



As we continue our 2021 summer sermon series, *Unburdened*, we find the Apostle Paul sharing with the Galatians yet another story about a key personal encounter with Peter. This time their interaction takes place in Antioch, a leading center of Gentile Christian activity. The Scriptures are unclear why Peter temporarily had left the Jewish collective in Jerusalem to participate in this more integrated church community in the city of Antioch in Syria. Nevertheless, it is in this multicultural environment that Peter is directly confronted and challenged by Paul.

The issue at hand was Peter's inconsistency with regard to Mosaic laws in the new Christian era. At first, Peter joins other Jews in eating freely with his new Gentile brothers in Christ. This was consistent with an extraordinary vision from God that Peter had experienced related to the relaxation of dietary restrictions (see Acts 10:9-33) for all believers in Jesus. As a result of that vision, Peter was convinced that no man should ever be considered unclean based on his eating habits. But when Peter suddenly reverses his actions based on the concerns of a legalistic group of influential Jews, Peter himself also begins influencing others with this distorted message. Now he begins to act as if Gentiles must be circumcised and/or remain under strict dietary considerations to be eligible for salvation.

Paul is having none of this. Paul's reaction to such hypocrisy from Peter is to confront him openly to reveal this deep transgression committed against the gospel of Christ. For the sake of spiritual integrity, Paul calls out Peter's error publicly and then very deftly clarifies what the true Good News of Jesus Christ is all about.

The purpose of Paul's retelling of this account to the church in Galatia is to illuminate the "different gospel" the Galatians also were embracing themselves. The Galatians had been persuaded into believing that works of the law were what justified us before God. With no ambiguity, Paul corrects this fallacy and declares instead that justification *by faith in Christ*, not by works, is the only way any person can possibly be saved.

- Read Galatians 2:11. In this encounter, Paul opposed Peter to his face. What do you normally do when you have a disagreement with someone? Read Matthew 18:15-17. What should you do?
- Do you think Paul was correct to mention Peter's error in the presence of others? Did he have the right to do this? Why or why not?
- Are there people you do not "eat with" because they are not "like you"? How subtle is the sin of self-righteousness? How do we keep from succumbing to it?
- Why was Paul so adamant about Gentiles not having to follow Jewish customs?
- What is the difference between being "moral" and being a follower of Jesus?
- Read Romans 7:4-6. What does "dying to the law" mean in Galatians 2:19?
- By what is a person not justified before God? By what is a person justified?
- Read Galatians 2:20. What was the result of Paul's being "crucified with Christ"?
- How does achieving success through our own efforts challenge our ability to understand grace?
- How strong is the temptation of peer pressure in your life? How do you feel after yielding to that peer pressure?

