

February 23, 2014  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Galatians  
Community Baptist Church  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study Galatians 2:11-14.

1. Explain how Paul had the authority to publicly rebuke Peter? Was Paul Peter's authority or was Peter Paul's authority?
2. Why did James send those men to Antioch?
3. What actually happened at this meal (or these meals)?
4. What did Paul appeal to as the reason for confronting Peter?
5. What truth about the gospel did Peter breach?

### **A TOUGH QUESTION Galatians 2:11-14**

Never at any time in history has God's plan been for sinners to gain salvation through their own works. Abraham, who preceded the law of Moses was saved by believing God. But what about all those sacrifices for sin that Moses' law required? The sacrifices of the law always were a picture of the final sacrifice of the Perfect Lamb, who in God's plan would be killed to pay for sins, a plan determined in eternity before God created the world. Therefore, even when the Mosaic law was in force, salvation was always a matter of trusting God to provide the acceptable sacrifice. God keeping His word and making provision through His sacrificed Lamb has always been the object of faith.

That Christians in the region called Galatia were dealing with this false teaching about works salvation is obvious from this letter Paul wrote. In the section of the letter previous to our text, Paul rehearsed some of the events and conclusions connected with the Jerusalem Council at which the apostles laid to rest the false teaching of the Judaizers who demanded that Gentiles practice Mosaic law in order to gain salvation. They taught that salvation was gained by practicing ceremonial regulations, and it was kept by the same means.

But to illustrate how dangerous it was to slip into that doctrinal error, Paul now pulled up an illustration from the past that revealed how two very important leaders of the Church fell into the trap. Peter became a hypocrite and that caused Barnabas and other Jews to follow him into the pit. Paul felt compelled by his love for the gospel to confront Peter with a very tough question about his actions.

### **Who Would Oppose the "Rock"? (v.11).**

The showdown happened when Cephas went to Antioch (v.11a). Okay, but when was that? It had to be while Paul and Barnabas were still teaching in the church at Antioch (v.1). That would put it sometime between the years 44 and 47. Therefore, it is also important to realize that it would have been before the decisions of the Jerusalem Council (49) which Paul just recounted (2:1-10). The conclusions James wrote in a letter were not in force yet among the Gentiles.

It might be significant that Paul used the name *Cephas* to identify the man in question. This was Simon's surname, a form of Peter. It reminds us of Jesus' conversation when He called Peter and told him he would no longer be called Simon but would be called Cephas, which means a stone (John 1:42). It also reminds us of Jesus' commendation of Peter's conclusion about Jesus' divinity (Mt. 16:17). In that setting Jesus said, "You are *Petros* and upon this *petra* I will build my Church." Whatever Jesus meant by that statement there is no question that Peter is a chief stone in the building of Christ's Church.

Peter came to Antioch. This is where the name "Christian" originated. The church in Antioch came into being as a result of God

scattering His messengers far and wide. When persecution broke out against the Church, especially in Jerusalem, it forced people out of their comfort zone so they could accomplish Jesus' command of being His witnesses in Judea and Samaria and the rest of the world (Acts 1:8). We know that some of the saints went to Cyprus, Phenice, and Antioch and preached the good news to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19). Some of the Jewish men from Cyprus went to Antioch and preached to the Gentiles and a great number of them believed (Acts 11:21). Because a number of the people believed, a church grew up in Antioch, and, when word about this got back to Jerusalem, the leaders sent Barnabas to lead the new church.

Antioch was no insignificant city. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire during New Testament times. In those days, the city had a population of 500,000 and was one of the most important cities of the empire strategically and politically. There was a large contingency of Jews in the city (estimated at 65,000).

Therefore, it was not surprising that there were both Jews and Gentiles in the church. The Gentiles in the church came from a thoroughly pagan background complete with idolatry, meat offered to idols, and all the sin that goes with lack of regeneration. The Jews could trace their background to Jerusalem, the temple, the synagogues, the keeping of many rules (often for conscience sake), and all the separation from Roman paganism that made them suspect to the politically correct.

In that setting, we discover that Paul opposed Peter who had come to Antioch. He opposed Peter to his face (v.11b). This sounds bad. What happened? To *oppose* means to stand against or to set yourself up in opposition to something or someone. It is the kind of thing Christians are **not** supposed to do in response to evil people who attack us personally. Jesus taught us, *But I say to you, "Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"* (Matthew 5:39). At the same time, because of God's grace, our adversaries will not succeed in being opposed to us. Jesus also taught the disciples, *"For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict"* (Luke 21:15).

True to Jesus' words when they murdered Stephen, the wicked religious rulers *could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with*

*which he was speaking (Acts 6:10)*. Withstanding was the kind of thing Jannes and Jambres did when Moses told the truth (2 Timothy 3:8). Paul warned Timothy about Alexander who did this to him. *Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message (2 Timothy 4:14-15)*. It is how we must respond to Satan and his work through his demons and people. We must, *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7)*. We must, *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (1 Peter 5:9)*. Now we know what Paul did.

Paul stood firm against Peter *to his face*. This means that Paul didn't write a letter or an email to Peter after the fact. Such face-to-face confrontation is extremely difficult which is why we generally avoid it. Often face-to-face opposition must be avoided because there is not certainty about the issue or accusation. Matters of opinion result in endless argument, not productive opposing. Such was not the case here. Paul opposed Peter *because he stood condemned (v.11c)*.

The Greek word for *condemned* means just that, to condemn, convict, or to judge something to be wrong or bad. Here the word is in the perfect tense, passive voice and carries this idea of *having known against himself*. That is the same meaning and use of the word as we find it in Titus 3:11: *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned*. The guy is condemned by what he has done. It was not that Paul was recommending some kind of sentence against Peter. Nor is this a case of Peter losing his salvation and facing eternal condemnation. Peter stood condemned because he was wrong. According to whose opinion? We all have different opinions so who was right—Peter or Paul? Or were both of them wrong?

### **What Was the Problem? (vv.12-14).**

Certain men caused Peter to mess up the meal (vv.12-13). The church in Antioch enjoyed their fellowship meals. We read in verse twelve, *For before certain men came from James, he was eating with*

the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party (v.12). Let's try to understand the setting. Eating a meal in this context has strong theological undergirding. The importance of such a meal is seen in David's lament, "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9). That very grief was illustrated again when Jesus handed the bread to Judas at the Passover Meal. The travesty of a trusted friend betraying the Lord is highlighted in that action. Judas trashed all the traditions of a friendship meal (which the Passover was).

To the Jewish people eating the meal together showed friendship, participation. All at the meal shared in the blessing the host prayed over the food. Sometimes such meals in the Old Testament were like forging a treaty. This is why the "love feast" of the early Church was so significant. In that setting, the Christians learned as the apostles taught doctrine. The teaching time was always connected with breaking bread in fellowship. *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42)*. Therefore, Paul took very seriously the breach of fellowship that developed at the love feasts in Corinth. He confronted (or opposed) them also by writing, *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse (1 Corinthians 11:17)*. Paul warned that separation between haves and have nots, or separation over preferences, at such a meal was unacceptable.

So before certain men came from James, Peter was eating with the Gentiles. It appears that the Jews and Gentiles in Antioch enjoyed the fellowship meals (love feasts?) together. This even though the Jews had most likely come from a background that held to very strict dietary laws. No doubt many of them maintained rules about not eating food offered to idols or even the distinctions between ceremonially clean and unclean food. But God had taught Peter not to call unclean what God called clean (Acts 11). God had given him the vision of the foods on a sheet. Peter had obeyed God, went to the home of Cornelius, and raised all kinds of chatter back home. After his explanation of God's work, the Jewish Christians finally conceded that must be salvation was for Gentiles also. Luke recorded, *When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God,*

*saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18).*

Regardless of backgrounds, there was a beautiful expression of fellowship at the table in Antioch. So the scene in Antioch pictures Paul (the old Pharisee), Peter (the disciple of Christ), Barnabas (the encourager) all sitting at meal with born again Gentiles from pagan backgrounds and born again Jews from a background of religious traditions.

When the certain men from James showed up, Peter separated. Were these the men James referred to later at the Jerusalem Council? James, the Lord's half brother, summarized the council's conclusions and wrote a letter to Gentile believers (primarily the ones in Antioch) telling them among other things: *Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions (Acts 15:24)*. I think these were the same guys. They were no doubt zealous Judaizers who claimed to be Christians but were not. They were legalists who taught that salvation is won and kept by doing good works.

When they showed up in Antioch, Peter separated from believers who did not keep the traditions of Judaism. This was sin because Peter sowed dissension and discord for no Scriptural reason. He—of all people—knew that God did not make this distinction. This was a matter of preference on Peter's part, and that only for the moment. He was guilty of doing what God hates. *God hates one who sows discord among the brethren (Proverbs 6:8)*. This is precisely what happened, for other reasons, in Corinth as is obvious from Paul's confronting of the problem of division at the love feast which resulted in some people being sick and some dying (1 Corinthians 11, written shortly after Galatians).

Why did Peter do this? Paul pointed out that Peter *feared the circumcision party*. That was not a party like a bar-mitzvah which indicates a young man has reached maturity. This party was a known group or sub-culture who considered themselves to be part of the Church. To "fear" can mean to be afraid of as in what they might say or might do to him; or afraid of their power. Probably that is not what Peter was feeling. It can also mean to highly respect in a bad way, as in fearing wicked authorities, about which Jesus taught "don't fear

them” (Mt. 10:26). Or the term can be used as in the case of Cornelius who “feared God.” It appears that Peter showed extreme respect for mere men who claimed they had come from James.

The greater problem was that Peter influenced a lot of people. *And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy (v.13).* Peter’s sin was infective. Sin generally is. People who ignore this reality are generally caught up in the sin and unaware they are caught up in it until they have been thoroughly infected themselves and have drawn conclusions and made decisions they later regret but cannot change.

Therefore God gave special warning to that end: *Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (Hebrews 12:12-15).* But, Peter was not strengthening the hands of the weak. Instead he made the path for them crooked, not straight. He caused division instead of peace and, therefore, many were swept up into his hypocrisy.

Even Barnabas got swept into the hypocrisy. Barnabas was a very well known leader and such an encouraging man—most of the time. He gave a lot of money to the early Church (Acts 4:37). He reconciled Paul with the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27). He brought Paul to Antioch to help him teach (Acts 11:25). He and Paul took money to Jerusalem to help the famine-stricken saints (Acts 11:30). Now he joined the division that separated from the Gentiles. Peter seems to have started it, and it quickly became group hypocrisy (*sunupokrinomai*). The hypocrisy was rooted in the fact that Peter acted one way before the men from James showed up and another way after they arrived. Either it was always acceptable to eat with the Gentile believers, or it was never acceptable to eat with them. We know which one God taught.

Paul took the bull by the horns (v. 14). Paul realized the conduct of Peter, Barnabas, and the Jews was not in step with the truth of the gospel. He confessed, *But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel (v.14a).* This is a critical conclusion.

It was not a matter of Paul disliking what they were doing. It was not Paul’s preference that Jewish and Gentile Christians would eat together in a sign of friendship and partnership. Worse is the fact that in reality there was a group of men from Jerusalem who were posing as Christians but were not. They caused Peter to get out of step with the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel is that the wall that separated the Jews and Gentiles disappeared through the sacrifice of Christ. As Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians: *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14).* Peter and the Jews ignored Christ’s work and rebuilt the wall of division, dissension, and discord.

We need to stop and consider what Paul did not conclude in this confrontation. Paul did not confront Peter because he was unwilling to compromise and embrace the “sin” of the Gentiles. The Gentiles were not sinning. They were practicing genuine Christian liberty. Later at the Jerusalem Council, the apostles would lay down guidelines about things from the Gentiles’ past they should avoid. They warned against eating food offered to idols, eating strangled things, eating blood, and engaging in illicit sex. There is no evidence that any of that was going on here. It is important to clarify this distinction because of the confusion in our day when Christian liberty is considered to be the same as loving the world. God does not call Christians to order their lives according to the sinful dictates and desires of the flesh in order to keep from causing division between them and unsaved sinners. In the case before us, it was a matter of well-grounded Christians (Peter and Barnabas) separating from genuine believers during the love feast simply because the background, which had to influence the believers in some ways, was not acceptable to false brothers from Jerusalem who taught a false doctrine of salvation by works.

So Paul confronted Peter publicly. He told the Galatians, *I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (v.14b).* That is unusual since Jesus taught that when there is a sin the individual is to go to the offender privately (Matt. 18). Why the exception? What Peter did was public, affected the entire local church, and, therefore, needed to be dealt with in such a way that the

entire local church would learn the lesson. There is another example of this in Paul's instruction to Pastor Timothy. *Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.*" (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

Paul's argument was simple. Yesterday Peter the Jew was living like a Gentile—not concerned about the unnecessary preferences (i.e. ceremonial rules) that Jews liked to keep. Today those unnecessary preferences were a cause for division.

In conclusion maybe we should stop to consider how Peter responded to all of this. We have no idea. Oh, but someone might argue that we know based on the conclusions Peter wrote about Christ's example to us in 1 Peter 2:21-23. *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* (1 Peter 2:21-23).

This is very good advice indeed. It is the standard of righteousness which we Christians must seek to emulate when put in similar circumstances. But there are inherent problems when we try to apply that principle to Peter's situation. First is the fact that Peter had committed sin. That is why Paul "reviled" him. Did Peter respond to Paul by reviling in return? We have no record of it.

Also there is another reason why we cannot judge Peter's response based on what he wrote. Peter wrote the letter called 1 Peter sometime in the years 63 or 64. The event Paul rehearsed in our text took place in 45. A man who follows Christ learns a lot in twenty years. Therefore, it is not accurate nor wise to impose Peter's conclusions twenty years later on an earlier event. We must be satisfied to know that we don't know how Peter responded because his response is not the focus of this text.

The focus of the text is Peter's sin and Paul's confrontation of it. When we try to speculate about the unstated, we often ignore the stated—which is the lesson God teaches us from the text. The lesson for us is this: When the truth of the gospel has been breached and the result is separation and division, it is necessary to confront it with truth.