

BOOK OF GALATIANS
CHURCH CONFLICT
GALATIANS 2:11-14; ACTS 11:19-27

Introduction

In our text this morning we are going to see some additional **Church conflict!** This whole book is about a **conflict** that arose **initially over the Gospel that was being preached by the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles.** We saw last week that it was **determined by Church Council to be the SAME GOSPEL that the other Apostles preached at Jerusalem to the Jews!**

Now understand that most Church **conflicts** fall into one of two categories. What we see here is what I refer to a **Category 1 conflict—It is a conflict that really matters!** I'll talk more about Category 1 conflicts in a moment! But, let's deal with Category 2 conflicts first!

Category 2 conflicts are those disagreements that are non-biblical in nature. That is, **they deal with matters that are NOT directly discussed in Scripture!** **Most Church conflicts that I have witnessed in Churches that I have been a part of or even heard about are in this category:**

(e.g. I remember a bitter conflict arose in the Church I grew up in when the Church had decided to put carpet over the terrazzo floors in the auditorium! The conflict was over the color of the carpet! How sad is that!)

There is not a verse in the Bible that tells us how to answer such a question as that! Another example would be a Church deciding when to **schedule its Church services or even how many services to have!**

Traditionally, I grew up in a time when **most every Bible preaching Church had Sunday School on Sunday morning and two services on Sunday—** a morning service and an evening service, **and then they had a Wednesday night Prayer Meeting and Bible study.** I can also remember when we had **“Training Union”** before the Sunday night service and the conflict our Church experienced regarding whether to drop that out of the Church Schedule! Again, **there is NOT ONE VERSE in the Bible to help with such a question! There is no Biblical mandate to follow that pattern!**

A big one today is whether we **should sing from the hymnal or from song sheets or from an overhead or by putting the words on a big screen using Power Point software.**

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I personally **prefer to sing traditional hymns from a hymnal and believe we ought to use the hymnal—not for Bible reasons— but for some reasons that do make sense that we don't have time to delve into!**

Another Category 2 dispute is **what to name your Church.** A lot of people are **changing their Church name for various reasons,** but it is a Category 2 issue because it doesn't involve clear Biblical revelation! **Nearly all conflicts in the local Church that I have seen in my 62 years in Church fall into this Category 2 type that mostly boils down to personal preferences!** And there is a wide variety of personal preferences sitting in here this morning!

(By the way, we're NOT looking to change our name or drop any services or get rid of our traditional hymns and our hymn book!)

That's enough said about Category 2 issues, now, lets get back to Category 1 issues and then to our text!

Category 1 disputes involve matters where the Bible has clearly spoken—especially with regard to the Fundamentals of the Faith! (A Fundamental of the Faith is something that is non-negotiable because it is clearly taught in Scripture! *e.g. Is the Bible the Word of God? Is Jesus the Son of God? Is Jesus the only way of salvation? Did Jesus literally rise from the dead? Do we believe in the Trinity?*) **Those are huge issues that Bible believing Churches have agreed upon for centuries because there is clear Biblical teaching in those areas!** These disputes are so important that to compromise on them is to deny important Biblical teaching!

And I suppose someone we might say there is a **third category** of conflict, which would be **arguing over whether a particular conflict belongs in Category 1 or Category 2!** One person says, *“This is clearly taught in the Bible”* and another person says, *“No, it's not clearly taught. At best, it's an inference; at worst, it is just your personal preference.”* And the battle rages on for weeks, months or even years!

Our text offers a classic example of a Church conflict that in many ways is a **Category 3** dispute.

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On the surface **it appears to be something that is Category 2**—who you choose to eat with, **but Paul treats it as a Category 1 issue**— **arguing that the Gospel itself is at stake!**

So, let's read the Scripture and then examine what was happening here and why Paul did what he did. **READ THE TEXT**

I. PAUL'S CONFLICT WITH PETER.

This is one of those passages that at first glance may seem rather remote from us today, but upon further inspection it is highly relevant.

The story actually begins in **Antioch**, which was **a major city and a commercial center** located north of Israel, in the province of Syria.

It was **the third-largest city in the Roman Empire** and became an early center for Christianity! (Scripture records in **Acts 11:26** that the Disciples were actually first called Christians at Antioch!)

Although it had a large Jewish population, it was predominantly a Gentile city. **We read how the Gospel came to Antioch in Acts 11:19-27.** (Note how this transpired **AFTER** Peter's vision in **Acts 10** and the Gospel opening to the Gentiles beginning with **Cornelius!** Also it happened **AFTER** Peter's defense of his preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles in **Acts 11:1-18.**)

We also know from reading **Acts 13** that **the first missionaries to the Gentiles (Paul and Barnabas) were sent out from the Church in Antioch, not Jerusalem.**

So, there were **Jewish and Gentile converts** in that one local Church! There were the Jews who had been circumcised, raised under the Law, and had come to faith in Christ. Then there were the Gentiles who had not been circumcised, had been raised in pagan religions, and had come to Christ. But it appears that these two groups got along just fine...until this matter came along that Paul rebukes Peter for.

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One day the Apostle Peter went to visit the Church at Antioch. And what Peter saw in Antioch were Jews and Gentiles worshipping together in one Church as the LORD intended!

That was different than what was happening in **the Jerusalem Church up to this time because it was pretty much still entirely Jewish.** And **the revelation given to Peter of the Gospel opening up to the Gentiles was still a new thing to that Church!**

But here in Antioch things were very different. **It was what the body of Christ was supposed to be!** And so Peter sat down and ate with the Church at Antioch, including the Gentiles! This should **not** have been a problem!

But then we see some Jews came from Jerusalem sent by James, the Pastor of the Church in Jerusalem. We're not told why James sent them. **But when these Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem, Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles!** (**Galatians 2:12**)

And when the Jews that made up part of the congregation of the Antioch Church saw Peter's hypocritical actions, they also did what Peter did (withdrawing and separating themselves) causing a rift in the Antioch Church! Even Barnabas, the Son of consolation, got involved in this hypocrisy! (**Galatians 2:13**)

So, Peter **gave in to the pressure of the presence of these Jewish brethren despite the vision that he was given regarding the Gentiles!** Oh how peer pressure can make us act in ways we know we **should not act and do things we know we should not do!**

I think in his heart Peter knew he was doing wrong! That's why Paul accused him of hypocrisy here. Peter pulled back from the Gentile converts out of fear of the men who came from James.
Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

Peter feared what these men might think, or say or do, so he compromised his convictions even though he knew it was wrong! And worst of all, his bad example caused the other Jewish Christians to follow his example. Even Barnabas (Paul's associate) was carried away in the same hypocrisy. Spiritual leaders never sin alone! What they do always drags others with them!

So we see the cause of the controversy here.

II. PAUL'S ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM! (Vs 14)

Paul's response to the problem in Antioch was decisive. He saw that they *"...walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel."*

Paul understood that Peter's hypocrisy was really a compromise of the Gospel itself! By withdrawing from the Gentile believers under these circumstances was to deny the truth that all believers are one in Christ!

It established two classes in the Church and implied that one class of believers (the Jewish Christians) was superior to the other (the Gentile Christians)!

This should not have been done and so Paul took drastic action! That's why he rebuked Peter face to face in front of the whole congregation!

He knew Peter's heart, he knew that **he knew better than that**, but that made his compromise that much worse! Under pressure, Peter had yielded his liberty in Christ and he had done it because of what those men from James **might do** or **might say** or what they **might write back to Jerusalem about him!**

Paul took drastic measures because in his mind, the heart of the very Gospel itself was at stake!

III. APPLYING WHAT WE'VE LEARNED!

I want to wrap up this story of conflict by focusing on four possible applications for us:

A. **We Need To Realize That There Are No Infallible Leaders!**
If one apostle can rebuke another apostle in public like we see here, then we know that **no one** (including any Pastor or other spiritual leader) **is beyond correction.**

No man should be regarded as infallible, no matter what office he holds or what throne he sits on! **Neither I nor any other Pastor or spiritual leader can claim infallibility.**

Please don't lay the burden of infallibility on my back. I am capable of just as many mistakes as anyone else! And if I speak the truth, it is only because I speak truthfully what God has already said in his inerrant Word!

It is always good to be like the Bereans who heard the words of Paul and then went home to search the Scriptures to see if what he was saying was true! (*Acts 17:11*)

And this truth certainly means that spiritual leaders must remain open to the correction of other godly Christians!

Sometimes we'll be like Paul and have to go to a brother or sister with a word of correction. Sometimes we'll be like Peter and be on the receiving end! May God give us grace in both cases to speak the truth in love and to receive the truth with humility!

B. **When Biblical Truth Is At Stake, We Must Put That Truth Above Personal Friendships!**

It couldn't have been easy for Paul to rebuke Peter face to face in front of the whole congregation. He knew he was risking their friendship for the sake of the Gospel.

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What if Peter did not respond well? What if he got angry and attacked Paul's character? What if it ended up splitting the Church? Paul couldn't be sure what would happen, but he did what he had to do anyway!

There are many times when lesser issues are at stake and we must decide to **agree to disagree** in order to preserve our friendship in the Lord. **But something that affects the Gospel—That is a great issue that has to be dealt with!**

There are some things that are worth fighting for and some things that are not!

The color of flooring or walls—No!

If we make every issue a *"hill to die on,"* we'll end up fighting all the time and have no friends at all.

The Fundamentals Of The Faith—We MUST Earnestly Contend for! When truly eternal issues are at stake! Stand!

The principle is this: **When the Bible speaks clearly and repeatedly to an issue, then we have found a *"hill to die on."*** In that case, personal friendships **must not** come before the Truth of Scripture itself!

It's easier to state that truth than to live it out in practice!

May God give us the courage never to back down or keep silent to save a friendship when truly great issues are at stake!

C. Public Sin Must Be Rebuked Publicly!

You might wonder why Paul didn't go to Peter privately. **Matthew 18:15-18** does teach us to go to our brother privately when he has sinned against us?

But that applies most particularly to a personal offense. If my brother sins against me, I am to go to him privately and admonish him privately.

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If he doesn't receive it well, then I take another person with me to establish every word. If he still doesn't receive it well, then and only then do I *"tell it to the church."*

So, why didn't Paul follow that pattern? The answer is that **Peter's compromise was not against Paul personally. It was a public sin that hurt the whole body of Christ. Therefore, it had to be dealt with publicly.** There are times when the sin is of such a nature that a public rebuke is necessary. This was one of those times.

D. Since Our Freedom In Christ Is Always Under Attack, The Church Must Defend That Freedom Vigorously!

Satan hates the doctrine of free grace and he hates our Christian freedom. He will do whatever he can to bring us back under bondage of the law! He will stir up trouble to cause us to live in the fear of men and not in the freedom of our liberty in Christ.

Paul was willing to fight for free grace and for Christian liberty and we must be willing to do the same thing!

Conclusion

So in closing! Have you believed the True Gospel of Grace in Christ Jesus? In the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemous, a very religious Pharisee: *John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

In the words of Jesus to the disciple Thomas before the other disciples: *John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Repent and believe the Gospel today! Embrace the freedom Christ offers!