



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

NOG #9: Paul the Midwife: Church Birthed out of Judaism

Bible Reading: Galatians 2:11-18

[Watch LIVESTREAM here at 10am](#)

[Join our post-sermon discussion on Zoom at 11am](#)

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SUMMARY:

Church conflicts are ugly & painful; yet they happen. Scripture eschews a utopian ideal; it realistically reports conflict, even among church leaders—e.g., Paul, Peter, & James. We can learn from their actions & reactions. The church's emergence from Judaism produced tensions—some soon resolved, others not. The 'Antioch incident' was no 'tempest in a teapot;' it was a major watershed. Both major players had divine revelations. Paul testified, "I did not disobey the heavenly vision." Peter couldn't say that. When James' delegation arrived, insisting Jewish believers segregate from Gentile "sinners" at fellowship meals, Peter retreated, splitting the church between Jews & Gentiles. Paul reacted, rebuking Peter to his face. This was no power play. Paul saw that this violated the gospel truth—all believers justified by faith, are equal members in God's family. Paul's rearguard action, despite the other leaders' defection, prevented Christianity from being reabsorbed back into Judaism. The other leaders' intransigence left Paul isolated, yet Church history vindicates Paul. In the church old distinctions along ethnic/racial lines can't coexist with faith in Christ—new creation's sole distinctive. At Antioch Paul was a 'midwife' birthing the church out of Judaism.

I. Christian church birthed out of Judaism (Acts 11:19-21)

- "The Christian church was birthed out of Judaism."—Timothy Tennent
- "In its 1st generation, Christianity was a Jewish movement...[there was a] *painful process of separation*."—Martin Goodman

II. Apostle Paul the Midwife: the Christian Church Birthed out of Judaism (Gal. 4:19)

- Paul is “the ‘apostolic mother’...birthing a spiritually fully-formed Galatian community of believers.”—James Harrison
- “Paul is substantially responsible for the Jesus movement’s not ending up as a movement of Jews only.”—Charlotte Fonrobert

III. Crisis & Confrontation in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-21)

A. Cornelius sets the precedent (Acts 10:1-11:18) He’s a ‘God-fearer’ associated with the Jewish synagogue (Acts 10:2)

B. Real Gospel breakthrough to pagan Greeks by Anonymous Refugees in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21)

C. The Antioch Incident (Gal. 2:11-21)

– “*The Antioch incident was a watershed in the early church. It forced Paul to split from the Antioch... church.*”—Michael Bird

– “Antioch...[is] *one of the greatest defining moments* in Paul’s theology...indeed in Christian theology”—James Dunn

IV. The Major Players—Paul, Peter, & James

A. Paul—an ‘Alpha Male’? A ‘Rogue Apostle’?

– “Paul may *have harbored some envy* against [Peter]...*Paul displays all the characteristics of an alpha-male.*”—Larry Helyer

– We’re “interested...whether Paul was a *Rogue Apostle* (as some thought in the early church...)”—David Wenham

– “*Paul was furious when representatives of James came to Antioch* (Gentile territory) & treated it as...their apostolate...” — Margaret Mitchell

B. Apostle Paul: ‘not disobedient to the heavenly vision’ (Acts 26:19)

- “So then, King Agrippa, *I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision...*” (Acts 26:19)

C. Peter (Cephas)—ecumenical ‘Bridge-Man’? Or Church-divider?

- “Peter was...*the ‘bridge man’...Peter, as shown particularly by the Antioch episode in Gal. 2,* [could]...hold firm to his Jewish *heritage...& [be] open...to...developing Christianity.*”—James Dunn
- Peter’s “action...*divided the church into 2 camps...*No doubt Peter’s action...hurt the Antioch believers personally. It implied ...Gentile believers were 2nd-class citizens...But Paul saw...the deadly intrusion of the Law...Paul reacted.”—Larry Richards

D. James the brother of Jesus (Acts 15:13, 19; 21:10-21)

- At Antioch “*the absent James was a more powerful influence than the present Paul*”—C. K. Barrett

V. How the Antioch Crisis Unfolded (Gal. 2:11-18)

A. Preview of the key act: Paul confronts Peter. (Gal. 2:11)

– “But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.” (Gal. 2:11)

B. Beginning: Peter regularly eats with Gentile believers. (Gal. 2:12a)

– Peter “regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James.” (Gal. 2:12a)

C. Catalyst: “However, when [certain men came from James]...” (Gal. 2:12b)

1. The influence of James—“*absent James was a more powerful influence than the present Paul*”—C. K. Barrett

– “Peter obeys James rather than relying on the conclusions...*he’d previously reached* [in Cornelius’ case]”—P. McKechnie

2. The Issue—Not the Menu, but the Meal Companions

D. Actions: “Peter withdrew & separated himself...” (Gal. 2:12c)

- Peter’s motivation – fear (Gal. 2:12d)
- Peter’s negative influence—“the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy” (Gal. 2:13)

VI. Paul's Discernment & Response

A. Discernment: "I saw...they were deviating from the truth of the gospel..." (Gal. 2:14a)

- "Eating with the Gentile [believers] is *not the better of two good choices, but the only possible choice...*" –Jack Gibson

B. Response: Challenge: "You're a Jew, but live like a Gentile how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal. 2:14b)

VII. The Fundamental Issues

A. Are Gentile Believers equal members? Or, are they still "Sinners" vs. Jews—"the Righteous"?

- "The question...is...Who is a member of the people of God? Are ex-pagan converts full members or not?" –N. T. Wright
- "Paul believed [faith in Jesus] was the vital thing. [So] *nothing...[of] the Law...was to come between one Jesus-follower & another.*" –N. T. Wright

B. Is the Church a Two-Tier Body?

- "Is the [Church]...*one body or two?...[Is it]...a two-tier body...[with] an inner-group & an outer-group?*" –N. T. Wright

C. Paul's Position—Alone, Standing Firm for Gospel Truth

- "*Now Paul stands alone* because the others...betray the gospel." –Christopher Land

D. Peter Or Paul—Which Pattern to Follow?

- "Antioch...provides a striking contrast between *two kinds of behavior*. Peter turning from the truth of the gospel...[while] Paul stood firm in the face of outward pressure. The Galatians...must choose which example they will follow." –Frank Matera

Questions

A. The message Summary says "Church conflicts are ugly & painful; yet they happen." Have you ever experienced a Church conflict? In what way was it "ugly" &/or "painful"? Paul says (elsewhere) "all things work together *for good*" (Rom. 8:28). If you've been through a church conflict (or split), can you identify some "good" that resulted from it? (Share)

B. Let's focus first on the behavior of Peter (Cephas) as described in Gal. 2:11-21

1. What did Peter (Cephas) do when he first arrived in Antioch? How did he behave (related to the Antioch congregation)?
2. After some time, how did Peter's behavior change?
3. What was the external catalyst which caused Peter's change?
4. What was the underlying motive to which Paul attributed to Peter's change?
5. What adjective did Paul use to describe the actions of Peter, the other Jews, & Barnabas?
6. Do you agree or disagree with Paul's assessment (in #4 & #5 above) (Why or why not?)

C. James Dunn's assessments of Peter (Cephas)

- James Dunn describes Peter as a "bridge man." Moreover J. Dunn says, "*Peter, as shown particularly by the Antioch episode in Gal 2, had both a care to hold firm to his Jewish heritage..., & an openness to the demands of developing Christianity...So...Peter...becomes the focal point of unity for the whole church.*"

1. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. Based on Peter's role in Gal. 2:11-21 is Peter a "bridge man," joining diverse people & groups together? (Why or why not?)
3. In Gal. 2:11-21 is Peter "the focal point of unity" for the Antioch church? ...for the wider church? (Why or why not?)

D. Larry Richards' assessment of Peter (Cephas)

Larry Richards' describes Peter differently from J. Dunn. Richards says: Peter's "action...*divided the church into two camps...No doubt Peter's action & that of the Jewish minority...hurt the Antioch believers personally.* It implied that Gentile believers were 2nd-class citizens in God's kingdom."

1. Do you agree or disagree with L. Richards' view (Why or why not?)
2. Which points in Richards' statement deserve the most emphasis? (Why?)

E. Paul's Intervention

1. Did Paul's intervention make a "bad situation worse"? Or did it actually (or potentially) make things better?

2. Was Paul “making a mountain out of a molehill,” making a big issue out of a small error/mistake?

F. Consider Paul’s opening statement to Peter (Gal. 2:14):

- Paul writes: “I told Cephas [Peter] in front of everyone, ‘If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile & not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?’ (Gal. 2:14b, c)
 1. What does Paul mean by telling Peter: “You, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile & not like a Jew” (Gal. 2:14b)? In what way was Peter “living like a Gentile”? In what way was Peter “living not like a Jew”?
 2. Paul asks Peter: “How can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Gal. 2:14c). In what way was Peter “compelling” (forcing) Gentile believers in Antioch to “live like Jews,” to “Judaize”? Is Paul exaggerating, or being rhetorical?