

# The Truth That Changes Everything

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning. You've been falsely informed that I am from Jackson, Mississippi. I'm from Glasgow, Scotland, but I live and work and serve in Jackson, Mississippi, and this was actually my home church when I was a student at what is now ETS at the Free Church College.

Derek and Katrina Lamont were a great encouragement to me and my family, and we were immensely blessed and helped by their ministry, an example to us. Corey Brock, of course, was an assistant minister with me in Jackson, Sebastian and Ainsley Byrnegaard, Hunter and Carly Nicholson, who are here among you and serve, who are interns in our congregation. I've worshipped here even just this past summer with members of First Presbyn Church, and we have many deep and wonderful connections to this congregation, and so it's a real treat for me to be with you today and to open God's Word. Do keep your Bibles open, please, at Galatians chapter two and the passage we read together. Such an important episode for us to consider, this little falling out, not so little falling out, actually, this real division that erupted between the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter in the church. In Antioch, as I was thinking about the passage, I remembered a moment when I was the free church minister in London. I was there 20 years ago, and the Lord opened an amazing door for us to plant a church amongst the many thousands of young African language boers, young whites of Africans who were the first generation to grow up in South Africa after the fall of apartheid, and they were in a real crisis of identity. They were glad that apartheid had been toppled, that racist regime was over, but theirs was nevertheless still the language and the culture of an oppressor minority, and they were really struggling, a real crisis of identity, and many of them, these young people were fleeing South Africa, they were coming to London, they didn't really know who they were or how to be, and the Lord opened an amazing door for us to begin to reach them, and we started to plant a church amongst them. We called a young pastor from

South Africa to be the assistant minister and help us plant that church, and as we were planning his ordination service, I was approached by another minister in London who was from South Africa, I'd never met this guy before, and he asked if he could come and participate in the ordination service as an official representative of his South African denomination, and so I met with the man and I discovered that his denomination shared the same theological convictions that we did, and that was encouraging, and then he told me something that really broke my heart, he said, but our denomination still upholds the view that people of colour are not welcome in our worship services, so if you are a black South African, you would not be allowed to be a member of their churches, and at that point I had to look him in the eye and say, there's absolutely no way you can participate in the ordination service, in fact we can't have any connection with you in any way at all, because you are prohibiting from the fellowship of God's people some of those for whom Christ shed His blood to welcome into His family, and I was sort of transported back to that moment as I read here about the confrontation between Paul and the apostle Peter in the city of Antioch because much like that South African minister, Peter had begun to impose extra restrictions upon those whom Christ had freely welcomed into the church simply on the basis of their trust in Him.

He had begun to impose additional rules that was dividing the fellowship of God's people, extra biblical requirements that was shattering the unity and the harmony of the church.

And looking at this episode together is really important and helpful for us because it helps us understand just how easily that can happen. After all, we're talking about the mighty apostle Peter, we're not talking about some new Christian who's just got some wrong ideas and they just need to work through them.

[ 4 : 58 ] This is the apostle Peter himself. And we're not talking about just any old church either. Antioch, where this takes place, was sort of the missionary church planting powerhouse of the New Testament age.

It was where Paul made his home base and where he was sent out on his missionary journeys all over the Roman Empire to plant new churches. The point really is if it can happen to Peter, even Peter, it could happen to us.

And if it could happen to a church like Antioch, it could happen here. That's part of the message. Now, Paul is engaged in the second half of chapter one all the way through chapter two in some autobiography, partly because in Galatia, he's writing this letter to the Galatians, in Galatia, there were some false teachers who had shown up in the church, they were legalistic.

And part of their strategy was to undermine Paul's authority and say, you know, Paul is a cut rate, you know, bargain basement secondhand apostle.

He's not the real deal. So don't trust him, listen to us. And so Paul has to, before he can get to his theology, he has to stop and tell something of his own story and demonstrate, no, I'm every bit as authoritative and valid as an apostle as Peter and the other apostles in Jerusalem.

[ 6 : 31 ] That's what he's doing here. And just before this passage, he's told us he himself went to Jerusalem and told the other apostles about his message.

And they said, we're with you 100%. And so it's really quite surprising here when Peter returns the favor and comes now up to Antioch where Paul has made his base to visit the church there, that Peter does this sort of U-turn.

And instead of a free gospel that unifies Jews and Gentiles simply on the basis of trusting Jesus without any additional requirements, now all of a sudden Peter changes his mind and backs away from fellowship with non-Jewish people.

He wants to reimpose ceremonial regulations from the Old Testament law. It's really shocking. So what is it that's going on?

Well, here's how I want to look at the passage. I want to think about three things because there's a sort of a spiritual disease that Paul is telling us about in Peter's life.

[ 7 : 40 ] So in verses 11 through 13, I want to look at the symptoms of that disease because I want us to be able to diagnose it in ourselves if it ever began to show up there.

So the symptoms. And then verse 14, behind the symptoms, I want us to see the diagnosis, the disease itself, the root of all the problems.

And then we'll look in verses 15 and 16 at God's treatment plan. If this disease ever showed up in your life or in this church, what should we do? Well, we need to get a hold of the teaching of verses 15 and 16.

So the symptoms first of all, Paul has to confront Peter because previously he was quite happy to have fellowship with Gentiles until some folks show up from the church in Jerusalem and then all of a sudden he backs away.

He says, Peter, I confronted him to his face because Peter stood condemned. That is to say, he was entirely unequivocally and ambiguously straight up just plain wrong.

[ 8 : 52 ] This wasn't a difference of strategy or a difference of personality or, you know, Peter did it his way and Paul did it his way. And these are two big egos clashing. That's not what it was.

Something much more serious is happening and Paul felt compelled to confront him. So what's the problem exactly? What are the symptoms of this spiritual disease in Peter's life?

Well, the first of them we've already begun to notice, haven't we? It's the symptom of division. You can see it in verse 12. Paul, Cephas used to eat with the Gentiles.

The tense there is important that the Greek word really indicates that this was his habit, his custom. Ordinarily, habitually, quite happily, he regularly sat down and had fellowship.

He ate meals. He did life with. He sat around the Lord's table beside non-Jewish people. And then these fellows from James in Jerusalem show up in Antioch and were told that Peter drew back and separated himself.

[ 9 : 59 ] And again, the language there is important. Really, the words mean that Peter began to back away until a full breach of fellowship, of separation, took place.

A fundamental division between Jews and Gentiles. A division actually that had been healed wonderfully in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus took away the middle wall of separation and made of the two one new man, canceling all the obligations and ceremonies of the Mosaic law that made the Jews so very distinct and joined Jews and Gentiles together as one body of Christ simply on the basis of trust in Him.

That's what Jesus has done. And now that old division that had been healed erupts again in the life of the church in Antioch.

And so something terrible is happening in Peter's life, but it doesn't stay with Peter. Did you notice in verse 13 that this spiritual infection of some false ideas that has penetrated Peter's life spreads?

[ 11 : 15 ] An infectious spiritual disease so that as Peter begins to back away, so do the other Jews in the church. And even Barnabas.

Barnabas was Paul's right hand man. So it's really shocking. Even Barnabas is swept up in all of this and breaks fellowship and returns to this Mosaic Old Testament division.

And what is it that's caused this awful breach of fellowship along racial lines so ugly in the church in Antioch? Look at verse 12 again, when certain men came from James, Cephas, the apostle Peter, was eating and drinking with the Gentiles.

But when they came, he drew back and separated himself. Now how come? Why? Fearing the circumcision party. So behind his separation from his Gentile brothers and sisters lies a second deeper symptom of spiritual disease in his life.

He fears the circumcision party. Fear of other people is what is driving him.

[ 12 : 36 ] And what a powerful motivator, almost always in a damaging direction, the fear of other people's opinion can be in our lives. Haven't you found that to be true?

It's almost never productive of something healthy in our hearts and lives, living in the fear of other people's opinions. There was a book in the second century called The Book of Jubilees that gave instructions to Jewish people, and it said this, separate yourself from the Gentiles and do not eat with them and do not perform deeds like theirs and do not become associates of theirs because their deeds are defiled, all of their ways are contaminated and despicable and abominable.

That's how the Jews thought about the Gentiles. And these folks from Jerusalem still seem to have bought into those ideas.

They were saying, sure, we want you to follow Jesus. You need to follow Jesus, but if you really want to be accepted with God, that's not enough. You need to follow Jesus and you need all these ceremonies.

You need to follow the dietary rules of the Mosaic law. You need to be circumcised. You need to keep the law. You need to perform religious ritual.

[ 14 : 05 ] And then on the basis of all of that in combination, then God will accept you. He'll count you righteous. He'll justify you on the basis of your religious qualification.

That was what these people from Jerusalem believed, and Peter is completely intimidated by them. Maybe he was afraid he would appear less strict, less faithful, less committed.

Maybe he worried that he's going to lose face or lose influence or lose position as a leader in the church in Jerusalem. Whatever's going on in Peter's mind, there was a division in the church and it was caused by Peter's fear of their opinions about him.

And then did you notice how Paul sums up all the symptoms of spiritual disease that have begun now to spread like an infection from Peter's heart into the hearts of so many in the church?

Twice over, Paul calls them hypocrites in verse 13. Do you see that? You might well know the word that's translated hypocrite comes from a Greek word that was used originally in the theater.

[ 15 : 32 ] Actors would wear a mask. You were a hypocrite, if you wore a mask as you adopted a persona. And Paul is frustrated and grieving and roused to confront Peter because he knows that Peter knows better.

This isn't who Peter really is. Actually you may remember something of Peter's backstory. In Acts chapter 10, Peter had a vision.

He was still a devout, observant, law-keeping Jew, even though he was a follower of the Lord Jesus. And in Acts chapter 10, he has a vision where the Lord showed him unclean animals.

The animals that the law of Moses said Jewish people aren't allowed to eat, not kosher. So a vision and he's told, rise and eat, Peter.

And Peter says, I've never eaten anything that's unclean. To which the Lord responds, what God has made clean, do not call unclean.

[ 16 : 38 ] And at that moment, Peter realized that Jewish people and Gentile people are now one, that there are no longer any unclean people among the Gentiles.

The moment they believe in Jesus, we are one in Christ. And we ought not to stand on these mosaic Old Testament distinctions any longer.

So in other words, Peter knew better. It's the epitome of hypocrisy, what's happening here in Antioch. You see how powerful the fear of the opinion of other people can really be.

Peter had a vision from Jesus. He heard the word of Christ telling him about the way things are now. And even that was overwhelmed by the fear of men.

So there's division rooted in the fear of the opinion of others leading to terrible, terrible hypocrisy. Those are the symptoms, now we're ready to hear Paul's diagnosis.

[ 17 : 44 ] Here's the spiritual disease that is the cause of all of this dreadful disorder. Verse 14, but when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, if you being a Jew live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?

I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel. Paul might have taken a different approach.

He could very appropriately and legitimately have gone symptom by symptom and confronted Peter on each of them and said, now look here, Peter, racial division is wicked and sinful.

And here's why he could have done that. That would be right. He could have said to Peter, feeding the opinion of other people is so destructive.

It's dangerous, Peter. And here's why he could have called Peter out for his hypocrisy. All of that would have been just and right and perhaps even helpful, but do you see what Paul does instead?

[ 19 : 03 ] He doesn't just go for the symptoms. He tackles the root. He tackles the disease. There's so much wisdom here, isn't there? Back of all the symptoms that are poisoning Peter's life, what is really going on?

Well, Peter, here's what's going on in your life. The gospel, the truth of the gospel is no longer. In this moment, it's no longer the governing principle.

It's not in the driving seats. It's not the operating system for your life anymore. It's the fear of men.

You're not walking in line with the truth of the gospel. That's why Paul is willing to confront him because this isn't just about a different approach or different strategies.

This is a gospel problem. The word, actually there's two words in Greek translated by six words in English.

[ 20 : 06 ] Their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel. That little word not in step with means straight walking.

Paul wasn't walking straight in line with the truth. He wasn't walking along the gospel line. One scholar says, the metaphor is of a confused wanderer, someone who veers from the path such as a staggering drunk who cannot walk a straight line.

That's what's happening in Peter's life. The point is the gospel, the good news about Jesus who he is and what he's done is a straight path and Peter's become so intoxicated with the pursuit of the good opinion of other people.

That drunk with their praises, he has staggered from a life lived along the gospel line with disastrous consequences.

And there's a sad irony in all of this that I want to make sure you don't miss. I wonder if you saw how even though once this circumcision party, these legalistic thinkers from Jerusalem have arrived in Antioch and intimidated Peter, even though Peter now tries to make strict obedience to the law his big thing.

[ 21 : 29 ] Did you notice how as he focuses on the outward ceremonies of the law, he actually fails to keep the heart and the spirit of the law of God itself?

In some pretty dramatic ways, did you notice that in the passage? So he might well have managed to uphold the mosaic dietary restrictions that would mean he couldn't have fellowship with Gentiles.

But all that manages to do in the end is shatter the unity of the church so that he fails spectacularly in the basic obligation to love his neighbor as himself.

For sure, he recommitted himself to the ceremonies of Jewish law, but he did it, Paul says, because he was captured by the fear of men.

He wasn't motivated by the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. You remember how Jesus sums up the whole of God's law. You remember what he said? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

[ 22 : 42 ] Here's Peter saying, I'm going to be all about the law. As he throws himself at trying to keep the law, what happens? He's focused on law instead of gospel and instead of obeying the law, he ends up distorting the law in this most basic of ways.

He neither loves his neighbor nor does he really love the Lord. He's driven by the fear of men. Now he looks down on upon other people and thinks them less than himself.

It's one of the reasons, by the way, why legalists are always so frustrated. They're always mad and unhappy, sour folks, have you noticed that about them?

They're always sucking lemons, these legalists. Why are they so frustrated, so unhappy, so miserable? Because they've made law keeping their central focus, that's what they're all about, not the gospel.

And the result is that no matter how hard they try to keep the law, the very thing they try to obey, they only ever end up distorting.

[ 23 : 49 ] So it slips like sand through their fingers. So what happens to Peter right here? What a futile way to live, it's miserable. Well, what's the solution? Is there a better way?

Luke verses 15 and 16, we've seen the symptoms, and then we diagnose the disease. Peter is not living according to the truth of the gospel. Now here's the remedy.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentiles sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by works of the law no one will be justified.

It's virtually a summary of the whole argument of the book of Galatians, and I love it. It's really Paul's report of what he said to Peter when he confronted him, and you get the sense that he's got one thing to say and he's really frustrated, so he says it three times over.

Have you ever been in an argument and you're making your point and you say it all these different ways backwards and forwards? Paul says it the same thing forwards and then backwards and then forwards again.

[ 25 : 09 ] You see that in verses 15 and 16, a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we have believed in Jesus Christ in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by works of the law no one will be justified.

He goes one way and then backs up and then goes the other way just to make sure we really get it. What's the point? Peter, you can't get right with God by doing stuff.

That's the point. A person is not justified by works of the law. That's what this circumcision party that showed up in Antioch thought, isn't it?

They believed all the ceremonies of the law of Moses still applied. They didn't understand that of course because of the cross of Jesus Christ, they are now all obsolete.

Jesus blood on the cross means you don't need sacrifices anymore. There's no partition or division between Jew and Gentile. We're now one. There's no need for circumcision. There's no priesthood.

[ 26 : 16 ] There's no temple because of the cross. So by affirming that you do need these things, they're undermining and distorting the gospel. And then as they base their confidence that God will accept them on their religious performance, they're distorting the law as well, aren't they?

They've missed the fact that Paul points to Peter here. You can't get right with God that way. It's impossible. I wonder if you really get that.

Do you get that? Do better, try harder is not going to work. It's not going to work. You can give money, you can pray, you can read your Bible diligently.

You can be here every day, every time the doors are open. Do those things. Those are healthy, beautiful things. Part of Christian faithfulness.

Do them, but don't trust them. Don't trust them that because you do them, God will accept you. By the works of the law, no one will be justified.

[ 27 : 24 ] You can't keep the law perfectly. You can't do enough, be good enough, perform enough ever to merit God's loving.

You can't do it. But Paul is saying, Peter, when you simply trust Jesus, when you rest not on how much you've done, but on what He has done perfectly for you, an obedient life is sacrificial death.

That's when God accepts you for free as a gift. What Paul wants Peter to remember in the Galatians as he writes to them here to realize and for you and me to grasp is how that one simple, beautiful, glorious truth changes everything.

Changes everything. When you understand that you're accepted freely in the sight of God for nothing in you, for nothing you've done, and for no reason you can supply, you're accepted freely only because Jesus obeyed and bled and died for you.

When you see that you are completely accepted in Christ, all your sin notwithstanding, and certainly not because you cleaned up your act first and qualified for God's love.

[ 29 : 15 ] But when you realize He accepts you freely and loves you freely anyway, when that really begins to percolate down into your heart, it sets you free from the need ever to seek acceptance in the opinion of other people because you're accepted already in the judgment of the only person whose opinion ever really matters.

And not because you earned it, which means of course if it was a free gift that you didn't earn, you can't lose it.

And so once you have received His acceptance, you're secure in it. He accepts you for free on the basis of what Jesus has done for you.

And that actually cuts the chains that hold you enslaved to seeking the approval of others. That's what Peter has missed.

It sets you free. Now you can begin to walk straight in line with the truth of the gospel at last. The thing Peter forgot, the thing that Paul is reminding him of here, the thing I need to remember every day, I dare say you need to remember it too, is that law keeping, a life of moral obedience, does not impress God.

[ 30 : 46 ] It doesn't make Him accept you. But it does come, it arises up in the heart of a Christian gladly when you realize how freely you've been accepted and beloved anyway.

You can never use your moral behavior, your religious performances leverage to make God accept you or pardon you. You have to realize He accepts you already for free in Christ.

But when that sinks in and becomes the operating system in your life, the amazing thing is you then actually begin to keep God's law the way it was meant to be kept, not superficially on the surface, but from your heart.

Because you've discovered that He loves you first, you begin to love Him, not perfectly to be sure, but more and more with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and you begin to love your neighbor as yourself.

So what kind of life are you living today? I wonder if you're here to log a few hours in God's good books.

[ 32 : 16 ] Remember would you by the works of the law no one will be justified. You can't do it. Or are you here because despite all your sin, all your ineptitude, your moral failure, even though you don't deserve any of it, you've discovered that God loves you and has forgiven you and embraced you as His child for free in the gospel of His Son.

He's given Jesus to the cross for you. He's kept the law that you could never perfectly keep and endured the penalty for all your law-breaking, so that now because of such love, you find yourself loving Him and loving all who love Him too.

Not to earn His favor, but to say thank you. We love Him because He first loved us. So the symptoms, do you see them? Division, seeking the approval of others, hypocrisy.

Be there was living for the acceptance of His peers instead of living from His acceptance in Jesus Christ. And that's the disease. He was no longer walking in step with the truth of the gospel.

The gospel had stopped reaching His heart. Has it stopped reaching your heart? Is the gospel the operating system in your life?

[ 33 : 50 ] Well there's a remedy. All reminds, Simeon reminds us, we've believed in Jesus Christ in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

You must come to see that you are accepted completely, wholly, and forever in Jesus Christ alone.

Only that will set you free from the enslaving power of people pleasing. May God help us then to get a hold of such wonderful good news.

Let me pray. Father thank You so much for the Lord Jesus Christ, for His obedience, for His death, that on the basis of what He has done, not what our hands have done, but on the basis of what He has done, You look at wretched sinners like me.

You accept us and love us and rejoice over us. Help us, oh God, to see that because we're accepted in Christ Jesus, we don't need the approval of others.

[ 35 : 10 ] We have the loving embrace of the only one whose opinion ever really counts. Let us free, we pray, from the enslaving bondage of people pleasing.

And as we begin to grasp the wonder of Your free love in Christ, melt our hearts to love You in return, more and more with all our hearts, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

For we ask it all that Jesus might have the glory. Amen.