

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

GALATIANS 2:11-21, PAUL'S CONFRONTATION WITH PETER

A. The occasion when Peter was rebuked by Paul (11-14)

1. The meeting in Antioch (11), *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.*
 - a. Date of meeting
 - 1) It took place after the brief meeting in Jerusalem in (47 A.D.), Galatians 2:9, *and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*
 - 2) It can't be dated exactly because Paul did not mention it in Acts but it had to take place before the Jerusalem Council (49 A.D.) since the Epistle to the Galatians is dated before that time.
 - b. Location of the meeting was Antioch
 - 1) Antioch was the capital of Syria, the third largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria with population between 250,000 and 500,000.
 - 2) After the death of Stephen, *persecution in Jerusalem sent missionaries throughout the region, including Antioch, Acts 11:19-21, Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.*
 - c. Paul opposed Peter face-to-face.
 - 1) Peter *stood condemned*
 - a) by his actions of not living what he believed.
 - b) and by the Lord.
 - 2) Donald Campbell, *Paul felt compelled to rebuke and condemn Peter for his actions, thus defending the gospel and demonstrating again his own independence and equality as an apostle.*
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *Paul had risked his life to carry the Gospel of God's grace to the regions beyond, and he was not willing for the enemy to rob him or his churches of their liberty in Christ.*
 - d. The development of Paul's relationship to Peter
 - 1) Paul was Peter's guest, Galatians 1:18-20.
 - 2) Paul was Peter's fellow-apostle, Galatians 2:9.
 - 3) Paul was a critic of Peter, Galatians 2:11-14.
2. Peter was condemned for his hypocrisy concerning faith in Christ alone (12), *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.*
 - a. Peter was eating with Jewish and Gentile Christians until some men came from the church in Jerusalem.
 - 1) He had been taught by God in a vision concerning how God makes people clean, Acts 10:28, *And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.*
 - 2) He was part of the group in Jerusalem who had given Paul and Barnabas *the right hand of fellowship*, Galatians 2:9, *and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*
 - 3) How easily Jewish Christians seemed to forget that Jesus led by example, Luke 5:30, *And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*
 - b. The group came from James.
 - 1) They were from the church in Jerusalem where James was the leader.
 - 2) They were of the circumcision party which believed a Gentile must be circumcised and obey the law before becoming a Christian.

- 3) It is doubtful that James endorsed their position since he had already approved Paul's ministry along with Peter and John. He later denied that he sent them, Acts 15:24, *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,*
 - 4) Some believe they had come from James with a message for Peter concerning the church in Jerusalem.
- c. Peter began to separate himself from the Gentile Christians.
- 1) They intimidated Peter and he chose to go against what he believed and what was taking place in Antioch from the beginning of the church, Jewish and Gentile Christians enjoying fellowship together.
 - 2) He stopped eating with the Gentile Christians and possibly stopped taking communion with them since the community meal and communion were closely linked together, 1 Corinthians 11:33, *So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—*
 - 3) John Stott, *The same Peter who had denied his Lord for fear of a maidservant now denied Him again for fear of the circumcision party. He still believed the gospel, but he failed to practice it.*
 - 4) Some believe Peter was concerned that his fraternizing with uncircumcised Gentiles at Antioch might hinder his evangelization of Jews as well as jeopardize the safety of the churches in Judea from non-Christians Jews.
- d. Fear is not limited to the life of Peter.
- 1) Every Christian can look to times of failure due to fear.
 - 2) Warren Wiersbe, *It is one thing for us to defend a doctrine in a church meeting, and quite something else to put it into practice in everyday life.*
 - 3) Proverbs 29:25, *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.*
 - 4) 1 John 1:9, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
3. The rest of the Jewish Christians followed Peter's example (13), ***And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.***
- a. Paul identified Peter as a hypocrite.
- 1) A hypocrite is one who *pretends, is insincere, saying one thing and doing another.*
 - 2) Peter had a tendency to compromise convictions under pressure, note the following passages, Matthew 16:16-23; Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27.
- b. Other Jewish Christians followed Peter's example.
- 1) The defectors included Barnabas who had been called to minister to the Gentiles.
 - 2) Donald Campbell, *All of them—Peter, the other Jewish Christians, and Barnabas—were guilty of hypocrisy because while confessing and teaching that they were one in Christ with Gentiles, they were denying this truth by their conduct.*
- c. The issue centered on the truth of the Gospel.
- 1) It was much bigger than with whom do I prefer eating my meals?
 - 2) It was a matter of *is* there one Gospel for all peoples or one for Jews and one for Gentiles?
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *...it could have derailed the effects of a unified gospel on the evangelistic efforts of the church and disrupted the church's mission for decades to come. The fact that it did not do so resulted from Paul's immediate and Spirit-inspired reaction.*
4. Paul's public rebuke of Peter (14), ***But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, 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?"***
- a. *not in step with the truth of the Gospel*
- 1) The phrase *not in step* is only used here in the New Testament.
 - 2) It may be translated, *to be straightforward about the truth of the Gospel.*
 - 3) A Christian's behavior is not justified by personal feelings but by living in accordance with the Gospel which is true.
- b. Paul rebuked Peter publicly, *before them all.*
- 1) Why didn't Paul go to him privately first and then publicly if he didn't repent.
 - a) Matthew 18:15, *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. Then, if Peter didn't change, Paul could publicly rebuke him,*

b) Matthew 18:16-17, *But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

2) Paul must have been aware of Jesus' instruction, Galatians 6:1, *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

3) I believe Paul rebuked Peter publicly because his offense was public.

a) Peter's hypocritical behavior had led others to sin because he behaved contrary to his convictions.

b) Thomas Constable, *Peter had also cast doubt on the truth that God accepts Jews and Gentiles equally thus playing into the hands of the Judaizers.*

c) Ronald Fung, *Peter's play-acting was, in fact, nothing short of a defection or deviation from that truth.*

c. Paul's rebuke

1) Paul accused Peter not because he chose to sit with other Jewish Christians but because he demonstrated the belief that fellowship with Gentiles demanded their observance of Jewish customs.

2) By Peter's actions, he was denying the truth that Gentiles and Jews are accepted equally by God, on the basis of the substitutionary work of Christ's death and resurrection alone.

3) Paul told Peter that his actions were hypocritical. Peter was living like a Gentile (saved by grace and not by the works of the law) but implying that Gentiles must like Jews (saved by the works of the law).

4) Donald Campbell, *He stood condemned. He was acting contrary to his own convictions, was betraying Christian liberty, and was casting a slur on fellow believers. Such behavior needed this severe reprimand.*

5) John Stott, *When the issue between us is trivial, we must be as pliable as possible. But when the truth of the gospel is at stake, we must stand our ground.*

d. Peter's response

1) It is not known what was said by Peter in response to Peter's rebuke.

2) We can ascertain that from future writings that Paul and Peter were moving forward together.

a) Peter's comments concerning Paul, 2 Peter 3:15, *And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,*

b) Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:7-11, *And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."*

B. Paul's defense of the sufficiency of Christ (15-21)

1. The relationship of Galatians 2:11-14 and 15-21

a. Some believe verses 15-21 to be the summation of Paul's rebuke of Peter.

b. Others believe it is the start of Paul's treatment of justification by faith.

c. My outline follows the former, that 11-14 and 15-21 are Paul's rebuke of Peter.

1) Ronald Fung, *Structurally speaking, these verses are, a continuation of Paul's address to Peter which began with v. 14b...*

2) Donald Campbell, *While it is impossible to determine, it would seem that Paul uttered more than one sentence in reproving Peter. The remaining verses of the chapter develop, then, the inconsistency between Peter's behavior and his beliefs. At the same time they form a superb transition and introduction to chapters 3 and 4 in which Paul defended the key doctrine of justification by faith.*

2. Importance of Galatians 2:15-21

a. Richard Longenecker, *While often largely ignored in the exposition of Galatians, this passage in reality is not only the hinge between what has gone before and what follows but actually the central affirmation of the letter.*

b. Grant Osborne, *The more I reflect on it, the more I believe this to be one of the most important passages in Scripture on the law-gospel debate. I don't see how the issue could be summed up better than it is here.*

3. He declared that justification is by faith in Christ alone (15-16)
 - a. Paul's rebuke was addressed only to the Jews (15), *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;*
 - 1) The Jewish mind-set was that Gentiles were sinners because they were not Jews.
 - a) The concept was social (human birth) nor necessarily behavioral, note Paul in Ephesians, *remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *Unsaved Jews regarded Gentiles as "sinners." Paul ironically referred to them as that since Peter was discriminating against them by behaving as he had.*
 - c) Robert Fung, *...for what made the Gentiles sinners in the estimation of the Jews was not only that they did not observe the law but also that they did not even possess it and consequently lacked the possibility of obtaining righteousness through it.*
 - 2) In verse 16, Paul will remind Jewish Christians that they weren't saved by the law but through faith in Christ.
 - a) He was cementing the argument begun in verse 14 which reminded Jewish believers that despite their superior advantages, they were still saved by faith alone, as were the Gentiles, Galatians 2:14b, *...If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?*
 - b) Martin Luther on why Paul chose to confront Peter, *...he hath here no trifling matter in hand, but the chiefest article of all Christian doctrine. ... For what is Peter? What is Paul? What is an angel from heaven? What are all other creatures to the article of justification? Which if we know, then are we in the clear light; but if we be ignorant thereof, then are we in most miserable darkness.*
 - b. Jewish Christians had rejected justification by works of the law (16), *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*
 - 1) Paul proclaimed that no person is justified by works but through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a) *a person*
 - 1] Neither Greek nor Jew is justified by works.
 - 2] Acts 13:39, *and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.*
 - 3] Galatians 3:11, *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."*
 - b) *justified*
 - 1] It means *to acquit, to set free, to remove guilt.*
 - 2] The clearest expressions concerning man being made right with God is *declared righteous.*
 - 3] 2 Corinthians 5:21, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
 - 4] Ronald Fung, *To be justified means to be declared righteous before God, that is, to enjoy a status or standing of being in a right relationship with God, of being accepted by him.*
 - c) *through faith in Jesus Christ*
 - 1] Jesus Christ is the object of our trust.
 - 2] He is the means of justification because it was accomplished by His work, not ours.
 - 3] E. D. Burton gives the best definition of *through faith in Jesus Christ: the committal of one's self to Christ on the basis of the acceptance of the message concerning him.*
 - 2) Paul repeats the statement that justification is by faith in Christ alone applies to Jews, as well as Gentiles.
 - a) He made it very clear that he was speaking to Gentiles, as well, note *we also*.
 - b) He repeated *works of the law* three times, also.
 - 1] Works is an invalid option which many Jews had difficulty accepting.
 - 2] Works included dietary laws which had become so important to the Judaizers, as well as to Peter.
 - 3] The purpose of the law was not to justify but to condemn, Romans 3:20, *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

- 3) Paul had a final emphasis concerning justification by faith in Christ alone by declaring no one will be justified by works.
 - a) There never was and never will be a person justified by works.
 - 1] Even Abraham was justified by faith and not by works, Genesis 15:6, *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*
 - 2] Paul addressed the age old question raised by Job in Job 9:2, *...But how can a man be in the right before God?*
 - b) James Montgomery Boice, *The threefold repetition of the doctrine of justification by faith in this one verse is important, because it shows the importance the apostle gives to the doctrine. Besides, the three phrases increase in emphasis.*
 - c. The important relationship of these verses to Ephesians 2:11-14, John Stott, *Now, if God justifies Jews and Gentiles on the same terms, through simple faith in Christ crucified, and puts no difference between them, who are we to withhold our fellowship from Gentile believers unless they are circumcised? If God does not require this work of the law called circumcision before He accepts them, how dare we impose a condition upon them which He does not impose? If God has accepted them, how can we reject them? If He receives them to His fellowship, shall we deny them ours? He has reconciled them to Himself; how can we withdraw from those whom God has reconciled?*
4. Paul refuted the idea that justification by faith leads to lawless (sinful) behavior (17-18)
 - a. Such an idea makes Christ the promoter of sin (17), ***But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!***
 - 1) Judaizers argued that since justification by faith eliminated the Law, it encouraged sinful living.
 - a) They thought a person who trusts Christ and not the Law would be encouraged to sinful living.
 - b) Donald Campbell, A person could believe in Christ for salvation and then do as he pleased, having no need to do good works.
 - c) John Stott, *If God justifies bad people, what is the point of being good? Can't we do as we like and live as we please?*
 - 2) Paul declared that Jews who seek Christ as their justification are acknowledging that they are sinners just like Gentiles.
 - a) F. F. Bruce, *Here he [Paul] may simply mean that when law-abiding Jews like Peter and himself cease to look to the law as the basis of their justification before God and find that justification in Christ instead, they put themselves effectively on a level with 'sinners of the gentiles'*
 - b) Ronald Fung, *... Paul is arguing that although it is true that in order to be justified in Christ it is necessary to abandon faith in the law as a means of salvation (premise 1) and hence to become sinners...*
 - 3) Christ is not the promoter of sin when Jews abandon the law as their justification.
 - a) The conclusion does not follow that Christ becomes an agent of sin or promoter of wrongdoing when a Jew realizes that he is a sinner just like Gentiles.
 - b) It was the faulty argument that Jesus promoted sin when a Jewish believer abandoned justification by the Law for justification by Christ.
 - 4) *Certainly not!*
 - a) This expression is found in Galatians 3:21, as well.
 - b) Paul declares without a doubt that Christ is not *a servant of sin.*
 - b. Those who left the law for grace and then returned to the law were lawbreakers (18), ***For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.***
 - 1) *For*
 - a) This looks back to *Certainly not!* in verse 17.
 - b) Paul gives a reason why Christ is not the transgressor but the one who returns to the Law.
 - c) Paul turns the faulty argument of license around on those who would return to the Law.
 - 2) *rebuild...transgressor*
 - a) Grant Osborne, *By "rebuilding" the law here Paul means reinstating it as the mandatory requirement for being Christian, as the Judaizers have done. If Paul were to allow Peter and the other Jewish Christians to renege on the gospel of Christ, and thereby on the centrality of faith and the cross, then he would join the Judaizers as true "lawbreakers" or "transgressors."*

- b) If a believer returned to the Law after trusting Christ alone for salvation, he would demonstrate that he was a lawbreaker since he couldn't keep the Law.
 - 1] Max Anders, *No one except Jesus can keep the law perfectly. So to put one's relationship with God on a legalistic basis is to make oneself a lawbreaker.*
 - 2] John Stott, *...if after my justification I am still a sinner, it is my fault and not Christ's. I have only myself to blame; no-one can blame Christ.*
 - 3] Donald Campbell, *Though Paul used the first person here, he clearly had in mind Peter, who by his act of withdrawing from Gentile fellowship was returning to the Law.*
5. Paul's personal testimony of new life in Christ (19-20)
- a. He died to the law and through justification by faith alone he was enabled to life for God (19), ***For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.***
 - 1) *For*
 - a) This is the second time Paul looks back to *Certainly not!* In verse 17.
 - b) Paul gives a second reason which is a positive one, obedience not license.
 - 2) Paul declared that being justified by faith in Christ alone brought death to the law and provides life in God.
 - a) Max Anders, *Christ died because he took our death penalty upon himself. By believing in Christ, his death pays for the death that the law required of us.*
 - b) The purpose of a Christian is to pursue life not to avoid death because our old lives died with Christ and we were raised to new life in Him.
 - 3) Why justification through faith in Christ alone does not lead to license.
 - a) John Stott, *Justification is not a legal fiction, in which a man's status is changed, while his character is left untouched.*
 - b) 2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*
 - c) John Stott, *It is not just his standing before God which has changed; it is he himself—radically, permanently changed. To talk of his going back to the old life, and even sinning as he pleases, is frankly impossible. He has become a new creation and begun a new life.*
 - b. His old life was crucified with Christ so now Christ lives in him (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.***
 - 1) The death of Christ became the Christian's death at the point of conversion.
 - a) Not only did the believer die to the Law but he died to his old self, Romans 7:4, *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.*
 - b) The issue of sinful living is a non-issue because Christ now lives in every Christian.
 - c) Robert Saucy, *When a person trusts Christ, God identifies him or her with Christ not only in the present and future but also in the past. The believer did what Christ did. When Christ died, I died. When Christ arose from the grave, I arose to newness of life. My old self-centered life died when I died with Christ. His Spirit-directed life began in me when I arose with Christ. Therefore in this sense the Christian's life is really the life of Christ.*
 - 2) The Christian when raised with Christ has been changed.
 - a) He no longer is under control of his old self because he has a new life controlled by Christ Who indwells him.
 - b) John Stott, *...He gives us new desires for holiness, for God, for heaven. It is not that we cannot sin again; we can. But we do not want to. The whole tenor of our life has changed. Everything is different now, because we ourselves are different.*
 - 3) The Christian's new life is lived by faith in Christ.
 - a) It is a trust-life in not a man but in the God-man, the Son of God.
 - b) God the Father and the Son love everyone who places faith in Him.
 - 1] Romans 5:8, *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
 - 2] His love for us is so deep that He died a physical and spiritual death so that we could be under His control.

- 3] Donald Campbell, *It is then faith and not works or legal obedience that releases divine power to live a Christian life. This faith, stated Paul, builds on the sacrifice of Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. In essence Paul affirmed, "If He loved me enough to give Himself for me, then He loves me enough to live out His life in me."*
6. Paul affirmed that Christ alone is sufficient or else Jesus' death accomplished nothing (21), ***I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.***
- a. Paul declared that he did not nullify the grace of God like Peter did.
- 1) Peter nullified the grace of God by his behavior of withdrawing from Gentile Christians.
 - 2) He did that by implying that faith in Christ alone is not enough by putting himself back under the Law.
- b. Paul stated that if righteousness comes through the law then Christ died on the cross for no purpose.
- 1) The purpose of the Law was to confirm sinfulness and not to make one righteous.
 - 2) Max Anders, *...for Peter and the Judaizers to go back to the law is to visit the graveyard.... If humans could be right with God by obeying the law, why would he send his Son to suffer and die on a cross?*
 - 3) Donald Campbell, *If righteousness comes by keeping the Law, the Cross was a futile gesture, the biggest mistake in the universe.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Hypocrisy is not living what you believe.
- B. How we live impacts those around us.
- C. The Gospel is too important to allow others to change it without confrontation.
- D. John Stott lists four Christian truths from this paragraph:
1. *First, man's greatest need is justification, or acceptance with God.*
 2. *Secondly, justification is not by works of the law, but through faith in Christ,*
 3. *Thirdly, not to trust in Jesus Christ, because of self-trust, is an insult both to the grace of God and to the cross of Christ, for it declares both to be unnecessary.*
 4. *Fourthly, to trust in Jesus Christ, and thus to become united to Him, is to begin an altogether new life.*