

Galatians 2:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

Analysis

For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. The temporal marker *pro tou gar elthein tinas apo Iakōbou* (πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τινας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου, "before certain ones came from James") establishes the timeline. Initially, Peter *meta tōn ethnōn synēsthien* (μετὰ τῶν ἔθνῶν συνήσθιεν, "was eating with the Gentiles")—the imperfect tense indicates habitual practice, not isolated incidents.

The dramatic shift: *hote de ēlthon, hypestellen kai aphōrizen heauton* (ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον, ὑπέστελλεν καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἔαυτόν, "when they came, he began to withdraw and separate himself"). The imperfect verbs show gradual, progressive action—Peter didn't immediately abandon Gentile fellowship but slowly pulled away. *Hypostellō* (ὑποστέλλω) means to draw back, shrink away; *aphōrizō* (ἀφορίζω) means to separate, mark boundaries—the same word used for excommunication.

The motivation: *phoboumenos tous ek peritomēs* (φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς, "fearing those of the circumcision"). Fear (*phobos*, φόβος) of the circumcision party—conservative Jewish Christians who insisted on maintaining food laws—drove Peter's hypocrisy. This people-pleasing contradicted the freedom Peter himself had experienced and proclaimed. When fear of man overcomes fear of God, even apostles can betray the gospel they preach.

Historical Context

Jewish Christians faced intense pressure from unbelieving Jews who viewed table fellowship with Gentiles as covenant betrayal. Eating non-kosher food or with uncircumcised Gentiles could result in excommunication from the synagogue, loss of family relationships, and economic persecution. Peter's fear was understandable but inexcusable—he let cultural pressure override gospel truth, threatening to re-erect the dividing wall Christ had demolished (Ephesians 2:14).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What forms of "fearing those of the circumcision" tempt you to compromise gospel freedom for social acceptance?
2. How does gradual withdrawal from gospel truth prove more dangerous than sudden apostasy?
3. In what relationships or contexts do you separate yourself from fellow believers due to others' disapproval?

Interlinear Text

πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἦλθον τινας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου μετὰ τῶν
before G3588 For came that certain from James with G3588
G4253 G1063 G2064 G5100 G575 G2385 G3326

ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν· ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον ὑπέστελλεν καὶ
the Gentiles he did eat when but came he withdrew and
G1484 G4906 G3753 G1161 G2064 G5288 G2532

ἀφώριζεν ἐαυτόν φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ
separated himself fearing G3588 them which were of
G873 G1438 G5399 G3588 G1537

περιτομῆς
the circumcision
G4061

Additional Cross-References

Acts 10:28 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Luke 15:2 (Parallel theme): And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

Ephesians 3:6 (Parallel theme): That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

Galatians 2:9 (Parallel theme): And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.