



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 2: 11-14

Spring 2021

"Courage To Correct"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Galatians and we're in chapter 2. This is a lot of biographical information that Paul is giving at this point before he gets into important doctrinal issues. But he has talked about his defense of the Gospel and his correct, right standing as an apostle, a genuine apostle. And he spoke of going up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus and defending the Gospel against those who would say circumcision, or any kind of ceremony, is necessary for salvation. And now he continues that with another incident in chapter 2, verses 11 through 14,

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, (*and I think most of you know "Cephas" is also Peter; so I'll refer to him as 'Peter' throughout the lesson*), I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 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 withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. ¹³ The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. 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?"

Galatians 2: 11-14

Well, may the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together.

(Message) In Proverbs 9 verse 8, Solomon says, "...Reprove a wise man and he will love you." Even wise men need correction, but it takes courage to do that, to reprove a person. It takes a man like John Knox, the great Scottish reformer of whom it was said, "He never feared the face of man." Paul was a man like that—or better, Knox was a man like Paul. He never feared the face of man, and demonstrated that once in Antioch when he opposed Peter to his face. He'd already shown great courage in Jerusalem when he stood firm against influential men who were enemies of the Gospel and he would not allow Titus to be circumcised.

But he also had the courage to correct friends when they were wrong. And that can take even greater courage because when we do that we risk losing friendships and alienating ourselves. So Paul was willing to do that for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of his friends—for the sake of Peter. For these reasons he opposed him to his face.

John Stott called the incident recorded here in Galatians 2 verses 11 through 14, "Without doubt, one of the most tense and dramatic episodes in the New Testament." The church was in danger of a major split—a great schism; so it was tense. You used to hear it said among evangelicals, maybe you still do, but you'd hear this statement, "Doctrine divides, love unites." So the idea is, 'Stay away from doctrine.'

We don't find that in Paul. He knew that unity at the expense of the Gospel—at the expense of pure doctrine was too expensive. Unity in error is worthless—in fact, it is fatal for the church. So it was out of love that Paul took his hard stand and rebuked Peter for his lapse in courage and good judgment. And I'm sure Paul knew that he was rebuking "a wise man".

Paul recorded the incident in defense of his apostleship. The Galatians had been told that Paul was not an apostle, or not one equal with Peter and John or with the 12.

So to show that he was an apostle in his own right, he recounted this incident in which he corrected Peter, one of the pillars of the church.

The scene of this event has changed from Jerusalem, the capital of the Jews, to Antioch, a Gentile city in Syria where a great work of God was happening. Antioch was an important city in the Roman empire, a cosmopolitan city known for its paganism with the temple of Apollo, and its immoral religious rites. And yet it soon became the center of Christian activity. Apart from Jerusalem, no city played as important a part in the life and growth of the early church than the city of Antioch.

Many Gentiles in that city were converted but not through the ministry of the apostles. Acts 11 describes unnamed people carrying the Gospel there, simple Christians. Luke identifies them as "men of Cyprus and Cyrene" who went there and began "speaking to the Greeks". (vs20). That was something new, speaking to the Greeks, preaching the LORD Jesus. Interesting—unnamed believers who, on their own, went to that place, went to that city, spoke about Christ. And the result was great revival. 'Large numbers believed and turned to the LORD', (vs21), Luke wrote. That's the power of the Word of God. It doesn't take a professional to preach the Gospel, or a person who has been ordained—just a Christian telling others about the LORD Jesus.

The results were so significant that they caught the attention of the church in Jerusalem, which was surprised and puzzled by these unexpected, unplanned developments. But that's the way the Spirit works. When He moves, He moves unpredictably. His movement is like the wind; it blows where it wills. He follows His plan, not ours. That's John chapter 3, verse 8.

And so to learn about what the Spirit was doing, to learn about these striking developments, the leaders in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. And after witnessing God's grace in that city, he stayed to oversee the work. The church continued to grow; many more souls were brought to the LORD, and the work got so big that it was more than Barnabas could handle alone. And so he went a little farther west from Antioch, to Tarsus, found Paul and brought him back. And the two of them began ministering

together in the city of Antioch—in that church, building it up, as more and more individuals came to saving knowledge of Christ.

It was there that the name “Christian” was coined. Luke mentions that in Acts 11, verse 26. "...the disciples," he writes, "were first called Christians in Antioch." It means, ‘Christ followers’. The church became a great blessing to the world. When prophets came down to Antioch and revealed that there would be a great famine in the world, the church of Antioch sent a significant contribution to Jerusalem for the famine relief. Luke records that in Acts 11. Paul and Barnabas delivered it. That was when they had their dispute over Titus and circumcision. And the apostles, you’ll remember, sided with Paul and they shook hands with Paul to show that they were partners in the same mission, the same Gospel.

It was from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey, and took the Gospel to Galatia. Antioch became the center of world evangelism. And so, when we read in verse 11 that Cephas came to Antioch, it is understandable that he would have gone down to see this great work that the LORD was doing among the Gentiles. He'd heard about it from Paul and Barnabas, and he wanted to see it firsthand.

What he saw impressed him greatly—a large, vital church that the LORD was building. Unlike the church in Jerusalem, which was almost exclusively a Jewish church, the church in Antioch was a mix of Jews and Gentiles, and mainly Gentiles. Peter was very pleased with what he saw, and he began to associate freely with the Gentile converts. He went to their homes and had meals with them. And you can just imagine how the Christians of Antioch received him, with great warmth and hospitality.

They were honored to have the apostle from Jerusalem in their homes and so they served him the best cuisine. Which may have been a challenge for Peter, as he sat down to eat, and they brought out a large roasted pig—maybe with an apple in its mouth. It was the first time that he sat down to a non-kosher meal and may have made him hesitate before taking a bite. But he did. He exercised his Christian liberty, and he

ate pork. At least that seems to be the meaning of verse 12, he used to eat with the Gentiles. He was eating their food; he was eating a non-kosher diet.

Now that was a big step. He'd been raised on the dietary rules of the Law of Moses. He had kept them faithfully all of his life. The Jews had strong scruples about such things. We see that, for example, in Daniel chapter 1, when Daniel and his three friends put their lives at risk by refusing to eat from the king's table. During the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks, some 200 years before Christ, devout Jews resolved not to eat unclean foods—and they suffered for it. There is an account in 2 Maccabees of a mother and her seven sons who were martyred because they refused to eat pork.

Many years ago now, I read an interview in the Dallas Morning News with a rabbi, Rabbi Yitzchak Perris, who gave the Jews' attitude toward pork. "The pig is abominable and disgusting, and our souls are horrified by it.", he said, "The pig was created especially to symbolize godlessness, lies, and hypocrisy, and a lack of physical and moral hygiene." Yuck!

So Peter's willingness to eat pork, or any kind of non-kosher food, to just sit down with a Gentile and share a meal, represented a major shift in Peter's thinking and faith.

But something had happened to him. He was given a vision by God earlier, some years earlier, when he was visiting Simon the tanner in Joppa. Luke records it in Acts chapter 10, how he was on the rooftop when he fell into a trance. He saw a sheet come down from heaven and it was full of all kinds of unclean animals. And he heard a voice say, "Arise, Peter. Kill and eat." (vs13). Peter was horrified by that and this disgusting diet that has been presented to him—and so he refused to do it. And then he heard the voice say, "What God has cleansed no longer consider unholy." (vs15). Now that occurred three times—and the point was that a new age had begun. The Law of Moses as a regulating system was finished. "Christ is the end of the law..." as Paul put it in Romans 10, verse 4.

But the vision in Joppa was not only about food—it was about people. Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean. Shortly after that Peter was in Caesarea. This was setting him up for the events there. He was in the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion who heard Peter preach the Gospel and was saved, along with other Gentiles with him. It was an important event because Peter saw that Gentiles received the Holy Spirit as believing Gentiles and apart from the Law of Moses. They were saved without being circumcised; they were saved without being baptized. They were saved without ceremonies. And Peter learned that day that the basis of fellowship is Christ, whom we receive through faith alone. We have fellowship in the Holy Spirit, not on the basis of rituals, not on the basis of rules—but through faith alone, by the grace of God, in Jesus Christ.

Now that occurred sometime before his visit to Antioch, so Peter knew well that it was permissible to eat with Gentiles and eat what they served him—even if it were pork chops, they were legitimate. So he did it and did it with a free conscience—and did it often because Paul says he used to eat with the Gentiles. And the idea there, the sense of that is, that he did it regularly as a practice. That is why Paul says that what follows in the story was a self-condemning act, an act of hypocrisy on Peter's part when some men came down from Jerusalem.

Paul identifies them in verse 12 as “men from James” who represented the party of the circumcision. So it's the same group of people, this faction within the church, that advocated the Law of Moses and wanted to impose it on the new converts. But their connection with James is dubious. James did not hold the position of the Judaizers. We saw that last week. We saw that in the previous passage. He's already identified with Paul's mission and Gospel, as Paul stated earlier. Later, at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, James declared that the church ruled against the legalists, these men of the Law, these men of circumcision, and they gave the judgment that Gentile converts not be troubled by the Law.

So Paul's meaning here is probably that these men claimed to have the authority of James. But they really didn't; they posed as representatives of the apostles. Even so,

they were men evidently of high stature—that the church had great respect for them because when they came Peter stopped having fellowship with the Gentiles. He held “himself aloof”, Paul says, out of fear. He was intimidated by the party of the circumcision. He was afraid of what might happen to his reputation back in Jerusalem, and so he yielded to the pressure. He did in Antioch just what Paul refused to do in Jerusalem. It was what he had done earlier in his life when out of fear of a maidservant he denied the LORD three times. Peter knew better. He just didn't have the courage of his convictions, because he feared men, he betrayed the truth.

So Paul calls his conduct “hypocrisy”. (vs13). We're all familiar with that word, hypocrisy. The word comes from the theater. It means, ‘to answer from under’. The Greeks wore masks when they did their plays. And they'd wear a mask with either a smile or a frown, depending on whether the play was a tragedy or a comedy. And so they would wear these masks and they would speak their lines from ‘under a mask’. That's hypocrisy. It's wearing a mask. It is masquerading.

I've read this statement, and it's been put in different ways by different people, but the statement is, “Good actors make good liars”. Well Peter was play acting. He was lying, concealing his true convictions. And he wasn't the only one. The rest of the Jews joined him. He knew better. He who had enjoyed this Christian liberty, and these others who joined Peter, also knew better. But they fell, just like he did.

And most surprising of all, most surprising at least to Paul, was Barnabas. “even Barnabas”, Paul says. He, too, got caught up in the hypocrisy. And for Paul, that must have been the greatest personal disappointment. Even Barnabas, the man he was close to—the man who had shown great courage years earlier in Jerusalem when he befriended Paul when all the others were afraid to do that. The man who had stood with him against the Judaizers in Jerusalem. This man, who knew better, he also backed down before these important people who had come to Antioch. Where is John Knox in this crowd?

Evidently all of this happened while Paul was absent from the city. It's hard to imagine that he would have allowed things to progress as far as they did if he had been

there. When he returned, when he discovered this, he knew what had happened. 'Peter and the others,' he said, "were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel." (vs14). Literally, they were 'not walking straight'. They were straying off the straight and narrow path. Peter and Barnabas and the others had not changed their position on the truth; they still knew the truth and still held to the truth, but their actions denied it.

Paul knew what to do, painful as it would be, and that was oppose Peter publicly. Otherwise, as John Stott said, "The whole Christian church would have drifted into a Jewish backwater and stagnated." So in a public meeting, (in the presence of all, and probably during the meeting of the church), Paul rebuked Peter. He said, "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?"

In other words, Peter knew that he was free from the dietary regulations of the Law, he knew that as well as anyone. He knew it better than most because he learned it in a vision and heard it from words spoken from heaven. And he had enjoyed his Christian liberty. He had associated freely and eaten repeatedly with the Gentile Christians. He lived like a Gentile, probably enjoyed his breakfast of 'pigs in a blanket'—looked forward to it every morning.

But by withdrawing from them, he was signaling to them, to these Christian Gentiles, that they had to keep a kosher diet and follow Jewish customs. His actions were compelling Gentiles to live like Jews.

Peter's hypocrisy was not just wrong, it was dangerously wrong. It was a threat to the Gospel because it suggested that faith was not enough: 'The Law was necessary for one to have complete acceptance from God.' Now that, Paul says, was contrary to the truth of the Gospel which is, that God saves sinners freely on the basis of grace—not on the basis of Law keeping.

Or maybe I should put it a little more specifically, on the basis of 'grace in the cross of Christ', because it is through faith in Him, in the God-man who suffered and died for us on the cross that we have salvation. And it's in faith in Him and what He has done that we have fellowship with the LORD God, and we have life. He accepts us. The LORD

God accepts us fully at the moment of faith. But this new system that he was implying by his behavior contradicted all of that. At best, this false policy made Gentiles second class citizens in the church.

William Carey, the great missionary to India, refused to baptize anyone who continued the practice of the caste system by refusing to share a meal with other Christians of a different social class. And he first convert from Hinduism was a man named Krishna Paul, who when he became a Christian, broke the caste by having a meal with the missionary. Revelation 5, verse 9 states it plainly, 'Christ has purchased for God with His blood some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.' All kinds of people. Everyone is represented in the cross of Christ. And so we are to love them as He loves them.

One of the clear lessons of this failure at Antioch is that actions have consequences. They influence people for good or for bad. So Paul had to address Peter's conduct. He couldn't deal with it privately. He felt he had to deal with this publicly because it had become a very public problem. And so, with his question to him, Paul unmasked Peter, exposed his hypocrisy and error. It must have been an embarrassing moment for Peter, to say the least—that's an understatement—as well as a painful moment for Paul. He took no pleasure in humbling another apostle and he took no pleasure here in recalling the incident. The reason he included it here was to show that he wasn't under Peter's authority. He wasn't a 'sub' apostle. He exercised authority over Peter as a true apostle, equal with the 12, and in so doing demonstrated the true nature of the Gospel. So it's a defense of his apostleship, it's a defense of the Gospel that he preached.

Now Paul didn't tell us Peter's response, but it's clear from what follows in Peter's life that he responded well to Paul with maturity. Later, at the Jerusalem Council, in Acts 15, Peter took the lead in defending the Gospel that Paul defended there in Antioch. And then, in 2 Peter, chapter 3, he mentioned Paul. He called him, "our beloved brother Paul," and spoke of the wisdom given him. As Solomon said, "Reprove a wise

man, and he will love you." Peter was a wise man who had a failure—but who loved Paul for the correction.

Now, if Peter could fail, if Barnabas could fail, we can fail. So we must consequently be on guard and we must constantly cultivate clear and strong convictions about the truth, about the truth of God's Word—all of the great doctrines, and certainly, the doctrines of salvation.

It's also important to note that Peter not only fell, he recovered from his fall. Martin Luther drew wisdom and encouragement from that. He wrote in his commentary on the Book of Galatians, "If Peter fell, I may likewise fall. If Peter rose again, I may also rise again." And that's true. God knows our weakness. He himself knows our frame. He is mindful that we are "but dust". (Ps 103:14). And he deals with us patiently and mercifully.

Paul's example has a lesson for us, and that is we are always to stand for the truth and have the courage, if necessary, to correct those who contradict it. That can be lonely. It was for Paul. Everyone joined the other side, even his close friend Barnabas. Paul stood alone. But he wasn't really alone, the LORD was with him, and that was always Paul's experience. Years earlier, or rather years later, when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, and alone in prison one night, Luke wrote in Acts 23 verse 11, "...the LORD stood at his side and said, 'Take courage.' " The LORD was with him.

At the end of his life, when he was put on trial in Rome, he wrote to Timothy about it. It's a very sad, in one sense, the statement that he makes. He said, "...no one supported me..." (2Ti 4:16). I've often marveled over that: The great apostle who had done so much for so many; who had brought the Gospel of eternal life to pagans; when he was arrested, when he was put on trial before the emperor, no one had the courage to support him; "...all deserted me..." he said. (Ibid) "But the LORD stood with me and strengthened me..." (2Ti 4:17)

That's a great truth. That's a truth for all of us. We can expect the same if we are living like Paul. If we stand for the Gospel in our home or at work or at school, we can expect times in which we will stand alone. Are you willing to do that for Christ's sake? If you do, you will never really be alone. Christ will stand with you and strengthen you. That's the first lesson.

Finally the incident at the church in Antioch has an important lesson for us as well: 'We are free in Christ'. That's a great privilege. We should not submit to rules and regulations that God has not imposed on us. And we should not be imposing rules on people that God has not placed on us. We are free. Now that doesn't mean that we are free to sin. Free from the law is not 'code' for antinomianism, (for lawlessness). We are to live godly, moral, disciplined lives following the principles of the New Testament, as set forth by the apostles, and by the life of Christ. But there is a tendency in people to go beyond God's Word and impose rules for justification and sanctification—for salvation and for holiness.

Let me say, the Gospel is sufficient: Christ is all we need for justification; the Word of God is all we need for faith and practice. Christ paid it all. He made atonement for our sins at the cross. All a person must do, all a person can do, and all a person can do only by the grace of God is, trust in Him. Recognize your need of the Savior and believe in Him—and He receives all who do. And those who do and are received by Him are justified at the moment of faith, declared righteous forever, accepted by God fully. There's nothing we can do, there's nothing we can add to that. It's complete.

So, we're to do that. Trust in Him and then live in the freedom and joy that the Gospel gives—that the LORD gives.

Now have you done that? Have you recognized that you're a sinner? We all are. None is perfect. We all need a Savior. We are all helpless. Christ is the only Savior. He died in the place of sinners. So if you have not believed in Him, looked to Him, trust in Him.

And may God help all of us who have believed to understand more fully what that means. Understand the Gospel of grace and the freedom that we have in Christ—and to live in it and live for it. By God's grace we will all be like the apostle Paul—and like John Knox. May it be said of us that we never feared the face of man. May God bless us and keep us strong and faithful to Him. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your goodness to us, and we thank You for the courage of men like Paul, and like others down through the history of the church who have taken bold and courageous stands for the truth. There'll never be a time, before the kingdom comes, that the Gospel will not be challenged and that our faith in it will not be challenged. Give us a clearer and deeper understanding of the Gospel of grace, of the great doctrines of the faith, that we would stand firm in them and be courageous, as Paul was. So much depends on that. So we look to You to bless us LORD, build us up in the faith.

One way in which our faith is built up is by taking the Lord's Supper, and we are about to do that, Lord. So prepare our hearts for that we pray. Thank You for all we have in Christ. And it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)