

Galatians– Embracing Grace and Truth

Facilitated by Sister Patricia Weaver

 **828 7580 6094** ▶ **Thursday April 23, 2026**

Women of Excellence

Bible Study 7pm

Memory Verse

Galatians 2:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me. and gave himself for me.

Justification by Faith Alone

Galatians 2:11–13 (NLT)

Paul Confronts Peter

¹¹ But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. ¹² When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. ¹³ As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

POINT 1- PETER'S DEVIATION

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 And the

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rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. (2:11–13) NASB

THE CLASH

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (2:11)

Because the Judaizers had told believers in the Galatian churches that Paul was not a true apostle, the incident mentioned in this verse is especially significant.

Paul not only was equal to the other apostles but had on this occasion even reprimanded Peter (**Cephas**), the one who was recognizably the leading apostle among the Twelve. Both Peter and Paul had experienced salvation by grace through faith, both were directly chosen by the resurrected Jesus Christ to be apostles, and both had been mightily used by the Holy Spirit in establishing and teaching the church. The book of Acts can be divided between the early church ministry that centered on Peter (1–12) and that which centered on Paul (13–28).

But in **Antioch** these two men of God came into head-on collision.

Opposed carries the meaning of hindering or forbidding, and was usually applied to defensive measures. By his withdrawal from the Gentiles, Peter had, in effect, joined the Judaizers in belittling Paul's inspired teaching, especially the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone working through man's faith alone. Peter knew better, and Paul **opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.**

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Peter was not **condemned** in the sense of losing his salvation but in the sense of being guilty of sin by taking a position he knew was wrong. He no doubt also **stood condemned** as a sinner in the eyes of the Gentile believers in Antioch, who, because they were well-grounded in the gospel of grace, were perplexed and deeply hurt by his ostracism of them.

Before Peter's compromise with the Judaizers could do serious damage in the Antioch church, God used Paul to nip the error in the bud. In so doing He also provided Paul with perhaps his most convincing proof of apostolic authority. God has a purpose even in the worst of circumstances, and what could have been a tragedy He used for His glory and for the strengthening of His church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. If a colleague of yours were doing something wrong, how would you confront that person?**

- 2. How do you tend to take criticism?**

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- 3. What changed Peter’s behavior—did his theological convictions shift, or did fear of the Judaizers simply override his earlier practice of eating with Gentile believers? How does Peter’s act of disguising his true convictions differ from genuine disagreement?**

- 4. When have you given in to pressure and acted insincerely out of fear, rather than from personal conviction?**

THE CAUSE

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. (2:12)

Peter had been in Antioch for some time **prior to the coming of certain men from James**, and during that time **he used to eat with the Gentiles**. The **certain men** were Judaizers who had come to Antioch claiming to be **from James** but were not. As leader of the Jerusalem church, **James** (our Lord’s half-brother) had summarized the decision of the council against the Judaizers, saying, “It is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles” (**Acts 15:19**). These **men** were of **the party of the circumcision** and not only taught a false gospel but also made false claims of

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support by the Jerusalem apostles and elders. Like Peter, **James** at times had difficulty giving up his lifelong adherence to the Mosaic rituals and regulations (see Acts 21:18–26), and he perhaps still had remnants of prejudice against Gentiles. But he would hardly have sent a delegation of heretics to Antioch to undermine the true gospel and cause the church there nothing but trouble. He would never have been the cause of discord and chaos where there was the pursuit of such Spirit-induced harmony and unity.

Peter’s eating **with the Gentiles** was continuous, that is, habitual and regular over some period of time. He ate whatever was set before him with whoever was sitting beside him. He had no doubt participated in numerous love feasts with Gentile believers and joined them in the Lord’s Supper. Until the **men from James** came to Antioch, he was participating with the church in a model fellowship of Jewish and Gentile believers who freely expressed and deeply cherished their love and liberty in Christ.

It is only a small digression within the broad boundaries of our discussion to say that the Christian church cannot be what it is called to be when ritual, race, class, or other distinctions separate members from each other. The labels men put on themselves and on others are irrelevant to God, and should also be irrelevant to His people. Before salvation, every person is equally separated from God, and after salvation every person is equally reconciled to God. Believers “are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for [they] are all one in Christ Jesus” (**Gal. 3:26, 28**). Because believers are all children of God, they are all brothers and sisters, with no exceptions or distinctions.

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Yet when the Judaizers came to Antioch, Peter **began to withdraw and hold himself aloof** from the Gentiles, **fearing the party of the circumcision.**

Withdraw is from a term used for strategic military disengagement. The imperfect tense may indicate that Peter's withdrawal was gradual and, if so, suggests the idea of sneaky retreat. With the ritualism and racism of the Jews, he began to drift away from his Gentile brethren and stopped accepting their invitations to dinner. He found excuses not to join with them in other activities and finally held **himself aloof** from them altogether.

Peter was not **fearing the party of the circumcision** because they might threaten his life or freedom. The Judaizers claimed to be Christians and therefore obviously had no authority from the Sanhedrin to arrest, imprison, or put anyone to death—as the men did who stoned Stephen and as Paul himself once had done. The most the Judaizers could have done against Peter was to ridicule him and malign him in Jerusalem, as their fellow Judaizers would later malign Paul in Galatia. Peter was afraid of just that—losing popularity and prestige with a group of self-righteous hypocrites whose doctrines were heretical and whose tactics were deceitful.

Peter was not unlike most Christians in finding it difficult to be consistent in spiritual commitment. He would show great courage and conviction and then stumble. He would staunchly defend the faith and then succumb to compromise. When he did that in Antioch, he played into the hands of the Judaizers, who must have been elated to have drawn this great apostle into their camp, by practice if not by precept.

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Christians who refuse to share the Lord's table with other believers because of fear and prejudice fall into the same spiritual error as Peter did at Antioch. And in so doing they fracture the divine unity of Christ's own Body, the church.

THE CONSEQUENCE

And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. (2:13)

Peter not only withdrew from the Gentile believers himself but, by example, indirectly induced **the rest of the Jews** to join **him in hypocrisy**. The separation became so widespread and influential **that even** the godly **Barnabas**, who at this time was one of the pastors at Antioch, **was carried away** into the sin. Paul and **Barnabas** had recently been on a fruitful missionary journey together, had gone with each other to the Jerusalem Council (see the previous chapter), and were now co-pastors at Antioch.

They had taught together, prayed together, ministered together, and suffered together. They were the closest of friends and loved each other deeply. It was **Barnabas** who had first befriended and defended Paul when he went to Jerusalem shortly after his conversion (Acts 9:27). Many times, **Barnabas** had heard Paul preach the gospel of salvation by faith alone and had preached it many times himself. But even he **was carried away by** the legalistic **hypocrisy** of Peter and the others. It may have been Barnabas's hypocrisy on this occasion that began the eventual rift with Paul that a short while later resulted in their separation over taking John Mark on the next journey (Acts 15:37–40).

Discussion Questions

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- 1. How does the argument—“we accept the Gentile Christians, but we need to maintain our Jewish identity” and be “separate but equal”—reveal the contradiction in Peter’s position?**

- 2. Why is it hypocritical for someone to act one way with Gentiles but differently in the presence of Jews, eating with Gentiles alone but refusing table fellowship with them when Jews are present?**

- 3. How does the principle that “we cannot say ‘We want you to be a Christian, but we do not want you at our church’” apply to modern church practices?**

- 4. Why did Paul consider denying Gentiles table fellowship based on ethnicity to be a denial of the gospel’s truth itself? How does the gospel “demolish the old barriers of the law and create a new family that is fully united by faith”?**

- 5. What stood out to you in this lesson ?**

Closing Prayer