

Galatians 2 pt. 2 v11-14a

V.11-13 - Paul opposes Peter publicly because he was to be blamed - blamed for what? As we find out Peter was complicit in creating an atmosphere in the church at Antioch where sectarianism, legalism, and hypocrisy ruled.

Remember that Paul, Barnabas, and Titus traveled to Jerusalem and met with James (the author of the letter bearing his name, not John's brother who had already been killed), Peter, and John.

It was there that those men recognized Paul's ministry among the gentiles at Antioch and gave Paul and his companions "the right hand of fellowship." It seemed that all was well.

But here we see that Peter comes to Antioch, and while he affirmed Paul's teaching to the Antiochians he lived out a double standard.

That double life he lived out in the eyes of the assembled body appears to be related to Peter desiring to present himself as a strict adherence to Judaism in front of "men from James."

We see here that very early in the church - cliques were alive and well - in groups, out groups, jews, gentiles, legalists, wolves, the

unsanctified, and those who used their new found liberty in Christ to continue in sin.

Quite a group! And yet it is this group of people, in a universal sense, that comprise the Body and Bride of Christ - that each find themselves in dire need of grace not only from Christ but also from one another.

Based on the composition of this motley group of believers, what happens next is entirely unexpected - and that is conflict.

Paul takes this confrontation into his own hands. He said earlier (v.5) that when false brethren snuck into the church trying to bring these Antiochians into bondage that he did not yield submission for even one hour. Paul would not yield now - even in the face of men like Peter and other men from Jerusalem who were associated with James - the brother of the Lord.

But he addresses this issue at its source - Peter.

We might ask ourselves - "How could you Peter!?" And that is exactly Paul's question to him as well.

Remember it was Peter that the Lord Jesus had given special revelation in Acts 10 -

[Acts 10:9-16 NKJV] 9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." 15 And a voice [spoke] to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

In this vision to Peter, the Lord Jesus specifically communicated to Peter that the Gentiles, those not of Jewish heritage, were being brought into the kingdom and being made clean.

[Acts 25-28, 34-36, 42-48 NKJV] 25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped [him]. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But

God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. ... 34 Then Peter opened [his] mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

So, what happened in Peter's life since then? Why was he so influenced by these "men from James." Was their devotion wrong?

First things first, Peter is not the villain here. We have to be careful not to paint him as such.

Reflect upon Peter's words to Cornelius in Acts 10:26 - "I myself am also a man."

Peter was a man, and was not exempt from failure - a fact that he knew deeply, having denied the Lord.

Peter was a work in progress, just like any of us. He was moldable, open to suggestion, open to man's wisdom. Peter was teachable, correctable, not too wrapped up in his own self to be deaf to sound doctrine, and we really see that through what he wrote in the New Testament.

Consider that Peter does not record this event for us in his own letters and it is not recorded for us in Acts.

But what Peter does say about Paul in his letters demonstrates a heart of humility, unity and knowing when God's hand is at work.

All of the Apostles mentioned here (Peter, James and John) wrote letters that we have access to in our Bibles. They all could have blasted Paul and said, "How dare you!? Who do you think you are!? You aren't allowed to correct us, we are "over" you in the Lord." They could have just said he was a heretic or illegitimate.

But they didn't.

Here's what Peter says about Paul in his own letters: [2Pe 3:15-16 NKJV] "...and consider [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they do] also the rest of the Scriptures.

Peter understood that Paul was appointed by God to work in the Kingdom, that some people twisted his words, but that the core of Paul's teachings and writings was "that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation..."

Peter messed up in Antioch, but he also didn't allow his misstep to create a rift in the broader church - there was already enough of that going on.

Peter's actions caused other people to do the same thing, play the hypocrite - Barnabas was one of those men - Paul's own travelling companion.

Barnabas had been at Antioch for quite some time by the time this event occurred.

Could you imagine!? This man Barnabas who was part of the social fabric of the church there, who ate with their gentile families, who played with their kids, who taught them the word, shared in the Lord's supper and baptism with them -- all of sudden he withdraws from them to be part of the "cool apostle" table - men from James, legalists.

How wounded would you feel?

Peter did this too - when he first visited he would eat with them, part of the family. When other men from Jerusalem came and "snubbed" that form of unity he was moved to withdraw. Ouch.

How many times have we heard over the years that cliques have driven people out of the church?

If you don't know what a clique is here is a simple definition: a small group of people, with shared interests or other features in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them.

Peter was more afraid of "those of the circumcision," of which he was also a part of by birth - than he was concerned with demonstrating the truth that God had shown him and confirmed to him.

We must realize that we are not beyond this temptation either.

These Judaizers, men from Jerusalem, then Peter, then the rest of the Jews, then Barnabas, only gained more influence in the church at Antioch. It appeared that their behavior became commonplace - to the detriment of the Body at large. To the exclusion of vast swaths of people.

Their meetings only became more homogenous, more one note. Where there was once diversity and mutual interdependence, a shared table, now there were cliques, factions, opposition, and social hierarchy.

And finally Paul couldn't take it anymore and had to say something. An unlikely candidate for this work - being raised as a Pharisee. But when you think about it, the perfect defender - a man who knew the law, but also understood grace, the unearned favor of Christ, down to his bones.

V.14a - I believe that Paul was not acting impulsively when he decided to make this defense and preach against the exclusive Judaizing bubble of these "better than" saints.

This had been building for years, Paul saw it creep into the church one little incident at a time. People began to add little ampersands next to Jesus' name in their small groups - their cliques.

Jesus & the law, Jesus & circumcision, Jesus & birthright

Remember Jesus + anything else = nothing. Jesus IS everything!

We see this in our churches today - Jesus & politics, Jesus & social justice, Jesus & health, wealth, prosperity; Jesus & pet-doctrines; Jesus & fashion; Jesus & whatever....

Have we not seen these modern day circles take the place of the Judaizers among the churches?

Not much has changed since then and we praise God that we have Paul's words to instruct our views - to correct us when we play the Peter, the Barnabas, in these situations. When we get carried away by the current of Jesus + anything else.

Where this gets especially dangerous is not in the realm of personal conviction but the realm of excluding saints from fellowship, or even implying or outright proclaiming that one of Christ's dear saints who doesn't fit our expectations of "good enough" is excluded from the Kingdom.

[Rom 14:4, 10 NKJV] 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. ... 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Are we ready to stand at the judgment seat dear Christian? So convinced of our pet project and exclusions that Christ won't see through it and see that we have padded his gospel with ash and garbage!?

Harsh words, forgive me, I have been on the other side of this issue. I have padded the gospel, May God forgive me.

Look to Jesus alone, loved one, it is His righteousness that saves us - none of our contrived special interests will do.

And don't you know Paul believed these lies in his former life! So we see the impetus for his vocal opposition in verse 14

“When I saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.” They began to obscure the gospel, to twist it, to make its way crooked rather than straight, to conceal it behind ritual.

That simply will not do. The truth of the gospel is straightforward!

[1Ti 1:15-16 NKJV] 15 This [is] a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

So Paul set himself against Peter's actions and publicly challenged his untoward behavior.

Here we have two great brothers in the Lord Peter and Paul on opposite ends of an issue that has monumental spiritual implications for the church.

It's important to note too that this issue is not a molehill made into a mountain.

Some people want to be the corrector, the opposition leader, the guy who opposes everything, they just want to be right and be loud, and be heard.

I don't think that you will find it surprising to know that churches have split and have experienced tremendous discord over things that shouldn't be issues at all - such as parking spaces, or music type and volume, or why does the pastor look so weird...

That is not the case here in Antioch with Peter and Paul. What we see here is not a couple of men squabbling over ancillary, peripheral, or bottom tier convictions. This is the real-deal, top-tier, salvation essentials.

By what means are men saved? That is what is on the line.

Paul sees that the gospel is being polluted and the danger is that it is endorsed by men like Peter that the Body will see this as sound doctrine when it is not that at all!

By the way, if you are thinking to yourself, "I can't imagine," we have lovely families who are part of our church today who experienced nearly this exact thing in their lives - literally. They were put in a position where they were required by God's Word and the Holy Spirit to oppose the aberrant teaching that in order to please God one has to follow the Jewish law and traditions.

This type of thing tears churches apart. It wounds people deeply. And I praise God that His word is so clear about this - we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. And I praise God for men like Paul, and men still today, who will not allow the gospel to be polluted, but who make it known that salvation is available to all by Christ alone.

Look to Jesus, loved ones - whether we find ourselves as Peter or whether we identify with Paul - look to Jesus. He will make us stand.