

**Peter and Paul**  
Galatians 2:11-14

Growing up in an area where the majority of people were Roman Catholic, there were a large number of well-known Catholic schools all around. They all had names that were very strange to me, names that meant nothing to me since I had no idea what they meant. They were just names of a school, like, “Our Lady of Victory,” “Immaculate Conception,” “Sacred Heart,” or “St. Francis.” Just names.

In the small town I lived in, there was one particular Catholic school that was very prominent, called St. Peter and Paul. Not one or the other, but as we always referred to it, just “Peter and Paul.” So from my earliest memories, those two names, those two men were always joined together. I didn’t know much about either of them, just that they were always associated with each other. But as I did learn more about them over the years, the account in the text before us this morning is very much out of character. It is different than anything else you read about Peter and Paul. For here in Galatians 2, they are not joined together in harmony. Instead, they are divided in opposition to each other. Separated.

v.11

Interesting that Peter is called by his name in its Hebrew origin, Cephas. Actually, Cephas is Aramaic, a language very closely related to Hebrew, and not anything we have to wonder about.

John 1:40 “One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, We have found the Messiah (which means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon the son of John.

You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter).”

So why this confrontation? Why such a strong verbal rebuke, one that will obviously demonstrate the reality that Peter is not infallible nor exalted to a position Roman Catholics call “the Supreme Pontiff.” Pontiff is the French word for Pope. So here is Pope Peter, they would say, being opposed by the Apostle Paul.

But first, before we look at that confrontation more closely, let me start with what had been done right. Before this circumstance that called for such a direct correction. We have looked at the doctrinal issues the past couple weeks, particularly the doctrine of justification by faith. Justification, therefore, not by works. Not by the performance of the Jewish ceremonial regulations, as if, by them, a person could be made right with God. And the focal point of all of those regulations was the Old Covenant requirement of circumcision, the sign of the Old Covenant representing God’s promise to his people. And his people were identified outwardly, by circumcision, as the people of Israel. So in the Old Covenant, to be one of God’s people, you had to be a citizen of the nation of Israel. You had to be circumcised.

But now that Jesus had come, those external regulations were done away with. Their purpose had been to point to Jesus, and now that Jesus had come in the flesh, no more preparatory pointers were needed. And, more importantly, now that Jesus had come in the flesh, now that he had laid down his own life as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin as required by the wrath and justice of God, now that the perfect lamb was slain for the sins of the world, those former signs become nothing more than an attempt to do something yourself that would add to the work that Jesus has already accomplished. In other words, circumcision now represents the attempt to accomplish your own salvation by your own works.

And, therefore, any distinction between Jew and Gentile is abolished. Both are saved the same way, by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ. And, therefore, the people of God, the nation of God include both Jew and Gentile together as one. Let me read the doctrinal statement of that in,

Eph 2:11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 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 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Now let me define that doctrinal proposition in the practical experiences of everyday life. In other words,

### **I. GOOD DOCTRINE IN PRACTICE.**

v.12a

He was eating with the Gentiles. Fellowship. Unity. They were one, Jews and Gentiles together.

#### **A. Christian fellowship.**

That is what defines our relationship to one another, the Christian fellowship of our lives. That is to be what defines the church, the Christian fellowship of our lives. Fellowship modeled by eating together.

That was a big thing! The background is given to us in, Acts 11:1 “Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 3 You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them. 4 But Peter began and explained it to them in order: 5 I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. 6 Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, Rise, Peter; kill and eat. 8 But I said, By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth. 9 But the voice answered a second time from heaven, What God has made clean, do not call common. 10 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. 11 And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13 And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household. 15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the

word of the Lord, how he said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? 18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Peter understood correctly. They could eat together. And they could eat anything together. The Jewish dietary regulations were ended, for those regulations separating the unclean animals from the clean animals represented the distinction between Jew and Gentile. So the words of God are as clear as could be, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

So Christian fellowship is the demonstration of good doctrine in practice. And so the church itself is defined this way,

Acts 4:32 "Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common."

Truly, they belonged to one another. "Those who believed were of one heart and soul." Beloved, that's a description of good doctrine in practice. And related to that idea of fellowship is,

### **B. Christian liberty.**

Peter was exercising his freedom to eat with the Gentiles, and we can assume those meals might include pork chops. Maybe a good pork roast. He was free, and what a painful disease it is upon God's people when we are not granted that freedom.

God sets his people free. Jesus sets his people free. Free "from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of

the moral law," as our Westminster Confession puts it. It is also "freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected." That same principle of Christian liberty can be extended, and must be extended such that, "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men...To believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience." In other words, Christian liberty means that you are not obliged to obey any commandments or believe any teaching which extends beyond the Scripture. God alone is the Lord of conscience.

That means there will be differences among us, different choices and different priorities, on things not specified by the Scripture. That means we might have different opinions, different priorities, on things not specified by the Scripture. Christian liberty. And Peter was exercising that liberty, at first, "before certain men came from James."

Now, I don't think that reference is intended to criticize James, as if the Apostle James himself was teaching error, but that James, as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, would have had people in the church who were wrong. They were still separating themselves as Jews from the Gentiles, and so the reference to James would be a reference to the church in which he was established. The point is that the practice of separation was nothing less than,

### **II. DOCTRINAL ERROR IN PRACTICE.**

Fellowship was crucial. The willingness to accept one another, to honor one another, and to be members of one another was the definition of the church. But all of that changed. Why? Paul tells us.

v.12

Why did Peter stop eating with the Gentiles? Why did he separate himself from those believers for whom Jesus had died?

**A. The fear of man.**

“When they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.”

Remember just how wrong the fear of man is.

Gal. 1:10 “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.”

The fear of man means that you care more about the approval of men than the blessing of God. It means that you care more about your reputation among other people than you care about pleasing God. It means that you care more about what others think that what God has said, that you are insecure around other people, that you cannot say no, that you fear shame before others, that you are jealous, that you are afraid of looking bad in the eyes of others, fearful of their rejection.

Just look at the disastrous consequences! The fellowship of church was harmed. The unity of the church was destroyed. And Paul found it necessary to oppose and confront Peter directly, and personally. It was a public display of utter and absolute,

**B. Hypocrisy.**

v.13

People were led astray, even Barnabas. The church was disrupted. No longer was there a unity of spirit and the bond of peace. Doctrinal error in practice is nothing less than utter hypocrisy!

Separation, shunning, and a rejection of personal fellowship within the church is nothing less than hypocrisy. A withdrawal from the active fellowship of other believers in the church is hypocrisy. Because we belong to one another. We are one in Jesus Christ.

Rom. 12:5 “...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

And with direct reference to the Lord’s Supper that is before us this morning, we read,

1 Cor. 10:16 “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

Beloved, that unity has to be the definition of who we are as well. We need to identify this hypocrisy that is evident when there are factions, when people are shunned and ignored. And we need to be honest to be able to say that sometimes that happens here, too. Dear friends, no church can survive when the hypocrisy of separation between believers is allowed to define our relationships with one another, as it was in the churches of Galatia.

v.12

So beware of the danger, beware of the temptation of drawing back and separating yourself from one another. And if, and when, you might be guilty, repent!

Rather than following Peter’s example, follow Paul. For Paul, rather than ignoring or bemoaning the problem that was before him, sought,

### III. THE RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM.

He did something about it.

v.11

That's what you do! Turn with me, please, to,  
Mat. 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

That's what you do! If there is a problem, you go to your brother and tell him his fault. You and him alone. You don't go and gossip about it to someone else. You don't slander him by ruining his reputation among others. You go to him, you and him alone. If he doesn't listen, take a witness. And then, if he still doesn't listen, take it to the church and let the Elders deal with it. That's what you do when there is a problem.

And it works both ways.

Mat. 5:23 "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

That's what you do, even before you offer the gifts of your worship. "First be reconciled to your brother."

The point is obvious.

#### A. Necessary confrontation is good.

v.11

Literally, Paul says, "I stood against him." I set myself against him, I resisted him. He was wrong, and I stood up to him in order to make that clear. He had stopped eating with Gentile believers, breaking off his fellowship with them, drawing back and separating himself from them. Because he feared the "circumcision party."

It was wrong. And Paul addressed the problem.

Too often we think that if you just ignore a problem long enough it will go away. Too often we think that if you make mention of a problem, it will just make it worse. If you try to deal with something, it will only make the situation worse. Just ignore it, and, of course, it will get better!

How utterly stupid that really is!

Too often we think that if you sweep the problem under the rug, the dirt will never again be seen. And in that context, you think that the worst thing to do is to point out the dirt. The worst thing to do is to let all your dirty laundry be seen by someone else.

We're all like that, aren't we? We pretend to be without dirty laundry. We pretend like we actually live without faults. And if we pretend long enough, why, it will come true! No more faults.

Let me tell you about my house. We have dirty laundry in my house. Now, I don't think that is too scandalous. Even with just two of us most of the time, the washing machine has to run most days to keep up with the load of dirty laundry. It is inescapable, isn't it? And one of the most important practical features in a house is a laundry room door. Here, our laundry room is actually across a small breezeway in a separate building. And that's really

really good, because we're not going to show our dirty laundry.

And in terms of having visitors over to our house, that's fine. But it isn't fine if that illustration of hiding our dirty laundry becomes the description of our life as a church. If I come visit your house, I don't expect you to show me your laundry room, but when there are problems, when there are conflicts and separations among God's people, necessary confrontation is good. And so, Paul says,

v.14 "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?"

"I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed." He was wrong. He was sinning. And he was harming the church. And not only that, as Paul emphasizes in verse 14, he was actually denying the gospel. Look at how Paul connects the gospel itself with this particular issue of Jew and Gentiles alike being freed from the requirement of circumcision. All of this is an...

### **III. APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL.**

v.14a

Separating from one another, breaking fellowship with one another, shunning one another within the church is not straightforward, it is "not in step with the truth of the gospel." It contradicts the gospel.

Just look at the very next verse, where Paul reaches the climax of the message of this whole book.

v.15-16

Ultimately, this separation is over the doctrine of justification.

Do you, in fact, have to do something yourself, some good work, some act of obedience? Do you have to do something as the ground upon which God will justify you? The answer is pretty clear, isn't it? The answer is no.

And so the truth of the gospel requires that we do not divide ourselves over the necessity of performing some sort of external measure of duty. The truth of the gospel requires that we do not divide ourselves out of the fear of man, creating political parties among us based on a particular political platform of ideas. That system is proving to be devastatingly harmful to our country as we approach that so-called "fiscal cliff," and that system will be absolutely deadly to the fellowship of God's people in a church.

Where there is doctrinal error or hypocrisy of life, we need to address the problem in order to resolve it. And when it is resolved, as this problem was, then we can enjoy again the fullness of fellowship.

Never is that unity of faith more evident than it is right here, at this table. And so, beloved, never forget,

1 Cor. 10:16 "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

As you eat the bread and drink from the cup this afternoon, let these thoughts settle deeply in your soul. When you partake of one bread, one load, you are demonstrating the reality of the fellowship and the communion of the body of Christ, which is made visible in this church. So if you draw back and separate yourself from one another, you act with the same hypocrisy as did Peter.

Having emphasized many of the dangers exemplified in this passage, let me end with the positive description of the goal. The goal of true fellowship, which is good doctrine in practice.

Eph. 4:1 “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 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. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.”