

Galatians 2:11-21 – I do not Nullify the Grace of God

So far in the letter to the Galatians, Paul argued that he was a true apostle who was sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father. The gospel which he preached was given to him directly by God. He did not receive it from any person and he did not learn it in some school or conference. In his second visit to Jerusalem, after his conversion, it was verified by James, Peter and John, that Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles just as Peter was an apostle to the Jews. It was also established that the gospel which Paul preached was the same as Peter preached. He didn't need to add anything to it, like circumcision. There was only one true gospel and Paul was preaching it. He received the gold seal of approval from the top church leaders. Peter and Paul were on the same page until Peter came to Antioch in Gentile territory.

Read Galatians 2:11-14.

When did Peter go to Antioch? Antioch was in Syria. It was populated mostly with Gentiles but there were also Jews living there. Why did Paul confront Peter? Who influenced Peter's inconsistent actions? Who else was influenced by Peter's inconsistency? What motivated Peter's hypocrisy? (2:11-13)

Paul was concerned with more than just table manners. What was at stake? Why did Paul confront Peter publicly instead of privately? (2:14)

How was Peter living like a Gentile? Was Paul living like a Gentile? How was Peter forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews? The word "forcing" is the same word that was used in 2:3 when Titus was not forced to be circumcised. (2:14)

What were the implications if Christian Jews and Gentiles could not eat together?

What would you say to someone who thought that Paul was making a big deal out of nothing? They might point out that Paul was inconsistent or a hypocrite when he had Timothy circumcised.

Read Galatians 2:15-21.

Paul used the word “justify” eight times in Galatians. Paul used the word to indicate how someone is declared righteous in the eyes of God. God is holy and he will not let unrighteous people into his kingdom. The question is how do sinners become justified, or righteous given God’s standard of holiness and perfection? Peter and Paul were both born Jews. How were Peter and Paul justified? While Paul was a pharisee, he sought justification through a different means? Where did Saul, the pharisee, think his justification would come from. Look at John 5:39-40. How are Gentiles justified? (Galatians 2:15-16)

When Paul talked about “works of the law”, what laws were included? Was it just the ceremonial laws like circumcision and dietary regulations? Did it also include moral laws like “do not kill, do not commit adultery”? What would you say to someone who said that following God’s moral law was essential for justification, entering into heaven? (2:16)

One objection to the gospel of “by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone” is that it promotes sin. Why live a good life if you didn’t do anything to earn salvation and you can’t do anything to lose it? The blasphemous charge is that this gospel makes Christ a servant or agent of sin. How does Paul respond to this charge? How would you respond if someone said to you that the gospel of grace promotes sin? (2:17)

Verse 18 talks about tearing down and building up. What had Peter and Paul torn down? In withdrawing from the Gentiles, what had Peter begun to build up again? What were the trouble makers in Galatia trying to get the Gentile believers to build up? What is the result of building up the things which were torn down?

In verse 19, what did Paul mean that he died to the law and that he was crucified with Christ? What in Paul’s former life was now dead to him? Look at Romans 6:3-11. How did Paul describe his new life? (2:19-20)

Verse 21 is a very important verse to understand. How were the trouble makers in Galatia nullifying the grace of God? How does justification by works make Jesus’ death on the cross purposeless and meaningless? I personally find the thought of nullifying the grace of God horrifying. I don’t want to be a party to it. I also don’t want any part of implying that Jesus’ death was meaningless or in vain.

How do people today nullify the grace of God? How do people today make Jesus’ death meaningless?