

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father,

We also acknowledge that we are sinners, in desperate need of the Savior Jesus Christ. We plead for Your grace and mercy, and ask for Your forgiveness and cleansing. Humble us that we may truly repent of our sins, and enable us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith.

Help us to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ – to know Christ and to make Christ known. Enable us to be disciples of Christ, and to make disciples of Christ. Empower us to use our lives and our spiritual gifts to obey the Great Commission, and to let the light of Christ shine through us so that others will come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Compel us to long for the salvation of unbelievers, and for the sanctification of those who are in Christ. May we always be prepared to give testimony, to anyone who would ask, of the hope that we have in Christ.

We pray that You would build Your church – strengthening, protecting, purifying and unifying her through the challenges of prosperity and adversity. We thank You for the assurance that we have in Your Word that nothing – no virus, no suffering, no persecution (not even the gates of Hades) will prevail against Your church; Your Son's beloved Bride. May this be an anchor to our souls, and a refuge for our faith.

Bend our knees before Your throne, O God. Cause our hearts and minds to be transfixed by Your majesty and authority. May our pride be supplanted by humility; may our sinful passions give way to righteousness; may our fears be turned to faith; may our ultimate, unwavering, unmitigated, unyielding desire be to glorify You in everything!

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

# “Justification by Faith Alone”

(Galatians 2:11-21 ~ Part 1)

## Introduction

➤ One of the many ways in which we can make a defense for the veracity of Scripture (its Spirit-inspired) is the unfiltered way in which it portrays biblical characters – “warts and all.” Humans tend to portray their heroes airbrushed and polished – deemphasizing their weaknesses and embellishing their strengths.

In the Bible, the “heroes” of the faith are depicted unfiltered, unpolished (e.g. Noah, Abraham, king David, the prophets, the apostles, etc.). Their weaknesses and sins are written down for all to see – and hopefully to learn from.

**1 Cor 10:6-13** ~ “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’ <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, <sup>10</sup>nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup>Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup>Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

➤ As we read and study this passage this morning, we must be careful to not dwell on Peter’s failing (leading either to discouragement or arrogance). Rather, we must be sobered and humbled by the reality that as Peter stumbled in his Christian walk – even after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and after the filling of the Holy Spirit – we too can “*stumble in many ways*” (Jms.3:2).

**Gal 2:11-21** ~ “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup>For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>13</sup>And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup>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, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’ <sup>15</sup>We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup>yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also 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. <sup>17</sup>But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

➤ In this passage of Scripture, we discover Peter’s offense against the Gospel (vs.11-13), and Paul’s defense of the Gospel (vs.14-21).

## A. Peter’s Offense against the Gospel (vs.11-13)

➤ Both Peter and Paul were godly and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Both were specifically chosen and anointed by Christ to be His apostles. Both were tremendously influential leaders in the early days of the New Testament church (after Jesus’ ascension, and the Day of Pentecost). In fact, the book of Acts essentially covers both of their ministries – Peter (Acts 1-12), Paul (Acts 13-28). But at this

particularly point in history, their paths crossed and there was conflict – not a conflict of personalities, ministry philosophies, or leadership authority, but concerning the doctrine of (and application of) the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

These verses (vs.11-13) unfold in five distinct stages.

### 1. The Occasion (vs.11)

➤ Once again, at the outset of this passage, we see the apostle Paul referred to the apostle Peter as “*Cephas*” (vs.11; the term Cephas means “rock” in Aramaic, which is translated “Peter” in Greek). Paul often referred to the apostle Peter, in Aramaic, as “Cephas” (see Gal.1:18; 2:9, 11, 14; cf. 1Cor.1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5). When Jesus began His public ministry, calling those who would be His disciples/apostles, He changed Peter’s name from Simon to Cephas:

**John 1:39-42** ~ “One of the two who heard John [the Baptist] speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ). <sup>42</sup>He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).”

➤ This occasion happened when Peter “*came to Antioch*” (vs.11). Located some 300 miles north of Jerusalem (on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea), Antioch (of Syria) was the capital of the Roman province of Syria (scholars estimate the population of 250,000 – 500,000). One of the largest cities in the Roman empire, Syrian Antioch (as opposed to Pisidian Antioch) was for many years a missionary base for the apostle Paul. According to Acts 11:26, it was “*in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.*”

There is no clear or definitive information in Scripture as to why, or when, Peter made his way to Antioch (or how long he stayed there). It seems likely, however, that this encounter (Gal.2:11-21) happened before the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

### 2. The Confrontation (vs.11)

➤ We do know, however, that during this time when Peter was in Antioch with Paul that Paul “*opposed him to his face*” (vs.11). The Greek word translated “opposed” (*anthistēmi*) can also be translated resist or hinder, and often in a defensive or passive posture. It is used for the opposition Christians face from non-Christians (2Tim.3:8), and as a command for believers to resist the devil (Eph.6:13; Jms.4:7; 1Pet.5:9).

As we will see, Paul needed to confront Peter on the spot as Peter was not acting in accord with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see vs.12, 14). Since Peter’s sin was committed in public, leading others astray (vs.13), Paul needed to oppose Peter in public. As the saying goes, “Public sins require public repentance.”

➤ As Paul explained, the reason why he confronted Peter “to his face” was because Peter “*stood condemned*” (vs.11). This does not imply that Peter was unsaved, or lost his salvation, but simply that Peter was guilty of sin.

It is important to keep in mind that this was no small infraction, or some peripheral doctrine. Paul was not arguing with Peter over the color of the carpet in the sanctuary, or pews verses chairs, or drums verses an organ. Paul was not quarreling about secondary doctrines or “*foolish controversies*” (see Tit.3:2, 9; 2Tim.2:23). Paul’s confrontation with Peter was over the crux of the Christian faith – the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

✓ **Illust:** “When this article [i.e. the Gospel] is endangered, we must not hesitate to resist Peter, or an angel from heaven [cf. 1:8]” (Martin Luther; *Luther’s Commentary on Galatians*, 2:11).

### 3. The Transgression (vs.12)

➤ The word “transgression” may sound like too strong of a word to describe what Peter had done, but I assure you it is not. The reason why Paul so strongly “*opposed [Peter] to his face*” (vs.11) is because Peter’s actions were sinful. Paul explained: “*For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself*” (vs.12). When Jews (the Judaizers) arrived, Peter ostracized the Gentiles. At best Peter was guilty of showing favoritism (Jms.2:1), at worst he was guilty of compromising Gospel/Biblical truths (for sake of worldly comfort and social privilege. As the context of this passage indicates, Peter was guilty of the latter if not also the former.

Falling back into his old patterns, Peter distanced himself from the Gentiles as if they were “unclean” or unsaved. Remember, Peter was specifically called to be an apostle to the Jews (vs.8, 9). He lived, worked and ministered in predominantly Jewish territory (in Jerusalem). Therefore, the Gentiles were largely foreign to him, and their influence on his life paled in comparison to the influence of the Jews. The temptation to align himself with Jews (or Judaizers) would have been great.

➤ This brings up an important point of application: Christians are called by God to hold one another accountable, and to lovingly confront any professing Christian who is walking contrary to Christ or the Word of God. This is not judgmentalism, but a humble Christ-honoring rebuke of those who call themselves a Christian (believer) but are in fact living like a non-Christian (unbeliever).

**Gal 6:1** ~ “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. ...” (cf. Matt.18:12-20; Lk.17:3-4; 2Thess.3:14-15; Jms.5:19-20)

There is another point of application that we can make here. As we see Peter stumbling in his Christian walk, we can be encouraged to know that even a godly and faithful Christian like Peter can be prone to weakness and sin (Jms.3:2). However, while this may be encouraging it also must be sobering. For as we see Peter stumble in his Christian walk, we must realize that we are certainly not immune to Satan’s deceptions and temptations.

**Gal 6:1** ~ “... Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (cf. Matt.18:12-20; Lk.17:3-4; 2Thess.3:14-15)

**1 Cor 10:12** ~ “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

➤ It is imperative to note that no person has ever been saved by any human merit or work. The teaching of God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone has been the Gospel throughout all human history (not just a New Testament doctrine)! The Old Testament saints were saved by God’s grace through faith in the Christ who would come, and the New Testament saints were/are saved by God’s grace through faith in the Christ who has come (see Heb.11:1-39; Rom.3:28-4:3). Every believer – whoever has lived and whoever will live – is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. God’s salvation always has, and always will be, only by His grace through faith in Christ!

**Gal 3:6-9** ~ “just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’? <sup>7</sup>Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ <sup>9</sup>So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Gal 3:6-9 ~ “Even so Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ <sup>7</sup>Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations shall be blessed in you.’ <sup>9</sup>So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.” (NASB)

➤ Therefore, the teaching of (and adherence to) a salvation by works is not merely a misunderstanding of the Gospel, but a perversion of the Gospel; “a different gospel” (1:6), a desertion of Christ (1:6; 5:4), a distortion of the gospel (1:7), and warranting God’s condemnation (1:8, 9).

✓ **Illust:** “The Judaizers were therefore not teaching Old Testament doctrine but the cardinal doctrine of Satan, that a person can by his own goodness and works gain favor with God. That is why Paul referred to the Judaizers as “*dogs, ... evil workers, ... the false circumcision*” (Phil. 3:2). ... Paul was declaring that for an unbeliever, no matter what his Jewish pedigree and attainments might be, circumcision amounted to no more than pagan mutilation. ...

The Judaizers recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but because their view of the Messiah was corrupt so was their view of Jesus. They did not look to the Messiah as the Lamb of God who would take away their sin, because they did not believe they had sin that demanded such sacrifice in order to be forgiven. As circumcised, ceremonial Jews they were convinced they already had the full favor of God and were spiritually and morally acceptable to Him just as they were. ... [Jesus] was not simply another great Jewish leader. He was of a completely different order, the very Son of God and Savior of the world, whose saving sacrifice was necessary for anyone to be right with God” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*; 2:11-21).

➤ Notice how severely the apostle Paul described Peter’s actions: “*condemned*” (2:11), “*hypocritically ... hypocrisy*” (2:13), “*not in step with the truth*” (2:14), “*sinners*” (2:17) and “*transgressor*” (2:18). Teaching, believing, or acting as though God’s salvation is in any way the result of works is condemned in Scripture as promoting or embracing a false gospel; which is heresy and heretical.

**Gal 5:2-4** ~ “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. <sup>3</sup>I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup>You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”

#### 4. The Motivation (vs.12)

➤ Further, we see that Peter’s actions were motivated by fear: “*fearing the circumcision party*” (vs.12). The “*circumcision party*” (or lit. “those of the circumcision”) referred to not just Jews, but those known as the “Judaizers” (see Acts 11:1-3; 15:5). These were men who tried to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised, believing that Gentiles had to ascribe to Judaism in order to be saved. Peter’s distancing himself from the Gentiles does not reveal a change in his doctrine/theology – he had not changed his view of the Gospel – but rather revealed the fragility of his faith, especially concerning those who could negatively and directly impact his life and ministry.

✓ **Illust:** “The old Peter – weak, fearful, and vacillating – had come to the fore again. Here was the same Peter who under divine inspiration declared Jesus to be “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” but who a short while later rebuked his Lord for saying that He must suffer and die (Matt.16:16, 22). Here is the same Peter who boldly declared he would die rather than deny his Lord but who, before the night was out, had denied Him three times (Mk.14:29-31, 66-72). Here was the same Peter who was called to preach but who disobediently went back to fishing even after he had encountered the resurrected Christ (Jn.21:3).

Peter was not fearing the party of the circumcision because they might threaten his life or freedom. The Judaizers claimed to be Christians and therefore obviously had no authority from the Sanhedrin to arrest, imprison, or put anyone to death – as the men did who stoned Stephen and as Paul himself once had done. The most the Judaizers could have done against Peter was to ridicule him and malign him in Jerusalem, as their fellow Judaizers would later malign Paul in Galatia. Peter was afraid of just that – losing popularity and prestige with a group of self-righteous hypocrites whose doctrines were heretical and whose tactics were deceitful.

Peter was not unlike most Christians in finding it difficult to be consistent in spiritual commitment. He would show great courage and conviction and then stumble. He would staunchly defend the faith and then succumb to compromise. When he did that in Antioch he played into the hands of the Judaizers, who must have been elated to have drawn this great apostle into their camp, by practice if not by precept” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*; 2:12).

- Ironically, but not surprisingly, the fear that compelled Peter to shun the Gentile Christians at Antioch was the same fear that compelled the Judaizers to embrace and proclaim a false (legalistic) gospel:

**Gal 6:12** ~ “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”

- Fear is a powerful motivator: it can cause us to compromise our principles, or succumb to temptation; it can cause us to deny our faith, or renounce Jesus as our Lord and Savior; it can compel us to betray our loved ones, or sacrifice that which we love most; it can motivate us to be silent when we should speak up, or say that which we should not; it can cause us to wallow in anxiety, and doubt/distrust the sovereignty of God; it can cause us to cower and yield to those who are enemies of the Gospel.
- We must not ignore or underestimate the influence fear can have on our lives, and our faith. Throughout history, fear has been the basis for Christians defiling their purity, compromising their convictions, distorting Scripture/the Gospel, slandering God, denying Christ, and even renouncing their faith. We must not think that we are somehow immune to being swayed by fear. Rather, we must regularly pray for courage and boldness, perseverance and faithfulness – *“I believe; help my unbelief!”* (Mk.9:24).

**Luke 12:4-7** ~ “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. <sup>5</sup>But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! <sup>6</sup>Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. <sup>7</sup>Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

- Once again, we need to take seriously the temptation to compromise biblical truth and practice, out of a fear of worldly opposition or persecution. It is all too easy for us to sacrifice godliness on the altar of worldliness. We see it in the actions of the apostle Peter, and we most likely can see that same tendency in our lives.

### 5. [The Repercussion](#) (vs.13)

- The repercussions of Peter’s actions were immediate and serious: *“And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy”* (vs.13). Being a leader in the church, Peter’s withdrawal from the Gentile Christians caused other Jewish Christians to separate from them.

Peter’s actions, along with the others who followed him, were hypocritical because it was contrary to the Gospel he preached. Peter believed and proclaimed that salvation had nothing to do with a person’s ethnicity, nationality or gender (see Gal.3:23-29; Acts 10:9-16; 15:8-11), but acted as if the Jews were somehow superior to the Gentiles.

- This ought to be sobering for us as well. For when we stumble in our Christian walk, when we act hypocritically, we not only sin but may be leading others to sin as well.

**Matt 18:5-6** ~ “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, <sup>6</sup>but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” (cf. Lk.17:1-4).

- We are called to be so faithful to Christ – to live such lives of obedience and trust – that whoever would follow our example would be led to Christ, and into a deeper relationship with Christ. This reality, of course, should compel us to pray to God for strength, wisdom, purity and perseverance.

**1 Cor 11:1** ~ “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (cf. 1Cor.4:16; Phil.3:17; 2Thess.3:9; Heb.13:7)

**1 Tim 4:16** ~ “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

## Conclusion

➤ Paul’s confrontation with Peter illustrates just how easily it is for Christians to go stumble in their Christian walk – even the most faithful and gifted church leaders. It is all too easy for us to compromise our faith – either our doctrine or our practice, or both. As Peter “*drew back*” (*hypostellō*; 2:12), if we are not vigilant, we too can cower or shrink under worldly opposition and persecution.

**Acts 20:18-21** ~ “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup>servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup>how I did not shrink [*hypostellō*] from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup>testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Acts 20:26-27** ~ “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, <sup>27</sup>for I did not shrink [*hypostellō*] from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

➤ To those Christians who were persecuted (and for all Christians who would be called to suffer persecution) for their faith in Christ, the author of the book of Hebrews offered this encouragement to persevere:

**Heb 10:32-39** ~ “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, <sup>33</sup>sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. <sup>34</sup>For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. <sup>35</sup>Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup>For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. <sup>37</sup>For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; <sup>38</sup>but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back [*hypostellō*], my soul has no pleasure in him.’ <sup>39</sup>But we are not of those who shrink back [*hypostolē*] and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

➤ The apostle Peter stumbled in his Christian walk, but he never renounced or abandoned his faith in Christ. Scripture and history records that Peter was a faithful follower of Jesus Christ – an influential leader in the Christian church in Jerusalem, and faithful preacher of the Gospel – to the end of his life. He was arrested, beaten and eventually martyred for his Christian faith, and did not shrink back from his faith in Jesus Christ.

✓ Illust: According to Christian tradition, Peter was crucified in Rome under Emperor Nero Augustus Caesar. These reports indicate that Peter died a particularly cruel martyrdom. Before he himself was crucified, he is said to have been forced to witness the crucifixion of his wife. In his Ecclesiastical History, the early church Father Eusebius writes that Peter stood at the foot of his wife’s cross and kept repeating to her in encouraging and comforting tones, “Remember the Lord. Remember the Lord.” After she died, it is said he pleaded to be crucified upside down, because he felt he was unworthy to die as his Lord had died – his executioners obliged him.