

## Gospel Confrontation

### *Galatians 2:11-14*

When I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, there were two girls in our class who were from very, very poor homes. They came to school with worn, wrinkled clothes wrinkled, matted hair and unbathed malodourous bodies. I felt very bad for them as they were outcast by the other girls in my class. The boys in my class said that they had “cooties” and that if you touched one of them that you would be contaminated by their cooties. Clearly, our class acted cruelly to these girls who likely endured much more hardship at home than I can imagine.

I wish I could say that I was their defender. I was not. I kept myself clear of the verbal abuse, but I did not confront it.

One day as we were coming back into class from a break to the drinking fountain, one of the girls was right in front of me. She walked through the door and then a popular boy said, *“Whoever walks through the door first gets covered in cooties.”* I looked behind me and saw all my classmates stop in their tracks. I was not the most popular kid in the class and really wanted their approval. So . . . in shame I tell that I stopped too. I did not want to be the first one through the door.

Inside the door was my teacher. He saw what had taken place. He was a smart guy and he undoubtedly noticed how this girl had been shunned through the school year. He might have seen the hurt on the girl’s face as the boy made his loud declaration.

As I stood just outside the door, I looked at my teacher in the eye. And his face showed great disappointment in me. He looked at me and said, *“Ritchie, I am surprised at you. I thought you are a Christian.”* He did not say more to me. He did not need to. The Holy Spirit resided in my heart and God’s Spirit cut me like a surgeon cutting on out an infected appendix. **My teacher was pointing out the fact that my conduct was not in step with the truth of the Gospel.** I do not think my teacher was a born-again Christian, but he knew enough to know that what I believed did not square with the way I treated this classmate.

In shame, I told him that I was sorry and I walked through the door determined to treat those girls with kindness.

Why did I act the way that I did that day? Because I wanted to be approved by the people whom I considered “important”. I wanted to be accepted by the guys whom I considered had social influence.

This danger of wanting to be liked by people whom we esteem hits everyone of us . . . often suddenly and without warning.

*“The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.” (Proverbs 29:25 [ESV](#))*

A snare is a trap that snaps suddenly and entraps its prey. “The fear of man lays a snare.” Remember that!

**MAIN IDEA: The Gospel is worth fighting for. Satan works to attack the Gospel of Jesus both outside and inside the church. We must be vigilant for the Gospel in both our creed and our conduct.**

In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul brings up a very dramatic episode in his life and the church at Antioch to show that he is not dependent on any other person for the Gospel he is proclaiming. He wants the readers to know that the Gospel he is proclaiming is straight from God. For this reason he asserts in 1:11-12.

*For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11-12 [ESV](#))*

To show how the Gospel from God is greater than any man, Paul very briefly tells about **a dramatic conflict he had with the apostle Peter over the Gospel**. He wants us to know that the Gospel is not dependent upon any human authority . . . not even the authority of a great man like Peter. But that the Gospel is God’s Gospel and we are all stewards of it. The Gospel is worth defending at all costs.

*“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” (Galatians 2:11 [ESV](#))*

The Book of Acts is the book that God gives us to learn about the advance of the Gospel, the growth of Jesus’ Church, and the power of the Holy Spirit to bring salvation through Jesus.

As you read the book of Acts, you find that two heroes of the faith are prominently featured: Peter and Paul. Sure, there are other noble characters like John, Stephen, Cornelius, Barnabas and Silas. But Peter and Paul are the two men mostly emphasized.

**So what is the danger of the two most prominent men in this fledgling church having a major, public fight?** Everything is on the line!! The whole future of the church is at risk! This is a really, really big moment for the church!!

Before we look at WHY Paul confronts Peter, let us consider briefly **WHERE Paul confronts Peter**. Paul tells us, “When Cephas (Peter) came **to Antioch . . .**”

Paul is speaking about Syrian Antioch . . . a city located over 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

You can read about the church in Antioch in Acts 11. The church in Antioch begins when some Jews from Cyprus preach the Lord Jesus to some Gentiles in Antioch. We do not know much more about these men . . . I think that they were simple businessmen who had come to Jesus as their Messiah and now talked about Jesus wherever they travelled. Regardless, God brought revival to this city.

Here is how Luke describes the beginnings of the church in Antioch:

*And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.” (Acts 11:21-24 [ESV](#))*

After this revival, Barnabas knows that he needs help discipling the new converts and rooting the new church in the Gospel so he travels to Tarshish, talks with Paul and brings Paul to Antioch with him.

*“For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.” (Acts 11:26 [ESV](#))*

So the church in Antioch, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, is grounded in the Gospel by Paul and Barnabas in its early days.

**During this time, the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Antioch hear about the financial hardship happening to their Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and so they take up an offering to help them financially.** When Paul and Barnabas bring this offering to the church in Jerusalem, Peter, James and John gave Paul and Barnabas the “right hand of fellowship” (cf Galatians 2:9).

Sometime after, the church at Antioch sends Paul and Barnabas out on Paul’s first missionary journey. What a church of influence! On that journey, the churches in Galatia are established. **I think as the Galatians churches are reading this story, they recognize that if the Gospel would have been distorted in Antioch, the Gospel may not have come to them.**

**Question: So WHAT did Peter do that caused Paul to confront him to his face?**

### **The Problem of Hypocrisy: A Life Out of Step with the Gospel**

*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 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. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 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?"*" (Galatians 2:11-14 [ESV](#))

Years earlier, Peter had received a vision from God. In the vision a blanket came down from heaven with unclean animals on it: pigs, rabbits, camels, hawks, ravens, lizards, snakes and the like. Then Peter heard a voice from heaven say, "Rise, kill and eat!"

Peter is a faithful Jew who adheres to God's law and he shakes his head and says, "No! I can't do that! I have NEVER eaten anything that is unclean."

The voice responds, "What God has made clean, do not call unclean."

This happens THREE TIMES. Peter gets the message.

That night Peter receives an invitation from a Gentile centurion named Cornelius to come to his house. Peter receives the invitation and he explains:

*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. So when I was sent for, I came without objection."*" (Acts 10:28-29 [ESV](#))

Peter then shares the Gospel of Jesus with the Gentiles at Cornelius house. He told them of Jesus being the Messiah . . . of Jesus dying on the cross . . . of Jesus rising from the dead . . . and of Jesus being the Judge of all the earth. Peter concludes his sermon by saying,

*"To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*" (Acts 10:43 [ESV](#))

And what happened when Peter preached to these Gentiles?

*While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.” (Acts 10:44-45 ESV)*

God gives to Peter the joy of seeing Gentiles becoming brothers and sisters. **God opens Peter’s heart to receive the Gentiles as members of his own family . . . to eat with them, to fellowship with them, to worship the LORD with them.**

Peter knows that a person is justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone. He knows that a person does not have to obey Moses’ Law in order to be part of God’s family. **And Peter enjoys this Gospel freedom to eat with and fellowship with Gentiles UNTIL . . . UNTIL this visit of Peter to Antioch.**

Some of the Jews in the church in Jerusalem hold on to their traditions and refuse to give up the demands of the Law upon the church. These guys are influential. They are important. **And when they come to Antioch, they talk with Peter about needing to act more respectably as a Jew and not flaunt his freedom by eating with and fellowshiping with the Gentile believers in Antioch.**

And Peter really really cares what these guys think. After all, they are from his hometown and they can damage his reputation back in Jerusalem.

So Peter stops going to Gentile Christian homes for dinner. At the Love Feast of the church, Peter sits with the Jewish believers and not at the table where the Gentiles are sitting.

And Peter is a key leader so his example impacts other Jewish believers. The rest of the Messianic Jews in the Antioch church see Peter’s example and they too back away from visiting the homes of their Gentile brothers and sisters. They too stop sitting at the Gentile table during their Love Feasts.

EVEN Barnabas is impacted! Barnabas who recruited Paul to come to Antioch in the first place! Barnabas who spent a whole year with this church and enjoyed the fellowship of both Jews and Gentiles in the church. Barnabas whose name means “son of encouragement”. Even Barnabas is withdrawing fellowship from the Gentile brothers and sisters.

Paul sees this for what it is. This is an act of HYPOCRASY. Peter has not changed his doctrinal position . . . Peter still believes that the Gentiles are included in God’s family through faith alone in Christ alone WITHOUT having to adhere to the Law that God gave to Moses.

BUT Peter’s is denying with his CONDUCT what he CONFESSES with his mouth. So Paul publicly calls out Peter for this “hypocrisy”.

**Principle: It is possible to depart from the Gospel without changing your doctrinal beliefs.**

Hypocrisy is the failure to live up to what one confesses. In one sense, any sin is hypocrisy since every sin is a denial of what we Christians believe. But this sin is a conscious decision that Peter is making during his entire stay at Antioch. I do not think that Peter is conscious that his conduct is a sin. Many if not most of our sins are unconscious to our minds. But unconscious sin is as surely a sin as a conscious sin.

**The Necessity of Confrontation: A Gospel in Danger of Being Distorted**

Can you imagine being at the church picnic that Lord's Day? The church is gathered for lunch after a nice morning worship service. As they sit at table, they sing a few hymns together. A church leader prays over the meal. And Paul walks up to the front and takes the microphone and says, *"Hey everyone. Before we eat together, I have a few things to say. You all may have noticed that Peter and some of our Jewish brothers are here from Jerusalem.*

*(Applause). Peter nods and smiles as everyone looks at him.*

*"Well, let me get to my point. Peter, you are sitting over there with the Jewish believers, but not with the Gentile believers. I noticed that when the brothers from Jerusalem came here to Antioch, you changed . . . you changed in the way you are fellowshiping with the Gentile brothers . . . you stopped going to their homes for meals . . . at our Love Feasts, you stopped eating at tables where Gentile brothers sit . . . and Peter this is wrong.*

*In fact, you KNOW it is wrong. You stand condemned by your own testimony that you gave back when you ate with Cornelius. You KNOW that the Gentile brothers and sisters are the same spiritually as us Jews who have received Jesus . . . we are ONE in the Messiah.*

*Peter, what you are doing is hypocrisy. Your conduct is NOT in step with the truth of the Gospel. If you Peter, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews.*

*Peter you know that a person is not accepted as righteous by God from any works of the law . . . but all of us are accepted by God based upon His gift of His Son. We are justified before the LORD through faith in the Messiah Jesus for by the works of the Law NO ONE is justified.*

*Peter, I call you to repent of your sin. You are influencing others. Even Barnabas has stopped eating with the Gentiles because of your example! Repent Peter and live out the truth of the Gospel!"*

Paul sets the microphone down. What do you do? Feel comfy?

Some may say, "Was this public confrontation necessary?" YES! Why? Because the problem of this hypocrisy made the confrontation necessary.

## **Why is the problem of hypocrisy so big that confrontation is necessary?**

### **Reason #1: Hypocrisy distorts the Gospel message.**

This is Paul's main concern here in this instance. The men from James are holding to a different Gospel than the one Peter proclaims and they are influencing him to live as though the false gospel of works righteousness is truth.

Paul's statement in verse 14-16 reveals Paul's concern that Peter's hypocrisy will twist the meaning of the Gospel out of the church's hands.

*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?" (The implication is that if the Gentile believers wanted Messianic Jews like Peter to eat with them then they needed to be circumcised and to change their eating habits.). (I think the quotation marks might extend beyond v. 14 to include at least vv 15-16.)*

*We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 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." (Galatians 2:14-16 [ESV](#))*

Paul is reminding Peter that Jesus alone brings complete inclusion into God's family . . . that Jesus alone makes us fit for fellowship with God and with each other. The condition for a right relationship with God is not Jesus PLUS . . . circumcision, PLUS eating the right foods, PLUS celebrating the right holy days.

I love the words Paul uses in verse 14: **I saw that their CONDUCT was not IN STEP with the truth of the Gospel.**

Peter's sermons were correct and in step with God's message. Peter's life was crooked and out of step with God's message. "Orthopodeo" Peter was not walking in a straight line.

Peter's problem was not doctrinal, but practical. Yet the practice was impacting the doctrinal foundation of the church.

I believe that this situation occurs BEFORE the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 where the Gospel on this issue is made very clear. I believe that Peter accepts Paul's public rebuke and will eventually side with him. **But for now, Peter's mind is so clouded by his desire for approval that he is undermining the Gospel that he is willing to die to proclaim!**

By Peter's actions, Peter was saying that Jesus the Messiah is not sufficient in Himself to bring us to full inclusion in God's family. The inference is that we must have Jesus PLUS some other commitment to the Law in order to be fully IN.

Friends, when the time comes for us to stand before God and if God asks us, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" The Gospel answer is ONE WORD: Jesus.

**Reason #1: Hypocrisy undermines the Gospel message.**

**Reason #2: Hypocrisy undermines practical Christian living in the church.**

The righteous standards that the Gospel presses into our lives are diminished when the church shrugs its shoulders at hypocrisy. Because Peter was not living up to the Gospel message, Paul mentions that the "rest of the Jews" also were succumbing to the temptation to follow Peter's lead in this hypocrisy. When hypocrisy goes unchecked, it will spread. The people committing hypocrisy will soon lose all sense that their conduct IS HYPOCRITICAL. **Hypocrisy becomes normalized to the point that it is accepted without biblical consideration.**

**More people advance the Gospel through their conduct than through their confession.** This truth does not negate the importance of speaking the truth of the Gospel, but it highlights the power of living a life consistent with the Gospel.

Failing to keep our life in step with the truth of the Gospel is the easiest stumble to make. **Let us examine our lives and ask the Lord to help us see where our "conduct" might not be "in step with the truth of the Gospel."** We might be holding on to bitterness for a wrong suffered. We might be engaging in a habit that dishonors the Lord. We might be loving money. Let us seek the Holy Spirit's direction today so that we can strengthen our church family in Gospel living!

**Reason #3: Hypocrisy is motivated by fleshly desires and not the love of God.**

Here Peter's fleshly desire was the fear of man . . . Peter longed for the approval of the men of James.

Peter had a choice. He could bring glory to God by living out the Gospel in full fellowship with Gentile Christians OR he could have the approval of these influential people from Jerusalem. BUT Peter could not have both. And Peter chose the wrong motivation to lead his heart.

*"The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." (Proverbs 29:25 [ESV](#))*

**Now Peter has already experienced intense failure following from the fear of man.** It is the fear of man that motivated his three-fold denial of Jesus after Jesus' arrest in the garden. We think that failure would have taught Peter never ever to let the approval of man guide his life.

And more than that . . . Peter has received so much more grace from the Gospel. NOW Peter is indwelt by the Holy Spirit . . . NOW Peter has been a bold preacher of the Gospel . . . NOW Peter has been imprisoned for the Gospel . . . NOW Peter has been threatened with death by the Jewish religious leaders . . . NOW Peter has received the vision of the Pigs in a Blanket and has fellowshipped with Cornelius . . . SURELY Peter is PAST the temptation to long for the approval of men.

Friends, none of us get past the temptation to want to be accepted . . . to be held in esteem . . . to be approved by the people we think are important. This is a temptation that chases us all the way to the end of our lives.

What are some modern-day issues that bring similar "fear of man" temptation to Christians in our day?

Here are a few that I have considered:

1. We are tempted to affirm other people's salvation even when we know that they are not believing in Jesus alone for eternal life. We want their approval more than their genuine salvation.
2. We are tempted to turn a blind eye to Christ-professing brothers and sisters in their sexual sins . . . whether they are living together prior to marriage or engaging in homosexual relationships or are confused in their gender or are casual in their dating relationships.
3. We are tempted to counsel or to affirm unbiblical divorce when a brother or sister is in pain from his/her marriage.
4. We are tempted to affirm extrabiblical community codes of conduct as essential to full inclusion of our fellowship.

5. We are tempted to hold on to bitterness for the wrongs we have suffered.
6. We are tempted to listen in silence to brothers and sisters as they make racist or antisemitic statements. Our silence in this situation is affirmation.
7. We are tempted to listen to gossip and slander about other brothers and sisters and then nod in silence. We want to be considered insiders and any confrontation would put us outside the circle of communication.

Illustration: My fifth grade failure. "I thought you are a Christian." My conduct was out of step with the truth of the Gospel.

**Oh how we need to be on guard ourselves lest we drift away from the purity of the Gospel, and oh how we need other godly brothers and sisters to call us back to faithful thinking and living. Daniel Shaeffer**

Friends, does the fear of man ever become a snare to you in your walk, in your motivations? Hypocrisy needs to be confronted because . . .

**Reason #1: Hypocrisy undermines the Gospel message.**

**Reason #2: Hypocrisy undermines practical Christian living in the church.**

**Reason #3: Hypocrisy is motivated by fleshly desires and not the love of God.**

**Reason #4: Hypocrisy brings division to the church.**

If this problem is not resolved, the church of Jesus will fracture and be destroyed. Whatever happens in Antioch will happen everywhere.

There is one Savior. Jesus the Messiah.

There is one way to God's kingdom. Faith in Jesus alone.

There is one message of salvation. This message is from God Himself and it never changes.

There is one church. One people made up of Jews and Gentiles who are united by the Holy Spirit.

By refusing to eat with Gentile brothers and sisters, Peter was twisting the Gospel, denying the sufficiency of Jesus' death, and dividing the church into two classes.

Some people say, "*Doctrine divides; love unites!*"

Sounds great. But nothing could be further from the truth.

*"Sound doctrine unites us in the love of Jesus."*

Paul is not a contentious man. He urges us to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He instructs us that without love our preaching becomes like a clanging gong and noisy symbol.

But unity in Gospel error is deadly. Out of love Paul takes his stand and rebukes Peter. Paul loves Peter here.

### **The Grace of Repentance: A Correction that Glorifies God**

We are not told of Peter's response to Paul's public rebuke. We do not know if Peter left in a huff or if Peter wept in repentance right there. I believe that Peter did repent . . . whether immediately or soon after.

Why do I think Peter repents:

First, Peter is with Paul at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and they are in agreement with the Gospel over this topic.

Second, Peter condemns "hypocrisy" in his first letter.

*"So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander." (1 Peter 2:1 [ESV](#))*

Third, Peter honors Paul in his second letter.

*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, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures." (2 Peter 3:15-16 [ESV](#))*

Fourth, Peter is a wise man.

*Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you." (Proverbs 9:7-8 [ESV](#))*

Friends, we are a family together. Some days I will need to correct you. Other days, you will need to correct me. This is what families who seek to grow in faith do. We do so in love. We do so with gentleness and humility. We do so with Jesus as our Shepherd. But we are right to keep our heart prepared to receive correction and not attack the person who comes to correct us. This does not always mean that the person will be right. It just means that we keep a humble ear, willing to receive what the Spirit may bring to us from each other.

What went wrong with Peter? Two things: He turned his ear to the wrong people. He turned his ear away from the Gospel.

**Principle: We need to preach the Gospel to ourselves each day. We need the Gospel to release its power in us every day. We need the Gospel to maintain its purity in us every day.**

Conclusion:

*“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.” (Galatians 2:16 [ESV](#))*

**“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” Wendell Phillips said at an anti-slavery meeting in Massachusetts over a hundred years ago.**

*That principle is true in politics, and it’s true in the domain of the church. Vigilance is constantly encouraged in the NT.*

**“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1 [ESV](#))**

**“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8 [ESV](#))**

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