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Daily Devotional - Friday, January 10, 2025 - Faith vs. Law

JANUARY 10TH 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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Daily Devotional - Wednesday, January 8, 2025 - Faith vs. Law

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Daily Devotional - Tuesday, January 7, 2025 - Defending the Truth

JANUARY 07TH 2025 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Tuesday, January 7, 2025 - Defending the Truth

Over the centuries, the gospel message has been distorted in many ways, from an over-emphasis on rules or performance to an excessive pursuit of emotion to supernatural wonders or prosperity. Still today, Christians must be vigilant about discerning and protecting the truth.

In Galatians 2, Paul jumps forward 14 years to his second Jerusalem visit as a follower of Christ (v. 1). For this important trip, he took with him Barnabas, his principal partner. Barnabas provided support and substantiation as Paul defended his ministry to the “esteemed leaders” who had been hearing defamatory reports from spies (v. 2).

Paul explained that he traveled to Jerusalem “in response to a revelation” (v. 2). He doesn’t tell the story of how he received this particular “revelation,” but he uses the same word that he did in 1:12 to speak of his conversion encounter on the Damascus Road. This repetition highlights the fact that God alone is leading Paul’s ministry, every step of the way.

In Jerusalem, Paul met privately with the most prominent apostles and gave them a report regarding his gospel ministry to the Gentiles (v. 2). He was seeking their blessing and partnership. He hoped they could present a united front as the gospel message of freedom in Christ—rather than slavery to the Law—spread to all people (v. 4).

One central issue of confusion and contention was circumcision. The “false believers” were insisting that the Gentile converts be circumcised. But Paul preached a gospel of

grace, which did not require such slavish adherence to Jewish Law. Titus, a Greek, was also with Paul in Jerusalem (v. 3), and Paul offered Titus as a living example. Though he was a faithful believer and a devoted minister of the gospel, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised.

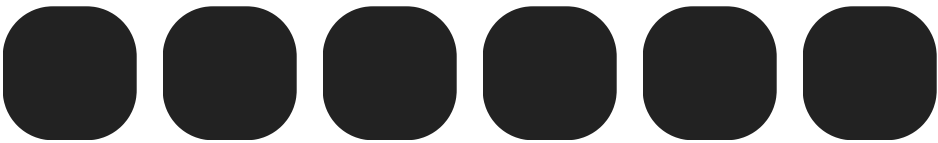
What false messages are added to the gospel today? How can we protect the truth of the gospel of Christ?

Father, Your Word is truth! May we always walk in Your truth. May we be blessed with rest and peace amid life’s storms, knowing that You are with us. Give us confidence that, like Paul, we are safe in Your arms.

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Daily Devotional - Monday, January 6, 2025 - Defending the Truth

JANUARY 06TH 2025 BY DEE LOFLIN

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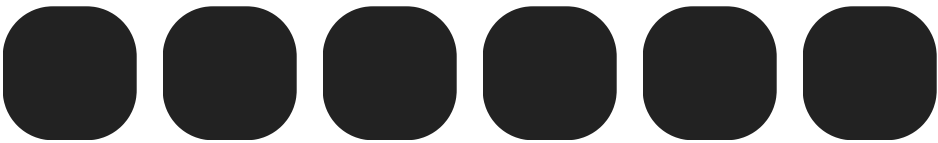
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Daily Devotional - Friday, December 20, 2024. - Rejoicing in Disagreement

DECEMBER 20TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Friday, December 20, 2024. - Rejoicing in Disagreement

Church splits are nothing new. For centuries, they have happened because of differences of opinion within the body of Christ. Often church divisions grow from different perspectives on important doctrinal issues. But personal taste or even petty disagreements can also grow into rifts that divide, disrupt, and even destroy a church family.

Early Christians experienced similar struggles. Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ sometimes had trouble accepting one another because of their differences. When Paul urged the “strong” to accept “the failings of the weak” in verse 1, he was referring to differences about things he described as “disputable matters” (Rom. 14:1)—disagreements mainly about abstaining from certain foods and the observance of certain sacred days (Rom. 14:2, 5). Paul described those whose lives were governed by such rules as “the weak.” Their conscience obligated them to obey laws that Christ had fulfilled by His sacrifice (Mark 7:19; Rom. 14:14).

Paul did not demand that all Christians agree on disputable matters but commanded that all believers accept one another as those accepted by Christ (v. 7). When we bear with the opinions and practices of others, we choose to “please our neighbors for their good” rather than please ourselves (v. 2). There may be occasions when their weak conscience calls us to limit our freedom when in their presence (Rom. 14:19–23). It is wrong to force other Christians to go against their conscience. We may think we are doing them a favor, but in reality, we are causing them to violate their conscience and act contrary to faith. Their views need not shape our practice. And we shouldn’t force

them to follow ours.

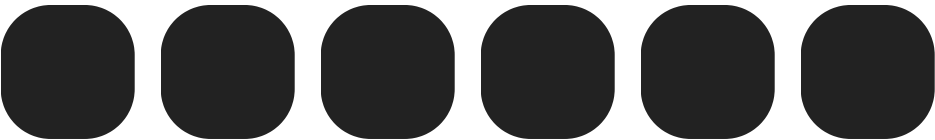
Can you think of a difference in church practice that is considered disputable or outside of core doctrine? Why does Paul urge believers toward unity despite these things?

Jesus, we pray for unity in our churches today! Give us discernment between differences in core doctrine and “disputable matters” that Paul mentions in today’s reading. Help us love and accept those accepted by You, Lord.

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