

GALATIANS 3

Defining Moments

"I have a dream today! I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; 'and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.' This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day." -Martin Luther King Jr.¹

Pre-Article Questions:

1. How did meeting with your prayer partner this past week and reading Acts 15 add to your understanding of the circumstances surrounding this letter?
2. How would you define unity? What has been the greatest form of unity and fellowship you have experienced in the past year?

A symphony of brotherhood: tonight, here in this room, we are that symphony. Right here, right now, our small group is in a better place because someone dared not to be silent, because someone prayed, because someone cared and addressed racial injustice. Unsurprisingly, the early church suffered from a similar kind of racism between Jews and Gentiles, the results of which threatened both the truth of the gospel and unity among the churches of Galatia.

In chapter two of Galatians, the first ten verses, Paul puts the finishing touches on his defense of his apostolic authority, closing his argument from chapter one. He confirms that when he spent a longer amount of time in Jerusalem, 14 years after his conversion, it was most valuable, in that the apostles: James, Peter (Cephas), and John all confirmed his revelation of the gospel and his calling to the Gentiles. Then in verses 11-16, the chapter takes a quick turn, depicting a major confrontation between Paul and Peter after their time in Jerusalem when both were in Antioch (where the Galatian churches had been planted). Paul uses his showdown with Peter as a defining moment to publicly ensure that nobody would distort the gospel as a result of Peter's hypocritical actions. Any actions contradicting the truth of the gospel had to be confronted, even if taken by an esteemed "pillar" like Peter.²

Peter received a revelation from God in Acts chapter ten not to call unclean that which Christ called clean.³ Before this vision, Peter, who had put his faith in Christ, still did not understand the repercussions of demanding adherence to Jewish traditions in relation to fellowship with non-Jewish people, or Gentiles. This vision from God immediately clarified God's heart to Peter, resulting in his first time eating and fellowshiping with Gentiles; it was awesome! Not sure what happened here, because this incident in Antioch was after the fact.⁴ Was Peter getting forgetful? Paul knew Peter's actions were not true to Peter's (or Paul's) understanding of the gospel. He had to call that to the table and point out how treacherous this "circumcision group" really was if even Barnabas

1. King, Martin Luther. I Have a Dream. Speech delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

2. The Holy Bible, NIV, Galatians 2:9

3. TNIV, Acts 10:15

4. Acts 15

was confused! It is important to remember here, Paul is not arguing against the Jewish rites or customs to eat certain foods or to be circumcised, but rather the "...theological baggage the false teachers, were placing on such rites...Paul is contending in this great epistle not for a 'spiritual' view of the law as over against externalism or ceremonialism; he is contending for the grace of God as over against human merit in any form." ⁵ The confrontation he has with Peter launches us into understanding the supreme grace of God (above and excluding human goodness) full force.

The last few verses conclude the first two chapters of Galatians, unpacking all the falsities at hand and begin Paul's revelation of what justification by faith truly is. In the remaining verses, Paul uses some unique rhetoric to help the Jewish believers to see it is no longer sinful to eat with Gentiles, declares Christ does not promote sin (to alleviate any confusion), and demonstrates that the cross was not in vain. So it is because of the cross that Jews and Gentiles can now work together, pray together, struggle together, go to jail together, stand up for freedom together, and, of course, eat and fellowship together. Jesus Christ broke down the first walls built by man and brought freedom both then and now. Praise God that there is freedom to be in fellowship together no matter our personal preferences, liturgies, worship styles, cultures, or backgrounds, and it is possible through Christ who has set us free.

Article Question:

1. What do you think Paul was feeling and thinking before and after he confronted Peter? Have you ever had to confront someone you know, respect, and love for being hypocritical about something? How did it go? Were you able to do it with wisdom, respect, and love?

Galatians 2, NIV

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. ² I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. ³ Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. ⁴ This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. ⁵ We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶ As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. ⁷ On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. ⁸ For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. ⁹ James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along. ¹¹ When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. ¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in

5. George, 198.

6. IVP New Testament Commentaries: Galatians 2:15-21. www.biblegateway.com

front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? 15 “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 16 know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. 17 “But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. 19 “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Study Questions:

1. In verses 1-10, Paul makes a longer trip to Jerusalem. Who does he take with him and what were some of the obstacles they faced on this trip?
2. Would someone be willing to summarize in their own words what happened in verses 11-16? How were Peter’s actions out of line with the “truth of the gospel”?
3. Why was it so important that Paul confronted Peter? How was he able to do it with love and respect?
4. We can expect that no one is perfect, and even spiritual leaders who are held to higher standards will stumble and still make mistakes (example of Peter). In light of this revelation, why is it so important we disciple people to Christ, not to ourselves?
5. What are some common hypocritical actions we fall into as university students that compromise the truth of the gospel to those around us?
6. Does Paul’s confrontation of Peter convict you where your actions have compromised the truth of the gospel? What spiritual, practical steps can we apply to see a difference in areas where we tend to act hypocritically?
7. What two routes to justification does Paul discuss in verse 16? In what ways is Christianity set apart from every other religious and moral system in the world in our doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone? How does this encourage you as a follower of Christ?
8. What arguments and counter-arguments does Paul use to prove that justification by works of the law is impossible in verses 16-21?
9. Re-read verses 19-21. What do you find the most encouraging and challenging in this last section of verses?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meet with your prayer partner this week to read and discuss:

1. Read Acts 10 and Acts 11
2. List the details that surrounded the before and after of Peter’s vision. Describe Cornelius and why this salvation experience was so important for the Gentiles.
3. What about this salvation experience is encouraging to you and why?
4. In what ways did Barnabas encourage the Gentile believers in Antioch?
5. How are you being used to encourage brothers and sisters in Christ?
Describe someone who comes to mind that God is calling you to encourage and pray together with your prayer partner for the strength to do it today.

Scripture Memory:
Galatians 2:20-21