

The Epistle to the Galatians
Lesson #6 • Galatians 2:11-21
Peter's Visit to Syrian Antioch
· H A N D O U T ·

► The last study lesson ended with Peter, after some undisclosed period of time, leaving the Jewish community of Christians in Jerusalem and traveling to Syrian Antioch. Though scripture doesn't tell us his motivation, we speculated that perhaps Peter wanted to see, for himself, the astounding work that Paul was doing among the Gentiles.

Some time after Peter's arrival in Syrian Antioch, others would follow him and cause some serious challenges within the Church. This is where we pick up the story.

Galatians 2:11-13 • When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him, to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 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.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that, by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray.

Q: From this terse statement, what can we surmise about the common practices between Jews and Gentiles in Syrian Antioch compared to the same practices in Jerusalem?

Q: Why are we surprised by Peter's behavior?

SO ... let's take a brief side-road to the story of Cornelius in Acts 10 ...

Acts 10:1-6 • At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

► Cornelius did as the Angel asked him to do. He sent two of his servants and one of his devout soldiers to find Peter and bring him back to Cornelius' house. As a group of men were approaching the tanner's house by the sea, in Joppa, Peter was on the roof praying. He became hungry and asked for a meal. As it was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

Acts 10:11-20 · Peter saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds.

Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."

"No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean."

But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven. Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean?

Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Standing outside the gate, they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there.

Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you. Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them."

► After a brief explanation from the men who explained they were sent by Cornelius, and with the urging of the Holy Spirit, Peter returned with them to Caesarea. Several of Peter's friends tagged along.

When they got there they found Cornelius, along with his friends and all of his relatives waiting for him. When they first saw Peter they fell down and worshiped him, but Peter reached down and pulled Cornelius up. *"Stand up man! I'm a human being, just like you!"*

They talked and Peter explained to them that it was against Jewish Laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home or to associate with anyone who was a Gentile. However, he explained that God has shown him he should no longer think of another person as impure or unclean. That is why he had come and he wanted them to know he had come without any objection.

Then Peter asked Cornelius why he had sent for him? In response, Cornelius told Peter his part of the story. He explained that they were now simply waiting to **hear the message that the Lord had given to Peter to tell them.**

Acts 10:34-36 · Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel – that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

► Then Peter told them about Jesus, God's Son, about His ministry, His crucifixion and His resurrection and how he and the other disciples had eaten and drank with Him after He rose from the dead, and how they had all been commissioned to go into the uttermost part of the earth and preach the Gospel. All – no matter who they were – all who believe in Jesus the Christ will have their sins forgiven through His Name and by His Grace.

Acts 10:44-48 · Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God.

Then Peter asked, "Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit, just as we did?" So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

Q: From Peter's perspective, what was perhaps the most amazing part of the encounter with Cornelius?

Q: Why would Peter feel he needed to ask those accompanying him if they were opposed to these Gentiles being Baptized?

With the event of Cornelius and his household in mind, let's return to our study in Galatians ...

► Paul had just made the statement that Peter entered into fellowship by eating with the Gentiles in Antioch until the Judaizers arrived from Jerusalem. Then, Peter changed and withdrew from his Gentiles brothers and now no longer ate with them.

Paul made the accusation that Peter was afraid of the Pharisees who preached that all Christians must be circumcised. If Paul sounds a little angry it is because of the hypocrisy that was on display. He said even Barnabas got caught up in the false rhetoric and was led astray.

Q: What is going on? Didn't the Jerusalem Council settle this issue? Hadn't even the Sect of Pharisees/Judaizers agree to the Council's decision. Why are they preaching circumcision again?

Q: After everything the Lord had shown Peter, why would the opinion of the Pharisees matter to him?

Paul doesn't hold back in his very public confrontation with Peter ...

Galatians 2:14 • 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?"

Q: Why does Paul choose to confront Peter publicly in front of the congregation?

Paul's confrontation with Peter yields some of the most significant truths of Christianity. These truths becomes central, not only to this Epistle but to the Gospel in general. Paul begins with the doctrine of justification by grace through faith ...

Galatians 2:15-16 · "We, who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 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.

Q: What is a good definition of "justification?"

Q: What does Paul say about the Law as it pertains to justification?

Q: If our salvation depends solely on God justifying us and not on our works, is there, then, anything in the process that we are held responsible for?

Galatians 2:17-21 · "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!

If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 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. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Q: Why would Paul ask the question, "does that mean that Christ promotes sin?"

Q: Of course, Paul answered his own question with "Absolutely not!" But what else does Paul say about sin and the Law?"

Q: What does Paul mean when he says: "*If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker?*"

Q: What does Paul mean when he said “I have been crucified with Christ?”

Beginning with Chapter 3, there will be a subtle change to Paul's format. Up to now Paul has been writing about his own new life in Christ. In many ways it has been like reading a personal journal.

1. He wrote about his success with evangelizing the Gentiles;
2. He revealed the various encounters with the Judaizers
3. He discloses the decisions made at the Council at Jerusalem regarding the status of the Gentiles who were claiming Christ Jesus as Lord
4. He shared his disappointing encounter with hypocrisy, especially from his friend, Peter, who had supported him so staunchly at the Council.

Through all of this, many Theological issues have surfaced. Paul will devote the remainder of this Epistle to teaching and clarifying, turning this letter to the Church at Galatia into one of the most comprehensive theological treaties in the Bible.



Next Time • Lesson #7

~~ O Foolish Galatians! ~~

Galatians 3

