

Galatians 2:11-21 ~ Paul Opposes Peter ~ Discussion Questions

Introduction: The population of Antioch in southern Galatia (Syria today) was largely Greek. The city became the headquarters for the Gentile church and was Paul's base of operations. Peter came for a visit, and Paul let him know he (Paul) disapproved of some of Peter's actions.

Review: The Judaizers accused Paul of allowing Gentile converts to ignore the law so that he would be more popular with them. Paul, in turn, accused the Judaizers of nullifying the power of Jesus' sacrifice by adding conditions for salvation. The question they debated was: Does salvation come through Christ alone or does it come through Christ *and* adherence to the law?

1. When Peter came to Antioch, what did Paul do? Why did he do that? (2:11-13)
2. Paul said in 2:11 that he opposed Peter "to his face." Note that he did not go to the other leaders of the church to "tattle" on Peter; nor did he write letters to the churches warning them not to follow Peter's example. If you have a disagreement with someone what do you normally do? What should you do? (Matthew 18:15-17) Why do you think that this time Paul spoke to Peter "in front of them all" rather than privately?
3. Describe a time someone criticized you in front of others. How did you react?
4. In v. 15-16, we are reminded that we are no longer "under the law." Why, then, should we strive to obey the Ten Commandments? Or should we? (Romans 7:4-25, especially v. 12)
5. When we use the word *justify* in modern English (*Please justify your actions*) what does it mean? How does this modern use relate to the theological use we see in this passage? (2:16)
6. What does "dying to the law" mean in v. 2:19? (Romans 7:4)
7. In verse 2:20, what is the significance of having been crucified (or died) with Christ? What does it mean to God? What does it mean to you? What effect should this have on your daily life? (5:24, Romans 6:8-10, 7:6)
8. In v. 21, Paul says, "if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" As Christians today, few of us are concerned with keeping the Jewish laws. Outsiders, however, may feel that Christians have additional requirements that they must meet to gain approval. Name some of these.
9. In the U.S. we admire "self-made" men—people who have achieved success through their own efforts, who have earned their position in life. How do you feel about such people? How does this feeling affect your response to the concept of *grace* (or *unmerited favor*)?

Galatians 2:11-21 ~ Paul Opposes Peter ~ Leader's Guide

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1. When Peter came to Antioch, what did Paul do? Why did he do that? (2:11-13)

Paul opposed and rebuked Peter because, Paul says, "he was clearly in the wrong." Peter separated himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of the Judiaziers. Other Jews (not Judiazers) including Barnabas joined him—after all, he was more or less the leaders of Jesus' original apostles.

Paul called this hypocrisy (v. 13) because (1) Peter had independently spoken out on it to the leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18) and (2) Paul, Peter, and the church leaders had previously come to an agreement on the matter in Jerusalem (2:1-9, Acts 15:1-5).

The Oxford Bible Commentary devotes a full page to discussing these three "difficult verses." This clash between Peter and Paul is in sharp contrast to the amicable agreement just reached in Jerusalem. Why? Some scholars say the events were recorded by Paul in Galatians out of order, but there is no real evidence of that. Some commentators feel that verses 15 and 16 are a continuation of Paul's statement to Peter but for the benefit of the troublemakers in Galatia.

Why doesn't Paul explain why Peter came to Antioch just after the meeting in Jerusalem? What was the reason for this dramatic confrontation? Who were these "certain men" who came from James who caused Peter to backtrack and no longer eat with the Gentiles? Why was the Jerusalem church concerned at all? Were these regular meals or the Lord's Supper or both?

Verse 12b implies that Peter began to draw back over a period of time. Who was applying the pressure and why was Peter, of all people, afraid? And so on.

The Oxford Bible Commentary concludes that these verses can be plausibly interpreted in several ways. Perhaps we have to accept that we do not know precisely why Peter acted in a way that led Paul to attack him with hypocrisy twice over in v. 13. What is clear is that Peter did not act impulsively and without support of other Jewish Christians including Barnabas. It was Paul who was isolated, hence his emotional language and perhaps lack of clarity.

For Paul, a fundamental principle was at stake. Gentiles were being compelled

to live like Jews in order to be accepted as members of the Antioch church. Hence Paul rounded on Peter in front of all those lined up against him. Paul says nothing about Peter's response, and nothing about the outcome of the confrontation. It seems that Paul was more concerned to press home the theological issues at stake, as he does in the following verses, than to record the outcome of a painful episode.

2. Paul said in 2:11 that he opposed Peter “to his face.” Note that he did not go to the other leaders of the church to “tattle” on Peter; nor did he write letters to the churches warning them not to follow Peter’s example. If you have a disagreement with someone what do you normally do? What should you do? (Matthew 18:15-17) Why do you think that this time Paul spoke to Peter “in front of them all” rather than privately?

Matthew 18:15-17 – “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

The scripture above not only describes the correct way to resolve a problem from a biblical standpoint, but also just, plain common sense. “Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill.”

In Galatians Chapter 2, Paul has essentially followed this approach. He spoke to Peter face to face (v. 2:11); he had previously spoken privately to a few church leaders (v. 2:2b), and now he feels it necessary to call out Peter “in front of them all.” Paul really had strong feelings about this: he believes that Peter (with Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians were “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” when they compelled the Gentiles to live like Jews. (v. 2:14)

3. Describe a time someone criticized you in front of others. How did you react?

4. In v. 15-16, we are reminded that we are no longer “under the law.” Why, then, should we strive to obey the Ten Commandments? Or should we? (Romans 7:4-25, especially v. 12)

In summary, Romans 7 says that the law really exposes our sinful nature and need for a savior. In v. 7 Paul establishes that the law itself is not sin, but rather exposes sin. For example, he says “I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’” He enlarges on this and concludes in v. 12, “But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good.” [CEV] Paul goes on to say that when it comes to the righteous deeds of the law, he continually came up short in compliance. This is evident in verses 15-17; as hard as he tries, Paul himself found 100% compliance with the law to be

impossible. In v. 15 he says “for that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” He realizes that he fails to make the cut in his venture to keep the law in light of James 2:10 (“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”) But here’s the good news: law-keeping is not what makes you righteous in the first place; it’s the Holy Spirit living in you that makes the Christian life work.

5. When we use the word *justify* in modern English (*Please justify your actions*) what does it mean? How does this modern use relate to the theological use we see in this passage? (2:16)

Justify today means “prove to be right or reasonable.” The Biblical definition is “to judge, regard, and treat as righteous and worthy of salvation.”

In Galatians it stands as the essential NT truth that people are justified by faith in Jesus Christ—by nothing less and nothing more—and that they are not sanctified by legalistic works but by the obedience that comes from faith in God’s work for them, in them, and through them by the grace and power of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It was the rediscovery of this basic message of Galatians (and Romans) that brought about the Protestant Reformation. Galatians is often referred to as “Luther’s book,” because Martin Luther relied on it so strongly in all his preaching, teaching, and writing.

Theologically, the key verse in the entire book is 2:16. Three times it tells us that no one is justified by observing the law, and three times it underscores the indispensable requirement of placing one’s faith in Christ.

But note, Paul is *not* depreciating the law itself but maintains it is “holy, righteous, and good” (Romans 7:12). He is arguing against the illegitimate use of the OT law that made the observance of it the grounds of acceptance by God.

6. What does “dying to the law” mean in v. 2:19? (Romans 7:4)

The law’s power to condemn no longer threatens believers. Those people who believe in Christ essentially live with him, are baptized with him, will be resurrected, and will be united with Christ forever.

Again, this does not mean that the law is a bad thing. It is good for defining behavior that is pleasing to God, but not for judging or condemning a person.

7. In verse 2:20, what is the significance of having been crucified (or died) with Christ? What does it mean to God? What does it mean to you? What effect should this have on your daily life? (5:24, Romans 6:8-10, 7:6)

When God looks at you, he doesn’t see you as a weak sinner, but he actually sees you as Christ.

Gal 5:24 – Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Romans 6:8-10 – Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live

with him.⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Romans 7:6 – But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

8. In v. 21, Paul says, “if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” As Christians today, few of us are concerned with keeping the Jewish laws. Outsiders, however, may feel that Christians have additional requirements that they must meet to gain approval. Name some of these.

Like the Hebrew National hog dog ad campaign slogan, “We Answer to a Higher Authority,” many people feel that Christians have (or ought to have) a higher standard of behavior than other people. That’s why it can be dangerous to have a chrome fish on your car or wear a cross on a chain.

Some pastors preach about these expectations. Search for “Expectations of Christians” on Google and you get 6.8 million returns of which many are sermons. Here are some of the expectations:

1) self-denial, 2) humility, 3) mutual concern, 4) unity, 5) set an example, 6) have a great reverence for God, 7) blameless, 8) stand out as “sons of God,” 9) shine out, 10) share, 11) be honest, 12) be sincere, 13) have no pretense, 14) pray, 15) attend church, 16) read the Bible, etc, etc.

Okay, most of these are positive things and things we probably strive for. But some people think that all Christians have requirements (or beliefs) that might be considered negative. I’m not talking about hypocrisy (the biggest complaint about Christians), but things like:

1) pro-life, 2) anti-death sentence, 3) anti-gay, 4) don’t believe in evolution, 5) anti-science, 6) hold down women, 7) authoritative, 8) judgmental, 9) intolerant

How can you help break down these stereotypes and performance expectations, not just the second list, but both?

9. In the U.S. we admire “self-made” men—people who have achieved success through their own efforts, who have earned their position in life. How do you feel about such people? How does this feeling affect your response to the concept of *grace* (or *unmerited favor*)?

Galatians 2:11-21~ Scripture Verses [NIV, 1984]

Paul Opposes Peter

¹¹ When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. ¹² 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 Peter 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 ‘Gentile sinners’ ¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ “If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!

¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am 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 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!”

There are two excellent memory verses in this short piece of scripture.

Galatians 2:16b – So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:20. I personally like the Contemporary English Version (CEV) – 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.

Galatians ~ Additional Notes on the “Law”

The central focus of the book of Galatians is the essential New Testament truth that people are justified and made righteous (right with God) by faith in Jesus Christ—by nothing less and nothing more—and they are not sanctified by legalistic works (the ‘law’). It was this message of Paul in Galatians and Romans that brought about the Protestant Reformation.

Verse 2:16 is a key verse – ¹⁵“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ ¹⁶know that a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. Three times this verse tells us that no one is justified by observing the law, and three times it underscores the indispensable requirement of placing one’s faith in Christ.

However, it is instructive and important to realize that when it comes to understanding the NT in its *Jewish* context, few topics are as controversial, confusing, or complicated as the “Law” (or “law”). [There is an excellent discussion of this in the essay, “The Law,” by Jonathan Klawans in the book, “The Jewish Annotated New Testament.”

The term, the Law (capitalized or not) appears almost 200 times in the NT but no single understanding of the term applies in all instances. A key problem is that in the original text in Hebrew (the language of the OT), *torat moshe* is best translated into English as “the Teaching of Moses” but when it was first translated into Greek (known as the Septuagint) it was translated as “the Law of Moses” rather than “teaching” or “instruction” thus leading to a great deal of confusion and controversy, which continues to this day.

From “The Jewish Annotated New Testament” I also recommend the essays, “Translation of the Bible” by Naomi Seidman and “The Septuagint” by Leonard Greenspoon.