

Study: Galatians 2:11-21

Background Study:

Acts 10

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection."

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³⁴ "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

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⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.

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^{Acts 11:18} When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Questions for Discussion:

What was the significance of Peter's revelation?

Why would this revelation surprise someone who had been raised under the Jewish law?

Galatians 2:11-21 (NIV)

***Note:** Peter is called Cephas in this passage. John 1:42 "Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which translates to Peter)."

¹¹ When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. ¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" ¹⁵ "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified." ¹⁷ "But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. ¹⁹ "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Key Terms

Antioch: Located in Syria, nearly 300 miles from Jerusalem and home to several Gentile believers.

Circumcision Group: The Early Christian Council of Jerusalem did not require circumcision of Gentile converts. This became known as the "Apostolic Decree" and is one of the first acts differentiating early Christianity from Judaism. Circumcision was part of God's covenant with Abraham, his descendants, and their slaves and an important sign that the Jews were God's people. The Circumcision party was a group of people who believed that circumcision should be practiced by all Christians, whether Gentile or Jew.

Questions for Discussion:

Why do you think Peter pulled back from eating with Gentiles?

How does Peter's spiritual journey in Acts 10 & 11 affect your view of his actions in Galatians 2?

Based on the language of verse 12, Paul passionately believes that Peter was in the wrong. What were the implications of Peter's actions, and why did Paul confront him directly and even call it hypocrisy?

Paul doesn't say that the "men from James" tried to persuade Peter to not eat with Gentiles, only that their presence changed his behavior. Has anyone's presence ever caused your actions to fall out of step with the Gospel?

- How can we live our lives in such a way that doesn't let pressure from others cause us to fall out of step with the Gospel?

Like the religious Jews of the first century, sometimes we feel like our faith is contingent on our behavior as "good" Christians. What self-imposed rules do you feel like you have to uphold in order to be a "good Christian"?

In verse 20 Paul says he has been "crucified with Christ." How should our crucifixion with Christ change our attitude toward those rules we try to live by?

Look at verse 21 again. By trying to attain our own righteousness, we act as if Christ died for nothing. How would our lives look differently if we relied on God's grace instead of trying to attain our own righteousness?

What is our community application of this passage?