

Connect360: Ready to Rumble

October 10, 2023

- *Lesson 4 in the Connect360 unit “A Cry for Freedom: Grace That Is Still Amazing” focuses on Galatians 2:11-21.*

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch with the upbeat report of the Jerusalem church’s decision regarding the circumcision issue (see Acts 15:1-10) and of being extended the right hand of fellowship. Sometime later, Peter came to visit the Antioch church, where he set aside his Jewish dietary laws and rules, as well as the rule of not eating with Gentiles. Peter knew he was in a different culture and church. So, he habitually joined the Gentile Christians in the church meals with the rest of God’s family.

But eventually some Jews came from the Jerusalem church who were of the Judaizers’ party that insisted Gentile Christians become circumcised Jews in order to be saved and join in fellowship (2:12). Upon their arrival, Peter abruptly withdrew from sharing meals with non-Jewish Christians.

What made matters worse was the other Jewish Christians in the church followed Peter’s lead, and also withdrew from interacting with Gentile Christians. Peter’s reluctance to eat with the Gentiles in the presence of the Jerusalem Judaizers was splitting the church over secondary issues about circumcision and/or what people ate. Ethnic and class divisions entered the congregation. Even Barnabas withdrew with Peter.

Paul had seen enough. Since Peter had publicly separated himself from fellowship with Gentile Christians, Paul called him out publicly and emphatically about the issue. Paul told Peter he was in the wrong, and he was behaving like a hypocrite (2:13). The word used is the verb form of the noun “hypocrite.” It was a word from the theater, used when the actor would hold a mask in front of his face with a different face painted on it,

and pretend to be the character painted on the mask. It referred to someone who knew he was just pretending to be someone he really was not in everyday life.

Paul saw Peter's action as not merely pretending to go back to legalistic Judaism, but as an act of denying Jesus had set believers free from legalism. Peter's act of appeasement had potential eternal consequences, if not stopped immediately. People's souls hung in the balance, because he was leading other new converts back into Judaism by his own relapse—even influencing a church leader, Barnabas. This was an essential issue for Paul, because he understood that the Jewish Law was a dead end. No person can become righteous by following the Law (2:16).

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