

Explorations in the Preaching of St. Paul



Week Three: Galatians

The Background of Galatians



Part One

Gal in the *Lectionary*



☞ 2 Major Solemnities:

☞ **Mary, Mother of God (Jan. 1):** 4:4-7 (from Key Text)

☞ **SS. Peter and Paul Vigil (Jun. 29):** 1:11-20

☞ Selections read on the 9th-14th Sundays in Ordinary Time (Year C)

☞ Weekdays during the 27th and 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time (even years)

Gal: The Background



Who are the Galatians? Good question! There are two possibilities:

Geography: The region more precisely labeled “Galatia” refers to north-central Asia Minor (around modern-day Ankara) inhabited by the descendants of Celtic tribes who had invaded Asia Minor around 279 B.C. Once the area was incorporated into the Roman Empire and the last Galatian king had died in 25 B.C., ethnic Galatia was incorporated into the larger Roman “Province of Galatia”. Included in the province were the cities of Antioch-in-Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe which were evangelized by Paul on his First Missionary Journey (cf. Acts 13–14).

Gal: The Background



- ❧ Hence, it is ambiguous as to whether Gal was written to the ethnic Galatians (North Galatia) or to the aforementioned cities in the Roman Province of Galatia (South Galatia).
- ❧ Significance of the Question: Date of Gal
 - ❧ If written to South Galatia, the letter would most likely be dated earlier, around 50, during the Second Missionary Journey (probably while Paul was in Corinth).
 - ❧ If written to North Galatia, it would be dated sometime in the mid-50s while Paul was in Ephesus (54-56), although some suggest a date after 1Cor in 57 from Macedonia.

Gal: The Background



“North Galatia” Theory Sequence of Events

- ❧ Paul preaches in South Galatia (1st MJ).
- ❧ Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15; Gal 2:1-10)
- ❧ Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3)
- ❧ Paul preaches in North Galatia (2nd MJ)
- ❧ Paul writes Gal to North Galatians (ca. 54-56)

“South Galatia” Theory Sequence of Events

- ❧ Paul preaches in South Galatia (1st MJ).
- ❧ Paul meets with apostles in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1-10; Acts 12:25)
- ❧ Paul writes Gal to South Galatians (ca. 48-50)
- ❧ Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)
- ❧ Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3)

Gal: The Background



- ❧ **North Galatia:** Majority opinion both in antiquity and in the present.
 - ❧ **Pros:** Clear ethnic identity; more in accord with Timothy's circumcision in Acts 16:3.
 - ❧ **Cons:** No clear narration of Paul preaching in North Galatia in Acts (but cf. Acts 16:6 on traveling through "Phrygian and Galatian territory" on the way to Macedonia during Second Missionary Journey). The Council reported in Gal 2:1-10 would need to be different from that mentioned in Acts 15:1-35 (perhaps the return to Jerusalem recorded in Acts 12:25???)

Gal: The Background



- ❧ **South Galatia:** Minority view advanced in the last two centuries (but still with a number of respected followers):
 - ❧ **Pros:** Resolves some apparent inconsistencies between Acts 15 and Gal 2:1-10 (by positing two different meetings with two different decisions); Acts corroborates Paul preaching in south Galatia.
 - ❧ **Cons:** Creates conflict regarding Timothy's circumcision, "Galatian" identity becomes a stretch, posits an extra conference on circumcision in Jerusalem which is unattested elsewhere (and makes Acts 15 harder to explain); the "14 years" (Gal 2:1) is harder to explain.

Gal: The Background



- ❧ At the end of the day, the question is only so important.
- ❧ Following the majority “North Galatia” Theory:
 - ❧ **Date:** 54-56
 - ❧ Some have proposed a later date (57) after 1Cor in which Paul reports a collection in Galatia (1Cor 16:1), arguing that such a collection would be impossible there after such an acrimonious letter as Gal.
 - ❧ **From:** Paul (while in Ephesus for 2 years – cf. Acts 19)
 - ❧ **To:** “The churches of Galatia” located in ethnic (north) Galatia whom Paul had visited on his 2nd and 3rd Missionary Journeys (cf. Acts 16:6; 18:23)

Gal: The Backstory



- ✧ Assuming the version of the “North Galatia” Theory adopted above, we can piece together the following history:
 - ✧ Paul (and companions) evangelize the Galatians on his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 16:6), stopping over for some time due to a physical illness (Gal 4:13; perhaps this illness has something to do with the “prevention of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 16:6). The Gentile converts (Gal 4:8-9) treat him with immense kindness (Gal 4:14).
 - ✧ Paul strengthens the Galatians further at the outset of his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23)
 - ✧ Apparently, Paul was present when the Spirit worked miracles among the Galatians (Gal 3:3).

Gal: The Backstory



- ❧ At some point soon after Paul left, other preachers arrived proclaiming that these new converts needed to be circumcised and to observe Jewish practices (cf. Gal 1:7; 6:13).
- ❧ Also, they apparently called into question Paul's authenticity as an apostle and the truth of the Gospel that he preached to them (Gal 1:11-12).
- ❧ The "judaizers" (as they are usually called) apparently are arguing that in order to inherit the blessings of Abraham, one must obey all the prescriptions of the Law recorded in the Mosaic Law.
- ❧ Quite offended, Paul responds with this passionate letter seeking to prove the truth of the Gospel and that its blessings (i.e. freedom) come by means of faith and not the "works of the law".

Gal: The Backstory



- ∞ Therefore, Gal is structured like a rhetorical speech given before a jury, seeking to persuade his recipients to adopt his (true) version of the Gospel:
 - ∞ **Main Thesis:** “¹¹ Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. ¹² For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal 1:11-12)
 - ∞ He support this thesis through four demonstrations (three descriptive/ doctrinal; one exhortative/ moral), each begun with a direct address to his recipients.

Gal: Literary Structure



- 1:1-5** **Opening Formula**
- 1:6-6:10** **Main Body of the Letter**
 - 1:6-5:12 The Descriptive Part: Justification by Faith
 - 1:6-10 Paul Angry at the Judaizers' Message
 - 1:11-12 Thesis: Gospel Is Not of Human Origin
 - 1:13-2:21 1st Demonstration: Autobiography
 - 3:1-4:7 2nd Demonstration: Faith like Abraham
 - 4:8-5:12 3rd Demonstration: Sonship like Isaac
 - 5:13-6:10 The Exhortative Part: Life in the Spirit
- 6:11-18** **Concluding Formula**

Gal: Significance



- ❧ **The Vocation of the Apostle**
- ❧ **The Gospel through Divine Revelation**
- ❧ **Freedom:** “For you were called for freedom, but do not use the freedom as an occasion for the flesh, but serve one another through love.” (5:13)
- ❧ **Fruit of the Spirit vs. Works of the Flesh** (cf. 5:16-26)
- ❧ **Solidarity of Christ and the Believer:** “^{19b} I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰ yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself for me.” (Gal 2:19b-20)

Gal: Significance



- ❧ Historically (at the risk of an over-simplification), the Protestant Reformation began as an argument among Christians over the letters of Galatians and Romans.
- ❧ **Justification by Faith:** Most important theme.
- ❧ **Must Avoid Anachronism:** Paul is replying to the 1st century judaizers, and not:
 - ❧ Judaism as a Whole
 - ❧ 4th/5th century Pelagianism
 - ❧ 16th century Catholicism
- ❧ **Paul is not anti-Law (or worse, anti-Old Testament)!!!**

In-Depth Text Analysis



Part Two

Galatians 4:1-7

(Filial Adoption)

Gal 3:1-4:7



☞ **Key Text:** Galatians 4:1-7

☞ **Context:** Paul's Second Demonstration (3:1-4:7)

- ☞ In his 1st of the four demonstrations, Paul told the story of his own conversion and his acceptance by the other apostles. He concluded by stating that justification (righteousness before God) comes not by the works of the Law, but by means of faith.
- ☞ He now proceeds to show from the Law itself that God had a much larger plan (indeed, a promise) that supersedes the individual legal prescripts.

Excursus: Abraham



- ✧ Paul assumes an in-depth knowledge of the Old Testament.
- ✧ Gen 12: Promise of blessing to “all families of the earth”
- ✧ Gen 15: Abram’s faith => righteousness
- ✧ Gen 17: Circumcision instituted (only after Hagar/Ishmael incident)
- ✧ Gen 22: Sacrifice of Abraham/Isaac; “all nations of the earth will find blessing”.

Excursus: Mosaic Law



- ❧ **Ex 12:** Pharaoh dismisses the Israelite slaves to “serve the LORD” (Freedom from service = for service)
- ❧ **Dt 7:** Israel is a people particularly belonging to the LORD. He had chosen them purely out of love.
- ❧ **Dt 27:** Curses prescribed for breaking the Mosaic Law.
- ❧ **The law was to be obeyed in its entirety; punishment/curses would result for disobedience.**

Justification by Faith



- ✧ For Paul, God had intended from the beginning to bless all nations, but the prescripts of the Law served to mark off Israel (chosen) from all other nations (unchosen).
- ✧ However, with the coming of Christ, God's original plan is now completed, in which all people (Jew and Gentile) are God's children without partiality (cf. 2:6; 3:28). The cross cancelled this separation.
- ✧ To trust in the prescripts of the Mosaic Law was to insist on some partiality between Jews and Gentiles which would be abhorrent in the eyes of Paul.

Justification by Faith



- ❧ “For Paul, a supplemented Christ is a supplanted Christ.”
- ❧ Hence, Paul vigorously opposes the judaizers:
 - ❧ “² It is I, Paul, who am telling you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ Once again I declare to every man who has himself circumcised that he is bound to observe the entire law. ⁴ You are separated from Christ, you who are trying to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit, by faith, we await the hope of righteousness. ⁶ **For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.**” (Gal 5:2-6)
- ❧ Given the high-stakes nature of the issue, his sarcasm is understandable:
 - ❧ ¹¹ As for me, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. ¹² Would that those who are upsetting you might also castrate themselves! (Gal 5:11-12)

Table Discussion



- ❧ 1. What is Paul's evidence in his appeal (3:1-5) to the Galatians that justification comes from faith? Would his appeal be successful if he used the same argument with you? Why or why not?
- ❧ 2. Does Paul think that the Law is "evil"? What does he say is its role in salvation history? What repercussions did this have for Christians in Paul's time?
- ❧ 3. What is the effect of the work of Christ for believers (4:4-7)? How might this influence and affect your own personal prayer?

Gal 4:1-3



4 ¹ But I say, as long as the beneficiary is a minor, he differs not at all from a slave, although he is the owner of all the property, ² but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by his father. ³ And thus, while we were minors, we were enslaved under the elemental spirits of the world; [...]

Gal 4:4-5



[...] ⁴ but when the fullness of time had come,

God sent forth his son,

born from a woman,

born under the law,

⁵ so that he might ransom those under the law,

so that we might receive adoption.

Gal 4:6-7



⁶ And because you are children,
God sent forth the Spirit of his son
into our hearts crying out, “Abba, Father.”

⁷ Consequently,
you are no longer a slave
but a son;
if a son,
then also a beneficiary through God.

What's the Point?



Part Three

Actualizing and Praying Galatians 4:1-7

Filial Adoption



- ❧ The language of **receiving adoption** is very rich in the history of the Church. We are the **children of God**.
- ❧ “Our Father”: A Model for the Life of Prayer
- ❧ Liturgy: The Communion of the Body of Christ
- ❧ The experience of a Christian vocation is one of an unworthy sinner nonetheless called to partake of God’s own divine life.

The Law



- ✧ **Paul is not an anarchist!**
- ✧ Indeed, at the beginning of the exhortative part of Gal, he will cite Leviticus in his moral instruction. (Cf. 5:14).
- ✧ Paul is discounting only those prescripts which served to mark off the Jews from the other nations.
- ✧ Even today in the Church, laws are necessary for the good order of the community (as they were in antiquity—cf. Acts 15:28-30). Nonetheless, “following the rules” does not equate to “following Christ”. (At times, Christians have interpreted Gal as contrasting “grace” and “law” in a rather naïve binary.)