

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Leaving the Chains Behind

(Studies in Paul's letter to the Galatians)

Truth, and its Consequences

(Galatians 2:1-21)

Study #3

Introduction: Aligning with reality...

Our earth-bound lives are governed by gravity. What goes up, must come down. Everything we drop falls to the earth.

Adrenalin junkies like bungee jumpers, parkour performers, and sky-divers are playing with fire as they tempt gravity. One misstep and they're toast.

Gravity is a settled reality of the natural world, and we suffer disastrous consequences if we foolishly fail to align our lives with gravity.

In every arena of life, there are these settled realities. In marriage - fidelity; in economics - work and save money; for health - exercise and eat well. Disregard these realities and disaster follows.

The Gospel - faith alone in Christ alone saves forevermore - is settled spiritual reality and God calls us to align our lives with the truth of the Gospel. On one sad occasion, the Apostle Peter didn't, and the results were, predictably, disastrous.

Over the next few minutes, we're going to look closely at what Peter did, then, at how the Apostle Paul responded, all the while taking an inside look at our own lives.

Last week, we learned some of Paul's story.

Review...

His faith-in-Jesus story began on the road leading to Damascus. Jesus arrested his attention while he was traveling to arrest Christians in Damascus by striking him blind just outside the city.

Paul quickly came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God.

Then, immediately after his conversion, he began to boldly proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Son of God in Damascus. Soon, though, he left for the desert area to the east of Damascus to sink his roots down deep in Jesus.

Three years later he went back to Damascus, again, proclaiming the Gospel. An attempt to arrest him (for being over-zealous for Jesus) failed because the Christians in Damascus lowered him down in a basket over the city wall, leaving Paul free to make his first visit, as a Christian, to Jerusalem.

After a very short stay in Jerusalem he traveled back to his hometown of Tarsus, and then to Antioch where he served in the church there along with Barnabas and others for several years.

We pick up his story as he makes his way from Antioch back to Jerusalem, for a second visit.

Serving with a Loving Heart (2:1-10)

A Trip to Jerusalem, to Serve the Poor (vv. 1-2)

Back to Jerusalem, with friends...

[1] Then after an interval of fourteen years¹ I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

¹ This is fourteen years after his conversion. The First Missionary Journey happened AFTER what is recorded here in Galatians 2.

It had been around ten years since Paul had been to Jerusalem. During most of those year he had been in Antioch, serving the Lord in the church there.

While he lived in Antioch, he made lots of good friends. Jewish friends and Gentile friends. Serving-with-Jesus kinds of friends.

As Paul made his way up (south, but “up” in terms of elevation), to Jerusalem, he traveled with two of these friends - Barnabas (a Jew) and Titus (a Gentile).²

Paul tells us that they went to Jerusalem because of **[Galatians 2:2] a revelation**, a revelation that is recorded in the book of Acts.

Off to Jerusalem to help the poor (see Acts 11:27-30)

[Acts 11:27] Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. [28] One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.³ [29] And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. [30] And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

So, Paul, Barnabas, and Titus traveled from the cosmopolitan, eclectic mostly-Gentile world of Syrian Antioch to the Jewish center of the world: Jerusalem. They went there to help meet material needs.⁴

This trip made for a great demonstration of the unity that exists in the church between Jews and Gentiles. Paul and his friends went with hearts and hands full to bless their suffering Jewish brothers and sisters in Judea.

That’s the setting and the cast of characters. Here’s what happened during this, Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem as a Christian.

² Titus, one of Paul’s closest co-workers, is not mentioned in the book of Acts.

³ Claudius was the Roman emperor from A.D. 41-54.

⁴ This trip to Jerusalem is usually referred to as “the famine relief visit.”

While in Jerusalem, Serving the Vulnerable (vv. 3-10)

Titus - a test case for freedom (vv. 3-5)

[3] But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.⁵ [4] But it was because of the false brethren⁶ secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

Titus was a believer in Jesus. I suspect that he was part of the leadership in the church at Antioch. And, he was a Gentile, a non-Jew.

Here, he functions as a “test case” for how Gentiles were going to be treated in Jesus’ church.

Titus was a saved man. And, being a Gentile, he was an uncircumcised man.⁷

Evidently, while the group from Antioch was in Jerusalem, bearing gifts for the needy members of the Jerusalem church, some were demanding that Titus be circumcised.⁸

The men who wanted him circumcised thought that Christianity was Judaism + Jesus.

⁵ Timothy, being half-Jewish *was* circumcised (Acts 16:1-3). Paul yielded to the weak brethren who would have stumbled over a half-Jew not being circumcised (Timothy), but not to false brethren who demanded that Titus become a Jew to be a true Christian.

⁶ He calls them “false brethren” implying either that they were brethren who, at the moment were being false, or that they were not brethren at all. I lean toward the first understanding.

⁷ Only *male* circumcision is ever in view in the Bible, and is a procedure that does no harm to a male. *Female* circumcision (or female genital mutilation) is never mentioned, much less advocated, in the Bible.

⁸ He uses the most severe language: “sneaked in”; “spied”; “bring into bondage” when describing these troublemakers.

They thought that Christianity should operate under the Jewish system of Law, which, of course, for men, included circumcision (along with and the rest of the Law).

Well, Titus was not circumcised, as Paul recognized the high stakes involved in this matter.

[5] But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

Remember the Gospel. It is simple and it is clear: faith alone in Christ alone saves forevermore. It tells us how we receive the gift of eternal life.

Aligning life with the simple Gospel means, among other things, that we never treat someone who has placed faith alone in Christ alone as a second-class citizen of Jesus' church.

We all got in to Jesus' church the same way, by trusting Jesus. So, we are all of equal value in Jesus' church.

Circumcising Titus would have said something very different.

It would have said that Titus, a believer in Jesus, was not really a Christian, wasn't really right with God, unless he submitted to the Mosaic Law.

But Titus was left free to remain as he was.

And the way he was treated signaled FREEDOM for all who come to Christ to remain as they are with respect to culture, with no need to conform to Moses' Law.

So, with Titus protected, Paul and the other church leaders worked hard to build on their unity in Christ as they recognized God's hand on each of their ministries.

They first established that both groups - Jerusalem leaders and Antioch leaders - had received authority from Jesus to serve as they did in their own spheres of ministry.

Paul and the "pillars" of Jerusalem (vv. 6-10)

Independent authority (v. 6)

[6] But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) - well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.

Neither group was beholden to the other when it came to ministry style or to the content of the Gospel.

But there was great respect, flowing both ways, between the Antioch group and the Jerusalem group.

Separate stewardships - same Gospel (vv. 7-9)

[7] But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised [8] (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), [9] and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas⁹ and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

Each group recognized the grace that was given to the other.

The Jerusalem "pillars" recognized that the ministry given to Paul and Barnabas to reach out to Gentiles was crucial.

The Antioch group saw that the Jerusalem group was equipped and commissioned by the same God with the same Gospel as they reached out with the Gospel to Jews - another crucial ministry.¹⁰

⁹ Cephas (v. 9) and Peter (vv. 7, 8) are Aramaic/Hebrew words for the word "rock." I so no significance to the change from one to the other in our passage.

¹⁰ To have "fellowship," (Greek, *κοινωνία*) does not refer to social interaction at a pot-luck or talking in the lobby after a worship service. "Fellowship" speaks of a shared life. If we have fellowship, we are going to look out for each other and seek

Their ministries focused differently, but their passion for God and for the Gospel were perfectly aligned.

In addition, both groups had the same heart to serve the poor.

Same love (v. 10)

[10] They only asked us to remember the poor - the very thing I also was eager to do.

Now, it was great to express this priority to serve the poor.

But, clearly, the Antioch Trio already “got it.” After all, that ministry - serving the poor Jerusalem church - was what had moved them to come down from Antioch in the first place.

If it seems to you that everything went great during this meeting in Jerusalem, you’re right. It did. But, the whole mood changed when the scene shifted back to Antioch.

Serving with a Gospel Foundation (2:11-21)

Peter’s Duplicity (vv. 11-13)

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face¹¹, because he stood condemned.

And we wonder, “*What in the world did Peter - did Rocky! - do while in Antioch?*”

Well, for the benefit of the Galatians (and us), Paul reveals what it was that Peter did.

Peter’s actions (v. 12)

[12] For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw¹² and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

So, when Peter first arrived in Antioch on a friendly visit, he ate with the Gentile Christians in Antioch at their pot-luck suppers.

In times past, Jews had always kept their distance from Gentiles due to concerns over ceremonial defilement. Peter knew that, in Christ, those concerns were no longer of any concern.

That’s because earlier (see Acts 10), God had given Peter a vision of a sheet lowered from heaven on which were all kinds of animals identified as *unclean* under the Old Testament Law.

A voice told Peter three separate times, “***Arise, Peter, kill and eat!***” This command told Peter that because of the work of Christ, no food was to be considered unclean anymore.

In Christ, Peter - a Jew - was free to eat whatever he wanted with whomever he wanted to eat it. We can imagine that Peter enjoyed culinary delights in Antioch he never had before - crab, lobster, bacon.

But then, this delegation of men from Judea arrived (the area around Jerusalem). Peter separated himself from the Gentiles and stopped eating with them.

Maybe you’re wondering if Peter had become convinced that enjoying pork sausage with Gentiles was wrong, or that sitting down at table with Gentiles was wrong.

Good wondering - but no. He knew that the restrictions of the Law had been abolished because of that vision I just mentioned.

Nor do we know if these guys said anything to Peter.

to meet each other’s needs. All of that was intended when Peter extended the right hand of *fellowship* to Paul, Barnabas, and Titus.

¹¹ Paul gives evidence of his apostolic authority by resisting Peter.

¹² Word used to describe the pulling back of troops in battle.

We do know, though, that whether it was stern glances or harsh words, Peter did not stand up *for* his Gentile brothers and sisters. He didn't set the men from Judea straight about the freedom he had to enjoy meals with Gentiles.

He withdrew. He treated the non-Jewish Christians in Antioch like second-class citizens of Jesus' church.

And, as almost always happens, Peter's sin had a ripple effect in the church.

Peter's actions' effects (v. 13)

[13] The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.¹³

I've always been surprised that Barnabas - Mr. Encouragement! - sided with Peter in separating from the Gentiles. But peer pressure can get the best of the best of us. It even got the best of Barnabas.¹⁴

Paul must have been away from Antioch when Peter arrived, had fellowship, and then withdrew. When he returned and saw what was happening, he was hot.

He wasn't concerned that the men from James - the majority, the people in power - would be offended if Peter continued to eat with the Gentiles.

He was concerned that the Gentiles - the newcomers, the minority population in Jesus' church - would feel disenfranchised by Peter's withdrawal.

So, he called Peter on the carpet for his hypocrisy.

¹³ Hypocrisy is concealing one's real character, and seeking to create a false impression purposefully, play-acting.

¹⁴ ***[13] The rest of the Jews*** refers to those residing in Antioch. Peter's hypocrisy had effectively created a schism, creating a Gentile church and a Jewish church.

Paul's Integrity (vv. 14-21)¹⁵

"Peter, your actions prove you to be a hypocrite." (v. 14)

[14] But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

To which was say, "Wow!" And what was it, again, that Peter had done? He stopped taking his meals with the Gentiles. That was all.

Because of that, Paul mounted an offensive against Peter. He charged him with not being "***straightforward***" (literally, "not standing upright") when it came to the Gospel.¹⁶

We can all see that there was a terrible relational failure here. Paul says that it was more than just being impolite to the Gentiles.

Peter failed to align his life with the settled reality of the Gospel.

By refusing to eat with the Gentiles, Peter had re-drawn the line separating Jews and Gentiles based on the Old Testament teachings about kosher regulations, lines that had been erased by the cross of Christ.¹⁷

By separating from the Gentiles at mealtime, Peter rebuilt a wall Jesus' Gospel had torn down.

¹⁵ We don't know when (or if) Paul's statement to Peter ends, or if this whole passage is part of the quote to Peter, narrative, or a switching back and forth. (There aren't any quotations marks in Greek.) I am taking the entire section from verses 14-21 as Paul's response to Peter.

¹⁶ This is the third time Peter and Paul have been together. (1). When Paul went to Jerusalem, a visit recorded in Galatians 1:18; Acts 9:26-30. (2). When Paul, Barnabas, and Titus brought the famine relief money from Antioch to Jerusalem. (Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 11:27-30) (3) Here, at the third meeting, when Paul rebuked Peter for hypocrisy. (Galatians 2:11-21)

¹⁷ Peter knew this by virtue of the Acts 10 vision from God.

You've noted that Paul treated Peter pretty harshly here. Other people have noticed the same. Some have been bothered that Paul publicly humiliated Peter.

Some say, *"Shame on Paul for being so insensitive to Peter, a man who had been embarrassed enough, already."*

OK. We get that.

But, Paul was more moved by concern for the unity of the church than he was for a fellow-apostle's feelings. He was more concerned to respect the Gentiles' place at the table than he was to protect a brother who had fallen into hypocrisy.

He was concerned that those who don't fit in to the majority culture are welcomed and that hospitality be lavished on the young, the new, and the few.

Now, this issue of Jewish/Gentile relations is not exactly the hottest issue facing us here at Northwest. So, I'm not going to exhort you, *"Don't stop taking your meals with those who don't follow the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law!"*

But, there is extreme relevance here at Northwest to what we are seeing there in Antioch.

Hypocrisy - the kind that Peter practiced - is alive and well when we erect barriers that separate us from those who believe in Jesus and are different from us in worldview or culture.

To be fair, we might not even be aware that we're doing it while we're doing it.

So we need to be constantly examining what we are doing to be sure we're not doing that. Because, if we are erecting barriers that hold those at arm's length who are different from us, culturally, we are sinning against the Gospel.

And when we affirm the worth and importance of EVERY member of the body of Christ, that's powerful. That's maturity. That's love. And that serves as a tremendous witness to those who are on the outside looking in.

Next, Paul voices a second concern raised by Peter's actions.

"Peter, your actions contradict justification by faith"

[15] We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles;¹⁸ [16] nevertheless knowing that a man is NOT JUSTIFIED BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW BUT THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that WE MAY BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH IN CHRIST, and not by the works of the Law; since BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED.¹⁹ [17] But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! [18] For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. [19] For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.

The Jews had been blessed with every blessing that ethnicity could ever bestow. He refers to ***"Jews by nature"*** and that brings to our minds all of the privileges that came with being Jewish.²⁰

But, simply being Jewish never made anybody right with God. And a Jew couldn't do enough good works or obey the Law completely enough to be justified before God.

We are all unable to do anything to get right with God. And that is exactly why Jesus lived and died and rose again. He provides a way of salvation through faith in His righteous work, despite our sinful work.

¹⁸ Paul is not claiming that he and the rest of the Jews are not sinners. But, he is simply stating that they are not sinners from the stock of the Gentile world.

¹⁹ By mentioning ***"Not by works of the Law"*** 3x in verse 16, *"Paul tries to beat it into our heads."* (Martin Luther)

²⁰ See Romans, chapters 2, 3, and 11.

Paul's point here is that obedience to a set of rules doesn't gain us merit before God. God values faith. We are justified by Faith.

Faith alone in Christ alone for eternal life; faith that God will do what only He can do as we trust Him AFTER we are justified by faith.

By pulling away from the Gentiles because of food, Peter piled on to them the burden of Law, a set of rules.

This was completely against the idea that we are justified by faith. And it stands against the spirit of Jesus, who came to free people from the bondage of the Law.

Now, in talking about the need to accept each other and to not have a works orientation, I am not suggesting that we wink at fellow-Christians who are caught up in sin.

Christians who are involved in dishonesty, immoral behavior, and gossip need to be corrected, rebuked, and restored.

Look at how Paul dealt with Peter's hypocrisy. He dealt with that sin severely. If I am guilty of sin, I expect to be confronted about it. I want to be and I need to be called on the carpet for it.

But when it comes to conforming to cultural conventions, we are called to *enjoy* the differences between us.

Clothes, hair, tattoos, piercings, language and accents. When it comes to differences of opinion on matters of conscience, we love, we accept.

This is where the church has its best chance to shine in 2018.

With Jesus at the center, we can show each other love and respect despite differences of appearance and temperament, whether male or female, young or old, rich or poor.

We don't require that somebody in our tribe measures up to our idea of what is politically or socially correct.

We don't ignore those who with whom we disagree about secondary matters. No. We embrace each other and we serve together.

And one more thing.

"Peter, your actions nullify the grace of God." (vv. 20-21)

[20] I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. [21] I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

These are two well-known verses. They are often quoted and frequently memorized. There's lots of meat on these bones and we could spend a lot of time exploring all that they say.

But, to best understand them, they need to be read in the context of Paul rebuking Peter for his hypocrisy.

This is Paul expressing the wonder that that he - murderer of Jesus' disciples, chief persecutor of Jesus' church - should have ever received God's grace.

But, mercy to end all mercies, grace was exactly what Paul received from the Jesus who loved him and gave Himself for him on a Roman cross.

And now, as these verses say, from the perspective of *empowerment*, it is Jesus who is living in and through him as he serves. From the perspective of *faith*, he, Paul, lives, trusting Jesus every step of the way.

Paul says, ***[21] I do not nullify the grace of God***, implying that Peter was nullifying God's grace.

When Peter stopped eating meals with his Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ up in Antioch because they weren't keeping *kosher*, he was nullifying grace.

I'm sure Peter never considered that his actions had such implications, but Paul was right.

Peter was saying, *"Your eating habits are weightier than the effects of Jesus' cross. The fact that you eat bacon is more important than that you've been shown grace, just like I have been shown grace."*

When we build walls rather than bridges between us and other people who are part of Christ's Body, we are saying that someone's immaturity or political views or social standing is more important than the fact that we've both been shown God's grace.

Conclusion:

To succeed in holding to a great belief system and then fail to live out the implications of those beliefs is not a "win".

It is a Gospel "win" though, when, in front of a watching world, our lives align with our beliefs

The loving, gracious Gospel is true: faith alone in Christ alone saves. Let's be sure to adorn this beautiful message with lives of love and grace.

Do you want to become a person who loves well? Live out the Gospel.

Do you long to be a person of integrity? Live out the Gospel.

Do you want to honor God in everything you do? Live out the Gospel.