

Agreement short-lived

The agreement that was made in about AD 47 between Paul and the Jerusalem Christians did not last very long. Soon something happened that raised the issue all over again. Galatians 2:11–14 is very closely connected with Galatians 2:1–10. Agreement was reached concerning the fellowship which Jewish and gentile Christians enjoy together, but then something happened which contradicted the harmony that had been reached. When (we might ask) did the incident of Galatians 2:11–21 take place? The ‘agreement’ was reached in or around AD 47. Then Paul and Barnabas went off on an evangelistic tour of lands to the north of Antioch (AD 47–48?). It was probably when Paul got back to Antioch that a crisis arose. Paul tells us what happened. *‘But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him publicly, because he was clearly to be condemned’* ^{☐1}. Paul is using very strong language here. Peter is ‘condemned’. What Peter did was doomed to be disastrous unless he should back away from it speedily. *‘For before certain people came from James he used to eat with gentiles, but when those people came he drew back and kept himself separate because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision people’* ^{☐2}. *Then the other Jewish Christians joined him in this play-acting insincerity. The result was that even Barnabas was led astray by their pretence’* ^{☐3}.

^{☐1} 2:11^{☐2} 2:12^{☐3} 2:13**Peter’s mistakes****What mistakes did Peter make?****1. Not in his teaching**

1. It was not that he adopted the teaching of the ‘false brothers’. It is quite clear that Peter did not in any way change his teaching.

2. He failed to work out his salvation according to his belief

2. Rather what happened was that Peter failed to work out the gospel he believed in. He believed that he was righteous before God simply by his faith in Jesus. He did not believe that he needed to keep the Mosaic law in order to be accepted by God. And he did not believe he needed to keep the Mosaic law in daily living. His growth in godliness would come in an altogether different manner. He actually had given up living in a very Jewish way. Perhaps he did not bother about keeping the Saturday-Sabbath. Some of the foods he ate with gentiles were forbidden by the Mosaic law. In his fellowship with gentile Christians he had ceased to be very Jewish. God accepted him just because of his faith. Peter accepted everyone who had the same faith, whether they were Jewish or not. But then suddenly he backed away from his living the gospel in fellowship with gentiles. He was no longer ‘working out’ his salvation ^{☐1}.

^{☐1} see
Philippians
2:12**3. He failed to see the implications of salvation by grace**

3. He was failing to see the implications of salvation by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus. If God accepts us freely as we trust in Jesus, surely we are to accept others freely as they trust in Jesus. If God does not require ‘works of the law’ from us, we should not require ‘works of the law’ from them.

4. He fell into a spirit of fear

4. Peter fell into a spirit of fear. He was ‘afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision party’. It is amazing but it is true. The leader of the Jerusalem church – the apostle Peter – became afraid of some false brothers who were attaching themselves to the Jerusalem congregation. Legalists can be frightening. Even strong men can become fearful of them.

Paul's response

1. He refused to be afraid of the false brothers

2. He refused to compromise the heart of the gospel

3. He refused to put friendship above the gospel

4. He made a public protest

5. He went back to the basics of the gospel

What did Paul do?

1. He was not afraid of the false brothers – or of anyone else. People who think that salvation is attained by living according to a law-code – God's law-code or their own law-code – can be frightening people. They threaten you with the anger of God. They slander you to your friends. They accuse you of all sorts of terrible things. It is not surprising that Peter was afraid of them. But Paul had a firmer grasp on the gospel. He knew the false brothers were wrong and he refused to be afraid of them.

2. He was not willing to modify the gospel – or the implications of the gospel. Peter believed the gospel but he was at this point a compromiser. Paul could never compromise the heart of the gospel! Peter seemed to be saying 'Well, let's compromise a little bit so that these brothers from Jerusalem will be satisfied' – and so he was willing to please the Judaizers, but break fellowship with true Christians who were gentiles! Paul was much more consistent, much more bold. He was not willing, having put his hand to the plough, to look back and compromise the very essence of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. He was willing to stand against even a close friend – Barnabas. Barnabas was a good colleague, but Paul could not put friendship above the gospel.

4. He publicly protested that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was being ignored. *'But when I saw that they were not straightforwardly living the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "If you, although you are a Jew, are living in a gentile manner and not in a Jewish manner, how can you compel the gentiles to live like Jews?"'*

¶¹. Peter was inconsistent in heeding false brothers and rejecting true brothers. How did this square with the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus – plus nothing?

5. Paul went back to the basic principles of the gospel. This is what he is doing in Galatians 2:15–16. Paul re-states the message of justification by faith only in Jesus, without the necessity of Mosaic law-keeping. This is always a good thing to do in controversy. You go back to the basics. **Salvation** is by grace, through faith, without Mosaic law-keeping. So **fellowship** is by grace, through faith, without Mosaic law-keeping. Anyone who says anything different must be resisted even if it is Peter the leader of the world's first church.

¶¹ 2:14



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