

# The Year of St. Paul



## The Letter to the Galatians

### DO I TRY TO WIN GOD'S APPROVAL BY MY BEHAVIOR?

Celebrating The Year of St. Paul, we now begin a study of the Epistle to the Galatians. The recipients of this letter are converts to Christianity from paganism (Gal. 4:8; 5:2-3; 6:12-13) Paul converted them, but not too long after he departed, legalistic Jewish-Christians came along and argued that in order to be a good Christian one had to be a good Jew, first. This could be had by being circumcised and by observing other prescriptions of the Torah. (the Jewish scriptures containing 613 laws among other writings to live by).

This, of course, struck at the heart of Paul's convictions that the Torah was no longer binding as law, but continued to be Scripture, that is, story telling how Israel arrived at its present situation.

The Jewish-Christians (Judaizers) as they were known began to question Paul's authority

as an Apostle. They accuse him of opportunism for having permitted circumcision because of the Jews (Act 16:3) and for watering down the requirements of the gospel for the sake of the Gentiles. Paul had learned of the fascination of the Galatians for these new demands of these Judaizers and of the confusion this caused in the Galatian Churches.

This prompted him to write a strong letter, warning the communities against this 'different gospel', defending his position as an Apostle, stressing the Christian's new-found freedom from the law, and insisting that his Gospel was the only correct view of Christianity. Although Paul calls the Galatians foolish 3:1, by 4:19 he once again refers to them as his children and in 5:11 as brothers/sisters. So Paul's letter to the

## GOD FIRST

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Galatians is unusually solemn. This letter stresses two points:

- 1) *the divine origin of Paul's Apostleship;*
- 2) *and the saving power of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.*

### Overview of Galatians

Opening (1:1-5)

The truth of the gospel (1:6-4:31)

No other gospel (1:6-10)

Historical arguments (1:11-2:14)

Paul's Gospel (1:11-12)

His former life and call (1:13-17)

First visit to Jerusalem (1:18-24)

Second visit to Jerusalem (2:1-10)

The Antioch incident (2:11-14)

Biblical and theological arguments

(2:15-4:31)

Paul's gospel (2:15-21)

The Galatians' experience (3:1-5)

Abraham's faith (3:6-9)

Freedom from the curse of the Law (3:10-14)

Abraham and the promise (3:15-18)

The purpose of the Law (3:19-26)

The true descendants of Abraham (3:27-29)

The sending of the Son (4:1-7)

The Galatians' experience (4:8-20)

The allegory of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31)

Christian Freedom (5:1-6:10)

The nature of freedom (5:1-15)

Works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit (5:16-26)

Exhortation on community life (6:1-10)

Closing 6:11-18)

Paul's personal remarks (6:11-17)

Closing benediction (6:18)

*Outline taken from "Meeting St. Paul Today" by Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, Loyola Press*

### DATE OF WRITING

**Scholars generally agree that this letter was composed about 54 AD, give or take a year. It is believed to be one of the seven letters assuredly written by Paul.**

In an estimated chronological order, this letter to the Galatians would follow what is believed his the first know letter, written to the Thessalonica community. After this letter to the Galatians, will come the first letter to the Corinthians, a letter to the Philippians and a very short one to Philemon before his second letter to the Corinthians and one to Rome. The remaining letters with Paul's name affixed are called Deutero Pauline Letters. We'll explain more as we address them.

**SITUATION:** Paul and Barnabas established churches in several cities in the Roman province of Galatia (in the south central part of modern Turkey). These churches began to grow but needed to be reminded of certain lessons.

**OBSERVATION:** Paul vigorously condemned the teaching that would require Gentiles to embrace Jewish laws and customs.

**APPLICATION:** Do you believe everything you might hear from a radio/television preacher? Will a book by a Christian author convince you of right and wrong? Confirm what you hear or read with what the Scripture says and the Church teaches.

### **PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCHES IN GALATIA**

From the very beginning of this letter to the churches in the region of Galatia (in central Asia Minor), Paul makes two things clear to his readers: he is a true apostle, and his message is the only true message (Gal. 1:1-10). These statements were very important, because some people claimed that Paul was a false apostle with a false message.

Wheel taken from "Reading the Acts, Epistles and Revelation by Kingsley E. Dalpadado, OMI, St. Paul Editions

Paul was indeed a true apostle, and his mission to the Gentiles was given to him by the Lord and approved by the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18 – 2:10). Paul had even corrected the apostle Peter, when he had stopped eating with Gentile followers who were not obeying the Law of Moses (Gal. 2:1—18).

Faith is the only way to be saved. Paul insists that this was true already for Abraham, who had received God's promise by faith. And Paul leaves no doubt about what his own faith means to him:

*I have been nailed to the cross with Christ. I have died, but Christ lives in me. And I now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me. (Gal.2:19-20).*