

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Galatians</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>9</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>Galatians 2:6-14</b>		
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### PAUL'S CONFRONTATION WITH PETER: TRUTH VS. CONSEQUENCES

The fear of being labeled *judgmental* is a phobia that has taken on epidemic proportions within the ranks of Evangelicalism. Matthew 7:1: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" has become, as D. A. Carson has noted, "the most quoted verse in the Bible."<sup>1</sup> If we disagree with another person's beliefs and values, we should never come out and say so. The *Christian* thing to do, we are told, is simply suspend judgment in order not to appear harsh and unloving. But is that the loving thing to do? We are instructed to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). Isaiah 5:20 warns: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil." Refusing to make judgments about what is good and true as opposed to what is evil and false is in itself an evil thing. Of course, a number of things can happen when we do stand up and make our judgments known. You could offend someone; you could split the church. So, we are warned by many today that you better consider the consequences before you speak. They are right; some bad things *could* happen as a result of speaking out. But a failure to speak out when the occasion demands it would certainly be worse. Conflict in this case was unavoidable. The matter had to be addressed because division would have reared its ugly head. Calvin: "See here a wicked madness: for by that means there was a division made in the Church. For (as it is said in another place) the wall was broken down when our Lord Jesus Christ was appointed to be a light from God, not only for the Jews, but also for the salvation of the whole world. Wherefore if it behooved those that had erst [*formerly*] been separated and estranged from the Church, to be called into one flock: then doth Peter disannul God's grace, whereas yet notwithstanding we know there is not a more precious thing than the union of the Church. Therefore he that varieth from it, cannot by any means be excused. But behold, the fault of Peter was that he brake this bond of concord by separating the Jews from the Gentiles, not withstanding that all belonged to the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and were the very children of God. Again they had all one selfsame head, and one selfsame redeemer: and therefore his deed was a diminishing of God's house, forso much as we be all gathered together in his name, and do become his household folk, even till we be gathered up into the heritage of heaven. But there was yet one other fault: which is that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was darkened. For what fare we the better by his coming, unless we know that in him we have the fullness and performance of the things that were figured to us in old time? If we should offer sacrifice nowadays as they did in the time of the law: we should not know that we were cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the same was a sufficient payment for the satisfaction of all our sins, and that we have there a perfect righteousness purchased for us. We should know none of these things. Therefore Saint Peter offended grossly in hanging up that veil again, which was as much as to stop Christ from being known as he ought to be."<sup>2</sup> The Apostle Paul recognized this. The situation he faced was indeed delicate and potentially explosive. Peter, the chief of the original twelve apostles, handpicked by the Lord Jesus Himself, could prove to be a formidable foe. Paul's actions could polarize the church. What was he to do?

- I. **NO ADDITION TO PAUL'S GOSPEL.** Paul has made abundantly clear that his apostleship was not second-class and that he was in no way subservient to the original apostles; therefore his gospel is the true gospel.

- A. **The Negative.** Paul has explained his gospel to them, and they *added nothing to my message*. The word translated *added* in Galatians 2:6 is a form of the same word in the Greek text (*prosanatithēmi*) as the word translated *set before* (*anatithēmi*) in Galatians 2:2. What Paul is saying is this: “I set before them my gospel, and they did not set before me any additions.”<sup>3</sup>
- B. **The Positive.** Not only did the apostles not add anything to Paul’s gospel (i.e., circumcision, etc.), they did just the *opposite* of that which the Judaizers were alleging. They recognized that Paul was indeed commissioned by the Lord Jesus and as such, there could be no questioning his gospel. “It speaks highly of the spiritual perception of Peter and his fellow apostles that they at once recognized Paul’s calling.”<sup>4</sup> There was only one gospel given by the one true and living God to Peter and to Paul. Note that the “right hand of fellowship” is linked directly to the agreement over the gospel. “Fellowship in the gospel,” noted Harmon, “is more than simply being in the same place at the same time with fellow believers. It is common participation in the benefits of the gospel. When we unite with fellow believers for the display of God’s glory and the advancement of the gospel, we make the truth of the gospel visible for the world to see.”<sup>5</sup> They recognized that what may be referred to as a *division of labor*, not in the sense that Paul was not to preach to Jews and Peter was to restrict his preaching to Jews – and it certainly does not mean that Peter’s gospel was inappropriate outside a Jewish context – it means that Paul had been sent predominantly to the Gentiles and the original apostles to the Jews. The expression “only that we should remember the poor” in verse 10 is a reference to the poor of the Jerusalem church. This was something Paul took very seriously as texts like Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1ff; 2 Corinthians 8:1ff and 9:1ff make clear.

II. **THE CONTROVERSY IN ANTIOCH.** The scene of the conflict is in Antioch, the chief city of Syria. The Apostle Peter visited the church there and no problems arose until a delegation from Jerusalem appeared, and suddenly Peter began to behave differently.

- A. **Peter’s Actions** (Galatians 2:12-13). Peter had been eating<sup>6</sup> with the Gentile Christians along with Jewish believers like Barnabas. But after the arrival of the Jerusalem delegation, Peter *drew back* and *separated* himself. “The first word suggests an unobtrusive retreat. The second word indicates the result.”<sup>7</sup> Why did he do this? Poor Peter proves the truth of Proverbs 29:25: “The *fear* of man bringeth a snare.” Peter was *afraid* of what the Jerusalem group would say.
- B. **The Actions of Others.** Peter’s behavior is described by Paul with the word *hypocrisy* which is derived from the Greek word *hupokrisei*, which originally referred to an actor wearing a mask. Peter’s actions had an adverse affect on the other Jewish Christians, including Barnabas. S. Lewis Johnson has made a telling observation: “Barnabas was a man with a very loving nature (cf. Acts 4:36-37; 11:22-26, etc.), a man of consolation. This incident shows the weakness of a love that is not strengthened by the steel of theological firmness. Love may, for fear of grieving fellow believers, melt into compromise and evasive straddling of the fence. Love, if it is not love *in the truth*, often becomes a cop-out. I wonder if this was not one of the elements that led to the breach between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark later on (cf. Acts 15:39)?”<sup>8</sup>
- C. **Paul’s Actions** (Galatians 2:11). He “opposed him to his face” – literally this means *I stood against him face to face*. Why was Paul doing this? By Peter’s withdrawing from the Gentile Christians he was, in effect, joining the Judaizers in communicating to the Gentiles that they were still outsiders because they were not circumcised. In other words, it was a denial of Paul’s gospel that we are justified by faith alone in the finished work of Christ. As such, Peter *stood condemned*. (The verb used is *kataginōskō*, to find fault with). He was condemned by his own actions. He had gone against his own conscience and acted contrary to what God had revealed to him (cf. Acts 10:9-11:18).

**CONCLUSION:** Was Paul unloving in what he did? After all, he not only rebuked the most prominent of the twelve apostles, he did it *in front of them all* (Galatians 2:14). Some would say that this only demonstrates that Paul was insensitive and possessed by a critical spirit. What would have been the effect if Paul had not taken the stand he did? Christianity would have simply become a Jewish sect along with the Essenes, the Ebionites and other long since forgotten groups. Paul’s actions were not that of a temperamental theologian who loved to split

doctrinal hairs. Paul did not fear the possible negative fallout from his actions, and that is the difference between Paul and so many who are ostensibly evangelicals today. They are more concerned with the consequences; Paul was concerned with *the truth of the gospel*. We too are called upon not only to *believe* the gospel and to strive to *preserve* the gospel, we also must *apply* the gospel. This is where Peter compromised the truth of the gospel. Martin Luther captured the matter when he observed, “Here you may plainly see, that Paul chargeth Peter with dissimulation. (Contrariwise, St. Jerome chargeth Paul.) If Peter dissembled, then did he certainly know what was the truth, and what was not. He that dissembleth, sinneth not of ignorance, but deceiveth by a colour which he knoweth himself to be false. *And other, saith he, dissembled likewise with Peter, insomuch that Barnabas also (who was Paul’s companion, and had now a long time preached among the Gentiles faith in Christ without the law, together with Paul) was brought into their dissimulation.* Ye have here then Peter’s offence plainly described to be mere dissimulation, which afterwards had been an occasion of the ruin of the Gospel then newly received, if Paul had not resisted him. And this is a wonderful matter, that God preserved the Church, being yet but young, and the Gospel itself, by one only person. Paul alone standeth to the truth; for he had lost Barnabas his companion, and Peter was against him. So sometimes one man is able to do more in a council than the whole council besides. Which things the Papists themselves do witness. And for example they allege Paphnutius, who withstood the whole council of Nicaea (which was the best of all that were after the council of the Apostles at Jerusalem), and prevailed against it. This I say, to the end that we should diligently learn the article of justification, and make a plain difference between the law and the Gospel, and that in this matter we should do nothing by dissimulation, nor give place to any man, if we will retain the truth of the Gospel, and faith sound and uncorrupt: which, as I have said, are soon hurt. Wherefore in this case, away with reason, that enemy to faith, which in temptations of sin and death, leaneth not to the righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness (for thereof it is utterly ignorant), but to her own righteousness, or at the least, to the righteousness of the law. Now, as soon as the law and reason join together, faith loseth her virginity; for nothing fighteth more strongly against faith than the law and reason. And these two enemies cannot be conquered, but with great labour and difficulty; which we must conquer notwithstanding, if we will be saved.”<sup>9</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This verse, as Carson comments, “cannot here refer to the law courts, any more than 5:33-37 forbids judicial oaths. Still less does this verse forbid all judging of any kind, for the moral distinctions drawn in the Sermon on the Mount require that decisive judgments be made. Jesus himself goes on to speak of some people as dogs and pigs (v. 6) and to warn against false prophets (vv. 15-20). Elsewhere he demands that people *make a right judgment* (John 7:24; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 1:8-9; Philippians 3:2; 1 John 4:1). All this presupposes that some kinds of *judging* are not only legitimate but mandated.” *Matthew: The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Zondervan, 1984), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons On Galatians* (rpt. Old Path Publications, 1995), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> This has the idea of “confer” as in 1:16. The underlying thought is that the apostles did not, in conference with Paul, require him to change or modify his gospel. Cf. the discussions by J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (MacMillan, 1869); E. D. Burton, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (T&T Clark, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> D. Guthrie, *Galatians: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1973), p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> M. S. Harmon, *Galatians: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Lexham Academics, 2021), p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> It is very possible that this expression includes a reference to participation in the Lord’s Supper – cf. 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 33f, cf. R. Y. K. Fund, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> H. N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Eerdmans, 1953), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> S. L. Johnson, Jr., *Galatians: Believers Bible Bulletin* (Believers Chapel, 1978), No. 5, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. P. S. Watson (James Clark, 1972), p. 120.