

Lesson Four: Galatians 2:11-21

Contending for the Truth

Paul confidently preached the gospel that had been revealed to him by the resurrected Christ, but he understood that he was not alone; he knew that he was part of a larger Church community. And that's why he returned to Jerusalem on more than one occasion during the course of his ministry—to seek out and offer the fellowship and support of his fellow Christians. Our last lesson ended on a unifying note, but this lesson describes a conflict that occurred between Paul and his friends in the city of Antioch.

The conflict (2:11-14)

What was the relationship between Peter and Paul up to this point? (Q#1 pg.47) What was your response to Q#2?

Read 2:11-14. What was your response to Q#3? In order to be able to best answer Q#4, I would recommend that you first read Acts 10:1-11:26 and also the explanation about “Eating with Gentiles” on pg.49 in our LifeChange book. We know that Peter was a good man who was earnestly trying to be a faithful disciple. Why do you suppose that he acted the way that he did? (Q#4)

The behavior of Peter and his companions really set Paul off. Our translation has Paul describing their behavior as “insincere”, but I think that's maybe a bit kind. Other translations call it what it is, “hypocrisy.” What had Paul in such a state? Why do you think he felt compelled to speak up on this issue? What danger was there in letting this pass? And why do you think that on this particular point, Paul confronted Peter and the others publicly when he had conferred with them privately in the past? See Q#5-6.

The argument (2:15-21)

Now we get to Paul's defense for his position. This passage is a little confusing, so let's read through these verses bit by bit to get his meaning. I can share with you a few notes that I found from some other sources to clarify what Paul is trying to say here.

The Law, the Law. This too can be confusing. What does Paul mean by “works of the law”? Modern readers may find it puzzling to find Paul saying that as Christians we are no longer obligated to keep the law. We may wonder, “What's the difference between those Judaic Laws that are now considered obsolete and the laws that we are asked to observe as Catholics? Have we just replaced one set of laws with another?” There is an excellent essay called “The Works of the Law” on pg.21-22 in our ICSB. What did you learn in that essay that may help answer those kinds of questions?

The laws of our faith are meant for our good. They are in place to build our spiritual and moral character. They are meant to make us more Christ-like. They are guides for how we are meant to honor and worship God. They are *not*, however, intended as measuring sticks for us to see how we compare to someone else. They are *not* designed to place a heavy burden on us or others that might cause us to give up hope. They are *not* conditions we fulfill to gain God's love and a place in heaven. Laws are good if they are understood correctly and obeyed out of love, not out of an insincere hope of gain or, even worse, fear.

Q#7-9 require you to determine the meaning of the words “justification” and “faith” by examining passages of scripture throughout the New Testament. Now that you have completed that exercise, what was your response to Q#11? Discuss your responses to Q#12-14. For Q#16, we are asked to return to the chart on pg.33 and fill in two more sections. What did you add to that chart?

Your response

Once again this week, we see that Paul had to make a determination between what might be an accommodation for the sake of the gospel and what could potentially be a compromise of the truth of the gospel. From past lessons, we know that Paul was capable of accommodating cultural and societal differences in the regions he visited, but we also know that on essential matters of faith, he was unwavering in his defense of the truth—despite the consequences. This was a bold move on Paul's part to publicly confront Peter, the leader of the Christian movement. Do you think that he did the right thing?

There are some who might find this conflict upsetting. What? There wasn't perfect harmony among those who formed the early Church? You mean there were always disagreements among Christians? Well, welcome to God's earthly kingdom.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul writes,

Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones..." (6:10-18)

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Not to panic anyone, but two weeks from today is Thanksgiving, so we will not meet again until December 2. That will be our last meeting until we return on January 20th. It has been our tradition to go out to lunch together before we break for Christmas/New Year's. Hopefully, we can all arrange our schedules so that we can do it again this year. We will go directly after our meeting.

Our next meeting will be on December 2 when we will discuss:

Lesson 5: Living by Faith LifeChange

Chapter 3: Proclaim the Gospel to Every Creature USCC for Adults (pgs. 21-33)