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Daily Devotional - Wednesday, January 8, 2025 - Faith vs. Law

JANUARY 08TH 2025 BY DEE LOFLIN

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If you've been a member of a congregation on the verge of a split, you know how confusing and painful it can be. Unfortunately, this threat to Christian unity is as old as the church itself. The transition into today's passage feels abrupt. Paul just finished describing the harmony between himself and the Jerusalem apostles (vv. 1–10). Then suddenly, he reports on a direct, public confrontation when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch (v. 11).

Many Jewish believers had fled to Antioch because of persecution, and they had shared the gospel with the Gentiles in that prominent city (Acts 11). A great number of people believed, and “the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:21, 26). The church leaders in Jerusalem felt responsible for this fast-growing body of believers, so they sent Barnabas to encourage and train them (Acts 11:22–24). Barnabas recruited Paul to join him (Acts 11:25–26). And for a year, the two men had disciplined the Antioch church. As a result, Antioch became a home base for Paul and a launching pad for his missionary work.

At some point, Peter also came to help. But unfortunately, the visit went south. Paul describes a significant shift in Peter's behavior. When Peter first arrived, he ate with both the Jews and Gentiles. But when James's disciples came from Jerusalem, arguing that the Gentiles ought to be circumcised, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and refused to fellowship with them (Gal. 2:12). In Paul's estimation, he did so out of fear. To make matters worse, the Jewish believers of Antioch followed his lead, and even Barnabas was "led astray" (v. 13).

Paul boldly called them all hypocrites. He publicly challenged Peter to live in alignment with the believer's justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone, not by the works of the Law (v. 16).

Why did Paul challenge Peter? What ripple effect did their disagreement have? Why was it necessary?

Even the strongest believers can fall victim to legalism and hypocrisy. Galatians chapter 2 is a stark reminder of this danger. Loving Jesus, may we never forget that we are not under Law but under grace.

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