

## Contending for the Faith

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AM Service

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### Text:

Galatians 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 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. 13: And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. 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?

### Introduction

As we have seen in our past lessons, the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians to counter the false teaching of the Judaizers and to warn the churches of the **dangers of departing from truth of the gospel of grace**. The Judaizers taught that a person could not be saved without keeping the Mosaic Law. They insisted that a person could only be right before God by hard work at keeping the law. **Things have not really changed since** the time of the Judaizers, for there are still many today who insist that salvation is by works righteousness. **Paul fought a good fight of faith and faithfully contended for the faith**. But Paul is long dead and gone, and **it's our turn** to defend the purity of the gospel. We must **strive together** for the faith of the gospel.

Now in this section, we will see that as Paul fights and contends for the faith of the gospel, **he ran into an unexpected and serious issue** with the leader of the apostle himself, Peter and that is the focus of this section—the **Confrontation** with Peter, the **Compromise** of Peter, and the **Consequence** of Peter's Action.

### I – The Confrontation with Peter

Galatians 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

After telling us about the Jerusalem Council, where the purity of the gospel was preserved and the church leaders in Jerusalem were united in endorsing Paul's message and ministry to the Gentiles, Paul now tells us of **another incident that happened in Antioch** sometime later after that successful and productive meeting in Jerusalem. **Antioch played an important role in the spread of Christianity**. It was the church in the Antioch where the first Gentiles were saved and where the first mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles was established. It was the church in Antioch where **Paul and Barnabas served together as co-pastors**. Now, Peter came to Antioch,

and while he was there, he was freely fellowshiping with the Gentile believers and eating Gentile food. But there arise an occasion where the apostle **Paul had to call him out because of his conduct**. Our text says, he withstood him to his face, in other words, Paul took issue and opposed him publicly. He openly and directly confronted Peter. **Paul had to do this** because he is fully convinced what Peter did was clearly wrong. The issue at hand is **not of secondary issue**. The issue was **absolutely vital to the future of the church**, because what is at stake is the purity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself.

Although Peter had been called an apostle before he had been, Paul did not hesitate to correct him. Peter had been called a pillar of the church, but Paul did not back away from correcting Peter when he saw him out of line with the truth.

Don Anderson commenting on this incident writes, *“We just left them in Jerusalem, unified and now in Antioch there is conflict. Paul goes to Jerusalem and in their creed they are unified. Peter goes to Antioch and in their conduct, they are divided. They joined their hands singing “Blest be the Tie that Binds” in our last study and now there is conflict between them. In Jerusalem Paul looked on Peter as his equal in rank and sphere of work, but in Antioch he was his superior in character and courage.”*

So, what was the conflict about? Paul in the next verse explains why he confronted Peter.

## **II – The Compromise of Peter**

Galatians 2:12 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.

Paul now tells his readers and us why he had to protest and oppose Peter publicly. Peter while in Antioch, was having dinner fellowship with the Gentile believers who were not circumcised, but when certain men from James arrived, Peter **“withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.”**

These certain men were the Judaizers, which were of the circumcision, that is, those who were teaching that faith in Christ is not enough, and that one must be circumcised also in order to enter the kingdom of God. These false teachers corrupted the gospel by teaching that works-righteousness is a prerequisite for salvation. They deny justification by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. When these men of the party of circumcision arrived, Peter separated himself from the Gentile believers. Peter would not eat with the Gentile believers anymore, **“fearing them which were of the circumcision”**. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision.

God had already spoken to Peter about this issue in a vision before his encounter with a Gentile named Cornelius. The Lord already taught him not to call unclean those whom He had cleansed. When he visited Cornelius, he was strongly criticized by some Jewish believers for having eaten with a Gentile, but **Peter boldly defended eating and fellowshiping with the uncircumcised Gentiles!** But now, here at Antioch, he refused to eat with uncircumcised Gentile believers.

When the Judaizers arrived, **Peter lost his courage**. Peter caved in in the face of Jewish peer pressure. “[The fear of man bringeth a snare](#)” (Prov. 29:25).

Paul in the next verse describes Peter’s action as **dissimulation** which is another word for **hypocrisy**. Peter's fault was that he was acting inconsistent with the Gospel message of being made completely righteous by faith in Christ apart from works of the law. No, Peter did not give up justification by faith. He still believes this great truth, but **he had compromised this truth by his outward conduct**.

**What is a hypocrite?** *A hypocrite is someone who wears a mask in order to mask their true character.* Merriam-Webster defines it—“*a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.*” Bible Commentator Guzik comments on their hypocrisy, “*In this case Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the Jewish Christians in Antioch knew that these Gentile believers were really Christians. Yet, because of the pressure from the certain men from James, they acted like they were not Christians at all.*”

Though Peter had not abandoned justification by faith, by his actions of withdrawing and separating himself and not eating with Gentile believers anymore, **he was acting as if he believes that Gentiles must become like Jews** and submit to the party of circumcision. This is hypocrisy. This is completely inconsistent with what Peter and the other Jewish believers believe and confess.

Wiersbe has a warning for us, “*Before we criticize Peter, perhaps we had better examine our own lives to see how many familiar Bible doctrines we are actually obeying. As you examine church history, you see that, even with a complete Bible, believers through the years have been slow to believe and practice the truths of the Christian faith. When we think of the persecution and discrimination that have been practiced in the name of Christ, it embarrasses us. It is one thing for us to defend a doctrine in a church meeting, and quite something else to put it into practice in everyday life.*”

### **III – The Consequence of Peter’s Action**

Now, **Peter's hypocrisy was causing serious problems**, not only for himself but also for others. His bad example was **leading others astray**.

[Galatians 2:13a](#) And the **other Jews dissembled likewise with him** ...

Peter’s action had negative effects on the other Jews, referring to the Jewish believers, who were in Antioch. The word ‘**dissembled**’ came from the same root word of ‘**dissimulation**’ and ‘**dissembled**’ means **pretended**. So, the rest of the Jews also joined Peter in his hypocrisy.

[Galatians 2:13b](#) ... **insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation**.

So, even Barnabas was led astray with them by their hypocrisy. Barnabas, who is known the son of encouragement, who was the faithful and loyal companion of Paul in the ministry, who was the first pastor of the church in Antioch, labored together with Paul in reaching the Gentiles with the gospel and in planting Gentile churches in Galatia, and who stood with Paul in the Jerusalem

Council, even this very Barnabas was carried away by Peter's hypocrisy. This must really be a discouragement to Paul to see Barnabas, his great encourager in the ministry, joined Peter and the rest of the Jewish believers in their hypocrisy.

This **must have been deeply disturbing and discouraging to Paul**, it was bad enough to see Peter cave in to the Judaizer's pressure, but to see Barnabas joining Peter in his hypocrisy was a real blow. **Paul cannot be silent**; he has to confront Peter publicly lest he leads others astray. It was bad enough for Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles and the champion of Gentile liberty from the law, to have Peter act as he did. But the hypocrisy of Barnabas was the cruel blow. Barnabas had been Paul's great partner in the ministry and the most effective minister of the Gospel in the conversion of the Gentiles.

Guzik also has a warning for us, *"It is easy to criticize Peter; but every person knows what it means to do something that you know is wrong. Everyone knows what it feels like to go against what you know very well is right. Everyone knows what it feels like when social pressure pushes you towards compromise in some way.... This was the kind of behavior that dominated Peter's life before he was transformed by the power of God. This was like Peter telling Jesus not to go to the cross, or Peter taking his eyes off of Jesus and sinking when walking on the water, or like Peter cutting off the ear of the servant of the High Priest when soldiers came to arrest Jesus. We see that the flesh was still present in Peter. Salvation and the filling of the Holy Spirit did not make Peter perfect; the old Peter was still there, just seen less often. We might be surprised that Peter compromised even though he knew better; but we are only surprised if we don't believe what God says about the weakness and corruption of our flesh. Paul himself knew this struggle, as he described it in [Romans 7:18](#): For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.*

*As they often say, it's not how the story begins but how it ends. In Peter's case after a shaky beginning, there was a strong finish. And so, in spite of Peter's actions in Antioch, it is interesting to read Peter's words on fear written about 63AD, some 12-13 years after this episode in Galatians (49-50AD). It is clear that over the intervening decade Peter had continued to grow "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (cp 2 Peter 3:18+).*

Now, while the defection of Barnabas must have been a deep blow to **Paul**, **he remained steadfast in contending for the faith** and preserving the purity of the gospel.

### **Closing Thoughts**

**How careful we must be** with our actions and behaviour. Peter had a powerful influence. **We all have influence, right?** We may not be leaders in the church, but we still have influence on others: parents on their children, grandparents on their grandchildren, older brothers and sisters on their younger siblings, brothers and sisters in Christ on their fellow believers.

*Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful  
May the fire of our devotion light their way*

*May the footprints that we leave  
Lead them to believe  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey.*

Let me also remind us that *“that great ministers may make great mistakes.”* We saw that from Peter’s example. Also in Barnabas, who was described in [Acts 11:24](#) as *“a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith”*, this same Barnabas failed in this crisis. So, what is required of us? We must be careful whom we trust and follow. *“Even when people seem devoutly religious, sincere, and honest, we should test their teaching by asking the Lord for guidance, searching the Scriptures, and talking with knowledgeable, trustworthy Christians. Sincere people can be sincerely wrong.”* - H.V. Lugt

So, it is important for us to obey our Lord’s command to search the Scriptures and also be like the Bereans in the book of Acts where they are described to have, *“received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so (Acts 17:11).*

**AMEN!**