

Peter's Problem Palate

Galatians 2:11-21

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Idea: All the apostles agree on salvation and sanctification by faith in Jesus apart from works of the law.

Introduction:

Most of us regard the Apostles as normal men, and in one sense they are. We view them much as we view ourselves. We are all busy about the ministry and all have various views about the different doctrines, but by and large we mostly agree on the major stuff. This is how we view the apostles. We turn to James 2 and wonder how Paul and James could be so far apart.

We also think that they, like we, grew in their understanding of doctrinal issues. No small effort has been put into trying to show this. Paul is the prime target of this thinking, because we have early, middle, and late letters. Since he is like us, in this line of thinking, surely there is a progression in his doctrinal development.

We read the book of Acts and find disagreements among the key leaders. John Mark's actions resulted in Paul separating from Barnabas and choosing Silas for the second missionary journey. If such disagreements are found among key leaders, surely the apostles do not agree on everything either.

So we come to a fundamental issue. Do the apostles all agree on issues of salvation, and sanctification? If we can settle this issue, it certainly would give us an indication regarding the other doctrines as well.

At first read, one would think Galatians 2 is an argument for the Apostles having disagreements. Paul appears to be harsh and caustic with Peter. What side of the bed did he get up on that would cause him to rebuke Peter publicly for eating with his Jewish friends from Jerusalem?

[If we study this passage carefully, we will find that Peter's problem palate is not just an uncomfortable story in Galatians. Paul is using the event as a central point in his book's argument. The explanation that follows also shows us the error of viewing the apostles as ordinary men.]

Before examining Galatians 2:11-21, let's get an overview of the first part of Galatians. In the first 4 chapters Paul argues that we should never, never add any works to the Gospel. If we leave

the gospel, we turn away from God (1:6-9), so Paul's only concern is that he pleases the God Who gave him the gospel (1:10-2:14).

Notice 1:10. One simply cannot please God and men.

Paul then provides some historical background on the gospel. This is helpful, because Paul was not an apostle, in the normal use of that term. He did not have the advantage of time with Christ before the resurrection, nor the benefit of the instructions provided to the disciples during the time from the resurrection to Pentecost. In verses 1:11-17 Paul tells us that Jesus revealed the gospel to him during his time in Arabia. (Given the statement in 3:25, it seems that the place of Paul's understanding of the gospel of grace very well may have been Mt. Sinai, which he says is in Arabia. The symbolism of grace replacing the Mosaic Law is significant.)

Having received his instructions differently than the other apostles, Paul went to Jerusalem after three years and met with Peter for 15 days (1:18) and also met with James. Then after 14 years God instructed Paul to return to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. Titus, of course, was a Gentile believer (2:3). This was a private meeting and not the Acts 15 meeting, but Peter was at this meeting along with the Apostle John and James; all three were leaders within the Jerusalem church.

Here is what we have seen thus far:

Introduction (Gal. 1:1-5)

1. The Apostle Paul's gospel will deliver us, 1:1-5.

Never, Never add any works to the Gospel (Gal. 1:6-4:31)

2. If we leave the gospel, we turn away from God, 1:6-9
3. Pleasing God (who gave him the Gospel) is Paul's only concern, 1:10-2:14.
 - a. One cannot please God and men, 1:10.
 - b. While in Arabia, Jesus revealed the gospel to Paul, 1:11-17.
 - c. The key apostles and leaders agreed with Paul's gospel, 1:18-2:10.

1. Peter was wrong for returning to the Law, 2:11-14.

Now in Gal. 2:11-14, we come to the problem of Peter's dining habits.

Please look at verse 11. Peter opposed Paul, as we would say, to his face. Very strong words; literally against his face, because he was (from time to time, imperfect tense) having been condemned (perfect passive tense). Peter did what he did on more than one occasion, and he incurred just condemnation for his actions.

What Peter did is explained in verses 12-13. Before some Jews came from James (in Jerusalem) Peter would eat with the Gentiles, but when the Jews arrived, Peter changed his practice. Barnabas as well as the other Jewish believers in Antioch followed his lead.

Paul does not state the nature of the occasions when these separations took place. Given the iterative nature of the events, it may be meals attached to the worship service, but the text doesn't specify. Arnold Fruchtenbaum thinks Peter, by his actions, supported two communions: one for the Jews and a separate one for the Gentiles (It created a separation from the Lord's Supper and now there were two communions: a Jewish communion and a Gentile communion. The presumption was that the Jews had something that the Gentiles did not have.¹). The important thing is not the occasion for separation, but that it occurred at all. Peter had previously been attacked for eating with Gentiles (Acts 11:3). His fear got the better of him, and he did the wrong thing.

Verse 14 says that Peter was not "walking in a straight course" toward the truth of the gospel. Peter knew better, so Paul rebuked him publically for his hypocrisy.

Peter's error was not that he slighted the Gentiles; he certainly did that, but that sin would not require a public rebuke. If we rebuked one another for shabby treatment there would be no time for singing or sermons. No what Peter did; this same Peter whom God had used to open the gospel of grace to the Gentiles by going to Cornelius's house and (gasp) eating with him. What Peter did was return to the Mosaic Law as a rule of life.

Peter sinned by following the Mosaic Law. He knew it was the wrong thing to do. God had used him to prove the point in Acts 11, but here he is some years later allowing his fear to govern his actions.

Now we can see why Paul is broadcasting this event. It is not to impose further embarrassment on Peter (sin should be dealt with on the lowest level possible...the Galatia churches are not entitled to know about Peter's sin), but to make the point to every reader of this book that it is wrong to follow the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law was until Christ (Gal. 3:19) and then it ended. It is over. It cannot be returned to without spiritual injury.

2. All the apostles understood justification apart from works of the Law, 2:15-16.

In the next two verses Paul establishes what all the apostles knew.

¹ Fruchtenbaum, A. G. (1983). *Vol. 126: The Messianic Bible Study Collection* (12). Tustin, Calif.: Ariel Ministries.

Notice verse 14. To whom does the “we Jews” refer to? It certainly refers to Peter, but I think it also includes James, and John, named along with Cephas in 2:9. What is it that these pillars of the church know?

Look at verse 15. They all know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Notice the next phrase, “even we have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.” All of the apostles understood that justification came from faith and not from keeping the law. Keeping the law can never produce justification.

While none of us wish to argue that the apostles always did the right thing; (this passage clearly indicates Peter was capable of sinning), when it comes to issues of justification and sanctification they all agreed in theory—even if they failed, like Peter, to put that theory into practice.

James is not in conflict with Paul. Peter is not in conflict with Paul. The three apostles named here (James is called an apostle in 1:19) all wrote books in the New Testament, and they all agreed that justification is completely apart from works.

[This should settle the debate about whether the apostles agreed about justification, but what about systems of sanctification. Did they agree about that as well? Let’s look at the next verse.]

3. Returning to the Law is sin, 2:17.

Notice in verse 17 that the “we” portion of this section continues. Paul changes from “we” to “I” in verse 18, but in verse 17 he is continuing what they all knew.

“Now if while seeking (present active participle) to be justified (aorist active infinitive) in Christ, we were found (aorist passive indicative) also ourselves sinners, then (is) Christ a minister of sin?

Whatever this means, we know Paul’s answer is a solid, “Certainly not!”

How are the apostles seeking to be justified in Christ? They all know that it is by faith and not works of the law. At the time of the writing, the apostles were still seeking to be justified by faith. They had not added works to the equation.

If seeking a faith-justification-apart-from-works-of-the-law is wrong, then they would be found sinners. If what they are doing, namely seeking a faith-justification-apart-from-works-of-the-law, is wrong, then they are sinners.

Where in the world did the apostles get such an idea that a person is justified by faith apart from works? They got it from Christ. The same Jesus that taught Paul also taught James and Peter.

If it is wrong to seek a justification apart from works then clearly Jesus must be the minister of sin, because He is the one who taught them this doctrine.

[In the next verse Paul leaves the “we” and changes to an “I.” Peter had returned to the law; he was rebuilding what Christ had replaced.]

4. Paul abandoned the Law to live by faith, 2:18-21.

In verse 18 Paul breaks with the “we” and begins to use “I.” Since Peter had failed to follow through on the Lord’s instructions to abandon the Law, Paul does not include him in this section.

In context, the things that Paul destroyed are adherence to the law for justification and sanctification. If he now returns to the law, he would have the same condemnation (2:11) that Peter had. He would find himself building (present active indicative) something he has already destroyed. What has been destroyed is the Mosaic Law as a means of justification and sanctification. If he returns to this it would prove or demonstrate that he is acting improperly. He is a transgressor.

Today most of us are very hesitant to address the Christian’s relationship to the Mosaic Law. We act as if it is a matter of personal choice left up to the individual believer. One pastor tells us to obey the 10 commandments, but when these ten words are seen as the summation of the entire Mosaic Law, it readily becomes apparent that it is impossible to hold these commandments as God’s system of sanctification. As if law could ever work for that anyway.

Other pastors substitute a system of other rules and regulations. This too makes no sense to me. If the amazing, wonderful, incredible, angel-written Mosaic Law cannot save nor sanctify, how will my North American manmade system possibly succeed.

[Paul followed Christ’s instructions into a system that ended his relationship to all law-based systems. Look at verse 19.]

Emphatic is the person. “I” through the law, died to the law. Paul was in the law-based system and now he is dead to it. A break with that old system is the only way one can live with God.

In verse 20 Paul explains that he has been (perfect passive indicative) co-crucified with Christ and the result of that is a new relationship of Christ living in him. The power for sanctification, or doing that which is pleasing to God the father cannot come from himself—he is as good as

dead. In Paul's flesh, and in ours, dwells no good thing. We have a desire to do the right things, but not the ability. His current experience (the life he is now living) is not one of adherence to laws, but one that is by faith in Jesus. He is the one Who loves us and has given himself for us.

Verse 21 sums up this section nicely. To return to law in any way shape or form is to set aside the grace of God. Righteousness for justification and righteousness for sanctification cannot come through works of the law. If it could, Christ would not have needed to die.

Conclusion

Galatians is written to tell believers to accept the suffering that comes with a grace-based system. All one needs to do to avoid suffering is give in and admit that works play a part in our justification and/or our sanctification. If we accept a works-based system of sanctification it hardly matters whether we quibble over which set of rules. If however, justification and sanctification must be by faith and by grace, you are saying humans of all kinds, including we who are redeemed, have no innate moral goodness.

All the apostles agreed that justification and sanctification are the result of grace and faith. Peter faced the issue and faltered due to fear. The Galatia believers are in danger of committing the same sin! Paul writes to tell us "man-up!" He invites us to suffer along side of him. All he had to do to avoid suffering is add works to his system. That always pleases everyone (1:10), but it doesn't please the Lord. He quietly steps back and allows us to learn that without Him we can do nothing.

God forbid that we should glory in anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (6:14).