruit of new life in Christ. However, some people (probably Jewish Christians) arrived on the scene after Paul had departed who suggested to the Galatians that in addition to being baptized and living by faith in Christ, they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, with all its ceremonial and dietary requirements. St. Paul saw this as a terrible threat to the truth, so he dashed off this epistle to set his friends straight.

Although perhaps hard for us to imagine, the question of whether new pagan converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised (essentially becoming Jews) was a serious source of confusion in the infant church. In some ways, it seemed like a reasonable suggestion, for this had been the sign of God's covenant with His people for many years. It was an issue of such importance that the very first Church council, the Council of Jerusalem, was called to confront it (a lesson from Acts 15 about that council is included in this study). As you will see by St. Paul's letter, it was a question that inflamed his passions and consumed him with urgency.

The epistle falls generally into two parts: (1) a very ambitious Scriptural and theological explanation of how men receive the blessing of being pleasing to God and how they are to preserve that blessing (2) pastoral direction to help this Christian community heal the divisions that always come with controversy. It is an epistle of particular interest to Catholics, since it was Martin Luther's interpretation of Galatians (as well as Romans) that convinced him that justification (being in a state of grace and thus ready to enter heaven) is by faith "alone." Studying this letter will be a wonderful opportunity to examine closely St. Paul's teaching on this doctrine. It will also provide an occasion to understand how questions about Christian truth were answered in the infant Church. That is, of course, an issue still relevant to us today.

This letter speaks directly to the heart of what matters most to men, in the first or twenty-first century. It is alive with the passion of a convert (St. Paul's conversion story from Acts 9 is included in this study as helpful background preparation) and full of the love a shepherd has for sheep. Every Catholic who knows it will find immeasurable grace in it. May God richly bless you as you study it.





Outline of Study

Lesson 1 — The Conversion of St. Paul (Acts 7:54-8:2; 9:1-30)

Lesson 2 — An Urgent Appeal (Galatians 1)

Lesson 3 — The Council of Jerusalem: Controversy Addressed (Acts 14:21-15:18)

Lesson 4 — The Council of Jerusalem: Grace and Obligations (Acts 15:19-35)

Lesson 5 — The Threat of Compromise (Galatians 2)

Lesson 6 — “The Righteous Shall Live by Faith” (Galatians 3:1-14)

Lesson 7 — “Why the Law?” (Galatians 3:15-29)

Lesson 8 — “No Longer a Slave, but a Son” (Galatians 4)

Lesson 9 — A New Kind of Freedom (Galatians 5)

Lesson 10 — “Let Us Not Grow Weary in Well-Doing” (Galatians 6)

