

# Unlocking Freedom: A Study in Galatians

## Galatians 2:11-21

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### Introduction

The older I get the more I begin to think that people enjoy conflict in their lives. I feel like they seek it out and when it is not present, they start something. It's as if our sinful nature drives us toward conflict and we are not satisfied until we experience the feeling of either being a victim or instigator. And it would seem that many battles with one another can lead to an end of relationship, but should it? When there is love between one another, no argument should be able to jeopardize your relationship. **Conflict** may be inevitable due to different opinions and different perspectives on life, but it should not cause a schism in a relationship that is unable to be crossed. For example, Emily and I argue from time to time, usually about little things that at the time seem like big things. However, I am happy to stand up here today and tell you that no matter how many arguments and disagreements Emily and I have we will never allow that conflict to tear us apart. Why? Because we love one another. This should be the same with you and your brothers and sisters in Christ. There may be times when in the flesh you or they sinfully attack your perspective, but you must not let it draw you apart. If there is love, than there is forgiveness. And when one humbles themselves, then there is a possibility that you may have been wrong. We see this in action this morning in Galatians chapter 2. Open your Bibles to **Galatians 2:11-21**, read with me **verses 11-21**.  
*Open in Prayer.*

If you remember the previous portion of Paul's letter has been in defense of his Gospel, being centered on Jesus Christ (given to him by Christ Himself), and in defense of his apostleship. You see the Judaizers have slipped in behind him, after he left Galatia, and had been dirtying up the Gospel by adding to it. They were saying that in order to be saved you must believe in Christ and keep the Law of Moses. And when some opposed them, they began to attack the apostleship of Paul – he's not really an apostle. He didn't follow Jesus around for 3 years. He does not even know the real apostles! And so Paul has been both in attack mode and in a defensive stance. He is trying to remind them of the truth and persuade them to ignore the false teachings swirling around the Church. Why? Because he loves them. This also has huge implications on the Church today. Imagine if Paul had not defended the Gospel and this marriage between Judaism and Christianity emerged victorious. You and I, being Gentiles, would not be a part of the Church and there would be countless amount of souls walking in darkness believing they are in the light. It was crucial that Paul emerge victorious and so with the help of the Holy Spirit he went to battle as Christ's champion. And as we continue to follow the testimony of Paul, we see once again that he is called upon to champion the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, even among his fellow brothers. This will be the final documentation Paul will write in support of his independence as an apostle. And it is here that we see Paul confront Peter in a rather public setting. What would drive him to do so?  
Read **verses 11-14**.

## 1. **The Issue between Paul and Peter** (vv. 11-15)

*“When Cephas (Aramaic of Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”* Antioch was where Paul and Barnabas had been ministering for quite some time. In fact, it was the Church that they planted and pastored together. So, Peter must have visited them at some point. This most likely is a visit that the Church in Antioch received from Peter prior to Paul’s trip to Jerusalem. And Peter evidently stayed for a while. Now imagine what this visit from Peter did to the Church. Peter walked with Jesus. Can you imagine the crowds of people coming to people and asking him what it was like to spend time with Jesus? What was it like to walk on water? What was it like to witness the many miracles of the Messiah? And sit under His gentle tutelage? The Gospels had not yet been written, and therefore an eyewitness with Christ would have meant everything to these Gentile believers in Antioch. Peter most like attracted quite the crowd and was a hero to these new believers. So then, why would Paul seek to oppose him face to face? Wouldn’t this cause a tear in the precious unity of the Church?

The word for “opposed” is even stronger than what we may expect. In the Greek this word carries with it the picture of “a person running full speed in to a wall, and their momentum being completely stopped. The wall opposed that individual” It means, “to stop somebody in the direction they are going.” So therefore, Paul is leading us to believe that Peter is doing something that needs to be quickly stopped. This must have been something big Peter was caught up in, causing him to stand condemned (which was a fancy way of saying that he was in the wrong). What would cause such a clash? Let’s read on.

*“For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles...”* Peter was there with the Church in Antioch and he did what each and every one of would have done. He joined whole heartedly in to the fellowship with his new brothers and sisters in Christ. He joined them in meals. And although he was Jewish, he ate whatever they sat before him. He understood what he was taught in Acts 10, *“Rise, Peter, kill and eat.”* There’s nothing unclean anymore, the dietary restrictions of the law of Moses have ended because Christ fulfilled the Law. Jew and Gentile are one in Christ – and Peter knows this, so he eats with them the foods he once would never eat. Think how encouraging this was to the Church and to Paul and Barnabas. But then something happened. Something that caused Peter change his course. *“But when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.”* He was having a great time with these Gentile believers trying foods he’d never eaten before for the sake of fellowship – and loving it! Then certain men from James’ circle showed up, and Peter began to withdraw and hold himself aloof. He stopped having meals with the Gentile believers. He stopped walking in complete freedom. Why? Because he was afraid of these Jewish men, who had just shown up. However, these Judaizers had no authority over Peter’s life. They could not imprison him for his practices. They could not hold him hostage or mistreat him physically in any way. The most they could do was to ridicule and malign him in Jerusalem, upon his return. And so Peter was afraid – he was afraid of losing popularity and the top place among those in Jerusalem. Therefore, he withdrew from having fellowship with the Gentile believers. This was hypocrisy at its finest. And Paul points it out.

*“The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.”* Peter’s actions impacted other fellow Jewish believers to join him in his hypocrisy. Even Pastor Barnabas found himself persuaded by Peter’s hypocritical actions. We can learn a few things from Peter’s hypocrisy. **First**, we can learn from Peter’s failure that even the most uniquely gifted ministers are capable of failing. No one is perfect, and all are capable of making mistakes. How do you respond to others when they are carried away by hypocrisy? Do you confront them with the truth and then lovingly assist them in their restoration to fellowship? Paul did not use this as the beginning of a personal vendetta against Peter for the remainder of his life. Paul spoke the truth and then continued to preach love and unity as he will later contend that the Church walk in the spirit of unity. And **Second**, we can learn that faithfulness involves more than believing the right doctrine, it also involves living the right way. *“Right doctrine without right behavior always produces hypocrisy.”* (John MacArthur’s commentary). Have you allowed what you believe to impact how you act? For example, the Bible tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; furthermore, I believe that Jesus died for all who have sinned, therefore I share the gospel, in love, even with those whose lifestyle or political ideologies I despise. We must learn from Peter’s life here and think through how our doctrine should impact our behavior.

And so Paul, after observing this hypocritical behavior by Peter confronted him in public to his face. *“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? We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;’”* (v. 14-15). So, Paul stands toe to toe with Peter, and charges him with hypocrisy. And in so doing, he is rather straightforward with Peter saying, *“As Jews, we of all people know what it means to live under the rituals and traditions of the Law. Yet even we were saved by believing in Jesus Christ, not by the Law. And if we, as Jews, cannot be saved by the Law, how can we expect sinners from among the Gentiles to be?”* Which comes directly back to Paul’s defense of the Gospel. We must be careful that we are not adding anything to it, because when we do, it ceases to be the Gospel – and we can impact others in at worse placing their faith in the wrong thing and at best we can confuse them majorly. So Paul calls out Peter for his hypocrisy and then spends the remainder of the 6 verses explaining and defining his position.

## **2. Paul’s Defense of the True Gospel** (vv. 16-21)

*“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.”* (v. 16). In this verse alone the word “justified” is used 3 times, 1 time in verse 17 and once again in verse 21, it is an important word. So what does it mean? The word justified means ‘being made right in the sight of God’, it is the opposite of being condemned – in court it would mean that the judge declares an individual not guilty. When we are justified by faith in Christ, that means that when Jesus sees us, although guilty sinners by nature, He no longer sees the despicable ugliness of our sin,

He only sees His Son's righteousness within us – and although guilty we are declared not guilty and we then can enter into a right and true relationship with God. And this has nothing to do with whether we are Jew or Gentile, and everything to do with our belief in Jesus. Paul is reminding us and those who have added to the Gospel that we (both Jew and Gentile) are only made righteous because of our faith in Jesus Christ and not by our ability to uphold the Law. For example, you are not saved because of Church attendance and baptism. You are saved because of your belief in Jesus Christ alone. The Law only points out our inability to keep it, it does not justify us, faith in Jesus justifies us. So, in this verse Paul defends the Gospel 3 different times against those who would seek to add to it – that is called legalism.

*“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!” (v. 17).* What is Paul saying here? Now remember Paul is speaking to Peter and Barnabas in front of other Judaizers and Gentiles and he is saying, let's say that the Judaizers are right. If while seeking to be justified in Christ, we are still found sinners in God's sight (in other words, Christ's death is not enough) – which is what the Judaizers are saying - If this is true, are you also going to say that Christ made us sinners and therefore is a *minister of sin? May it never be!*

He continues in **verse 18** – *“For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.”* Again the purpose of the Law was to reveal to us our sinful nature, not to usher in salvation. So Paul is saying that when Christ came He fulfilled the Law, and thus after His death and resurrection we entered into a new covenant with God through belief in His Son, liberating us from the restraints and condemnation of the Law. If we build that up again, that which Christ destroyed, we will once again be found a sinner in need of a Savior.

In verses 19-20 Paul gives us an inside look at what takes place when a sinner turns to faith in Christ. *“For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.”* **Through the Law** I died to the Law – which means that the Law can take the sinner only to the point of condemnation and death. So that I might live to God - Life can only be had upon our understanding of redemption aside from the Law. Now we get to the saving portion of the Gospel. *“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.”* **When a man is saved** by faith in Christ, he has died in Christ to the law. Christ now lives within him, enabling him to both live righteously and stand in righteousness before God. He is now able to live a new life by faith, not by works! This is a tremendous upgrade to a life stuck in the law. This is what Paul is reminding Peter and Barnabas and all the others who are listening in.

Paul then concludes in **verse 21** – *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”* If you add works, then grace is no longer needed. And Paul is saying that he will not nullify (or get rid of) God's grace – he neither desires to get rid of something we desperately need, nor can he, it is God's to

give. And if righteousness (aka salvation) comes through the Law than both God's grace and Christ's death is worthless.

### **Conclusion**

So, what can we learn from this text?

First, we can learn that right doctrine should always accompany right behavior.

Peter did not allow this to happen in his life. Let's learn from his lesson, that's one reason why it's there for us today. As you walk through each day make certain that your actions reflect your beliefs. *Walk the talk.*

**Second**, we can learn that there are certain issues that deserve accountability. When one's behavior does not testify to Christ, then we should seek to lovingly confront that brother or sister. And when we do, make certain you are standing on the truth of God's Word. On the other hand, there are times for grace, when the issue is not as big. For this we need wisdom, so let us seek the Lord in prayer when these moments arise.

Let's pray.