

Galatians | The Grace Manifesto

The Grace-Grid

2.11ff

6.23.19

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. ¹³ The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?

¹⁵ "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; ¹⁶ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. ¹⁷ "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! ¹⁸ "For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹ "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. ²¹ "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

This summer we're looking at St Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia. It's a very personal letter; Paul refers to his own experiences (autobiographical). It's also a passionate plea or warning and you feel the emotion from the start.

AND it's doctrinal... which goes against the grain of our own cultural mood... most people think of spiritual life and practice as being private and purely emotional and facts or teaching or doctrine just gets in the way and makes people exclusive...EXCEPT...what IF the doctrine/teaching IS: "we're all the same"?

That's what we find in today's passage. It's a revolutionary scene promoting radical inclusivity. It's predicated on the dogma/doctrine that all people are the same...and all people need God's intervention.

Today, Paul begins to press The Main Thing into life to show how this Big Idea of grace/gospel, how it translates into life...how it works out in our relationships ...AND TODAY, we get a clue that what God has achieved in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – that can and MUST

factor into the decisions we make, our moral choices and our basic approach to God, to others and to ourselves.

Grace is not only the way we get restored to God; grace is also a way of looking at LIFE. Grace/gospel becomes a lens, a paradigm, a grid or New Logic that has to be applied to everything.

This scene is a kind of “clash of the Titans” (Peter vs. Paul) and out of this clash comes big help in how to think and how to live in this world by a new logic.

Let’s look at: **1) A Crooked Occasion,**
2) A New-Logic Explanation,
3) A Sweeping Application (the Grace Grid)

Paul was originally from Turkey... but in time he found a home in a gigantic city in Syria called Antioch and that became his home-church.

This city was the third or fourth largest in the Roman Empire... some say it had 600,000 people and it would have been an extremely crowded cosmopolitan center... And the Gospel (basic message) got rooted there and the church flourished.

Peter came up from Jerusalem to check it out and he was overjoyed with what he saw: all kinds of people finding relief from guilt and being reconciled to God by what Jesus Christ had done... AND these people were also being reconciled to one another!

People who would’ve been natural enemies were now experiencing forgiveness from God and then sharing that forgiveness with one another and soon these former enemies were friends...and even family.

All the original believers in Jesus Christ were Jewish but now in super-diverse Antioch some Gentiles were coming to faith in Jesus Christ and joining the church (Acts 11.20ff) and Jewish Christians were relating to Gentile Christians as equals. Peter saw it.

God had given to Peter (“Cephas”) that triple-vision predicting that this would happen – that Gentiles would believe and would be “grafted in” to the people of Abraham... SO when Peter/Cephas got to Antioch (Paul’s home-church) and SAW Jews and Gentiles all together believing in Christ... Peter was happy to actually SEE it and Peter jumped right in! He ate/drank with his new Gentile brothers and sisters.

And Peter reasoned to himself, “Hmm! Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again for guilty sinners who need to be reconciled to God – guilty Jewish sinners and guilty Gentile sinners are now both receiving forgiveness and new life because of Jesus Christ.”

And then... maybe at some church gathering...where there was food... Peter/Cephas who was getting into this New Community made up of all kinds of people who'd been accepted by God ONLY because of what Jesus Christ DID... as Peter was splashing around at the church in Antioch... laughing, loving and eating with his new Gentile family IN Christ...THEN some people showed up from the Home Office in Jerusalem.

And Peter was afraid.

Why, you ask, was Peter afraid? Well, it was because he didn't want to be judged by these Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who were NOT comfortable eating with Gentiles... All their lives they'd been taught to stay away from Gentiles because Gentiles are unclean and are separated from God... AND even though THESE GENTILES (at the Antioch Church) were believers in Jesus and were acceptable to God (no longer separated) because of Jesus Christ... and even though we BOTH, Jews AND Gentiles have come to God through Jesus but ... "How could these Gentiles REALLY be thought of as children of Abraham if they eat unclean food and haven't been circumcised? I mean...they're acceptable to God, just like WE are... but they have to do their part too...right? Get circumcised and quit eating swine...and squid...and who knows what else...Right?"

Now, Peter didn't believe that ... but (12) "fearing the party of the circumcision" Peter withdrew and held himself aloof from the Gentile Christians.

And when Paul saw it...and OTHERS...even Barnabas ("son of encouragement") – this was a contagion! – and Paul confronted Peter/Cephas face-to-face and publically...this occasion has become CROOKED!

And for WHAT does Paul confront Peter?

Well, we could label this failing any number of ways. We could call it racism and that would be correct; Peter segregated himself from others because of their different/inferior racial and cultural differences.

OR we could call it hypocrisy (and Paul does – twice in v 13). Peter celebrated, "We're all the same!" but then he acted contrary to his words (definition of hypocrisy!)

Or...we could call it...people-pleasing (as we said last week) and it certainly WAS that! Peter/Cephas was "fearing the circumcision group" (13) – and people-pleasing is a form of fear (a really big deal in the Bible!)

But when the confrontation took place, the way Paul identified the sin of Cephas was that "they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (14)

The Greek word Paul uses is “straight-walking” or “walking in line with”. In other words, “Cephas is not seeing the world through the lens of the Gospel” and what WE might call racism or hypocrisy or people-pleasing or fear... was... really and most seriously a failure to see God, to see people, to see one’s self and to see everything by this New Logic, the “Truth of What Jesus Accomplished” which changes everything!

Then Paul goes on to reiterate what the Truth of the Gospel really is. It’s like he says, “Let me summarize it for you again” (it’s like Paul can NEVER repeat it enough and is always happy to do it again!).

And just to summarize this second paragraph, Paul told Peter, “we’re Jews... we know the writings and we know about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and we know what God requires (the Law) BUT we’ve also become convinced that WE DON’T DO IT!”

“We don’t measure up to the Law... and when we compare our lives TO GOD’S STANDARD (Law) THAT LAW diagnoses our problem but it doesn’t fix the problem. The Law condemns us Jewish people because NO ONE KEEPS IT PERFECTLY...right?”

And in what MAY be the thesis statement for the entire letter Paul writes (16), “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we (Jews) have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

Peter like every man, woman and child who EVER believed in Jesus Christ, when Peter believed the Good News – God gave to Peter the perfect record of Jesus Christ and God applied TO Jesus Christ Peter’s BAD record. All the love and obedience that Jesus Christ expressed in His perfect life is attributed to those who trust in Jesus Christ AND all my failings and flaws and law-breaking and bad motives were all attributed to Jesus when He faced justice FOR me.

Everyone who stops trusting in his/her own efforts to measure up and INSTEAD trusts in Jesus Christ’s efforts is justified by God – God declares ABOUT YOU what only Jesus deserves, “You are innocent and righteous in My sight!”

But in withdrawing from these fellow believers who were of a different race, Cephas/Peter returned to the works of the Law... was depending on his own racial superiority or at least tried to look that way to others... He acted as if God was pleased with him because he had the right ethnicity INSTEAD OF GOD BEING PLEASED WITH HIM just because of Jesus.

Peter was communicating...by his cowardly actions: “God forgives and accepts Gentiles because of Jesus (that’s all they've got!) but me and my type – God loves us because we’re the right nationality and we eat the right food... and Jesus” (crooked logic).”

Peter was rebuilding his house of cards that he had once torn down – relying on his obedience that had only let him down and only proven him to be a sinner.

And by using this whole example with the churches in Galatia, Paul is equipping them with a new way to look at issues... He's saying, "In this New Logic, every issue is now a gospel issue..."

And that's why our last point is: A Crooked Occasion, A New-Logic Explanation, and last A Sweeping Application ... See, progress in the Christian Life is always a matter of factoring-in to any situation WHAT IT MEANS to be totally accepted and forgiven and delightful to God NOT because we eat the right foods or look the right way or have the right stuff or impress the right people or even do the right thing.

The Christian says, "My self-salvation projects must come DOWN... My efforts to measure up are DEAD –I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

"My efforts are DEAD and I live in a new confidence."

And yet just as Peter – the Lord's right-hand-man, if Peter could become an "unbelieving believer" then so can we... and we DO...often. Whenever we attempt to prove that we're right (in an ultimate sense) – whenever we try to justify our existence by competition or comparison with others (that I'm a better parent... I have better taste... I'm better than so-and-so because I've never been divorced or I never end a sentence with a preposition...

Or even when I find it necessary to defend myself so that other people think highly of me (when I tout my "dishwasher-Righteousness"... my grammar Righteousness ... my social-conscience R, my green R, my food-law R, my Christian Liberty R) I THEN STOP AND SEE through this new lens: "Wait! This issue is a gospel issue... What part of the gospel am I not believing? What cheap-imitation have I put in the place of Jesus Christ who loved me and gave Himself up for me?"

"How have I started to trust some effort of mine (that I can see and touch and control) instead of resting in HIS efforts... which are the only efforts that can really end with the words, "It Is Finished" ?

Peter failed at it. The Galatians were obviously failing at it IN PART because it's so completely FOREIGN to us all – to have a secure and perfect standing before God based NOT on my labors, my superiority to others, others' opinions of me but BASED ONLY ON WHAT Jesus DID for me... It doesn't come naturally to us to factor this into every life-issue... BUT

That's really what growth in the Christian life is: the wonderful quest of seeing through the

grace-grid... and learning to live in all my callings BY THIS NEW LOGIC... The Sweeping Application of the Gospel to every area of my life; to carry out my parenting as a grace-man...to live out my singleness as a grace-person, to be a school teacher seeing through the lens of grace, to vacation, to retire, to marry, to succeed, to fail and do it all as a person forgiven, accepted, secure in God ONLY because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – the life that I now live, to live it by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1Cor 10.31)