

GALATIANS 2:1-14 - Circumcision, Freedom & Unity

THE CIRCUMCISION QUESTION: Should the GENTILE Christians be REQUIRED to be CIRCUMCISED?

→ *Why would this topic have been so tricky / emotive for Jewish Christians? What did being circumcised mean to a Jewish man? Why might they have wanted Gentile converts to be circumcised?*

WHY WAS THIS ISSUE SO IMPORTANT?

1. Vital in determining who QUALIFIED as a TRUE believer.
 - * False teachers had a strong & LEGALISTIC view of what a 'real Christian' looked like.
 - * The Good News = We're FREE from ritual, regulation & religious compliance.
 - * Not free from importance of HOLINESS, the pursuit of GODLINESS, our obligation to LOVE as Jesus loved.
 - * But free from the OBLIGATION of Old Testament LAW.
 - * Instead, we've been released into the EXPRESSION of our own RELATIONSHIP with the Lord ... Led by His SPIRIT, not someone else's OPINION, PREFERENCE OR AGENDA.

→ *Who qualifies as a real Christian / true believer and why?*
→ *Under the New Covenant, what are we free from and what are we still under obligation to?*
→ *What is 'heavy shepherding?' What sort of rules has it historically held / might it feature? Have you ever been subject to it or know anyone who has been at a church like that? How did it harm them?*

FOR YOU / US

- i) Are you KIND to yourself: Have you given yourself lots of RULES or are you drawing from God's GRACE at every turn?
→ *Are you kind to yourself? What sorts of rules do you inflict on yourself & how do they unwittingly turn from a good idea into religion? What does it mean to be grace-ruled rather than legalistic in your own Christian walk?*
- ii) As we worship & serve together, have we created a culture of GRACE or do we tend to construct FRAMEWORKS, REGULATIONS & RULES that drag us right back under LAW?
→ *What sorts of rules can we inflict upon one another in a church context? What behaviours make us regard others as 'good Christians' or 'bad Christians?' Are they necessarily true? How do they shift from encouragements to godly behaviour into ritual or compliance?*
→ *Tim Keller wrote, "If you raise your traditions to the place of non-negotiables, you essentially create a system of legalism. You are saying, 'Real Christians do things this way.'" Discuss!*

2. Circumcision was just the 'TIP of the ICEBERG.'
 - * The PROBLEM: Though Peter had been happily EATING with Gentiles he had BACKTRACKED under pressure.
 - * All CLEANLINESS laws, CEREMONIAL laws, all the FEASTS & FASTS had been FULFILLED by Jesus.→ *Why is sitting down to eat a meal with someone an especially meaningful social exchange? Why would eating with Gentiles have been counter-cultural / counter-intuitive for a religious Jew?*
→ *Why had Peter backtracked? Why was this issue such a test for his particular personality? Where had he 'fallen' in a similar manner before?*
3. The UNITY of the early church was AT STAKE.
 - * SIDING with or even TOLERATING false teaching would have SPLIT the CHURCH.
 - * Again, fortunately, the apostles PASSED the TEST.→ *Why was Paul's agreement with Peter so important to him? Why was it so important to the Galatian churches? Why is it so important to us today?*

UNITY DOESN'T MEAN

- * Everyone has to CONFORM to YOU.
- * You have to CONFORM to everyone else.
- * We will always AGREE.
- * We all have to DO IT THE SAME.

UNITY DOES MEAN

- * We worship the SAME Lord ... Lift up ONE VOICE ... Share the same PURPOSE ... Walking in LOVE, full of GRACE.
 - * We ACCEPT as brother/sister, EVERYONE who is 'in Christ,' without putting EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS in their path or WITHHOLDING GRACE if certain regulations aren't met.
 - * We recognise we all have different GIFTS & CALLINGS.
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- What does unity look like to you? Why is it so important? Why is it tricky to achieve / keep? How do people tend to mess it up!?*
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- What are the key 'closed hand' doctrines (non-negotiables) and what are the 'open hand' ones (that we're not going to fall out over!?)*

UNITY will be the product of GRACE

- * LEGALISM produces fear, imposed-hierarchy, pride & resentment.
 - * GRACE produces kindness, patience & positivity; feeds acceptance, confidence & creativity.
 - * Takes GRACE to NAVIGATE the inevitable differences of OPINION, PREFERENCE & PRIORITY that exist in any church family.
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- Why does grace have such a crucial part to play in achieving & maintaining unity? What is it like when grace is in short supply in a church? What is it like when grace is in abundant supply in a church?*