



CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

SERIES V

WISDOM LITERATURE AND NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Lesson 11 Commentary Galatians

Lesson 12 Questions 1 Corinthians 1-9

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO THE GALATIANS

INTRODUCTION

In the area that we now call Turkey, the Romans had named a number of provinces. Galatia was the central part. The inhabitants were originally Indo-Aryan tribes from the Eastern lands of Asia. About a hundred years before Christ they settled throughout the land of Asia Minor. Rome had conquered Asia Minor and named seven provinces there.

These people were barbarians; some of these later went to France (Gaul). At Paul's time the south of this area was composed of Hellenistic cities with Greek culture, but some were Gallic, from which we get the term Galatia. These people probably didn't speak Greek. In his early missionary journeys, Paul went first to the Jewish citizens, to the synagogues, and preached mainly to the Jews. Some scholars believe that these people spoke Lyconian and knew no Jewish religion. They were then the first gentile Christians not knowing the truths of the Old Testament.

If the first Galatians that Paul preached to were Jews settled there, they called the Asiatic Galatians "incomplete Christians" for they had not

been circumcised, and Paul "was not a true Apostle." Later Paul had to go to the first church council in Jerusalem and defend these Galatians and others of his converts who were not Jewish. The decision of the Apostles was that such citizens of the Roman Empire did not require any Jewish religious background or requirements. In this letter, Paul was defending the Hellenists, using all the devices of Greek-influenced lawyers in his style. Galatians 1:1 is "the opening broadside of a battle running from 1:1 - 2:14. Paul is a commissioned apostle unlike the counter-missionaries from Jerusalem."

Galatians' argument from Paul "won the fight against all the odds by a dazzling display of intellectual fireworks, reinforced by his own saintliness and force of character" (Literary Guide to the Bible, Alter & Kermode, Harvard Press).

The address in this letter is shorter than that to the Thessalonians, and less "friendly"—for he reproaches those who "are so promptly turning away from the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are going over to a different gospel," from trouble-makers seeking to pervert the gospel of Christ; but "even an angel from heaven who

preaches to you a gospel other than the one you were first given is under God's curse" (Galatians 1:9-10).

I. GOD'S CALL (Galatians 1:11-24)

A. Paul's First Years. The unique claim that Paul had to preach the Gospel was "that it was not from any human being that I received it, and I was not taught it, but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12; Matthew 16:13-19). In the account of Jesus' call of Paul, we hear only of a voice that Paul heard. At some point, by revelation or from Peter, Paul knew of Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, of His crucifixion, of Jesus' baptism by John in the beginning of Jesus' public life, and of other events which he mentions in his letters. But it is also possible that Jesus Himself taught Paul about all this, as Paul claims above.

Paul gives information here to the Galatians about his activities after conversion, mentioning that "I went off to Arabia." This might have been a "retreat"—a time of retreat and prayer, such as Jesus did before his ministry. Paul then spent three years back in Damascus, where he knew Ananias and the Christians there. He tells us of his important step that we all make—he acknowledged Peter's leadership, for "I went up to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, with whom I stayed fifteen days" (Galatians 1:18-19). Otherwise, he met only the "apostle James, the brother of the Lord." This was James, son of Alphaeus, named in the list of Apostles (Luke 6:12-14). Then he returned to "Syria and Cilicia" where he was born. He does not tell us of his activities there, but they must have been influencing others to Christ. In Jerusalem he had made a lasting friendship with Barnabas, a Jerusalem Christian who had sold his farm and brought the money to the Apostles (Acts 4:36-37). The two of them went to the Jerusalem Council fourteen years later, where "James, Cephas (Peter), and John... gave him the handclasp of fellowship" and sent them to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9).

B. Peter and Paul. Paul had an interesting encounter with Peter when he came to Antioch, the earliest Christian town, where Peter had "been taking his meals with the Gentiles." This was an un-Jewish act, which the Jerusalem authorities under James (the first bishop of Jerusalem) protested. Paul only pointed out to Peter that Gentiles were not bound by Jewish laws, and neither were Jews who became Christians, for the truth of the Gospel was their "law." Peter agreed (Galatians 2:15-21).

II. THE FAITH AS TAUGHT BY PAUL (Galatians 3:1-29; 4:1-31)

A. Justification Through Faith (Galatians 3:1-9; Psalm 143:1-2). Paul writes to his "senseless Galatians" who had again felt bound to Jewish Law, reminding them of Jesus upon His cross, of their receiving of the Spirit and asks, "Was that through observance of the Law or through faith in what you heard?" The works of the Spirit among them, "remarkable experiences" wrote Paul, come from faith. Then the clearest argument of all comes: that Abraham "believed God and it was credited to him as justice" (Genesis 15:6). Thus "all who believe are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Galatians 3:9). Furthermore, the prophet Habakkuk wrote: "the just man shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

The Law depended on observation of everything written in the book of the LAW (the five books of Moses—the Pentateuch). "Christ has delivered us," taught Paul, "from the power of the law's curse by himself becoming a curse for us, as it is written: "Accursed is he who is hanged on a tree."

For Christians, God made everything totally new. They accepted the saving power of God through the Gospel; they are in the right position before God; reconciled to God. It is a new creation. This is Paul's understanding of justification. The covenant with Abraham, Paul declares, was

formally ratified by God by a promise that God made to Abraham, not by the Law that came hundreds of years later. The Law was valid only until the offspring of the promise had been given, Jesus, sent by God. As Christians, our baptism clothed us with Christ. “There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus!” (Galatians 3:27-28). This triumphant discovery, Christian history has seldom reached! Think of its reality in our U.S.

B. Sons and Daughters of God in Christ (Galatians 4:1-31). “God sent forth his Son.” This divine Person deigned to begin a human life “born of a woman, born under the Law to deliver from the law those subjected to it, to deliver those under the law,... so that we might receive our status as adopted sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). We hear this read out a number of times each year in our liturgy of the Eucharist, where Christ comes in an even lower form: bread and wine. Yet, though the spirit of Jesus is Divine, he deigns to send that spirit into our hearts and we cry out “Abba!” “Father!” A few words before this, Paul called us “adopted”; he now exclaims to his Galatians and to us: “You are a son (daughter). “And the fact that you are, makes you an heir” (Galatians 4:7). We are neither a slave, a servant, nor an adopted child, but a child of God. This is God’s magnificent decision as to who we are (Colossians 2:16-19).

Paul’s next thought needs an explanation for us, who know so much science. In those days, people thought that the “natural elements” were run by angels, called “gods who are not really divine” but who control life on earth; from the heavens they influence life on earth. The highly civilized Greeks, the brilliant Romans with their genius for law, believed that many gods existed, each in charge of some heavenly element or earthly enterprise: a god of War (Mars), of the planets (Neptune), of the season of spring (Ceres), gods controlled the days, the seasons. Through Christ, explains Paul, we are liberated from natu-

ral elements, not slaves of them (Galatians 4:8-11).

C. Paul and the Galatians. In another appeal to the Galatians to resist taking up Judaism and its practices as the Jerusalem Jewish Christians urged, Paul resolutely pointed out that this was not God’s will in his gift of Christian faith. The Galatians had complete devotion to Paul as he revealed Jesus to them, even though Paul was ill with a “bodily ailment,” an unsightly one which we do not know. He writes that this was “a challenge which you did not despise or brush aside in disgust... but you took me to yourselves as an angel of God, even as if I had been Christ Jesus!” These are strong words to describe what must have been a whole-hearted devotion to Paul for revealing Jesus to them. One of Paul’s great appeals to us in reading his letters to his Christians to help them grow in becoming like Christ, is his human love and care which comes to us in Galatians 4:19-20: “You are my children, and you put me in labor pains until Christ is formed in you. If only I could be with you now and speak to you differently! You have me at a complete loss!”.

D. Children of the Promise. One last powerful argument, a new one, begins in Galatians 4:21. There were two wives of Abraham in Arabia, one a slaveborn, Hagar, the other Sarah, a freeborn. A son of Hagar is of a natural line, but Sarah’s son was a receiver of a promise and of a freeborn mother (Genesis 17:19-22). An allegory on freedom begins here. Paul tells the Galatians that “the Jerusalem on high is freeborn and it is she who is our mother.” He quotes Isaiah: “Rejoice you barren one who bears no children, break into song you stranger to the pains of childbirth.” These were the Gentiles. “For many are the children of the wife deserted, far more than of her who has a husband!” (Isaiah 54:1). Sarah is the receiver of the promise; and the “one who justifies you is God,” says Paul to the “once deserted” Gentiles, for he has been open to them and they have welcomed him.

Their covenant with God and ours also is in a spirit of love, of commitment, of carrying out the will of our Father through love.

III. LIVE AS CHRISTIANS (Galatians 5:1 - 6:10, James 2:14-17).

A. Final Conclusion. After continuing with his argument against the “yoke of slavery a second time” (Galatians 5:1), Paul bluntly states to the Galatians who have listened to the arguments of the Jewish Christians which opposed Paul’s idea of freedom: “Any of you who seek your justification in the law have severed yourselves from Christ and fallen from God’s favor!” As Paul struggled with this problem of the Galatians, his reasoning develops into new arguments, and at the end of his efforts, he is certain of his position enough to strongly state it with an air of finality that must have convinced or persuaded anyone from such a fall (Galatians 5:4).

For us, Paul’s succinct statement is full of light: “Faith, which expresses itself through love” is our salvation, our growth. Later, when Paul writes to the Corinthians on love that is born of the faith, he is so sublime, he is so practical, that just to meditate on a phrase of it is an incentive full of power (1 Corinthians 13).

Here, he teaches that the freedom he acclaims so highly is “not a freedom that gives free reign to the flesh” (Galatians 5:13). Instead the challenge to live out our faith says: “Out of love, place yourselves at one another’s service” (Galatians 5:13c). We do find this beautiful and successful faith in Christians we have known, yet how many of us have been persuaded as strongly as these Galatians were, to go back to chapters and chapters of laws, each one binding? No, ours is so simple that it is hard. A Christian mother or father raising their children can reach true Christian love when it comes from a Christian faith (Romans 6:12-14); but unchurched and unbaptized parents can also love unselfishly their children. One shin-

ing example and perhaps the greatest one of a number of centuries lives among us: Mother Theresa of Calcutta whose love for the unlovable, the strangers of other countries, has reached across the earth through hundreds of her followers. Young women of every nation who wish, like her, to disdain dress styles, natural attractions and development of self, give themselves as vowed women to “place themselves at one another’s service,” that is, to the whole world’s service. Paul says that this is our proper use of freedom, and he himself did just that, finally giving himself up to death as a Roman citizen and a martyr for Christ. He and St. Peter were put to death in Rome within two or three years apart, for loving and serving and bringing to Christ whole nations...

A powerful balance in the use of words comes in Galatians 5:17-18: “The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; the two are directly opposed. This is why you do not do what your will intends. If you are guided by the spirit, “...you do not need the law!” And here Paul follows the contrast between “the flesh”—fallen human nature—and “the spirit”—redeemed human nature: “It is obvious what proceeds from the flesh: lewd conduct, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, bickering, jealousy, outbursts of rage, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 8:28-30). How many of us find ourselves only too often falling under that description in one or more ways!

And if we are guided by the Spirit, our society would be described as one of: love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity” (Galatians 5:22). Each of these can be the subject of an honest, earnest examination of conscience which will spur us on to positive efforts. “Against such there is no law!” This is, it seems, the best argument yet that Paul gives. Then he gives the source of such achievement: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh (human nature) with its passions and desires.” Of course, Paul means sinful

deeds, coming from our fallen nature. Can we say the next sentence that Paul writes? “Since we live by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s lead” (Galatians 5:26).

B. Practical Demands of Conscience (Galatians 6:1-18). How should we deal with one of us who “is detected in sin”? If we are living by the Spirit, “gently set him right, trying to avoid falling into temptation himself” (Galatians 6:1). Implying that our sins are a burden to us, Paul counsels, “Help carry one another’s burdens”; for if we want to be law-abiding, then “in that way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” We are next led to humility and to a simplicity about ourselves: “If anyone thinks he (or she!) amounts to something, when in fact he is... ‘nothing,’ he deceives himself” (Galatians 6:3).

In a strange off-the-subject comment in the next verse (Galatians 6:6), Paul speaks of one who is instructed and his instructor: “Share all he has with his instructor!” And of a farmer he comments, “If he sows in the field of the flesh, he will reap a harvest of corruption, but if his seed-ground is the spirit, he will reap everlasting life... in due time we will reap our harvest” (Galatians 6:6-9; Romans 15:25-27). Do you sow in the “field of self-indulgence,” or “in the spirit” (Galatians 6:8)?

In an astute comment, Paul notes that the Christians who accept circumcision are just trying to escape persecution when they insist that the Galatian Christians need to be circumcised; because then the circumcised Christians will win approval of the Jewish persecutors incensed about Jews not being circumcised when they become Christians.

“May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!” exclaims the great apostle... “All that matters is that one is created anew” (Galatians 14-15). In a closing comment which has puzzled many and has been much pondered about, Paul says: “Henceforth, let no man trouble me, for I bear the brand marks of Jesus in my body” (Galatians 6:17). Could that be, asks some scholars, that St. Paul had what Christ gave to St. Francis of Assisi, centuries after Paul: the stigmata of the nail wounds in his hands and side? We know that this self-styled “least of the Apostles” through these faith-filled and loving outpourings in his letter to so many peoples whom he brought to Christ, is one of the greatest followers, perhaps the greatest Apostle, of Christ Jesus.

As we study the teachings of St. Paul, may he bring us to active, growing, faith and love.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12
1 Corinthians 1 - 9

Day 1 Read the Notes. Choose one or two sentences that are important or helpful to you.

Day 2 Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-31.

a. What was dividing the Corinthians (1:10 and Philippians 2:2)?

b. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16. Choose and explain one of Paul's comments on wisdom in 1:26 - 2:16 that gives light and understanding to you.

Day 3 Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-23 and Psalm 94:11 (and 94:19).

a. What does Paul mean by "you are still of the flesh"?

b. What do you understand by 1 Corinthians 3:16-17?

c. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-17. Share some lines that helped or enlightened you.

