

We have been diving into this letter from the Apostle Paul to the churches of Galatia. He was shocked that false teachers were able to convince those churches that they needed to keep the laws of Moses to be saved. He responded by shared the amazing story of his conversion that was totally by grace. Then he shared how the gospel of grace was revealed to him. He told of how the leaders of the church in Jerusalem confirmed his understanding that grace alone was required for salvation. In our passage today, he gives the account of a confrontation between the two ideas prevalent in the church. One was that those in Christ were obligated to keep the old covenant laws, and the other was that we are free in Christ to follow the Spirit rather than the letter of the laws of Moses. The issue still comes up in the church today, especially in Messianic congregations.

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. Galatians 2:11 Apostolic conflict! Yes, even apostles had to keep one another accountable. The same should certainly be true for elders and fellow believers! James tells us that if we see a brother wander from the truth and someone brings him back, we save their soul from death and a multitude of sins (James 5:19,20ⁱ). Public opposition should always be face to face and not behind the back. It should never be about personalities, but only regarding the vital issues of the faith (Titus 1:13ⁱⁱ). It should be done with gentleness and meekness but also with a firm unwavering conviction of the truth, not to shame, but to help all see the truth for their good and the good of all who are involved (Galatians 6:1ⁱⁱⁱ; Proverbs 25:12^{iv}).

Paul was certainly bold to rebuke the lead apostle whom Jesus appointed (John 21:17^v). It was the right thing to do (2 Timothy 4:2^{vi}). The issue here was if salvation is by grace alone or are the works of the law necessary? Timidity in these essential matters of the faith is usually from the fear of man. The proverb warns us, *²⁵ The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.* Proverbs 29:25 When we fear man more than God, we are idolizing the opinions of men. To not speak out means we are in bondage to the same fear that caused Peter to act hypocritically. In this situation, Paul feared God, but Peter feared man.

Why do we need to help one another by bringing correction? When we initially come to faith, we bring our old habits and tendencies with us. We have the power to refuse to sin (Romans 6:14^{vii}), but we must train ourselves by replacing those old habits with new ones. 1 Timothy 4:7,8 tells us to *⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.* Instead of reacting instinctively as we once did, we train ourselves to look to the Lord for His leading. We ask the Holy Spirit for the correct response. We ask ourselves how Christ might be expressed through us in the situation (1 Thessalonians 5:14^{viii}). Our old patterns are our weaknesses that we must vigilantly guard against. We do that by memorizing verses that address those weaknesses and determining by the help of the Spirit to see Divine patterns begin to take the place of the old ones (2 Corinthians 5:17^{ix}; Ephesians 4:22-24^x).

Peter's weakness was fearing what others think of him. That issue of pleasing man was brought up in the last chapter. We cannot be a servant of Christ and please men at the same time (1:10^{xi}). Paul was helping Peter to live a new pattern by publicly addressing

his weakness. Remember that Peter had seen in a vision a sheet come down from heaven with unclean animals which the Lord commanded him to eat. It happened three times. He told the Gentile household that he now understood that God accepts all people who fear Him and do what is right (Acts 10:34,35^{xii}). The lesson was that God was calling the Gentiles into the kingdom, but it also had an application to food and fellowship.

The Gospel of Mark most likely came from Peter conveying the accounts of Jesus' life to Mark. In that gospel, Mark tells the story of Jesus explaining that it is not what we eat that defiles us, but rather it is what comes out of a person's heart that defiles us. He explains that it was things like lust, covetousness, deceit, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. It isn't food that we eat and is then expelled. Mark commented that when Jesus said this *"he declared all foods clean"* (Mark 7:18,19^{xiii}). Jesus was teaching that righteousness doesn't have anything to do with what you eat or don't eat. It is a matter of the heart. I don't know if Mark wrote that comment before or after this event in Galatians, but the connection with Peter is interesting. Peter heard Jesus say this. He should have known better than even Paul that the kosher laws ended with Jesus.

About abstaining from certain foods Paul wrote, *"Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."* 1 Timothy 4:4,5. Many Messianic Jews today eat kosher citing a desire to be faithful to the commands given to Moses. I suppose there is no harm in doing so as long as you don't think it is in some way adding to your righteousness or salvation. All who are in Christ need to realize they have entered a new covenant that supersedes the old (Jeremiah 31:31-33^{xiv}). Hebrews 12:18-24 tells us we have not come to Mount Sinai where the law was given with fear trembling as the mountain shook and the voice of God was like a trumpet blast. We have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly city, the saints made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the *new* covenant.

¹² *For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.* Galatians 2:12 James was the first among equals, the lead elder, at the church in Jerusalem. That church was almost all Jewish and apparently still practiced the kosher laws. While they decided not to ask the Gentiles to keep the Jewish laws, they seem to have still been observing them out of respect for their culture and the covenant Moses introduced. The leaders had apparently not discussed with the whole church what they had agreed upon with Paul regarding the law not being a part of the new covenant. Maybe they wanted to avoid conflict and thought it unnecessary as believers in Jerusalem were Jews.

Peter recognized that even as a Jew he was not bound by the law to eat kosher. Jesus fulfilled the law for us and in Him we have freedom to walk in the Spirit of the law rather than the letter (2 Corinthians 3:6^{xv}). Paul claims that when Peter was in Antioch he was afraid of what the Judaizers would think. They are those who believed one must keep the law to be saved. Fearing their criticism, Peter drew back from eating with the Gentile believers and ate with these Jewish believers. The appearance and message it sent was that the laws of Moses should be observed. This led to all the Jews at one table and Paul and the Gentiles at the other table.

To understand the significance, we should remember that table fellowship was a sharing of life. Jews would never eat with Gentiles. That is why an accusation against Jesus was that He ate with sinners, meaning those who don't keep the laws of Moses

(Luke 15:2^{vi}). So even eating with Jews who were non-observant was looked down on. But **by eating with the “sinners,” Jesus was declaring the kingdom had come.** A relationship with God was not about the Jewish laws but about fellowship with Christ! The old covenant pointed forward to a new one. For Christians, eating together was a time of fellowship and often included communion. A new covenant was being ushered in, one with a new high priest, Christ Jesus. This new covenant was not based on obeying rules, but upon what this glorious high priest would do for us. (See Hebrews 7.)

In Christ we are one! There is no Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, male or female in Christ (Colossians 3:11^{xvii}). There are only those who have the righteousness of God in Christ and those who reject His grace. Some groups think they are the only ones who have the correct doctrines and have some special corner on the gospel. The bride of Christ is one. ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all* Ephesians 4:4-6 There are no partitions in heaven. You are a part of the heavenly city or you are not. There are no front row seats for Messianic Jews, or charismatics, or Baptists, or whatever your group is. We all think we are in the group that is best, or we would not be in that group. We forget that the group we are all in is the church of Jesus Christ and that all our sins have been forgiven and that none of us is perfected yet (except those who believe in entire sanctification in this life - ha!).

¹³ *And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.* Galatians 2:13 Peter's bad example caused Barnabas and the other Jewish believers in Antioch to do the same. Our actions always influence others for better or for worse. They communicate a message, and if the message is corrupt, it has the potential to lead others astray, especially young in the faith believers (1 Corinthians 15:33^{xviii}). No one is an island.

"Acted hypocritically" means that they acted one way with the Gentiles and another way with the Jews. Their actions were inconsistent with their faith. Which was it? Do Jews have to keep the laws or are they free in Christ? Barnabas had seen the power of the Holy Spirit at work in Gentiles and heard Paul proclaim the gospel of grace through faith, but even he followed Peter's lead in eating with the Jews from Jerusalem. Are we one or is there a Jewish church and a Gentile church? How did the Gentiles feel when the Jews started to act like they were special?

Paul was abandoned by his Jewish brothers. We cannot imagine the damage which would have been done to the gospel message had Paul caved and gone with them. It would not be the gospel we know today, or God would have raised up someone else to proclaim it. How important it was for Paul to stand against them all. Truth prevails even when a majority oppose it because it will eventually be found out.

¹⁴ *But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”* Galatians 2:14 The truth of the gospel is that Christ fulfilled the Law for us, so we are no longer under the Law but under grace. If they had to circumcise the Gentiles and have them eat kosher, then what other laws needed to be done --sacrifice in the temple? What difference would Christ make then? Peter knew what the Spirit taught him in Joppa, that what God calls clean do not call unclean (Acts 10:15^{xix}). He witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit on Gentiles who

did not observe the law. He was taught the gospel of grace from God and yet he was fearful of the opinion of the self-righteous Judaizers.

Paul's confrontation was based on Peter's actions not being in step with the truth of the gospel of grace. It sent the wrong message, one that was contradictory to the gospel. It led others astray. As it was public Paul had to address it publicly. Paul went right to the point and exposed the hypocrisy. *"If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"* Are we free in Christ, or aren't we (Galatians 5:1^{xx})? And if we are, why change behavior in front of certain people, confusing the Gentile believers as to what is necessary for salvation? Instead, why not demonstrate the freedom Christ gives us by being united with believers in grace?

Messianic congregations today still struggle with this issue. If individually they want to eat kosher, or even in a group that is all Jewish, that is not a problem. But when Gentiles are present at a potluck and those who eat non-kosher food must sit at a separate table, or if they refuse to attend a non-kosher gathering, is that not saying there are two kinds of Christ followers?

The middle wall of partition, the balustrade that kept Gentiles out of the temple, was destroyed (Ephesians 2:14^{xxi}). That was the wall that warned Gentiles not to enter the temple. Paul wrote that Jesus broke that wall down before it was physically destroyed. The spiritual reality was declared before the physical destruction of the wall in AD 70 demonstrated it to be true. All those who are in Christ can come right into the Holy of holies because the Lord is our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6^{xxii})! The Jews no longer need an earthly priest to go in once a year - that was the law too. All believers have access to God through the Spirit (1 Timothy 2:5^{xxiii}). He made us one. Acting otherwise distorts the message of the gospel.

This dispute between the two apostles demonstrates the veracity of the Bible. None of the characters in Scripture other than Jesus are presented as perfect. Jesus selected Peter to feed the sheep, and yet here he is being rebuked for compromising out of fear. Our Bible was written by 40 different authors from all walks of life over a period of 1500 years and has one consistent message. Man is fallen, and even God's chosen leaders make mistakes. The Bible not only reveals to us the nature of God, but it also reveals the struggles of every human being. It all points to Jesus as the solution to our sin debt. No work can add to what He accomplished for us on the cross!

I want to add to this passage the response of Peter. We are not told in this text. The Proverbs tell us that the wounds of a friend are done in faithfulness, but an enemy's flattery is full of deceit (Proverbs 27:6^{xxiv}; Psalm 141:5^{xxv}). Did Peter respond with an angry rebuttal? We don't know, but I would expect that he did what he did after the betrayal when the rooster crowed, going out and weeping (Luke 22:62^{xxvi}). Peter was a strong, impulsive man with a tender heart. We do know that later Peter wrote that Paul's letters were inspired Scripture and full of wisdom (2 Peter 3:15,16^{xxvii}).

We should take rebukes addressed to us before the Lord to see if we are indeed guilty and be willing to gratefully receive correction. Sometimes people accuse us of motivations or acts of which we are not guilty. We should receive them with grace and leave our defense to the Lord. Whatever a person thinks of our fallen nature, they can never be critical enough. But praise be to God, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1^{xxviii}). That is the wonder of grace!

"...how can you force Gentiles to live like Jews?" "to live like Jews" is one word in Greek. It was used to describe the conversion of a Gentile to Judaism. So, we could translate the phrase, "how can you force Gentile Christians to become Jews?" The next verse refers to "Gentile sinners." It was how Jews thought of the rest of the world. But Peter knew they were partakers of the same Holy Spirit, sanctified by the blood of Jesus, full partners in the family of God, heirs of the promises, and members of the kingdom of God. To separate himself at another table denied all of that! *Racism of any brand in any culture is incompatible with the truth of the gospel.*^{xxix}

Sometimes we want to imply that everyone must have the same disciplines and behavior. We add to the gospel of grace by insisting on good things like Bible reading, prayer, witnessing, and fellowship. While all those are needed, we cannot force a person or guilt them into doing those things. It must be the work of the Holy Spirit, or it will be done out of duty. It is the Spirit's work to convict (John 16:8^{xxx}). We can encourage but take care that your encouragement does not end up being discouragement. **We are not cattle to be driven, but sheep that are led. The Lord is our shepherd.** He leads us to green pastures (Psalm 23:2^{xxxi}). He's not a cattle rancher that drives us to market!

This encounter was a major turning point for the church! Thank God the Spirit moved Paul to stand for the truth. Thank God Peter received it and that the church of Jerusalem endorsed the gospel of grace. Otherwise, we would still needlessly be under the heavy yoke of the law, but Christ has set us free to walk in the Spirit and not the letter (Romans 2:29^{xxxii}). The laws of Moses were guidelines for a world that did not have the Spirit indwelling them. Now that Jesus opened the way to sanctify us through His blood, the Spirit of God is living with and in us to guide us into all truth (John 16:13^{xxxiii}). The message to the Galatians was that life in the Spirit is so much better than the cold law. Peter's error was sending the signal that that was not necessarily true. Paul of all people knew where the law led him and how the Spirit rescued him and set him free.

My prayer is that we all, myself included, learn to live by the Spirit rather than routines or rules. How we need to appreciate the wonder of this grace, that Christ has done all. For as Paul describes in the next paragraph, ¹⁹ *For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.* Galatians 2:19 (ESV)

In a sermon preached at York Minster shortly after the death of the late Dean (Augustus Duncombe) Canon Body said: "A few days before his departure I was by his bedside, and in course of conversation alluded to his work for the Church, and the brave way he contended for the faith. He stopped me, saying, 'Say nothing of that. When you are where I am now you will see nothing will bear looking at of one's own. There is only one trust then, the infinite mercies of the Saviour.' I said, 'True, it is peace, is it not, with you now.' He replied, 'Perfect peace, thank God, perfect peace.'"^{xxxiv} The only way we can know that peace is by faith to receive the grace Jesus freely offers us (Titus 3:5^{xxxv}).

Questions

1 Why is Paul bringing up this confrontation? 2 How were Peter's fear different from Paul's fear? 3 How do we change our old patterns? 4 Why do we know Peter knew better? 5 How did Peter affect the others? Lesson? 6 What would have happened if Paul was silent? 7 Why are we free from the law? 8 What is the picture of the middle wall of partition? 9 How does this dispute authenticate the message? 10 Why might we think Peter responded appropriately?

ⁱ **James 5:19,20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

ⁱⁱ **Titus 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

ⁱⁱⁱ **Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

^{iv} **Proverbs 25:12 (ESV)**

¹² Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprove to a listening ear.

^v **John 21:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

^{vi} **2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)**

² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

^{vii} **Romans 6:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

^{viii} **1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

^{ix} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^x **Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV)**

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

^{xi} **Galatians 1:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

^{xii} **Acts 10:34-35 (ESV)**

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

^{xiii} **Mark 7:18-19 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him,

¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

^{xiv} **Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)**

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

^{xv} **2 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

^{xvi} **Luke 15:2 (ESV)**

² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

^{xvii} **Colossians 3:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

^{xviii} **1 Corinthians 15:33 (ESV)**

³³ Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

^{xix} **Acts 10:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.”

^{xx} **Galatians 5:1 (ESV)**

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

^{xxi} **Ephesians 2:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

^{xxii} **Jeremiah 23:6 (ESV)**

⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

^{xxiii} **1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

^{xxiv} **Proverbs 27:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

^{xxv} **Psalms 141:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds.

^{xxvi} **Luke 22:62 (ESV)**

⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

^{xxvii} **2 Peter 3:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

^{xxviii} **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

^{xxix} George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 183). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{xxx} **John 16:8 (ESV)**

⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

^{xxxi} **Psalms 23:2 (ESV)**

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

^{xxxii} **Romans 2:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

^{xxxiii} **John 16:13 (ESV)**

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

^{xxxiv} Exell, J. S. (n.d.). *The Biblical Illustrator: Galatians* (p. 98). New York; Chicago; Toronto; London; Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company.

^{xxxv} **Titus 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,