

After pointing out that the apostles in Jerusalem approved of the gospel of grace that he preached, Paul then refers to an occasion when Peter, the foremost apostle, acted contrary to the truth of the gospel and needed to be corrected. This situation illustrated Paul's earlier point concerning the fact that the truth of the gospel is more important than the messenger (Gal. 1:8-9).

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

Not only did the apostles approve of Paul's understanding of the gospel (v. 9), but even they needed to be corrected when their actions contradicted the gospel of grace. This backs up Paul's contention that the message of the gospel was more important than the messenger (Gal. 1:8-9).

"But when Peter was come to Antioch" – It's not clear when Peter came to Antioch since this visit is not recorded in Acts, but it likely happened sometime after the council at Jerusalem mentioned in vs. 1-5 (Acts 15:1-31).

"I withstood [to stand against; to oppose] him to the face" – The fact that Peter was a leading apostle from Jerusalem that had interacted with Jesus Himself did not prevent Paul from opposing him when he was not acting in accordance with the truth of the gospel. The expression "to the face" indicates that Paul stood face to face with Peter to rebuke him.

"because he was to be blamed [stood condemned]" – Peter's behavior (v. 12) implied that the decision made by the council at Jerusalem was wrong and that Gentile believers were indeed required to keep the Mosaic Law or else be considered unclean. Not only did his actions violate the truth of the gospel, but Peter's behavior influenced others to commit the same sin (v. 13).

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. 13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

"For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles" – Jews did not normally fellowship with Gentiles, particularly in the intimate setting of sharing a meal. However, Peter had been shown in a vision that God considered believing Gentiles to be as clean as believing Jews (Acts 10:9-16, 28). As a result, he had been eating with the Gentiles during his visit to Antioch and presumably enjoying their fellowship. However, that changed when "certain came from James." These "certain" were apparently Jewish representatives sent by James, the head of the Jerusalem church, implying that these men were genuine Jewish believers.

"but when they were come, he withdrew [to timidly withdraw] and separated himself" – Peter seems to have been a man easily intimidated, since it only took a young girl to cause him to betray Jesus in fear (Luke 22:55-57). When the Jewish men sent by James arrived, Peter seems to have timidly left the company of the Gentile believers so that these Jews would not see him with "the heathen."

"fearing them which were of the circumcision" – Peter was afraid of what these Jews might think and/or what they might report to James and the church at Jerusalem. Peter was obviously not following the Holy Spirit at that moment since the Spirit had previously led him to say "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) and now he was obeying the expectations of men.

"And the other Jews dissembled [to act hypocritically] likewise with him" – The other Jews that had come with Peter apparently had followed his example and were also eating with the Gentiles. Now they were still following Peter's example and acted as hypocritically as he did when the men from James arrived.

"insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away [to be led away] with their dissimulation [hypocrisy]" – This fact shows that peer pressure can exert a powerful influence even on a man who had stood by Paul in defense of the gospel of grace (Acts 15:2). The Jewish cultural taboo of remaining separate from Gentiles must have been strong indeed since Barnabas apparently felt the pressure of being the only Jew left (besides Paul) among the Gentiles.

14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all" – Paul recognized that they were not acting in accordance with the truth of the gospel by presenting the incorrect impression that these Gentiles were not yet saved because they were not circumcised and were not keeping the Law of Moses. Because the truth of the gospel was at stake, he publicly confronted Peter, who had begun the withdrawal from the Gentiles, so that all could see the truth.

"If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" – Paul points out the hypocrisy of Peter's actions. He was a Jew who had been having fellowship with the Gentiles and eating what they ate (likely including things prohibited by the Mosaic Law), but because he withdrew himself from their company when the other Jews arrived, he was sending the message that believing Gentiles ought to be living like Jews in obedience to the Law of Moses.

15 We *who are Jews* by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

It's unclear if Paul's quote of his rebuke of Peter ends in v. 14 or continues to the end of the chapter. If it ends in v. 14, then vs. 15-21 represent Paul's explanation of why Peter's actions were wrong. Paul identifies himself and Peter as "Jews by nature," which refers to their bloodline as God's chosen people who had been given the Mosaic Law and other revelations of the LORD. As Jews, they were in a far better position to understand the grace of God than the Gentiles (**Eph. 2:11-12** "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:").

16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

“Knowing that a man is not justified [to be declared righteous] by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” – As Jewish believers, they have learned from the gospel that they cannot save themselves by keeping the Mosaic Law because salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter understood this and had taken a stand for it during the council at Jerusalem (**Acts 15:11** *“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they”*).

“even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified [to be declared righteous] by the faith of Christ” – As Jews who have come to understand that justification cannot come through the law, they have instead placed their faith in Christ for justification. **“and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified [to be declared righteous]”** – Their justification came only through faith in Christ without “works of the law” (obedience to the Mosaic Law). As Jewish believers in Christ, they understood that the Mosaic Law did not contribute toward their justification, nor could it. Obedience to the law of Moses cannot atone for the sins we have already committed. Rather, the law looked forward to redemption through Christ (**Heb. 10:1** *“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect”*).

17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

As believers in Christ, we look to Him for justification. Christ taught that food does not defile us (**Matt. 15:17-20** *“Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man”*). So if eating with Gentiles (in compliance with Christ’s teachings) was a sin (as the Judaizers taught), that would place the blame for their sin on Christ. Is Christ the minister of sin? Paul answers that question in the strongest of terms: “God forbid!”

18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

“For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor” – As Jewish believers, their old life was spent trying to be justified by keeping the law. If they attempt to go back to their efforts at self-justification, which they had abandoned in favor of faith in Christ, then they are placing themselves back under a system that cannot bring justification and thus would become a transgressor once again with no means of being justified.

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God” – The death sentence that the law imposes on us because of our sin has been carried out through Christ’s death on the cross. Just like a convict who has been put to death under the law can never be put to death again, the law no longer has the power to condemn us. This work of God frees us to live for Him.

20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live” – When we trust in Christ for salvation, we become identified with Him in His death, burial and resurrection. Paul declares that since the punishment required by the law has been carried out because we have been crucified with Christ, the penalty for our sin has been paid. The paradox, however, is that we are alive even though we have been crucified with Christ. This is because we are not only joined to Christ in His death, but also in His resurrection (**Romans 6:5-8** *“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him”*).

“yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” – Paul is alluding to the new nature that we have been given through the new birth. We are alive, but it’s Christ Who lives in us (**Gal. 6:15** *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature”*; **2 Cor. 5:17** *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”*).

“and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” – We are now spiritually alive even though that life is still being lived in a fleshly body, which is still awaiting redemption (**Romans 8:22-23** *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”*).

“who loved me, and gave himself for me” – Jesus, the Son of God, is the One Who loved us enough to give Himself for us on the cross and thereby obtained salvation for us.

21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

“I do not frustrate [reject; disregard] the grace of God” – Paul did not want to set aside the grace of God since it is the only means of salvation. Rather than setting it aside, the gospel designates the grace of God as one of its essential elements.

“for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain [needlessly]” – There would have been no reason for Christ to die on the cross if it were possible to be righteous by keeping the Mosaic Law. Christ would have wasted His time.