

## “Peter at the Cool Kids Table...”

*Galatians 2:11 – 21*

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
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**Galatians 2:11 – 2:21** Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before [them] all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? 15 "We [who are] Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. 17 "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! 18 "For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19 "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me. 21 "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

### 2:11-13

Paul and Barnabas had founded the church in Antioch effectively before they even began their missionary journeys. The Antioch church had grown to be a great Gentile church, and the first church to actually send missionaries out. So this church by this time was fairly well established and it seems Peter had come to town to conduct some services. (Acts 11:25-26).

Apparently when Peter first arrived in Antioch, he had hung out with the Gentiles, fellowshiping, eating, and sharing with them. But then some Jews came to visit Antioch, and began to apply some pressure on Peter to withdraw from such a familial relationship with the gentile believers there. According to the record, these boys feigned that they were sent there under with the blessing of Pastor James, the man in charge up at the Jerusalem church, but according to Acts 15:24 it is clear that they were quite simply lying. They came with an agenda. They were on their *own* mission.

The Judaizers were a religious sect...a.k.a. “*denomination*,” that believed in Jesus Christ, but “with a twist.” They held to the belief that He was only an addition to all the trappings of traditional Judaism, not a fulfillment of it all. They thought that if people wanted to be right with God they had to first be circumcised, and come under the other laws of Moses. They held that they needed to follow all the old Jewish rules and regulations, like observing strict laws about what they could and couldn’t eat. They also held the position that in their higher spiritual state they needed to separate themselves and have no fellowship with Gentiles who didn’t follow all those rules and regulations.

So when these guys rolled into town and saw the great Jewish apostle Peter hanging out with Gentiles who weren’t following the rules, they no doubt began to put the pressure him to conform to their thinking and to pull back from all the Gentiles. The result was division in the church, and that is something Christ clearly does not

appreciate. In Luke chapter 11, verse 17, Jesus said *“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.”*

**Jude 1:16-19** warns us also saying *“These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage. But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.”*

Paul himself certainly has strong feelings about this issue. Romans 16:17-18 says *“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.”* And in **1 Corinthians 1:10-13** says *“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”*

Despite numerous and clear warnings about this, there continues to this day to be those who sow seeds of discontent and cause a ruckus most everywhere they go. The bottom line here is that Peter was clearly in sin. So much for the “infallible first pope of the church” as some would have us believe! So when Paul sees this play out, he ‘throws down’ against Peter despite the dangerous ramifications. Paul was not going to have any of this “go along to get along” business. It simply wasn’t going to stand under his watch!

Please note a couple of important caveats here: One, Paul deals with Peter face to face. Not behind his back. He didn’t send a nasty letter back to the home church to try to nark him out. He didn’t go and whisper some gossip about Peter to his buddies. He didn’t google review him under a fake name. Everything was done out in the open and above board.

This is how God Himself operates. When He had to correct King David, He said in 2Sa 12:12 *“For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.”*

Secondly, he did so because Peter was guilty, plain and simple. Peter had done this publicly and therefore had to be corrected publicly. Other people were watching after all, and division, *like a lot of sins*, can spread like an epidemic. Paul dealt with things as a Christian, and as a righteous man. This is our guideline in dealing with similar situations. And we *have* and we *will* have to deal with such things!

One important aspect here is also that Peter was on Paul’s turf. That’s a crucial element in all of this. Paul wasn’t getting in the face of some pastor in a church up in Timbuktu. This was *his* ground. So we shouldn’t get any idea about being the “corrector of all things perceived to be misaligned” and go from church to church to get all up into the face of the pastor to tell him how to run his show. That’s God’s work.

But Paul had a responsibility and a calling from God to protect his sheep. And that’s just what he was going to do. He may only be the “under-shepherd” but he wasn’t going to flinch from doing his job.

## **2:14**

Paul corrects Peter here because he was out of line. It was a public sin and thus called for a public rebuke. It was not because Paul had a superiority complex or that he thought himself to be ‘oh so righteous.’ It was because Peter was wrong in what he was doing, and potentially could drag others down with him so he had to be corrected. It all may seem harsh, but Proverbs 27:6 says *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend...”* And Paul no

doubt cared deeply for Peter. Ultimately such correction is to be meted out by God, but He does use his shepherds for such at times and Paul had an obligation here to tend to his flock's safety.

**Job 5:17** *"Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty."*

**Ps 141:5** *"Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked."*

**Heb 12:10** *"For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness."*

Paul asks Peter... "Dude, why are you asking these people to do what you can't even do?" Ahhh...herein lies the truth of hypocrisy! Hypocrisy always asks others to do what we won't do ourselves! There was no way Peter could follow the "Jewish way" any more than anyone else could!

Peter was simply more concerned about what his 'buddies' thought, than what God thought. Such behavior is a blight in our own day and age. And not just the opinions of those close to us, but even those outside the church. It seems we have a deep need to be accepted and liked by the culture around us, even at the blatant rejection of God and His Word! Peter however...*as we usually are*...was greatly mistaken as to who his friends really were. Sometimes it takes a lifetime or longer to finally realize that we cannot please this world.

This account would be nothing more than just a sad story if it were not so very...*well*, "current." Instead of blowing these guys off, how often we will entertain what they say, only to find ourselves like Peter "warming our hands around the fires of the enemy."

## **2:15-16**

Paul doesn't just do some spanking... seeking to embarrass Peter. He presents the truth, and moreover the reason behind this correction. He states publicly ...for all in the room to hear, "... *we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.*"

These words of verse 16 are crucial to our faith foundation and therefore our stand before God. No one is justified and made acceptable to God by what he or she does. That is in no way saying that our actual living has no merit or weight. But such will not save us or keep us saved. That aspect of our redemption is "all Jesus all of the time."

Paul brings this up at this point, not only for how it concerns Peter and the Jews that were gracing his table. It was said at this juncture in respect to how he...how *they*, and how *we*, deal with others around us. Because while we might be apt to receive this concept of grace in our own lives, we are often so slow to apply it to others around us. No one "gets saved" by being a good person, going to church, and following the rules. We are saved by our faith in Christ. What does that mean? It means I am trusting Him and what He did on the cross to make us right with God. I am acknowledging that Jesus holds my salvation in his hands and I cannot acquire it or secure it through my own actions on any level. Moreover it means that I am actually receiving that payment by Him to my account.

Now make no mistake here. This act is not an "event" that begins and ends there. No, as we will see as we go along in this passage, our "reception" of that payment has profound ramifications and has a "ripple effect" that will resonate through every aspect and every moment of our lives. Indeed such involves church attendance and

participation in a local body. It involves holy living and a daily spiritual warfare against the darkness. But none of that saves you or makes you “more saved.”

Jesus saves us alone. He has done this for us and ours is to just trust in Him and His righteousness, and to “hang on” when the ride gets bumpy. Because it WILL get bumpy at times. But He even equips us to endure through it all. He comes and walks with us and encourages us and corrects us and steers us through the rough waters.

These blessings of God are based solely upon His grace, not because we deserve them or earn them in anyway. A person is not justified and made acceptable to God by his works, what he does or does not do. Perhaps that truth should rid us of the modern Judaizer mentality that attempts to legislate Christianity through politics and legislation. Such is merely man’s attempt to patch together a Frankenstein of religious “parts” and thereby make a “Christian.” That’s not a Christian, *that’s a monster.*

Why? Because such may be animated enough to walk and talk Christianity, but we cannot make a Christian. Not even close. Man on his own will never attain to such a level, nor will he or she ever reach God's glory; we are imperfect, in-complete, and always and forever less than what we should be. Indeed, everything that stands in God's presence must be perfect and complete, because God is the very embodiment of perfection, completeness, and fullness. But man, under his own efforts and works, is doomed to be imperfect and incomplete. Therefore, on our own, we cannot stand or live in God's presence. We must have a “ringer.” A stand-in who can and will save the game.

## **2:17-18**

Paul goes even further in this argument, pointing out that if he and the others had gone to Christ to be justified before God, and then ‘walked it back’ to their old paths by attempting to establish righteousness through any other means, then would not Christ be a minister of sin by failing to fulfill His promises?

The fact is, if we “build again” the world we left behind, whether it be one made of our own attempts to be right with God, or back to our life of worldly sin, we become a “transgressor.” Note it doesn’t say “sinner.” We already are that no matter what happens! The word is carefully and seemingly purposely used here. Transgression is a knowing sin. Meaning I know it is wrong and I do it anyway. And we know that from elsewhere in scripture and the use of that specific word, that such an act is a fatal error.

For remaining in transgression is the ‘red flag’ that despite having said a sinner’s prayer, going to church for years, greatly serving Him, etc., we were never really born again. No one who was once blind and is truly given sight willingly goes back to being blind. If you are lost today, it is because you were always lost and never knew the life of a true believer. Because no one knows what we know, sees what we have seen, and been loved the way we have been loved and “goes back.” For us, there is nothing back there worthy of resignation. You may have “tasted” these things...a.k.a Hebrews 6:4-5, but you have never embraced them. If you return, you have not died to the world and your old life. You may have walked away from it for a time, but you were never dead to it.

*“When a true believer comes to understand what God has done for him, he is driven to please God. The believer sees Christ bearing the guilt and punishment for his crimes (sins), then bows in love and adoration, and arises to work in appreciation for such amazing love. The believer seeks a holy living, not to earn or to win righteousness, but to serve God out of appreciation for salvation. He sees that he owes God whatever service he can perform. The genuine believer has come to know above all others that love is a much stronger force than fear. He follows Christ—does all he can to live like Christ—because he loves Christ.”* Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible – Commentary

## 2:19-20

Let me draw you a scenario. Suppose I am being tried for a crime in court. But right during the trial, I have heart attack and die in the courtroom. Does the trial continue? Of course not. We may be guilty, and certainly we are, but you can't try a dead man. There is no defendant any longer!

Understand today that those standards of God that we read about in the Old Testament ...those "laws" and standards did not go away...they did not die, but in fact are still in force. According to the Word, they continue to shine their bright light on our shortcomings and failure to be righteous before God. But when I truly accepted and thus received the grace of God in the form of my salvation, I "die" along with Christ. God counts our belief and faith as having died along with Christ. He counts our faith in Him and that act of Him standing in for us as our identification with Christ in his death. He then counts our sin as "already paid for" in the death of Christ. Through Him, I share that cross, and Romans 6:3-4 tells me that I having shared His death, now share His resurrection, and moreover **share His life**.

Rom 6:3-5 "... *have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was...*"

As a believer, I am held righteous in the eyes of God because of Christ's death on the cross, HIS payment. And when I receive that work, I receive Him AND His work; I am thus crucified WITH Him, practically speaking, and am declared "paid up" in the eyes of God.

Think of it for a moment. Christ now literally lives *in* us! The lives we now live are lived out in our faith in Him. If all this is true, then let me ask you this...How then... *believer...* should we live?

## 2:21

Paul was not ever going to surrender his position of grace. He knew, as we need to know, that without it we are lost eternally. James 2:10 says "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*" I would guess at this point Peter would have moved off the "cool kids table" and found a seat at the "kid's table..."