

Paul rebukes Peter

Galatians Explained

By Pastor Pieter Van Ruitenburg

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Bible Text: Galatians 2:11-16
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Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation

8920 Broadway Street
Chilliwack, BC V2P 5W1

Website: www.nrcchilliwack.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/bnrcchilliwack

The Apostle Paul has written a letter to the Galatians, not to just one congregation but to the Galatians, to more than one congregation, not only in the province of Galatia but them with a Galatian, a Celtic, a Gaul background. He's been there before. He has preached the word there previously and now in the year 50 or so after Christ, he is so concerned about the congregations with that Celtic Galatian background and he writes them a letter. That's our Galatians letter, right, warning them to not fall back, to keep the doctrine pure because there is a danger he has encountered. He has seen that some Judaizers came from Jerusalem and confused them and said, "Do you know what? It's not enough to believe in Christ. You also need to become Jewish. You need to adhere to those old laws, the food laws, and circumcision, etc." And the Apostle Paul was so concerned about that that he wrote this letter to just correct them, to rebuke them, and certain pieces of that letter to the Galatians is biographical, is personal witness, is autobiographical, and he writes what happened and who he met and what has been decided among them in the past. And so he also writes about an occasion in Antioch. He reminds the Galatians something that happened in Antioch where the Apostle Paul met the Apostle Peter and something happened there. It was not good and so they had to be set straight. So the Apostle Paul is reminding the Galatians of something that happened in Antioch.

So that's Galatians 2:11-16. That's the text for this morning, Galatians 2:11 through 16. Let me only read 11 and 16.

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. [And verse 16,] 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

So far.

Paul rebuking Peter. That's tense, right? Two apostles. Two apostles, Paul rebuking Peter. For the children, three thoughts. The unity among them. They were close. They were

close. Paul and Peter so close brothers in faith. No problem at all. Unity. Secondly, the separation they experienced. There was separation made. There was distance. There was a problem. They did not agree on something. Some strong words fell. He withstood him to the face, "You're so wrong. I can't accept this even in public." And then in the third place, the doctrine they needed to hear again. That is verse 16, right, by faith only, not by works that united them again, I hope, well, they did it. Paul rebuking Peter: the unity among them, the separation they experienced, and the doctrine they needed to hear again.

Let's go to Antioch. Let's go to that church building or something, maybe that hall, and I see tables, I see chairs, and I see food on the table, and I see the members of the congregation of Antioch together in that hall, in that place. And they eat together. God's people together, something which is an agape meal, a love meal, some say it's even close to the Lord's Supper. I'm not so sure about those things but at least I see them united around the tables. Beautiful. They are not only friends, they are not only people agreeing with each other, but they are family. That's how they feel. They feel like family. They have fellowship with one another. They have communion with one another. I see an example of the unity of the church, of that same blood in the veins, of that same faith, that same humility, that same grace. You are so united, those people, God's people together. And you know, there are differences. Younger ones and older ones, some well-to-do, some poor, some originally Jewish. Yes, they sit at the same table and some originally Gentile, that's kind of altogether new for them as well. I see rich and poor and young and old and they're all in that same stem, in that same root, in that same faith. They are implanted in Christ.

And now look at that table. Who is sitting there? A few of them we know. I see the Apostle Paul sitting there and eating. I see Barnabas sitting there. I see even a visitor, the Apostle Peter is visiting and he's sitting at the same table and they just talk and eat and have communion and celebrate that time together and the time they have also in fellowship with the Lord.

I also would like to look what's on the table. On the table I wouldn't be surprised if there is pork. That was off-limits for the Jewish people but, you know, there was pork. Shellfish and maybe food of animals that were sacrificed to the idols before, or animals that are not properly killed. It was not kosher. It was not so that the meal was prepared especially, specifically for Jewish people. No, it was a Gentile table. It was for the common child of God but apparently there was no problem with that and Peter and Paul and Barnabas enjoyed their time, and they don't worry about the food laws, and they sit next to someone who is a Christian but not circumcised. That's fine. No problem at all. Unity. And no wonder, because you remember of the Apostle Peter that he was in Joppa, in the city of Joppa praying and in a trance, "I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend as if it had been a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners, and it came to me and I heard a voice saying unto me, 'Peter, rise, slay and eat.'" And he said, "Not so, Lord." He had a vision. "Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has anytime entered into my mouth. I've never eaten anything unclean and I have to eat something that's unclean? I never did that. That's so strange. How can that be? No! No, Lord!" But the voice answered me again from heaven, "What God has cleansed thou call not common." So

that's why the Apostle Peter was absolutely comfortable, is sitting at this table together with friends from Jews and Gentiles, united in true faith, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was their common point, was their Savior. In the next chapter, in Galatians 3, we read, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." That was the case. One in Christ Jesus and he had hoped that it would remain that way, that they could accept that difference, one circumcised, the other one not, yet united because what God has cleansed we may not call common.

Do you see that unity? Well, look, children, I see those tables, I see people having a great time together. The door opens and some other people are coming in. "Hello! Good morning. Good evening." What was it? "We are So-and-so. We are from Jerusalem. We're also Christians." Oh yeah, I've heard about you. I know you. Join us. Join us, there's still room at the table, there's enough food. "No. No, we can't do that. We cannot sit together with Gentiles at the table. We are Jewish. We can't do that, so we sit at a separate table, or we sit in a separate building, or eat outside, but to sit next to a Gentile Christian, he might be Christian, she might be Christian but, you know, he's not Jewish." So that he can't accept that. "That's not right. We are old-fashioned, you know? We are conservative. We don't like changes. We like the old paths. This is so new to us. We can't accept this."

So they set up tables somewhere or so or sat there. Then what I see happening is that there is a separation. Second thought: the separation. I see the Gentile Christians on this side and I see the Jewish Christians, at least some of them, Judaizers, followers from James from Jerusalem on the other side. Well, that's sad enough, sad enough that they cannot sit together. But you know, look again. The Apostle Peter rises. Where is he going? He's going to the other side of the room, to the other side of the table, and he separates from the people he was sitting together with and he joins the Judaizers and he sits with them.

Look at verse 12, "For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles." Do you see that? Read for yourself verse 12,

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles:
but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing
them which were of the circumcision.

Fearing them which were of the circumcision. He feared them, who? The group of the circumcision. He feared the circumcision people. He feared those Judaizers. He feared those people that had just come in. He feared them. He was afraid of them, afraid of his reputation, afraid that they wouldn't accept him anymore and say, "You, Peter, you sit together with those people? You can't do that." He feared those comments. And although he had no problem with it himself, although he knew it was right to sit there, although he knew, "I should remain here," he yet left.

13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

Dissimulation. That's an old word to say hypocrisy. He knew there was nothing wrong with that. He knew that. The Lord had said himself, "Thou shalt not call it common." Just remain seated. Don't have fear of men. Fear the Lord. But he got up and he just changed and Barnabas, Paul's friend, oh, that hurts, Barnabas also was carried away and all the other Jews dissembled likewise. It was messy. Quite a few left from one side of the room to the other side of the room, on the other side of the building. There were a lot of people getting up and separating. Awful. Because the Apostle Peter felt uncomfortable.

And what was on his mind? I don't know, something like, "I sat for a while with them and now I sit for a while with them also. I would like to be a peacemaker. I would like to be friends with both of them." I don't know what he was thinking but he was not straightforward. There was fear.

Verse 11, back to 11,

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch [as a visitor] I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

It was wrong. It was not just a mistake. It was not just something he should not have done, just misjudgment. No, it was a sin. This was an error. This was absolutely wrong. Not just a difference in opinion. Definitely wrong. He was to be blamed and I withstood him in the face.

So, you see, the Apostle Peter afraid of his name, afraid to offend people, afraid to offend people, afraid to be the liberal, afraid of being called light. They were kind of heavy and they were strict and he felt, "You know, people look at me kind of he's so liberal." So he went up and said, "No, no, no, no, no. I'm strict as well."

So that's dissimulation, that was hypocrisy and the Apostle Paul was shocked. The Apostle Paul was hurt. The Apostle Paul felt, "This is so terribly wrong." He really made a big problem of this and some, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, still say the Apostle Paul should have kept his mouth closed. He should not have interfered and done anything because it's Peter, right? It's Peter. The predecessor of the pope. And he did that. "He thought it was wise so, Paul, keep your mouth shut. Don't interfere. Just let him go. Who do you think you are?" Some say it was a mistake of Paul to do something, to say something.

Verse 14,

14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

So when he saw he was deeply hurt, the Apostle Paul. He saw all these people getting up and leaving, just changing to the other tables. He almost cried. He was upset. He saw that they walked not uprightly. Not uprightly. Not sincerely. Not correctly. Not biblically. But hypocrisy. Not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. That was at stake. The truth of the gospel was at stake. It was not just a difference in opinion as was said before but, no, the truth of the gospel.

And that's the Apostle Paul, right? If it was minor things, he's like a lamb. He says, "You know, take it, accept it, work with it, don't offend people, be easygoing, adjust, be a chameleon." Yes, sometimes he was like that, very easygoing in minor things but here, a lion. "Never! I can't accept this!" And he did not go privately to the Apostle Peter and say, "Can I talk to you, please?" And talk to him in a different room, "You know, Peter, I think this is wrong. You should do something about it. We should talk this over a little bit more." No. Publicly. Right away. "I withstood him to the face when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. I said unto Peter before them all." In public. Did he make even more problems then? Did he make it worse by officially criticizing Peter publicly in front of all of them to the face bluntly?

But you know, what happened happened in public, and if he would have talked about it in another room, the people would not have known, right? Wouldn't have known what happened so he has to state in public that this is not only an error but this is not uprightly, this is not according to the truth of the gospel because now people were thinking, "It's not enough that I'm believing in the Lord Jesus Christ? I need to be circumcised as well?" So the Apostle Paul starts reasoning with them and said, "If thou," if you, thou, Peter, "If thou being a Jew," right, he was a Jew, "lives after the manner of Gentiles," that's what he did. The Apostle Peter lived as the Gentiles did, right, at the table before? They're seated at the same table. Right. "If thou, being a Jew, lives after the manner of Gentiles," was eating pork and stuff, you lived according to the Gentiles, "and not as do the Jews," so, "why compellest thou the Gentiles," the Gentile Christians, "to live as do the Jews?" Because the fact that you left and joined the other Judaizer's group is a message to those Gentile Christians, and the message is you don't measure up if you don't get circumcised. You don't really count if you don't become Jewish. So why do you become Gentile and now you ask the Gentiles to become Christians in the Jewish way, because that's what you said with your actions. You did not say that verbally but with your actions you say, "Join me," right? He left so he says, "Join me."

15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

So the Apostle Paul was really upset and really knew what was at stake and could not possibly accept this. The Apostle Peter was so wrong. He was so wrong. He did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. Those people thought that they were the truthful ones, the law-abiding ones, and the Apostle Paul says, "No, you aren't. You don't walk uprightly. You are proud of your truth. It is not the truth. It is not the gospel of Jesus Christ."

So I understand the Apostle Peter is falling back again, right, falling back into old patterns. What is he? A complex man like everyone is, like all God's people are, complex. Now think of a few things of the Apostle Peter from scripture, you may also remember them. "Thou has the words of eternal life, to who else shall we go?" Oh, he really believed and highly esteemed and treasured the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a sincere child of God. When the Lord Jesus said he would die and be crucified and rise again from the dead, and he said, "It won't happen!" And when the Lord Jesus told him that he would deny him, he said, "Never! Maybe they will but I won't!" Or he denied the Lord Jesus Christ in that house of Caiaphas. He denied. "I don't know the man!" And he wept bitterly and later on he said, "Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee." What a complex man and he would say after he sees the vision in Joppa two times, two times the same vision, "Eat. Slay and eat." No, Lord. "Yes, you do." You would think, "Now finally he's straightened out. He won't fall backwards again anymore." But you see, a dear child of God, an apostle, the chief apostle, the chief apostle, the spokesperson, he was absolutely wrong in doctrine. He was not walking uprightly in the gospel.

So apparently that is possible, it is possible that a child of God does not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. A child of God, a servant of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ with love in his heart for the Lord Jesus erred in the doctrine of free and sovereign grace, right? This was not a mistake, not a weak moment. No, the gospel was at stake. And of course, sometimes we have to be easygoing and adjust but here he was wrong. I read of that unjust judge, remember, children, the parable of the unjust judge and the widow? An unjust judge who did not fear God and did not regard man. He didn't care about people at all. Is that the Apostle Paul? So the Apostle Peter cared, he cared what people thought. The Apostle Paul, he didn't care anything about people. That's not correct. The Apostle Paul cared for people as well and he sometimes adjusted. In fact, he asked Timothy to be circumcised because of the Jews. In certain circumstances, he knew it would stand in the way of the gospel, it would turn the people off so much that they can't see anything anymore.

So that's why the Apostle Paul here puts his foot down. Then verse 16,

16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Our third thought. First we sing. Psalter 325, stanza 1.

You remember one of the slogans of the Reformation, of Luther, "Sola Fide, by faith only." Our forefathers saw in Galatians the justification by faith of the ungodly and that's exactly what the Apostle Paul writes in verse 16, justification by faith and not by works.

That goes back to an old story. You don't understand 16, verse 16, you don't understand it if you don't go back to Genesis 15. The Lord met with Abraham and Abraham was very concerned and fearful that he would not have children, he was old already. And the Lord

had promised him, "So shall thy seed be, all the families of the earth will be blessed." It didn't happen. Sarah did not become pregnant. She was barren. And then some day the Lord took him outside of his tent and he looked up because the Lord said, "Look, tell, count the stars if you can." And Abraham must have looked up and seen the stars, in those days, you know, you could see more than today; if we are living too close to big cities it is kind of difficult to see the stars that well. But in those days, the stars, all those stars, "Count them. Tell me." Well, I can't. And the Lord said, "So shall thy seed be." And how did Abraham respond to that? That's crucial. What did he say? "Oh? We'll see. That's good to hear but it hasn't happened yet. I can't believe it. Maybe, we'll see." What did he say? How did he respond? What he said was, "I believe." He believed it and that faith was counted unto him for righteousness. Just that faith, nothing else. No works. Nothing else but believing the Lord's promise was enough and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith in Jesus Christ, that's sufficient, and that was marred here. The Apostle Paul was concerned about that, that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ would not suffice. He said, "Listen, I withstand you in the face and I tell this publicly before all that we are justified by faith only and not by the works of the law. By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." He can't stop talking about it. He repeats himself in verse 16.

And you know, that was apparently a struggle in those days, and that's a struggle today. There is still something like, "But I need something else." It can be the fear of men and also that error of believing is not enough. It sounds too simple. No works are helpful? You don't have to pay anything? You don't have to qualify in any shape or form? That sounds too good to be true. Having nothing, being unconverted, having only sins, having nothing to present to God, only that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that will suffice, that's so hard to believe.

And that was at stake here. So that's why the Apostle Paul was so strong about that, "Knowing that a man is not," not, "justified by the works of the law." Not by food laws. Because those Judaizers, they were wrong. Those Judaizers, they were adding something to the gospel and said, "But you also need..." And the Apostle Paul said, "No, you don't also need something else." It's the justification of the ungodly and, congregation, that is at stake all the time, and even God's people can fall back into that. And those Galatians the Apostle Paul is writing to, they also are falling back in those days. That's why he says in chapter 3,

1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? 2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? 4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

You know the Apostle Paul said before even if there would come an angel from heaven or even if I a year from now would change my mind, don't believe that angel and don't believe me a year from now. There's no other gospel. There's no other Jesus. And if you bring another gospel, you're accursed. Accursed. In verse 11 it says because he was to be blamed and some stayed condemned. So by faith only.

Congregation, do you desire Christ? Do you flee unto him? Do you seek to touch the hem of his garment? Are you following him? If not, I can't make anything of it. If not, don't think you're a child of God. You need that faith, that following, that treasuring of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they who believe in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

So let's pause here and look back and see what lessons we can derive from this chapter. In the first place, that we all search our own hearts. Why do we talk the way we talk? Why do we teach the way we teach? Why do I preach the way I preach? Why do we govern the way we govern? Is there a fear of men? "Oh, they're going to say... Oh, they will be so upset with me!" You have to be cautious, be a Jew to the Jews, and a Greek to the Greek, but be careful. Be careful that you don't change the truth of the gospel. There's no leniency allowed there. You have to be upfront and straightforward with the truth of the gospel. If that's at stake, be like a lion. Whatever people say, be a peacemaker, yes, but the Apostle Peter was too much of a peacemaker. He went too far in making peace and keeping people equally satisfied or dissatisfied.

You know, we think of ministers preaching the word, of course I'm sensitive to what you think and what you say. I'm human, right? But I must always remind myself, "Don't preach what people want to hear but preach what they must hear. Don't fear men but fear God." Right? To be sincere and to have no dissimulation and hypocrisy. It would feel so much of hypocrisy if I would preach something because of men. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is not after man. "It cannot be after man because I haven't received of a man. I'm sent by God," the Apostle Paul said.

So we need to be careful, we also need to be patient and not too judgmental. You know, in a situation like this, you see that those Judaizers criticizing the Apostle Peter. "Are you sitting at that table?" And I see the Apostle Paul rebuking the Apostle Peter but he did not question his salvation. He did not say, "Peter, you are not straightforward in the truth of the gospel so stop preaching. We will get rid of you as an apostle. We will ban you out of the congregation. You are not truthful. You don't preach the truth." He didn't say that because although he was wrong in the doctrine, yet he was a child of God, right? Was he right in the doctrine or not? He wasn't. That's what it says. Was he a child of God? Yes, he was so be careful, be careful with just pointing fingers and saying, "They teach that so there can be no truth there." You will be surprised and yet be like a lion fighting for the truth of the gospel.

So sometimes, yes, we must be careful. I read in 1 Corinthians 9,

19 For though I be free [for although I'm free] from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the

Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

So that I might gain them, that I might gain them, that I might gain them. If you gain people, we're being careful and adjusting a little bit, that's fine. To do for the people is not always hypocrisy. It's not always hypocrisy to just blend in a little bit and to not offend people. That's not hypocrisy. That's not. But it's hypocrisy if you change the truth of the gospel against better knowledge.

So we should not be legalistic but we should be law-abiding. We should not be Antinomians either. Some say because of this chapter, I've heard the strangest things about this chapter, I have heard that Dutch minister defending homosexuality with this and saying, "There are different opinions about that. We should tolerate that because the Apostle Paul also tolerated things." And we should not have any additions of the law.

I read also in Matthew 23, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." So be careful with that, with all the outward things. That was also here the case, those outward things, and some outward things are biblical and we need to abide with them. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men, so he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, that shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Do you see? Do you see God's patience here, God's patience with the church? God's patience when there is separation? Patience with Peter and James and Paul? What patience. What a patient God. What a patient Lord Jesus Christ.

And then finally, by faith only. That true and saving faith is a gift of God, right? Absolutely and that's good. That's good to hear, that you don't have to work that up in your own heart. Faith is a gift and faith is also crucial, and faith is the opposite of doing something. What's the opposite of doing something? Doing nothing. Now, in a sense, that's not what true faith is, doing nothing. Him that worketh not but believeth in him, the justifier of the ungodly. Any one of us this morning stuck in that prerequisite? Stuck in their conditions? Stuck in, "I don't qualify"? Stuck in, "I should first have this and first have that"? I know the Lord works a certain way. He makes room for himself but never in such a way that we feel good about it. So you say, "See, I now have something. I have that well-prepared soil I feel in my heart." No, that's not how the Lord works. By faith only, that coming unto Christ as a sinner, as someone with empty hands coming without money and without price to the Savior, and then, congregation, then we can sit together with those Gentiles, we can sit together with them that are found, have been found in the gutters of this life that gives patience, that gives love, and gives the fruits of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul writing to the Galatians, he reminds them of by faith only. Amen.