

PETER (CEPHAS) OPPOSED BY PAUL (2:11-21).

A. Peter's Relapse (2:11-13).

But when Cephas came to Antioch, 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.

1. Apparently, sometime after the important conference described in Acts 15, Peter came from Jerusalem to Antioch. The first thing to note is *Peter's freedom* then. He enjoyed fellowship with all the believers, Jews and Gentiles alike. To "eat with the Gentiles" meant to accept them, to put Jews and Gentiles on the same level as one family in Christ. [WWW]
2. Peter was not merely condemned by a fellow-apostle, he was self-condemned, his own conscience reproving and repudiating his actions. Paul stated in Romans (Rom. 2:1) the principle that holds a man self-condemned if he practices what he condemns in others. This Peter did, for he advocated eating with Gentiles in Ac. 10; but here he refused to do so. [JBC]
3. But Peter's freedom was threatened by Peter's fear. While he was in Antioch, the church was visited by some of the associates of James. [WWW]
4. In Ac. 15, it is learned that these Judaizers actually had no commission whatever from James (Ac. 15:24), yet they were sinfully and deceitfully operating in his name. [JBC] No doubt they belonged to the "circumcision party" (Ac. 15,1,5) and wanted to lead the Antioch church into religious legalism. [WWW]
5. The identity of these Judaizers is provided in Ac. 6:7; 15:5, where it is made clear that they were priests of the sect of the Pharisees who had accepted the gospel, but were unwilling to give up the customs and ceremonies of Judaism. They were a powerful and very influential group, and Paul here made extenuating remarks regarding the conduct of both Peter and Barnabas, Peter's mistake being due to fear of the powerful Pharisaical party, and Barnabas' being that he was just "carried away" with it in a moment of weakness. [JBC]
6. How do we account for this fear? For one thing we know that Peter was an impulsive man. He could show amazing faith and courage one minute and fail completely in the next. [WWW]
7. There are two tragedies to Peter's fall. First, it made him a hypocrite. He endorsed and participated in the Jerusalem conference. Second, is that Peter led others astray with him. Even Barnabas was involved. [WWW]

B. Paul's Rebuke (2:14-21).

There are five basic Christian doctrines that were being denied by Peter because of his separation from Gentiles:

1. The unity of the church (2:14).

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?

- a. This bold rebuke administered by Paul to Peter may not be taken as a relaxation of Jesus' rule that the brother having sinned should first be approached privately (see Mt. 5:24; 18:15). The situation was not one which pertains to any persons today, for both Paul and Peter were inspired apostles of the highest rank; and the near-unique situation demanded exactly what Paul did here. [JBC]
- b. Because he was a Christian, he was part of the church, and in the church there are no racial distinctions (Gal. 3:28). [WWW]

- c. Peter himself had stated at the Jerusalem Conference that God had "put no difference between us and them" (Ac. 15:9). But now Peter was putting a difference. [WWW]
2. Justification by faith (2:15-16).
 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; **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 no flesh will be justified.
 a. "Faith in Christ" or "faith of Christ"?
 ... the usual definition of faith as the word is used in the New Testament is not trust/faith as usually thought, but "faithfulness," in the sense of "obedience," "reliability," or "fidelity." Thus, the "faith of Christ" includes both His own trust/faith in the heavenly Father, and His perfect obedience and fidelity in the discharge of His mission of redemption. [JBC] You can instead of "faith in Christ" say, "though the faithfulness of Christ." [gls] The faith of Christ... meaning His perfect fidelity and obedience, is actually the ground of man's redemption. [JBC]
 b. This is the first appearance of the important word *justification*, in this letter, and probably in Paul's writings (if, as we believe, Galatians was the first letter he wrote). [WWW]
 c. But what is justification? Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ. [WWW]
 d. Furthermore, justification is an act of God; it is not the result of man's character or works. "It is God who justifies" (Rom. 8:33). It is not by doing the works of the Law that the sinner gets a right standing before God, but by putting his faith in Jesus Christ. [WWW]
 e. When Peter separated himself from the Gentiles, he was denying the truth of justification by faith, because he was saying, "We Jews are different from--and better than--the Gentiles." Yet, both Jews and Gentiles are sinners (Rom. 3:22-23) and can only be saved by faith in Christ. [WWW]
 f. The phrase "even we believed on Christ Jesus" is the subjective faith, whereas the other two phrases best translated "faith of Christ" references the obedience of Jesus and the system of faith. [gls]
3. Freedom from the Law (3:17-18).
 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.
 a. At the Jerusalem conference Peter had compared the Mosaic Law to a burdensome yoke (Ac. 15:10; Gal. 5:1). Now he had put himself under that impossible yoke. [WWW]
 b. To say or act in such a way as to make the Law of Moses necessary for salvation, and not Christ alone, is to in effect make Jesus a minister of sin. To follow Him alone, when the Law is necessary would nullify one's justification. This of course is not true, Paul argues just the opposite. [gls]
4. The very Gospel itself (2:19-20).
 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. **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 gave Himself up for me.
 a. If a man is justified by works of the Law, then why did Jesus die? His death, burial, and resurrection are the key truths of the Gospel (1Cor. 15:1-8). [WWW]
 b. Here the thought is that "in Christ" Christians have already fulfilled all of the law, since that is what Christ did; and we are "in Him" and "of Him." Also, there is here the thought that people are dead to the law through the body of Christ. [JBC]
 c. To go back to Moses is to return to the graveyard! We have been "raised to walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4); and since we live by His resurrection power, we do not need the "help" of the Law. [WWW]

- d. This forsaking of one's identity to be "in Christ" was announced by Christ himself, who said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt. 16:24). Also he said, "He that abides in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit ... If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, etc." (Jn. 15:4-6).

Therefore, if a man is able to answer two questions affirmatively, there is no way he can be lost:

(1) Is he "in Christ"? The only way one can be "in Christ" is to be baptized into him.

(2) Will he be "found in him"? (Phil. 3:9). This means, will he still be "in Christ" when life ends, or the Lord comes?

The person described by affirmative answers to these questions is of them concerning whom the voice from heaven said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).

[JBC]

5. The grace of God (2:21).

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

- a. If true righteousness could have been procured by any man who ever lived on earth through means of the Mosaic Law, Christ's death would not have been necessary. The corollary of that is that for one to rely upon law-keeping for justification is to repudiate and reject Christ' sacrifice.

[JBC]

- b. We have no record of Peter's reply to Paul's rebuke, but Scripture would indicate that he admitted his sin and was restored to the fellowship once again. Certainly when you read his two letters (1&2 Peter) you detect no deviation from the Gospel of the grace of God. [WWW]

C. The Believer's Response. [WWW]

The important question today is: what is *my* response to the "truth of the gospel."

1. Have I been saved by the grace of God?

The only Gospel that saves is the Gospel of the grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).

2. Am I trying to mix Law and Grace?

"Are we trying to do Egypt's work in Canaan's land?"

3. Am I rejoicing in the fact that I am justified by faith in Christ?

It has often been said that "justified" means "just as if I'd never sinned" and this is correct. It brings great peace to the heart to know that one has a right standing before God (Rom. 5:1). Just think: the righteousness of Christ has been put into our account!

4. Am I walking in the liberty of grace?

Liberty does not mean license; rather it means the freedom in Christ to enjoy Him and to become what He was determined for us to become (Eph. 2:10).

5. Am I willing to defend the truth of the Gospel?

- a. This does not mean we become evangelical detectives investigating every church and Sunday school class in town. But it does mean that we do not fear men when they deny truths that have brought us eternal life in Christ.

- b. But we do have the Word of God to proclaim; and it is our obligation to share the truth.

6. Am I "walking uprightly" according to the truth of the Gospel?

The best way to defend the truth is to live the truth. My verbal defense of the Gospel will accomplish very little if my life contradicts what I say. Paul is going to explain to us how to live in liberty by the grace of God, and it is important that we obey what he says.

NEXT LESSON.

- A. On October 03, Faith Brings Righteousness (Gal. 3:1-14)
B. On October 10, Gone to Texas, substitute teacher and lesson.