

Galatians 2 v 11 – 16

Paul opposes Peter

Recap Paul and Barnabas had received the go ahead from the apostles in Jerusalem to preach the gospel to the Gentiles while Peter and co would preach to the Jews and lead the church in Jerusalem.

v.11 Antioch was Paul's missionary base for several years.

Background:

Acts 11 v 19 – 26 Jewish believers in Jesus from Jerusalem scattered after Stephen's martyrdom and some went to Antioch. They didn't witness to Gentiles, only to Jews. But then some of the dispersed believers came to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene; they were Greek-speakers and they witnessed about Jesus to Hellenists as well as Jews. 'Hellenists' refers to people from Greece, but also to Greek-speaking Gentiles, living in Antioch.

Many Jews and Gentiles were saved in Antioch and when the mother-church in Jerusalem heard about the Gentiles being saved, they sent Barnabas up there to see what was going on. There was such a move of God in Antioch that Barnabas went off to Tarsus to collect Paul to come and help with the work.

In Acts 10 v 9f We read about Peter's vision preparing him to preach the gospel to Gentiles and his encounter with Cornelius. On this notable occasion the Gentiles were converted, baptised and filled with the Spirit.

So, Peter knew that God was working in and through Gentiles. God always intended that the knowledge of Himself should go through the Jews to the Gentiles and that Jew and Gentile would be saved through Jesus -the Way, the Truth and the Life – the only way to the Father.

Introduction

Remember, Paul isn't writing a record of events for future readers or even to give account of himself to the fledgling churches. He is writing a letter to a church – a letter with a specific purpose – to address the problem of Judaisers corrupting the true gospel he had preached in Galatia, and leading the believers astray.

This is why he recounts this incident with Peter.

Gal.2 v 11

So, Peter has come to visit this church of Gentile and Jewish Christians in Antioch. It was quite a journey, so he would be there for a reasonable stay. At first, perhaps remembering the vision God gave him in Joppa (Acts 10) and how Cornelius and his household were saved, baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit, he was happy to eat with the Gentile believers, who were not observing Jewish dietary rules.

Then, more visitors came for the Jerusalem church and they, it seems, were judaisers who believed that the Jewish rules should continue to be observed by Gentile as well as Jewish Christians. Peter promptly stopped eating with the Gentile believers. **The pressure to conform led to hypocrisy.**

We can all feel the pressure to conform to the standards and expectations of the group we're in. It might be a social group or friendship with non-believers, or family, where we find ourselves

reluctant to share our true beliefs, or we behave in a way that fits in, even if it compromises our walk with Jesus.

But it isn't just non-Christian groups where the pressure to conform can affect us. For the first few years of my walk with the Lord I was a member of an organisation of mainly young Christians in our twenties. It so happened that most of us attended the same church and in the holidays, we all went on Beach Missions. I am incredibly grateful to this group – I learned so much from the leadership and gained an immense amount from the other members, some of whom are still friends. However, there was a problem, which we identified at the time, but didn't solve, and that was the pressure to conform to an unspoken code of behaviour. To be a good member of this group, you must have a Quiet Time every morning, dress modestly (short hair for the guys, no mini-skirts for the girls), attend every meeting, go on beach Missions, and so on. All of these things were good and helpful, but the danger was we were doing them to fit in and look good. And of course, if anyone didn't fit in, there was a feeling of superiority and judgementalism towards them.

Here, in a mixed church in Antioch, at the beginning of the spread of the gospel across the world, Peter caving in to the desire to conform was very dangerous.

You can imagine the trouble this would cause in a mixed church.

The Jewish believers followed Peter's example and stopped eating with the Gentile Christians. Even Barnabas was led astray. This would be incredibly hurtful to the Gentile believers, who would feel like second-class citizens. Friendships would be broken and the fellowship fractured.

How extraordinary that Peter the Bold should crumble like this. It wasn't conviction on his part, but cowardice in the face of these men from Jerusalem. But we've seen him crumble before – in the courtyard at night when challenged by a serving girl. Dear Peter – so brash and apparently confident but with feet of clay. And yet Jesus called him and commissioned him to lead and nurture the people of God.

It's often said that if the Bible was fiction, the heroes would be faultless, but in the scripture we have the record of real people who failed, sinned, got things wrong and were picked up and forgiven and restored and still used for God's purposes. So encouraging for us!

Anyway, here we are in Antioch with a bad situation. Remember that Paul is very aware that although he definitely is an apostle called by Jesus Himself, Peter was one of the original twelve. What is he to do?

For the sake of the church and the integrity of the gospel, he speaks to Peter face to face and in front of the church, to correct him. V 14

Face to face – not behind his back. It takes courage to confront someone – especially someone you feel is senior to you.

The first principle is that we should speak the truth in love. Truth – what we ourselves have witnessed – not hearsay or rumour. In love – love which is concerned for the person we are speaking to and, in this case, the Antioch church. And we should speak directly to the person concerned. This can take courage and the danger is that we will avoid the confrontation and, instead, talk to others about it – to people we think will agree with us. This is like cancer in a church.

Matt.18 v 15 – 17 Read out

Here we have Jesus' teaching on how to handle a situation where one brother has been wronged by another:

In the first place, the person who has been wronged should speak privately to the person concerned. Hopefully, he or she will apologise or explain, if there has been a misunderstanding, there will be forgiveness and fellowship is restored.

If the guilty party refuses to listen or accept the situation, the wronged person should take along one or two witnesses to speak to them.

Only if that fails should the matter be brought to the church as a whole.

But here in Antioch, the issue was so important and so damaging to the church that it needed addressing publicly. And, as Paul was careful to say earlier in his letter, he was not one to try to please men or to say what others wanted to hear.

Later, in Gal. 6 v 1, we will see that Paul says ...

'Brothers, if anyone is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness'

Notice: he says 'restore' : when you restore something you try to return it to its original state of beauty or usefulness.

Notice also that this should be in a spirit of gentleness. We might think that Paul was harsh in his confrontation with Peter and in some of his written letters to the churches, but I think that behind his words there is a deep love and desire for the good of others – and gentleness.

V 14

The issue is the truth of the gospel. Paul gets straight to the point: You're a Jew, Peter, but you have been living like a Gentile in your non-observance of dietary laws and so on. So why are you now compelling Gentiles to live like Jews and obey all these laws? This is hypocrisy, Peter.

V15

“Look, Peter, we are both Jews by birth”

In this letter to the Galatians, ch 1 v 14 – 15, Paul set out his Jewish credentials: a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a high-flier in Jerusalem destined for the Sanhedrin.

Who was Peter? A fisherman from Galilee.

But Paul doesn't mention the difference in Jewish status, here.

They are Jew and Jew; 2 followers of Jesus Messiah; both called by Him to be apostles; one to take the gospel to the Jews and the other to go to the Gentiles.

“Even though we are Jews by birth, we know that salvation is not through keeping Jewish practices or through the Torah, but only through faith in the Lord Jesus, our Saviour.”

‘we are Jews by birth and not sinners of the Gentiles’

In his use of the word 'sinners' Paul isn't making a moral judgment, but indicating that the Gentiles do not keep the religious laws and customs of the Jews.

V 16 And so we come to the end of this section of the letter.

I'm so glad this amazing verse came into my bit.

Remember, Paul is not writing a diary or account of his life, but a letter to address a problem in the churches of Galatia. Look at this verse:

NKJ (Justification can be defined as being declared righteous)

'knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ' **ONE**

'even we have believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law;' **TWO**

'for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.' **THREE**

Three times in one sentence, Paul makes his point:

We cannot earn our salvation by keeping rules and being 'good'. We will never become righteous by keeping the law because we cannot keep it – we fail every time. Salvation is only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.

Amen