

## Message #6

## Galatians 2:11-14

We are living in a day when most people do not want to confront or stand for anything. We live in an age of political correctness. In fact, the vast majority of people do not believe that we should ever be dogmatic on any point and just let people have their own opinion. Some believe that there are no absolutes; that we should never take a stand or take a side. Don't ever say someone is right and someone is wrong. Just say we agree to disagree. Most live by a code that says never dig your heels in and look people in the eyes and tell them you are dead wrong.

Paul did not live by that code especially when it came to the grace of God and the Word of God. If someone was wrong in their theology, he would look them square in the eyes and tell them that, even if that person was an apostle.

Peter was a solid apostle who knew a great deal about the grace of God. In fact, Peter had experienced a remarkable demonstration of God's grace in the aftermath of his own failure. But there was an episode that took place in Antioch in which Paul opposed him. Now Peter had agreed with Paul's doctrine and had actually given Paul the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:7-9).

But some time lapsed and there was one moment when Peter became fuzzy in his grasp of grace and fortunately Paul was there to see it first hand and he confronted Peter and rebuked Peter in front of many people and the response of Peter was important to grace. What this all proves is that:

**PAUL'S PUBLIC REBUKE OF THE APOSTLE PETER AND PETER'S ACCEPTANCE OF PAUL'S REBUKE PROVES THAT PAUL'S GRACE MESSAGE WAS ABSOLUTELY TRUE AND SO WAS PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP.**

Paul was teaching a doctrine of pure grace. This message taught that man is only made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. His message was one that taught faith plus no works; faith plus no law-keeping; faith plus no religious traditions of men. **In fact, this text is important because the real issue in Antioch was grace versus legalism.**

Once you come to faith in Christ, you are free. You are not made right with God by a legalism that says you eat or do not eat certain things. You are not made right with God by a legalism that says you must wear certain clothing or you must attend certain religious rituals. The only way you are made right with God is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and that is also how you govern your life. That is what saves you and that is what will sanctify you. No matter how religious a person is, faith in Jesus Christ is the only thing that can save a sinner and grace is the only thing that will develop a sinner who is saved. It is faith plus nothing. **Even some good men like Peter can become fuzzy on this doctrine of grace.**

There are many good men who are fuzzy about grace. They love the Lord but they embrace a Lordship gospel that Paul did not teach. They are wrong. Others incorporate a legalism Paul did not teach and they also are wrong.

Sometimes they need someone to get in their face and tell them that. That is what Paul did with Peter.

Now there are three historical observations we may make from this text:

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #1 – Paul opposes Peter. 2:11**

H. A. Ironside said what we have here is Peter's defection (*from grace*) at Antioch. As we said, we live in a time when many misguided people think you should never challenge anyone's belief. You should just let people believe what they want and not argue. God's truth is something we must defend. God's truth is something we must fight for as a good soldier. Paul did not hold to a passive, closed mouth position.

It is interesting that even some commentators have criticized Paul for rebuking Peter publicly. But what they don't realize is the grace Gospel and grace sanctification was at stake. Paul was always after true doctrine and if someone taught something that was unsound, he did not just sit quietly on the sidelines; he took a stand.

True doctrine always takes precedence over a person's belief even if that person holds some high rank or position in religion. The grace Gospel outranks everyone and everything. Grace doctrine takes precedence over peace and unity and sound doctrine must be defended.

Now Antioch was Paul's home church. It was this church that sent Paul out and sanctioned him as a man of God (Acts 13:1-2). This church was an integrated church comprised of Jews and Gentiles like Barnabas and Titus. The name "Cephas" that Paul uses in **verse 11** is the name that Jesus gave to Peter (John 1:42). Peter had been raised an orthodox Jew. This particular name in Aramaic means "stone." Peter had a good name and was known as a key apostle, but **when he came to Paul's home town of Antioch, Paul opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.**

Apparently sometime after Peter had shook hands with Paul in Jerusalem (v. 9), he traveled north about 500 miles to Antioch of Syria where Paul and Barnabas were teaching the Scriptures in that church. While he was there, he did something that really bothered Paul to the point he had to oppose him.

That word "oppose" means to set yourself against someone. To strongly resist, to withstand and oppose someone (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 37). **When Paul saw Peter do something not consistent with grace theology, he set himself against him and he did it to his face, not behind his back.**

This is important. This is integrity. Paul opposed him to his face and it was the right thing to do. So many sneaking agents of Satan do things behind your back. Paul did not do that. That is how agents of Satan work; they do things and say things behind your back; but a true agent of God will talk to you face to face; man to man; woman to woman.

One commentator observed “conflict can be resolved only in face-to-face encounter.” Nothing positive ever comes from behind the back accusations or innuendoes. In fact, all that accomplishes is gossip. Paul confronted Peter right to his face.

Now the reason why Paul did this is because Peter “stood condemned.” That word “condemn” means that Peter stood in a position to be blamed. Paul was not just standing against Peter for the fun of it; it was because he deserved it. Peter had known the Lord much longer than Paul. Peter had a bigger name in Christianity than Paul. **But Paul had a better grasp of grace doctrine and Paul was right and Peter was wrong.**

There are those who have said that apostles could not err or sin. Well Peter did. Paul called himself the “chief of sinners.” Peter’s theology was fuzzy on grace. He apparently thought in terms of some form of Jewish grace that integrated a little law. But as Paul previously said, if you mix anything into grace, it is not grace; it is another gospel.

Just because someone has known the Lord for many years does not mean their doctrine is right. Just because someone has earned a good name in a church does not mean their theology isn’t wrong.

### **HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #2 – Paul explains why he opposed Peter. 2:12-13**

The early church met once a week on Sunday and they carefully studied the teaching of the apostles and they typically ate a meal. Many of these first century believers were slaves and probably it was the best meal they had all week.

Apparently while Peter was visiting Antioch, he was eating a meal with and enjoying the company of Gentile believers. **The focal point is on the fact that Peter was eating.** The Gentiles did not have any dietary restrictions. They would eat bacon and pork and things not considered by Jews to be kosher and apparently Peter was enjoying a meal with them.

After all, Peter knew that there were no more dietary restrictions because he had received a direct revelation from God concerning this very issue (Acts 10:9-16). The Jews taught that only Jewish people could be right with God and God revealed to Peter that any sinner could be right with God—Jew or Gentile; man or woman; rich or poor. He also revealed that O.T. law dietary restrictions were now done.

While Peter was at one of these gatherings in Antioch, some Jews, who had been affiliated with James, came to Antioch and came to the gathering. When Peter saw them walk in he backed away from the Gentiles and kept himself aloof because he was “fearing” or “afraid” of what the Jews might think or say. He was afraid of what the legalists might think. In fact, according to **verse 13**, even Barnabas was starting to get carried away by this peer pressure nonsense. **Grace freedom was being threatened by legalistic fear.**

Now remember Peter and Barnabas are seasoned believers and veterans of the faith. They are not novices. But their theological opinions were starting to get warped by religious leaders who had legalistic tendencies. This must have really hurt Paul when he saw Barnabas being swayed away from Pauline grace.

Eventually Paul and Barnabas would split over the John Mark issue (Acts 15:36-41) and when Barnabas ended up leaving Paul, Barnabas passed off the Biblical stage and he went into oblivion. He just didn't seem to have the right kind of backbone at times.

We tend to think of peer pressure as that which can influence others to do bad, evil things. This peer pressure was the kind that tried to get people to do religious things not consistent with grace. Peer pressure in any context may be threatening. It is not easy to take a stand against your peers when it goes against their cultural and legalistic ways. If you have been around certain people for many years who have their beliefs, it isn't easy to take a stand against these people. But that is precisely what God expects us to do.

God does not want His people giving in to the religious peer pressure that moves you away from His grace. This was, as **verse 13** says, pure "hypocrisy." That word "hypocrisy" means to pretend or play act (*Ibid.*, p. 461). A hypocrite is one who pretends to be something he isn't. He plays a game. He plays a part. He acts the part. **What Peter was doing was hypocritical to grace.**

When he stopped associating with Gentiles simply because Jews are present, Peter was play-acting and pretending to be on their side. Paul called him on it. He accused him of "hypocrisy," not "heresy." But the truth is this is a hypocrisy that was bordering on heresy. Peter believed the truth, but he was hypocritically playing a part that he agreed with the legalists.

It is interesting that James is brought up here. He is the half-brother of Jesus Christ and he does seem to have struggled a bit with the idea of "pure grace" (Acts 21:18-26), which is probably why at times the book of James seems to be a little confusing. James was a believer in Jesus Christ but he also was apparently a strict Jew. Paul does not name the men who actually came to Antioch, but he does name James as being the source of these men.

One historian said in the late A.D. 40's, Jewish believers faced severe opposition from zealot-minded Jews for socializing with Gentile Christians. Perhaps James got caught up with this and so did Peter.

But it doesn't matter if your name is Peter or James if your doctrine does not square with Pauline grace; it is wrong.

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #3** – Paul explains what he personally did. **2:14**

Things were emotional, but Paul's spiritual discernment was able to rise above the trauma.

Paul had a mind that was clear-thinking when it came to doctrine. He was very non-emotional when it came to trying to mix law into grace for salvation or for sanctification.

When Paul saw Peter back away from the Gentiles, he realized the dangerous theological ramifications to this. He did not sit quietly in his chair; he called Peter on the carpet publicly. Had Paul not done this, these Gentiles would have been confused about grace.

What is really on the line here is what actually saves a person and sanctifies a person. Paul knew that the only thing that saves and the only thing that sanctifies is a focus on the grace of God found by faith in Jesus Christ. You are saved by faith and you are to live by faith. We are not saved or sanctified by trying to incorporate the O.T. Law into anything. We are not saved or sanctified by following some law or church code of behavior. We are saved and sanctified by our relationship with Jesus Christ and that relationship is solely one of grace.

Now usually you confront one privately first and then plural second and then publically last. But in this case public confrontation came first. Now a public confrontation is very dangerous. One commentator said a public confrontation often results in a no win situation. Usually a public confrontation results in all losing. But this was one time when it was needed. In front of everyone who was at this church gathering, Peter, who was a Jew who had been eating with Gentiles and living like the Gentiles, all of a sudden switched sides when the Jews showed up. Peter was happy to fellowship with Gentiles until the legalistic Jews got there and then he joined the other team. Paul said no way. You aren't getting away with that.

Back in the 1700's a powerful preacher arose in church history whose name was Augustus Toplady. He is best known for his famous hymn "Rock of Ages." Mr. Toplady came to faith in Jesus Christ as the result of the witness of a Wesleyan Methodist. After he came to faith in Jesus Christ, he began to see some inconsistencies between what the Bible says as opposed to what the Wesleyans were teaching. He took a strong stand against them because their doctrine was not sound, which it is not to this very day.

That is exactly what Paul did. He saw the inconsistencies in Peter's doctrine and he took a stand against Peter.

Paul said to him—how is it that you were here living and eating with the Gentiles and then when the Jews show up Peter, you change sides and give in to the legalistic views of the Jews?

We need to be willing to take a stand against believers today who are confused about grace. We need to take a stand against the rigid legalism of some believers who would have people to believe they are right with God by their rules and codes.

Sometimes it is critical that we lay aside our old religious prejudices in light of grace.