

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 3 – Galatians 2:11-21

Big Idea: The Gospel message is that sinful people are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by observing the law. Peter's behaviour was not in line with this message and therefore it was necessary for Paul to rebuke him

Study Aim: That group members will grasp the heart of the Gospel message (justification by faith and not by works) and be encouraged to live lives that are in line with the truth of the Gospel

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter

How would you define hypocrisy?

Why do we find hypocrisy so distasteful?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 2:11-21.

Passage Questions

What does Peter do when he comes to Antioch¹?

Initially he was happy to eat with the Gentile believers in Antioch but when men came from James he drew back and separated himself from these Gentile believers.

What effect does Peter's action have on others?

Other Jews, even including Barnabas, joined Peter in his hypocrisy and they were led astray.

¹ The city of Antioch played a significant role in the early church. Persecution after Stephen's martyrdom caused believers to spread out to such cities as Antioch, where they shared the Gospel with both Jews and Gentiles. When the church in Jerusalem heard news of such a great number of people coming to faith there they sent Barnabas who was in turn encouraged by what he saw. Barnabas and Paul spent a year with the believers there. Antioch was where believers were first called Christians and, during a famine, they sent aid to their fellow-believers in Judea. See Acts 11.

What is underlying Peter's behaviour here?

Paul mentions fear in verse 12. More deeply, and as we will see as the passage progresses, Peter's fear betrays an underlying misunderstanding of the Gospel message and its implications.

How does Paul respond?

Paul opposes Peter because he believes that Peter has been in the wrong and acted hypocritically.

What does Paul see is at stake here?

Peter, and the others led astray by his behaviour, were "not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel" (v 14). Peter, though a Jew, was happy to act as a Gentile (sharing a meal with them) and yet he, through his withdrawal and separation, showed that he actually believed that Gentiles had to first become Jews before they could become Christians. He was employing a double-standard and had to be rebuked. The very Gospel message, and all that it means and achieves, is what was at stake in this critical episode in early church history.

Activity²

In the verses that follow, Paul continues to explain exactly what was at stake in this incident with Peter at Antioch.

Split your group into pairs or triplets. Have each pair/triplet complete the following table from verses 15-21.

	At the start of the Christian life	Throughout the Christian life
The place of the law	<i>Observing the law doesn't justify³.</i>	<i>Through the law we have died to the law.</i>
The place of faith in Christ	<i>Faith in Jesus Christ justifies.</i>	<i>Having died, our (new) life is now lived by faith in the Son of God.</i>

² Sourced from 'Free for all – Galatians' – Matthias Media Study Guide – p 30.

³ This is the first time that this important concept of justification is used in Galatians. Therefore, it may be necessary to explain its meaning for some people in our groups (and to remind others). Put simply, it has to do with how we can have a right standing before God (i.e. be accepted, seen to be righteous, declared innocent before him). In Greek, the words for justify/justified/justification and righteous/righteousness all have the same root word. Thus, although it would be terrible English, you could say that someone is 'righteous-ified' in the same way as you could say someone is justified.

Bring your group back together. Share responses for each category entry in the table⁴. (Try and ensure that each of the pairs/triplets have the opportunity to make a contribution).

Passage Questions cont.

How do verses 15-21 relate to Paul's episode with Peter?⁵

Peter's behaviour (vv 11-14) was, in effect, a denial of the fundamental Gospel truths outlined in verses 15-21. Therefore, having referred to the incident with Peter, Paul provides further defence for his response.

In what ways do verses 20-21 sum up Paul's position?

There is an emphasis on Jesus' person and work – his love and his self-giving. Jesus' work on Paul's behalf is such that Paul can say that he no longer lives but it is all about Christ living in him. The life that he lives is a life of faith in Jesus. Alarming, if the false teachers are right, and righteousness is possible through observing the law, Christ died for nothing!

⁴ It is important to be aware that in engaging in this activity (i.e. thinking through the place of the law and the place of faith) people will naturally err towards answering 'from their head' rather than 'from the passage'. This is actually more true than we'd like to admit when it comes to reading the Bible, whether personally or in groups. Unfortunately, given its prevalence, it's a bad way of reading the Bible and ultimately one that's detrimental to our faith. Therefore, when the group comes back together after the activity it is a good opportunity to gently prompt people to demonstrate that their responses do actually come from the passage. As the leader, you don't have to come across as though you're the heresy police when you do this! It can be done in quite a non-threatening way through the use of follow-up prompting questions spoken in a kind and moderate tone – e.g. "Where did you see that in the passage?" or "Can you help us see what verse that's in?" It is also important if you use these prompting questions to follow up on a few different responses (i.e. including those that you would consider to be biblical and orthodox) rather than just singling out one particular individual that you have doubts about. In terms of the bigger picture of leading Bible studies more generally, it's a good idea as a leader to have these prompting questions up your sleeve to use at other times as well.

Incidentally, this is where you see the true beauty of using an inductive rather than deductive style of Bible study. I.e. Inductive – where facts are observed and then interpreted to reach a conclusion, as opposed to Deductive – where conclusions are made and then facts are searched for and commandeered to back up the conclusion.

⁵ This question is important to draw the passage as a whole back together.

How does our whole passage contribute to Paul's overall response to the situation in these Galatian churches?⁶

Remember the situation: false teachers have come in and taught the Galatian believers a different, perverted version of the Gospel of Christ. This has introduced confusion and caused the churches to turn to this different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Peter's outward actions in Antioch communicated something of this different gospel – that Gentile believers needed to take on Jewish practices in order to be Christian. Paul will have nothing of it (cf 1:8-9). In terms of justification, Gentile believers are justified in the same way that Jewish Christians are justified – solely by faith in Jesus. Furthermore, for both, this Christian life is one that is lived by faith in Jesus throughout its duration and not by law observance.

Application Questions

From our Activity we saw that faith alone is central both at the start and throughout the Christian life (It is faith in Jesus that justifies. Our new life is one that is lived by faith). What challenges pose a threat to this for us?

Think about your personal life. What additions to faith might others sense as being necessary in order to be right with God?

Think about our church life. What additions to faith might others sense as being necessary in order to be right with God?

Prayer Points

Praise God for Jesus, the Son of God – who loved us and gave himself for us.

Thank God for the Gospel message – that we are not justified by what we do but only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thank God that the way we start the Christian life is the same as the way we continue in the Christian life – by faith.

Ask God for his forgiveness for the hypocritical ways in which we have not acted in line with the truth of the Gospel.

Ask God to help us identify areas in our personal life, and in our church life, that others could misunderstand as being necessary to be right with God.

⁶ This question serves both a contextual and a summary purpose. It points people back to the context of the letter – the earlier passages in the book that we have looked at in previous weeks – and explores the contribution that this particular passage makes to the overall argument. As a summarising question it also helps people to crystallise in their own words what the big idea of the passage is. They are helpful to use at the end of studies to draw together the observations and reflections that have been made during the study.