

Review Questions (Lesson #6)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. Paul sinned by confronting Peter publicly rather than privately.
2. Barnabas was carried away with the hypocrisy of Peter and the Jews.
3. By becoming a Christian, Paul died to the Mosaic Law.
4. Truth is always consistent with itself.
5. Peter had always withheld full fellowship from Gentile Christians.

Give short answers:

1. What is “the” faith “of” Christ? _____
2. What had Peter learned in Acts 10 that should have kept him from the errors in this lesson? _____
3. What argument had Peter himself used in Acts 15, which Paul uses against Peter? _____
4. Briefly tell what it means to “die to the Law”: _____
5. In what way did the circumcision party set aside God’s grace? _____

Fill in the blanks:

1. If Christ could not really _____ as He had promised, then He was a _____ of _____ for teaching them to _____ the _____ of _____.
2. Besides being _____ and _____, Peter’s behavior was a _____ in the _____ to Christ’s _____.
3. The _____ could not give Paul spiritual _____; only by _____ to the Law could he gain _____ through Him (Christ).
4. If Paul had been _____ on Peter or the other _____ he preached, he certainly would not have _____ & _____ Peter as he did.
5. The _____ of _____ stands in contrast to the _____ of _____

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

Lesson #6 Paul’s Independence and the Truth of his Gospel (Galatians 2:11-21)

False teachers were questioning the genuineness of Paul’s apostleship as well as the truth of the gospel he preached. The text covered in this lesson proves that Paul was in no way dependent on the Jerusalem apostles for his authority, and that his doctrine of justification by faith was true, being exactly what Peter and the other apostles also preached.

Some time after the conference in Acts 15 (see lesson #5), Peter came to Antioch. At first, he had full fellowship with the Gentile converts, even eating with them. This would have included foods that Mosaic Law classed as unclean. Peter knew Moses’ Law was no longer in force, and that he should not think of Gentiles or their food as unclean (See Acts 10:9-48, esp. vv. 34-35). However, when some Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem, he gradually scaled back his fellowship with the Gentiles, eventually withdrawing from them completely (Galatians 2:11, 12). Though the text says the men from Jerusalem came “from James” (v. 11), it is doubtful that James approved of their behavior toward Gentile Christians, given his words in Acts 15:13-21.

Peter certainly knew better than this, but he feared “those who were of the circumcision” (v. 12, i.e. Jewish Christians who thought keeping the Law of Moses was necessary, especially circumcision). By acting as though he shared their incorrect view, Peter became a hypocrite. His bad example tragically influenced other Jewish brethren in Antioch to do the same (v. 13). Even Barnabas, Paul’s faithful co-worker who had evangelized Gentiles and defended their liberty in Christ there at Antioch and at the Jerusalem conference, became caught up in this fiasco!

If Paul had been dependent on Peter or the other Jerusalem apostles for his authority or for the gospel he preached, he certainly would not have withstood and corrected Peter as he did in verse 11. Paul may have been alone in standing for the truth on this occasion, but by God’s grace he was more than equal to the task! This was not a personal issue to be handled privately, as Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15-17. Peter and many others were not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel. Since the whole congregation knew and was being adversely affected by this situation, Paul had to deal with it publicly (compare 1 Timothy 5:20).

Truth is always consistent with itself. Peter’s conduct, on the other hand was not only hypocritical, but inconsistent. Though ethnically a Jew, and having

grown up Jewish, Peter had been living in the manner of Gentiles (Galatians 2:14). Especially since his experience in Acts 10, he had realized that God did not consider Gentiles unclean, nor was it now sinful to eat food that would have been unclean under the Law of Moses. Even when he first came to Antioch, he had shared meals with Gentiles. But now he was acting as if Gentile Christians and their foods were unclean. In essence, Paul was asking, "Peter, which way is it? Can we be in fellowship with uncircumcised Gentile Christians, or not?" By standing aloof from them, Peter was pressuring them (whether intentionally or not) to surrender their Christian liberty by submitting to the Law of Moses and living like Jews. Otherwise the church would be effectively split into a Gentile wing and a Jewish wing. Any such division would be contrary to Christ and intolerable!

Besides being hypocritical and inconsistent, Peter's behavior was a slap in the face to Christ's atoning sacrifice, and was contradictory to the gospel doctrine of justification by faith. Ironically, Paul used Peter's own argument from the Jerusalem conference against him in vv. 15-16. Peter had argued at the conference that by becoming Christians, the believing Jews implicitly conceded that they could not be justified from their sins through keeping the Law of Moses (Acts 15:10-11). If the Law could have justified them, they would have had no motive to believe and obey the gospel of Christ. This is exactly the point Paul now made to Peter himself. Both Paul and Peter were Jews by birth. Both had grown up keeping the Law of Moses. Eventually, both realized that neither they nor anyone else could be justified (i.e. acquitted of the charges of sin against them) by the works of the Law, so they sought justification from Christ. Paul described his own experience with law-keeping in Romans 7:13-25, concluding that the only way he could be delivered was not through working harder and longer at law-keeping, but through Christ.

Both Paul and Peter knew that justification was not through the works of the Law, but through the faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16, 20). Most English versions read "faith in Jesus Christ," but the KJV is correct in reading "of Jesus Christ." The difference is important! The faith of Jesus Christ stands in contrast to the Law of Moses. The faith of Christ is not merely that personal trust that Jesus had in the Heavenly Father, or even His perfect obedience, crucial as those things are. Just as the Law of Moses refers to that system of law which God gave to Israel through Moses, so the faith of Christ refers to that system of faith of which Jesus is the author. The faith of Christ is another way of saying the gospel. Acts 6:7 says "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." In other words, they obeyed the gospel; they became Christians.

Peter's behavior at Antioch amounted to a reverting to the Law of Moses for justification, thus effectively denying justification by Christ. The logical conclusion would be that both Paul and Peter had sinned by leaving Mosaic Law -keeping to serve Christ. If Christ could not really justify as He had promised, then He was a minister of sin for teaching them to forsake the Law of Moses! Could this be so? "Certainly not!" (v. 17). We might say, "No! No! A thousand times, No!" Peter himself would never have said Christ was a minister of sin, though his actions were implying it. Quite to the contrary, it was Peter and the others who were sinning by turning back to the Law of Moses for justification. Paul referred to it as "build(ing) again those things which I destroyed" (v. 18; note how Paul shifts from "we" in v. 17 to "I" in v. 18, hypothetically using himself to illustrate what Peter and the others were doing). Both Peter and Paul had taught and practiced the truth regarding fellowship with the Gentile Christians. By doing so, they had "torn down," so to speak, the necessity of Mosaic Law-keeping. But now Peter and the others were building it up again. In doing so, they made themselves transgressors.

By becoming a Christian, Paul "died to the Law" (v. 19). That is, the Law ceased to control him. When a slave dies, he no longer responds to the commands of his master. Paul had a new master - Christ. But in what sense was it "through the Law" that Paul died to the Law? First, through his experience in trying to keep the Law, Paul learned he could not be justified by it (as discussed in Romans 7). Second, since Jesus fulfilled the Law perfectly, then took it "out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14), Paul naturally died to the Law by his trusting obedience to Christ. The Law could not give Paul spiritual life; only by dying to the Law could he gain life through Him. So radical was this conversion that Paul could refer to it as being "crucified with Christ" (v. 20). Of course Paul was not literally crucified, and he was still physically alive; but now he was subject to the will of Christ, not the Law. "The faith of the Son of God" (not merely "faith in" Jesus, see previous discussion) was now his guide. Paul appreciated, as all of us should, the love of Jesus as demonstrated at Calvary.

The Jews correctly viewed themselves as recipients of God's grace in the giving of the Law at Sinai (see Romans 3:1). However, Paul did not "set aside the grace of God" by dying to the Law and living in Christ (Galatians 2:21). To the contrary, it was the circumcision party that set aside God's grace in Christ by seeking to be justified by law-keeping. Many in the churches of Galatia were doing the same thing. Paul will correct them further in the next chapter.