

(2:11-14) Peter's hypocrisy opposed

11 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 [he] 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.* **14** 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?"*

The Apostles' had essential agreement on the Gospel and the multiple mission fields, but what happens when these mission fields merge, as in Antioch?

Why include this account and why here?

- This account serves as a key test case, accomplishing three things:
 - **KEY POINT #1:** Demonstrating Paul's commitment to defending his gospel
 - **KEY POINT #2:** Using the incident as a transition, connecting his opposition to Peter's actions with his opposition to Galatian teachers and setting up the main argument of the letter in Ch. 3-4.

If you've ever listened to someone recount a story that described someone else's undesirable behavior, and as you listen you realize that you do the exact same thing and have this sinking feeling of conviction in your stomach - that's the kind of impact this story would have. Or similarly, like the parable of the lamb that the prophet Nathan told to David following the incident with Bathsheba where he concludes, "You are the man!"

1. The Setting

What was Antioch like at this time?

- When reading the NT, the only accounts of Antioch relate to the situation of the church there and you might come away with the impression that this was a small outpost town. However, city was in fact a large metropolitan area - the third largest city in the Roman empire behind Rome and Alexandria. It was akin to a NYC and to some extent a Las Vegas with the amount of vice that the city had become known for.
- Important for our purposes was that Antioch boasted of a large Jewish population, and was the place where the Christians fled when persecution heated up in Judea, as reported in Acts 11. It was here that the gospel first began going out to the Gentiles in any significant numbers. The result is a very intermingled Jewish/Gentile church.

So, Peter used to be in the practice of sharing table fellowship with Gentiles. Why is this a big deal?

- While there were varying degrees of laxity among Jews regarding interaction with Gentiles, meals were generally considered sacred. Even among the more liberal of the Jews, they would find eating with Gentiles permissible if it were a Gentile coming to a Jew's house to eat a kosher meal. The more strict would find that abominable, and would refuse to eat with Gentiles under any terms. Gentiles were "sinners" in the worst sense of the word. The angst shown by the Pharisees in the gospel accounts regarding Jesus going into the houses of "sinners" and eating with them - in that case, they're disgust being with other Jews who did not meet their standards of purity - is something that would have found widespread agreement when it came to doing such things with Gentiles.
- Peter (by God's revelation) was in fact the first to break this kind of ground among the Gentiles, as we see reported in Acts 10-11 with Cornelius. This event itself created no small controversy among those in Jerusalem. There was already some tension in the Church (as seen in Acts 6) between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews, and the Cornelius situation takes that to another level. So in the following chapters, when you see the believers in Antioch leaving off preaching exclusively to the Jews and beginning to bring the gospel directly to the Greeks, it's a continued escalation towards what some would call this new thing God is doing and what others would call apostasy.
- This is the situation when Peter is in Antioch, with a large number of Gentile and Jewish believers and quite a bit of sharing and intermixing among them. Already being the metropolitan center that it is, this type of activity is likely much less controversial in a place like Antioch than it might be elsewhere. Peter is perfectly fine with this arrangement at the time, because theologically (as seen in Acts 11) he understands that God has welcomed the Gentiles who believe and it is not for him to make a distinction.

2. Peter's Pragmatism

What is it that would've caused Peter to change his behavior?

- Paul clues us into what's at the root of Peter's behavior, which again we must understand in light of the circumstances. He says Peter withdrew himself, "fearing the circumcision" -
 - "the circumcision" might instead be referring to the non-Christian Jews in Jerusalem, and the message to Peter from the men from James was along the lines of "Peter, if word gets back to Jerusalem that you (a leader in the Jerusalem church) are eating with Gentiles in this way, it risks discrediting all that we're trying to do in reaching the Jews, and it also puts our whole Church at risk. We'll be considered apostates and face violence at the hands of those zealous for the law."
 - Accepting Robert Jewett's thesis that "Jewish Christians in Judea were stimulated by Zealot pressure into a nomistic campaign among their fellow Christians in the late forties and early fifties" (*NTS* 17 [1971] 205 [further on Jewett's thesis, see *Introduction*, xci–xciii, xciv]; cf. also the thrust of G. Dix, *Jew and Greek*), what seems to have concerned believers at Jerusalem vis-à-vis Gentile believers was the rising tide of Jewish nationalism in Palestine and its growing antagonism directed against any Jew who had Gentile sympathies or who associated with Gentile sympathizers. Such a concern seems to have been shared by all Jewish believers at Jerusalem—by James, Cephas, and John, the three "pillars" of that church; by the "false brothers" of Gal 2:4–5 who agitated for the circumcision of Titus; by the delegation from James to Antioch; and by the Judaizers who came to Galatia. Yet though they shared a common concern as to how their nation would respond to the gospel's Gentile outreach, there seem to have been distinct differences between Jerusalem believers as to how to express that concern.
 - In this case, Peter's motivation is driven by a practical concern not to put his ministry to the Jews at risk, and not to bring unnecessary persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

How are we pressured to compromise the gospel in our day (either out of shame or out of practical concern)?

- If Peter's concern was, "I don't want my brother to fall into persecution because of my actions" - that should give us pause to consider how easy it would be to rationalize compromise.

There's an interesting reverse parallel here with two accounts in Jewish apocrypha that would have been well-known in Paul's day. Let's take a moment and read them so you can see the significance of the reversal that's taken place:

READ 2 Maccabees 6:18-7:42

In these accounts you have people who willingly suffered persecution, tortured, and death in order to remain faithful.

- In these accounts, the pressure is to compromise by eating unlawful foods and faithfulness is a refusal to do so, even unto death.
- What's striking in Paul's accounts is the pressure to compromise is to withdraw from unclean table fellowship and to be circumcised, and faithfulness means to refuse to circumcise the Gentiles and to share in table fellowship with them, even if it means risking being branded an apostate and suffering persecution.

What was the impact on the Christian community of Peter's behavior as a leader?

- The other Jews among them followed suit by withdrawing (even, as Paul painfully recounts, his long time partner Barnabas was led astray), creating two separate classes among the Christians - those who were Torah-observant and those who weren't.
 - The point is underscored by the fact that in Pharisaic tradition in particular, unless one could be accepted at the meal table one was not qualified for entrance into the kingdom of God, which the table itself portrayed. Feasting and wine in biblical imagery are symbols of the eschatological age (Isa 25:6-8; Jer 31:10-12; Amos 9:12-15). The metaphor of the banquet subsequently is found in Jewish literature (4 Ezra 2:38; 1 Enoch 10:19; 62:14; 2 Apoc. Bar. 29:5-8; 1QS a 2:11-23; Gen. Rab. 62:2; b. San. 153a). Within the Gospels, the bliss of the messianic age is symbolized as a great meal (e.g., Matt 8:11; Luke 14:15; John 2:1-11). This image is used to portray the present realization of the kingdom of God (Mark 14:22-25; 1 Cor 11:23-26) as well as the future consummation when the believer will sit at table with the risen Christ and share in his kingdom (Mark 14:25; Luke 22:30; Rev 19:9)
 - It is important to be fully clear on what the issues were. This was not a matter, as some have absurdly suggested, of people 'learning table manners'. The question was as central as anything could be: is the community of Messiah-believers one body or two? Which is the more important division: that between Jews and non-Jews (because Messiah-believing Jews would still be able to eat with non-Messiah-believing Jews), or that between those who believed and those who did not? Was Messiah-faith simply a subset of Judaism, leaving the basic structure untouched, or did it change everything?
- This clearly wasn't the intention, but it was the result and this is what Paul observes. The Jews at Antioch did not change their beliefs or begin to preach a different gospel, but their actions had the same effect. Their "conduct" was not in step with the truth of the gospel. Peter was acting hypocritically - that is, he believed the same as Paul believed (an important point), but he was not living consistently with it. Peter is not on the side of the Galatian teachers, he just had a lapse of judgment.

The influence Peter's false living led to false living by a lot of believers. How does the same principle still apply?

- It's imperative that we examine ourselves and our lives to ensure that we are living consistent with the profession we make.
- This provides the key point of transition for Paul:
 - The thing the false brethren were trying to impose upon Paul and the Jerusalem leaders
 - The thing Peter and the other brothers inadvertently preached by their hypocritical actions
 - This very thing is what the Galatians are buying into - not the gospel, but the very thing that Paul has been running up against and fighting to defend against, alongside of and in opposition to the Jerusalem leadership.

3. Paul's Rebuke

"If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

How does Peter live like a Gentile?

- When Peter was in Antioch, before the men came from James, he would have table-fellowship with Gentile Christians. This likely involved mixed meals, with Jewish Christians eating meals and food supplied by Gentiles, and likely not kosher. This (eating with Gentiles on Gentile terms) would have been the greater affront, not the speaking or eating with Gentiles on Jewish terms.

How does he force Gentiles to live like Jews?

- By separating from the Gentiles, he essentially rebuilds the wall that the Law had put in place, and implies that for the Gentiles to have full fellowship in the Church they would need to become Jews, with respect to the food laws and possibly even circumcision (though Peter might not have gone so far).

By recounting the incident at Antioch, Paul demonstrates his commitment to maintaining the integrity of this one Gospel, and provides a bridge from his narrative to the situation in Galatia.

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Key to the "truth of the gospel" for Paul is equal standing for the Gentiles within the people of God.

Peter was acting pragmatically, and out of concern for his Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, but in doing so he inadvertently lived a gospel contrary to the one he preached.