



Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Chapter 2, Verses 11-21

by Tim Kelley

In the first half of chapter 2, Paul defends his understanding of the gospel, the good news of the redemption of Israel and the re-establishment of the Kingdom of God. He showed how some notable people from Jerusalem had snuck into the congregations in Asia Minor and had tried to alter Paul's gospel message, but that he had resisted them – never letting their message alter his message. Then, years later when he went to Jerusalem himself and met with Peter, James, and John, they concurred with his version of the message, and agreed that he and Barnabas should continue working with the Greeks and that they would continue with the “circumcised”, i.e. – the Jews.

To review a couple of details: we must remember that the term Greek or Grecian does not necessarily mean a non-Israelite, but often refers to a person who's acting as a heathen – a pagan. This could include people who are genetically Greeks, but could also include Romans, non-Jewish Israelites, or Jews themselves if they have departed from the “halacha”, the Jewish walk. It could also include those non-Jewish Israelite “exiles” who were returning to the ways of God.

In the remainder of chapter two, Paul shows that even if one of the “pillars” (Peter, James, or John) were to waver in regards to the “truth”, he (Paul) would confront him, for Paul is unwilling to waver – not for a minute!

^{ESV} **Galatians 2:11-13** But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Apparently, sometime after Paul went to Jerusalem to visit Peter, James, and John – the Pillars as Paul referred to them, Peter made a trip to visit Paul in Antioch, a town on the southern edge of modern day Turkey – a distance of about 300 miles from Jerusalem. There is some speculation as to why Peter would have made such a trip, being that he and the other disciples were the apostles to the “circumcision” – the Jews. One obvious reason is that Peter calls himself an “apostle to the Galatians” as well as a number of areas in Asia Minor, and by visiting these place, he would have passed right through Antioch.

^{ESV} **1 Peter 1:1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cap-padocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

Another – less obvious reason is based on the fact that in his day, there were more Jews living in both Egypt and Babylon than were living in Eretz Israel – the land of Israel. Thus the disciples had a large area to cover - much more that did Paul.

While Peter was in Antioch, he obviously had no reservations in regards to eating with the non-Jewish believers, after all – it was Peter who Yeshua had used to show that, in regards to faith, there was no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. According to the text, after his encounter with Cornelius, Peter clearly saw that the God-fearing gentile could be in good standing with God as well as be a part of the people of God, i.e. – Israel. He told his fellow disciples -

^{ESV} **Acts 10:34-35** “. . . Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

He also understood that conversion to Judaism, and all that entailed, was not incumbent on the God-fearing gentile. He simply had to express his good standing by observance to the Torah, just like the Jews did. But then something happened to cause Peter to waver in his belief.

The beginning of verse 11 contains the phrase “hote deh” or “but when”. Paul is contrasting what Peter did in Antioch with what he had previously committed to in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of Paul's visit to Jerusalem, the “Pillars” - Peter, James, and John – concurred with Paul and Barnabas concerning the gospel message. Both groups of men were to proclaim the SAME message to two different audiences. They had shared the “right hand of fellowship” – a handshake of sorts. There was a bond between them – they were going to work towards the same goal, but to different peoples. They were in total agreement!

And when Peter came to Antioch, he seemed to still be in agreement with Paul and Barnabas, for at the conclusion of their Sabbath meetings, the Jews and the non-Jews would share their food and sit at the same tables – and Peter would join them. There was no “Jewish” side of the room, no “Gentile” side, and no “For Jews Only” tables. Everyone – Jew and Gentile – ate at the same tables. This was important, because “table fellowship” was very important in that day. The table is where the people discussed the scriptures. It's were questions were asked and answers were given. It was a place for “midrash”, tossing out ideas and seeing what others thought. What's more, it symbolized “covenant”. In the Hebrew culture, covenants were ratified with a meal. A good example is Jacob and Laban.

^{ESV} **Genesis 31:52-55** This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. ⁵³ The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country. ⁵⁵ Early in the morning Laban arose and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned home.

To the believers in Antioch, sharing a meal between Jews and non-Jews indicated they were in covenant together. It implied that, in the eyes of God, they were one people, but then a group of men came from Jerusalem and things fell apart.

The text indicates that these men came from James. This fact could lead one to believe that they were carrying a message from James. I submit that, even though they may have been associated with James, they were not representing him. No matter which came first, the Acts 15 conference or Paul's letter to the Galatians, it's evident that not everyone in Judea was in agreement in regards to the gospel and the inclusion of non-Jews into the believing community. After a decision was made in regards to strict observance of the oral law, the congregations were notified of the decision –

^{NKJ} **Acts 15:22-24** ²² Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. ²³ They wrote this *letter* by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, ~~saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" -- to whom we gave no such commandment . . .~~ ¹

Yes, there were those in Judea who believed that Yeshua was Messiah, but had a different understanding of His role in bringing Israel back together, and they were quite willing to proclaim their view of the gospel to anyone who would listen. Apparently, when they arrived in Antioch they found a couple of willing ears in the persons of Peter and Barnabas. It appears that when these fellows showed

¹ The last portion of this text is not in many of the “original” texts

up, both Peter and Barnabas would no longer eat with the non-Jews, in fact, they even separated themselves from them. The Greek word used here for “separate” is “aphorize” (Strong’s 873) and implies *marking off from others with boundaries*. It’s like they re-built the “wall of separation” between the Jews and the Gentiles.

What had gotten into Peter? We can only guess. One theory is that he had succumbed to the “doctrine of the Pharisees”, something he’d been warned about by Yeshua himself.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 16:11-12** ¹¹ "How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? -- *but* to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹² Then they understood that He did not tell *them* to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Peter was well aware of the fact that in normative Judaism, Jews simply did not eat with non-Jews. He said such in his response to Cornelius.

^{NKJ} **Acts 10:28** Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

So had they convinced him that he was wrong in his interpretation of the vision he had had before meeting Cornelius? Or was it that the presence of his Jewish peers was just too great. He wanted to be in good favor with his friends from Jerusalem, and these fellows could really smear his name back home as well as in the other areas where he’d been sent.

Whatever happened, it apparently took some time – either days or weeks, because it trapped not only Peter, but Barnabas and many of the other Jews in the Antioch congregation as well.

Paul was infuriated, and he let it be known to everyone (to those in Antioch, those in Galatia, and to us today). Peter had done something that could potentially set the Hebraic movement back years. Peter was being a hypocrite, and Barnabas went right along with him. How could the non-Jews trust the Jews when they only practiced what they preached when their friends were not around? Would the non-Jews ever be comfortable around the Jewish believers, or would they always think of themselves as second-class citizens, if citizens at all, in the community of Israel.

Paul had to make it known that he was not at all in agreement with Peter’s actions, thus he followed the Torah principle found in Leviticus 19:17 –

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 19:17-18** ' You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸ 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.

Paul, I’m sure with proper respect to Peter’s position as a disciple of Yeshua, let him have it! Not behind his back, but in his face! Those who were present - including his friend Barnabas - knew that what Peter had done, and obviously was continuing to do, was wrong.

^{ESV} **Galatians 2:14-16** But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" ¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Paul could see that Peter was willing to get off the path in regards to the gospel if it meant pleasing his friends. He was unwilling to teach the true gospel in certain situations. The Greek word for "straightforward" in this passage is "orthopodeo" or "strait walk". The gospel message was clear and defined. It was a strait, narrow path. Deviating from the path would cause you to speak untruths; to misrepresent Yeshua himself; to sin, and Paul was not going to have any of it, so from this point forward, and until the end of the chapter, Paul lays into Peter.

"If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

This passage puzzles most commentators. It doesn't seem to make sense. What is Paul trying to tell Peter? After linking this statement to what we've seen Peter do, it would seem that Paul is saying -

If you Peter, a Jew, are going to represent the Jewish people with your lies and hypocrisy, then the Jews are just like these pagan Gentiles, and not like the upright people they claim to be. Thus why would you persuade the Gentiles be like Jews? Why not just leave them alone?

Another take on this is presented in the Aramaic English New Testament (AENT) by Andrew Gabriel Roth. The AENT is a translation of the Peshitta which is a collection of copies of many New Testament texts in the Aramaic language. Some claim that these texts were copied in the 2nd century CE, thus making them the oldest New Testament texts. What makes this interesting for us is that in the Peshitta, Paul most often uses the word "Aramean" where other (Greek) translations use "Greeks". Arameans are Semitic people, and the Israelites are descendants of the Arameans, since Jacob's mother was Aramean and his two wives, Rachael and Leah, were Arameans as well.

^{ESV} **Genesis 25:20** and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean.

In the story of Jacob, Laban is the villain. He's the one who tricks, lies to, and accuses Jacob. He's certainly not someone to look up to. The Torah makes this even more clear in this blessing that was to be given when the people bring in their first-fruits.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 26:5** "And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.

So the Jews, and all Israelites for that matter, were Arameans, and if they had been following Torah in regards to their offerings, they were aware of their deceitful grandfather. With that in mind, let's look at Roth's translation of the latter part of vs. 14 -

^{AENT} **Galatians 2:14** ". . . if you who are Judeans live as Arameans; why do you encourage the Gentiles who have joined themselves to Judah to live as Judeans?"

Speaking collectively of Peter and the group of believing Jews from Jerusalem, Paul would be saying that if they, being Jews and conducting themselves like Laban their father – represent Judaism, why would they encourage the Gentiles to live like Jews?

Neither of these attempts to understand Paul's statement seem to fit. So let's look at this statement a little deeper, but before we do, let's look at Paul's next statement –

^{ESV} **Galatians 2:15** We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

What is that all about? It doesn't seem to fit into the context of Paul's previous state, nor does it fit into the context of the next. It sounds boastful – as if Paul is comparing the "superior" Jews to the "lowly, sinful" gentiles. But this is obviously not what Paul believes, nor is the message he would want to convey to Peter or the delegation from Jerusalem who teach that Jews must be separate from the Gentiles.

Instead, I believe Paul was simply being facetious. It's sort of like he's mocking Peter's actions, saying under his breath - "We Jews are Abraham's children. We're not Gentile pagans!". It reminds me of the Pharisee's comment to Yeshua when He was trying to show them that He is the fountain of truth and freedom. They said –

^{NKJ} **John 8:33** . . . "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* you say, 'You will be made free' . . .

Thus it's my conclusion that Paul's statement in verse 15 is meant to show Peter the foolishness of his actions, and to remind him of what he had claimed to have come out of. If that's the case, then the next verse, verse 16, is a continuation of Paul's statement in the latter part of verse 14. Thus the text would read like this (using the New King James to make it clearer) -

"If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews ¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.? Even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified . . ."

At least now the sentences seem to flow a lot better. But in order to get the crux of Paul's open correction of Peter, we need to look at a few of the words, specifically the word "Jew". In this statement, Paul used three different variations of the word "Iouda" or "Judah" (Strong's 2448). Each variation has a somewhat different meaning, that when recognized, help us to understand what Paul was saying.

The first case of the word "Jew" is "Ioudaios" (Strong's 2453) which means "belonging to the Jewish race". The second is "Ioudaikos" (Strong's 2452) which means "Jewishly" or "after the manner of the Jews", and the third is "Ioudaidzo" (Strong's 2450) which means "to adopt Jewish customs".

The second word – "Ioudaikos" is interesting. It's only used in this one verse, but its root is found in Paul's letter to Titus where he talks about the requirements for a man who would be the overseer of a congregation –

^{NKJ} **Titus 1:7-14** ⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. ¹⁰ For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. ¹² One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans *are* always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men **who turn** (themselves^{YLT}) **from the truth** (of the gospel?).

Paul is telling Titus to beware of Jewish fables and commandments which will turn a person from the truth. I suspect he is telling Titus to watch out for those who would introduce Jewish customs as Torah (commandments) and say that they had been passed down orally for 1500 years, yet remained perfectly intact (fables).

Getting back to verse 14 . . . using the various meanings of the word "Jew", we can grasp what Paul is saying –

"If you Peter, being born a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles - i.e. free from Oral Law - and not as the Jews who submit to Oral Law, why do you - by your actions - compel Gentiles to submit to Jewish Oral Law? . . ."

Paul then goes on to say (vs. 16) in effect –

“How can you do that knowing that we’re not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Messiah Yeshau?”

Peter knew that obedience to Torah did not “justify” God’s people. And if justification² cannot come by obedience to God’s written Torah, then it certainly can’t come by man-made Oral Law.

Paul continues by asking a rhetorical question - “We did believe that, didn’t we?” Notice how it’s worded in many translations – ^{KJV} “even we have believed”; ^{ESV} “so we also have believed”; ^{YLT} “also we in Christ Jesus did believe”. These are all past tense. He’s asking Peter – “You still believe that, don’t you?”

We must keep in mind that Paul is not giving some theological discourse. Instead, he’s hammering on Peter, trying to make him see the foolishness of his actions. He’s being his brother’s keeper while at the same time, showing the congregation that Peter was wrong in what he was doing. Thus, we’re not going to get involved in the theology of his statements in this study.

^{ESV} **Galatians 2: 17-18** But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

As usual, Paul’s writings are hard to understand, but they can be understood if we consider Paul’s background and what he teaches. The above statement by Paul must be found in the context of the Jewish belief about those who do not convert to Judaism and what it means to be “found to be sinners”.

In a nutshell, the first century Jewish leadership (the Pharisees particularly) believed that a person had to become “Jewish” in order to be a part of the people of God, and thus inherit the kingdom³. That doesn’t necessarily mean that they believed all Jews would automatically inherit the kingdom, but if you had any hope of inheriting the kingdom, you had to be born Jewish, or you had to convert. To them, if a believing and “righteous” non-Jew refused to convert, he would have no place in the kingdom because he was still a Gentile – a “sinner”.

Based on that understanding, those non-Jews in Antioch, no matter how righteous they were, would be considered “sinners” by the Jewish delegation if they had not converted to Judaism. What’s more, Paul and his companions, when they taught the non-Jews that they didn’t have to convert, could be considered “sinners” as well.

Another point is to consider the word “servant”, which in Greek is “diakonos” (Strong’s 1249). Its primary meaning is “one who executes the commands of another”, but it also means “a waiter, one who serves food and drink”. In the context of Peter’s refusal to eat with non-Jews, Paul could be asking “is Yeshua waiting tables in a sinful environment”, i.e. – a meal of both Jews and non-Jews? So what Paul is asking Peter is simply -

“if we teach that we are justified by belief in Yeshua, and some Jewish believers take that as sin because we don’t require conversion to Judaism, then those fellows must believe that Yeshua is promoting sin by encouraging us to eat together, does it not?”

Peter would have no choice but to agree. He walked and talked with Yeshua. He knows His heart. He knows that Yeshua is anything but a sinner. But Paul isn’t finished. By his actions, Peter not only implied

² A court term that means to be acquitted of a crime. The Greek term is “dikaioo” (Strong’s 1344) and it’s the same Greek word used in the LXX to translate Exodus 23:7 – “Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.” (ESV)

³ The bible does not teach that a person must become Jewish, but it does indicate that you have “cross over”, i.e. – become Hebrew – by having faith in Israel’s god – YHVH, and by showing your faith by your actions, specifically - the walk YHVH gave the Hebrew people.

that Yeshua was a sinner, he also began to rebuild a wall that Yeshua spent His life trying to tear down, and Paul was not willing to go there himself. He was not going to be a part of rebuilding a wall between Jews and non-Jews, because to do so would be transgressing God's law by adding to it.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 15:2-3** "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." ³ He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?

^{ESV} **Galatians 2: 19 - 21** For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Paul is still not done rebuking Peter. He now contrasts his departure from his old ways with what Peter had just done. He shows that he (Paul) is a changed man. His previous attempts to rid the Jewish people of those "Christian idolaters" are behind him. That part of him has died and he now lives in the truth of the Gospel, in fact, he's a part of bringing it about. And because his old self is dead, it's gone, never to be resurrected. He now has a new life based on faith that Yeshua has covered him, just as He does anyone who turns to Him.

Then in one last rebuke, he says that "I don't set aside the grace YHVH has given me by compromising my convictions when it's convenient to do so (like you did)". "If we ever teach that we are justified⁴ by law, then there was no need for Yeshua to die."

With the end of the chapter, Paul is finished with his open and deliberate rebuke of Peter. Paul clearly shows that the gospel message he's been given is something he truly believes. He was given it by inspiration, he checked it out, he took it to Jerusalem to make sure he understood it correctly, and he was willing to defend it at all costs, even if it meant be ostracized by his colleagues and the Jewish community.

Now he's ready to confront the Galatians for turning away from it.

⁴ dikaiosune (Strong's 1343) – a broad word that means "to be in the state one ought to be". A secondary meaning is "justice that has been served". See footnote 2 above.