

was taken quite seriously. And even though some might misconstrue his gathering of funds from the Gentiles (as possibly as way of “buying” their acceptance into the Jewish community), such a possibility never discouraged Paul. As a matter of principle, it was the right thing to do, regardless of how some might have misunderstood.³¹

11–13 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

The incident of Peter’s activity in Antioch is now addressed. Given the background of the previous verses, that all had entered into an agreement pertaining to the scope of their respective missions, it is all the more clear why Paul was particularly upset at Peter’s actions. He writes as a member of the Antioch community (“Cephas came to Antioch”) but also as one of the leaders commissioned by the Jerusalem pillars themselves to oversee and represent the believing community of the diaspora, particularly the Gentiles who were no doubt a growing majority of that community. For Peter to therefore act in a way that undermined the unity of the believing community, and to do so against the clear position of Paul and (at least initially) Barnabas, was doubly to undermine the truth of the gospel and the position of the community’s leaders. It seems clear that Paul’s abrupt shift to this narrative scene is done to highlight the contrast between the apparent shalom of the “handshake” in Jerusalem and the otherwise contrary actions of Peter.

To oppose someone “face to face” is a common Hebrew idiom. Note the following:

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (Ex 8:20)

He will deliver their kings into your hand so that you will make their name perish from under heaven; no man will be able to stand before you until you have destroyed them. (Deut 7:24)

No man will be able to stand before you; the LORD your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you. (Deut 11:25)

No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. (Josh 1:5)

In all of the verses above, the underlined phrases represent the Hebrew **יצב**,

31 I am reminded of recent statements by some Rabbis that relief sent to Israel from the Christian Church had ulterior motives connected to it (i.e., a softening of the Jews for Christian evangelism) and that it therefore should be rejected.

yatzav, “to take one’s stand firmly, to resist”³² followed by the Hebrew פָּנָה, “front, face.” To “confront” in the Hebrew is “to stand before someone’s face,” or “to stand in someone’s face.” Paul simply puts this Hebraism into Greek with κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ, *kata prosōpon autō*, “opposite of his face” = “face to face.”

Paul does not hide his disgust with Peter’s actions, nor did he keep the whole matter private. Such outward actions of community division, based as they were on a denial of the heart of the gospel (as Paul will shortly explain), warranted public confrontation. Peter “stood condemned” (ὅτι κατεγνωσμένος ἦν, *hoti kategnosmenos en*, “because condemned he was”).³³ The precise meaning Paul intends here is not clear, but his words mean either that all right-thinking people would see the hypocrisy of Peter’s actions, and thus reason them to be wrong, or that Peter’s actions surely would have been condemned in the divine court, since he was acting contrary to the very agreement (handshake) in which he participated previously in Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul means that Peter was self-condemned, that he knew he had done wrong and was unwilling to admit it (cf. 1John 3:20-21, the only other place the word is used). Regardless of the precise meaning, the overarching meaning is clear: Peter had no righteous foundation for his actions—they were purely self-serving, not flowing from principles found in a life of faith based upon the gospel.

It is clear that the issue at hand was that of table fellowship—eating together as that which constituted covenant membership in the most practical ways. We would do well to investigate more what constituted table fellowship in the 1st Century.

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Excursus – Table Fellowship as Represented in the Rabbinic Literature

In the general history of the Christian Church, it has been assumed that the Judaism(s) of the 1st Century strictly disallowed any observant Jew from eating with Gentiles. For instance, Strack and Billerbeck write:

Social intercourse of observant Jews with non-Jews was practically impossible Only reluctantly, one would enter a non-Jewish house; and a Jew would feel even more uncomfortable when having a Goy in his own home. Hence table fellowship of Jews and Goyim was hardly possible, whether the Israelite was host or guest.³⁴

However, more recent evaluations of the Judaisms in the 1st Century have opened the issue to new investigation. Yehezkel Cohen has shown that the Jewish sources themselves contain no precise prohibition for Jews and non-Jews to engage in mutual hospitality. In fact, Mishnah *Avodah Zera* 5:5 reads:

If [an Israelite] was eating with [a gentile] at a table, and, leaving in his presence a flagon [of wine] on the table and another flagon on the side-table, left him and went out—what is on the table is forbidden, but what

32 HALOT, “יצב”.

33 Note BDAG “καταγνώσκω” where they give parallels in non-biblical Greek to the use of this word meaning “commonly acknowledged to be condemned.”

34 Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols. (München, 1928), 4.374. Translation from Peter Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law in Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Fortress, 1990), p. 230.

is on the side-table is permitted.

The point of the Mishnah is simply that what is forbidden to the Jew is anything that has been offered to an idol. Since, if the Jew leaves the room the non-Jew might pour out some of the wine as a libation to the house idol, and since this would contaminate the whole flagon of wine as a libation to the idol, to drink of it would be to participate in the libation offering and thus render the person an idol worshiper. But what is important for the discussion at hand is the evidence that Jew and non-Jew eating together was so so common an occurrence as to require *halachic* discussions in the Mishnah.

Furthermore, the words of two prominent sages (R. Yoshua and R. Tsadok [both late 1st Century]) in the company of the Yavneh Sages extol universal love of mankind as practiced by Abraham and the Shekinah (visible glory of God). R. Meir is recorded as saying:

A certain gentile living in our town arranged a banquet for all the town's dignitaries, inviting me too, and offered us of all that the Holy One, blessed by He, made on the six days of creation; nothing was lacking from his table but crack-nuts. What did he do? He took the beautiful table before him, worth six talents of silver, and smashed it.... I applied the verse to him, "[The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but] the belly of the wicked suffers want" [Prov. 13:25].³⁵

"Everything created in six days" means that there was kosher and non-kosher food. Yet R. Meir [mid-2nd Century] is apparently at the table. The point of the statement is that R. Meir considered the gentile a righteous man, since his table was full, and even then he would not settle for less than complete. We may also assume that there would have been a libation ritual at the pouring of the wine, and that this also did not hinder the rabbi's place at the festival.

Why was R. Meir not concerned with contamination by the idol worshiper? It appears that he was willing to set aside his strict purity laws in favor of good relations with his neighbors. He even says that a Gentile who studies Torah is like the high priest.³⁶

But the Jewish literature also demonstrates a different opinion. For instance, a pupil of R. Meir, R. Shimon ben Elazar states:

R. Shimon ben Elazar says: Israelites outside of the land worship idols in purity. How? If a non-Jew prepared a wedding feast for his son and sent out to invite all Jews in his town—even if they have food and drink of their own and have their own servant waiting at them, they worship idols, they worship idols. Thus it is said: "[Lest you make a covenant ... when they sacrifice to their gods and] when one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice" [Exod 34:15]³⁷

Another source confirms this contrary view. An anonymous quote in Seder Eliahu Rabba³⁸ says:

35 From *Pesikta de-R. Kahana*, quoted from Peter J. Tomson, *Ibid.*, p. 232.

36 *b.Bava Kama* 38a.

37 *t.Avodah Zarah* 4.6.

38 Also called "Aggadat Bereshit," Seder Eliahu Rabba is a midrashic

one should observe in his heart not to eat with a Gentile at table... Thus they taught: anyone who eats with a Gentile at table, worships idols and eats sacrifices to the dead.

This perspective is confirmed in Jubilees:

And do thou, my son Jacob, remember my words, And observe the commandments of Abraham, thy father: Separate thyself from the nations, And eat not with them: And do not according to their works, And become not their associate; For their works are unclean, And all their ways are a Pollution and an abomination and uncleanness. (Jub 22:16)

And m.*Oholim* 18:7 states, “the dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean.” Tacitus records that the Jews “eat separately,”³⁹ all of which is confirmed by the statements of Peter in Acts 10:14 and 11:3, 8. Thus, against the viewpoint that interaction with Gentiles was common, there existed the rulings and practice of some Sages that contact with Gentiles should be severely limited, and eating with them forbidden.

These data highlight a phenomenon well attested throughout the literature, namely, that the *halachah* of table fellowship between Jew and non-Jew was not yet completely settled in the early centuries. There appear to have been two opinions: one, that accommodation to the Gentiles was necessary and even acceptable, and a second, that close contact with Gentiles, especially in the realm of table fellowship, was not only unwise, but a compromise of essential covenant requirements. One could well imagine that the more lenient view was the majority, while the strict position was held by the few. If this were the case, then Peter could well have rationalized his vacillation as an accommodation of both camps.

We should remember the various ways in which table fellowship had taken on almost sacred proportions in the 1st Century. The long-standing Semitic emphasis upon hospitality, and the offering of a meal as an important part of that acceptance, meant that eating together was both a cultural expectation as well as a covenantal one. What is more, the *barachah* (blessing) said at the initial breaking of the bread was participated in by all through the “amen,” as well as by participating in eating the bread over which the blessing had been offered to God. Thus, even the common table took on a kind of “sacramental” nature.

But at the Jewish table of the 1st Century, all of the laws (both those well confirmed as well as those emerging within the rabbinic debates) governing purities came into play as well. These involved the separation of clean and unclean animals, the laws of ritual slaughter to assure that the blood had been properly disposed of, and a separation from all things tainted by the common idolatry of the pagan society in which Israel lived. Taken together, these concerns gave plenty of motivation for “building fences,” the most obvious being avoiding the Gentiles all together. In this sense, remaining separate from the Gentiles was more a conscious effort to maintain the purity laws than it was to uphold any prejudiced view against non-Jews. What is more, at a time when national identity was being threatened by Hellenism in general, it is understandable how purity laws and the food laws that went along with them

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work incorporating earlier midrashic material. Its composition is very late, but it is possible that it reflects in some measure the period of earlier midrashim.

39 *Histories* 5.5.1-2.

became identity markers for the Jewish community.

The importance of these laws and traditions within second-Temple Judaism should not be underestimated. Uncleanness was a relative matter (prohibition from participating in the cult during the period of impurity); but disregard of the blood taboos entailed being ‘cut off from the people’; and anything which gave scope to idolatry infringed Israel’s loyalty to the one God. As with circumcision, the Maccabean crisis made the food laws a test case of national loyalty and religious faithfulness (1Macc 1:62-63; 2Macc 5:27).⁴⁰

The erecting of “fences” in order to guard purity issues in regard to table fellowship most likely underlies the hand washing routines initiated by the Pharisees (note Mark 7:3ff).⁴¹

----- End: Exkursus -----

With these few data in mind, we may now ask some questions regarding Peter’s actions and Paul’s disapproval. First, the text is clear that the issue at hand revolved around table fellowship. At one point Peter willingly eats with the Gentiles, but when some “from James” came to Antioch, he withdrew eating with the non-Jews because apparently he knew these Jerusalemites would frown upon his practice, and he was more intent upon pleasing them than continuing his table fellowship with the Gentiles. Yet in light of what we have seen about the yet-to-be-settled nature of the *halachah*, it is a little easier to appreciate Peter’s dilemma. While his strict Jewish brethren were not in attendance, he bent to the majority opinion, that eating with Gentiles was okay. Moreover, these were believing Gentiles, so the larger issues of food impurities (at least from a biblical standpoint) or food offered to idols were a non-factor. But when the Jerusalem contingent arrive, who no doubt held the minority view, Peter vacillated back to the minority *halachah*, one he more than likely had personally held before. So while we will see that from Paul’s perspective Peter’s actions were a theological strike against the gospel, from Peter’s vantage point he may have simply been choosing between two acceptable norms, albeit at odds with each other in certain points.

A second question that presents itself is why Peter’s eating with Gentile believers would have been viewed as unacceptable by the group from James. What was the problem from their vantage point? Since, as the data have shown, there clearly were authorities who saw nothing wrong in eating with Gentiles as long as certain precautions were taken, why would the Jerusalem company not be willing to be more flexible, especially since these were not just any Gentiles—they were Gentiles who had confessed Yeshua as Messiah?

While the answer to this question is more elusive, some logical deductions may be made. First, it would seem obvious that the purpose of the visit from Jerusalem was the issue of Gentile inclusion. And we should likewise presume that those who came already had concluded that Gentiles

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 118.

⁴¹ The notice that “the Pharisees and all Jews” engaged in these purity issues should probably be understood as “the Pharisees and all Judeans,” the latter expression meaning those Jews who were particularly attached to the Temple and Jerusalem in a religious sense.

should not participate in the community on equal footing with Jews—they should undergo the ritual of a proselyte and make a complete and full commitment to being “Jewish” (at least from the rabbinic viewpoint). If they were coming with this conclusion firmly in hand, then table fellowship with the Gentiles in this case was a direct statement to the contrary. It was salt in a wound that was already considered painful enough. Secondly, we should not overlook the political factors that may have weighed in on this situation. In a time when Jewish identity continued to erode, the need for stricter boundary markers was all that much more valued. As such, the inclusion of the Gentiles as indistinguishable from the Jews only threatened the self-identity of the Jewish community, and was therefore frowned upon. Peter’s “fear of the circumcision” may therefore have gone beyond theological realm to that of the socio-political. Even as Paul, in his former years, had resorted to violence in the zealotry of his cause, it is likewise conceivable that the circumcision party was heightened in their zeal for national identity. Dunn notes:

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Such pressure could very well lie behind Paul’s criticism of Peter that he acted ‘out of fear of those of the circumcision’; whether the criticism was justified or not, Peter’s action might well appear to be stimulated by fear of those who, like Paul before, had been prepared to use violence to maintain Jewish ethnic and religious distinctiveness. ‘Those of the circumcision’ (cf. Rom 4:12; Col 4:11; Tit 1:10) signifies a group whose self-identity was bound up with circumcision, that is, here at least, with maintaining the distinctive markers of Jewish identity which circumcision itself most clearly expressed; Peter could well have shown some trepidation at confronting such zealous Jews, believers included (cf. Acts 11:2; 2Cor 11:26; Rom 15:31).⁴²

Thirdly, in attempting to understand Peter’s actions, we should simply presume a weakness on Peter’s part in regard to acceptance by those in his immediate company. We saw this during the trial of Yeshua (though admittedly, this is an extreme case). Peter may have been one who, at least in this phase of his life, was weak when it came to standing upon principle in the face of personal rejection. According to the previous verses, Peter and the “pillars” had been entrusted with the responsibility of the Jews, while Paul and Barnabas were representing the Gentiles within The Way. Peter may have been persuaded in his own thinking that he was, in some measure, being disloyal to his own people if he were to maintain his associations with the Gentiles. As such, he waffled at the approach of the Jerusalem group, desiring to be fully accepted by his own people.

A third question: did the group that came from Jerusalem represent the will of James? The text would imply this: “... prior to the coming of certain men from James ...” would indicate that they came representing James. But while this may be the implication, it is by no means certain, at least by the language itself. To “come from” (ἐρχόμεαι + ἀπό, *erchomai* + *apo*) is often used in geographical designations (e.g., “to come from Jerusalem”) and does not necessarily carry with it a sense of representation. It is possible, of course, that James himself had become persuaded that Gentiles should take on the covenant symbol of circumcision before being fully accepted within the community, but this seems unlikely. More likely, in my estimation, is that this group came from Jerusalem, appearing to represent James and the leadership there, but without any genuine official stamp-of-approval for their mission and message.

⁴² Dunn, *Galatians*, 123.

A fourth question revolves around the language of v. 12. What is meant by Peter holding himself “aloof” (NASB)? Actually, the word (ἀφορίζω, *aphorizō*) means “to separate,” and thus the translation “aloof” is interpretive on the part of the NASB. The NIV and ESV have it correctly: “and separated himself.” Peter’s withdrawal from table fellowship was a clear act of separation from his Gentile brothers in Yeshua. He was acting the part of a Pharisee, the name itself most likely meaning “to separate” (note the assonance with the Greek word as well). It was this separation that caused such consternation on the part of Paul.

A fifth question comes from v. 13. Who were the “rest of the Jews (Judeans)” who “joined him in hypocrisy,” even including Barnabas? These were, no doubt, the Jewish element of the Antiochan assembly, who previously were fellowshiping without reservation with the Gentile believers, but who were urged away from this unity to a separatist position by the message of the “circumcision party.” If we were to speculate that James was in agreement with their message, and with this notice that even Barnabas lent his support, it is clear that the pressures formed by the centuries of tradition were strong indeed. The gospel had been so long cast in a Jewish mold, that to envision it ever existing otherwise was not only impossible, it was also theologically errant. Here we come to understand that the message of Yeshua, and even more so, Paul, was revolutionary not because it was brand new or never before heard, but because it cut across so many layers of traditions. And having cut across so much tradition, it appeared innovative and new, when in fact it was a throwback to a time when Torah defined Israel rather than Israel defining the Torah.

Sixth question: (v. 13) how was it that Paul could judge them and Peter as being hypocrites? We should note the language which, though Barnabas is included, skirts the accusation that he too was a hypocrite, for Paul speaks of “their hypocrisy” which carried (interjecting a passive sense) Barnabas away. Surely this must have been a blow to Paul. To have his own working companion side with the others and against him must have been nearly devastating. Yet the language Paul employs might indicate that he considered Barnabas’ actions a lapse in judgment that would soon be corrected (and by all accounts, it was).

But what was the hypocrisy Dunn considers the use of the word “hypocrisy” as polemical, and just an indication of the fierceness of the disagreement. But while this may be true (after all, Paul is using rhetorical irony throughout the epistle), I doubt that this is Paul’s usage here. I think he did consider these actions hypocritical, if for no other reason than that they, to one extent or another, denied the very gospel that was the heart and soul of The Way. This Paul plainly states: (v. 14) “... they were not straightforward with the gospel ...” Here is the crux for Paul: the gospel message was null and void if it was not lived out in truth. The “truth of the gospel,” that is, its very heart and soul, is that salvation begins with God’s sovereign choice, and is made real in the life of the sinner through drawing close to God by faith in His Messiah. No one remains a covenant member who is not also changed in heart by the Spirit of God, and walks a life of faith, i.e., a life conformed to the image of Yeshua. To make ethnicity a fundamental factor in covenant membership is to miss the very reason for Yeshua’s death in the first place. For He died, not to make Gentiles into Jews, nor to erase Jewish identity in favor of some ethereal spiritual entity, but to bring together all the nations of the earth to be blessed in Abraham. Only a living, viable

community that demonstrated this reality could be champions of the gospel that Paul proclaimed. And eating together was at the heart of this expression, for it demonstrated in the common table the oneness of Jew and Gentile in the risen Messiah. Conversely, to deny the inclusion of the Gentile believers as Gentiles, was likewise to deny that the death and resurrection of Yeshua had accomplished what the Father had promised to Abraham: “in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Furthermore, such a denial was also a denial of the gospel as it is found to reside in the person and work of Yeshua. One cannot help but comment that the current debate among some Messianic groups, to the effect that the so-called “Messianic movement” is primarily for Jews and not for Gentiles, falls into precisely the same trap, and deserves the same rebuke that Paul directed towards Peter. While we each may have an ethnic identity with this people group or that, our ultimate and final identity is found in Yeshua and in Him alone. This in no way diminishes our ethnicity, but rather brings it to its intended purpose, whether Jew or non-Jew. But in finding our final identity in the Messiah, we likewise find solid ground for unity in the midst of our diversities. For each of us is a sinner saved by God’s grace without regard to our bloodline. And thus we find commonality both in our having been sinners as well as being saved from our sin through His sovereign work of salvation. We were all dug from the same pit, and we all were adopted into the same family, given the same privileges and responsibilities by the same Father. But simply affirming this as theologically true without living it out in the context of life and community is actually to deny that we believe it at all. The proof of our oneness is found in the “pudding” of our lives together: Jew and non-Jew functioning as the equal children we are in the family of God.

Paul’s public rebuke of Peter is therefore a statement about the gospel. As a leader, commissioned by the very same pillars who extended the handshake to Paul, Peter deserves open rebuke for his hypocrisy, and Paul was not timid to give it. “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how do you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (v. 14). Here Peter’s hypocrisy is evident: he was compelling the Gentiles to do what he himself was not doing.

How was it that Peter was “living like the Gentiles?” Clearly the issue at hand, from Peter’s viewpoint and those who had come from Jerusalem, was that of identity and the boundary markers that governed this identity. “To live like a Jew” was to adhere to those boundary markers that were widely known as Jewish. Likewise, to “live like a Gentile” was to adopt those patterns of life which, sociologically, marked a person as a non-Jew. But we should understand these phrases as relative terms. Paul is not suggesting that Peter had entirely abandoned his Jewish way of life, nor that he had taken on pagan modes of living. Rather, the terminology is polemical, and no doubt reflects the verbiage of the controversy itself.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

What does “live like the Gentiles” imply? As Dunn notes, this seems to be the language of an “intra-Jewish polemic,” being a common term used within the dialog and debates of the “party of the circumcision.” For instance, we know that during the Maccabean and post-Maccabean period, some Jews saw them-

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