



*December 8, 2024*

*“Did Christ Die Needlessly?”*

*Peace, the Second Sunday of Advent.  
Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.*

*News:*

Potluck Christmas Party! Join us after the Service – All are welcome.

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The simple act of establishing peace creates conflict with those who do not want peace.

While Paul’s Gospel came to him independently, it was the same Gospel.

In the first several years Christianity was very Jewish in practice. Even Paul conformed to strict Jewish rituals and traditions. The issue wasn’t the doing and the avoiding, it was the attitude that human performance moves God.

All human beings are susceptible to legalism.

**GALATIANS 2:11–21 ~**

Why would Paul tell this story?

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

It is all about the Message, not the messenger and so it is all about the Truth and not the person, even if that person is the Apostle Peter.

Objection: Peter couldn't have been wrong...

- 1) When we elevate others... we let ourselves off the hook.
- 2) When we invoke Saints... we flirt with idolatry and witchcraft.

Prayer is to change us not God...

Objection: Paul was a gossip...

Nothing is more Satan-like... Gossip is διάβολος (dē-ä-bö-lös)...

II Peter 3:15&16

Objection: Criticize in private...

There are times when an error is so publicly influential that immediate, public chastisement is the only appropriate response.

Jews didn't eat with Gentiles, and they certainly didn't eat what Gentiles ate.

Every Christian service included Holy Communion in the form of a meal.

How do you avoid persecution? Compromise your faith.

You can choose your own worthiness and performance, or you can choose Christ. It cannot be both.

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Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

The Second Week of Advent (Arrival), the Candle of Peace: Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful coming over the mountains are the feet of the Messenger Who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings good tidings, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to the people of God, ‘Your God reigns!’”

Biblical Peace is first and foremost Peace with God. All humans are naturally at war with God. Because of our direct descent from Adam and Eve that is our factory setting, our default position – war with, and rebellion against, Almighty God the Creator of everything.

Seems pretty dumb really. What human can possibly force God to the negotiation table for a cease fire, let alone a peace treaty? It’s not even in our nature to try! Only God could establish peace between Himself and mutinous mankind. The only way that He could do that would be to take extreme unilateral action.

Last week we saw in Isaiah 9:6 that one of the names of Jesus is “Prince of Peace.” Paul declared in Romans 5:1, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus Himself said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the

earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a person's enemies WILL BE the members of his household" (Matthew 10:34–36).

I bring that up because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself promised us that if we followed Him as our highest priority in life, while that would grant us peace with God through Him, it would also cause others, even some of our closest family members, to declare war upon us.

You see the simple act of establishing peace creates conflict with those who do not want peace. Accept God's peace treaty written in the Blood of Jesus and others will reckon you as their enemy. As you interact with family and friends this Christmas season remember that you are the one who has peace with God so be patient and gentle with those who are still at war.

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Last week we finished up by reading Galatians 1:11 through Galatians 2:10. The primary thrust of the passage was the Apostle Paul defending his Gospel Message by explaining a bit about his journey from

Pharisee elite persecuting Christ to Christian Apostle serving Christ.

We saw that Paul had not in any way been recruited by, taught by, ordained by, or sent by, the original Apostles, or the church in Jerusalem. He was entirely the product of the Lord's call, mentorship, and commission. Still, the independent Gospel given by Jesus to Paul was, as you would expect, identical to the Gospel given by Jesus to His original Apostles.

As described in Acts chapter 11, sometime in the mid-40's A.D., 14 years after his Damascus Road experience, Paul went to Jerusalem and submitted his Gospel to the original Apostles and the church in there. James, Peter, and John, along with the rest approved of Paul, his Gospel, and his commission from Christ as the "Apostle to the Gentiles."

While Paul's Gospel came to him independently from Jesus, it was the same Gospel that Jesus had taught the Twelve. And so, the whole Christian church was in communion with one another in principle. In practice, things were not that simple.

There were practical matters that varied from one area to another and had to be worked out, but most importantly there were developing issues as Christianity spread.

Remember how Christianity grew? How it was initially, only Jews from the two heavily Jewish provinces of Judea and Galilee? How it spread to Hellenistic Jews and then to the half-Jew Samaritans, and only then to Gentiles, but the first of whom was Jewish by religious choice?

Christianity was looking less and less Jewish every year. Imagine how that would make you feel, if you were one of the original Jewish disciples who had actually heard Jesus teach and now everything was changing and these less and less Jewish converts were gaining more and more influence in the church.

At some point the writing was on the wall. The potential among Gentiles was far greater than it ever could be among Jews. It was inevitable that the Gentile Christians would eventually outnumber Jewish Christians.

At that time, Christianity among Jewish people, especially in Judea, the center of Judaism, was very Jewish in practice. We even see the Apostle Paul conform to strict Jewish rituals and traditions. The issue, as I have said, isn't the doing and the avoiding, it was the attitude that human performance moves God. That such things are either necessary for Salvation, or help gain God's favor, or elevate one's status, or result in rewards from God.

As I have repeatedly tried to point out, all human beings are susceptible to legalism. It is in our nature to want to justify ourselves, to rationalize that we deserve to be blessed. To want some semblance of control over our destiny, to want to be recognized, appreciated, and rewarded for our efforts. It's normal. It's what we know. It is a performance-based acceptance. That's what we experience. We gain approval when we are unique, special, or otherwise entitled. We get recognition when we play the game and even more, when we excel at it.

When it comes to God it is legalism. It is the elevation of man over the completed work of Christ.

Paul spent 30 verses trying to show the Galatians that while he was in full Communion with the original

Apostles, his Message and his Apostolic Authority were directly from Jesus... That was all for the purpose of denouncing legalism by establishing his credentials to do so.

Let's continue with Galatians 2:11–2:21, but let me preface the passage with this... In retelling a past event, Paul asked Peter a question recorded in verse 14. It is easy to think that after that, starting in verse 15, Paul begins a diatribe directed at the Galatians... It is better to see that as Paul's continued conversation with Peter. Paul's conversation with Peter probably extends through the end of chapter 2.

Knowing that the conversation continues between the two Apostles beyond Paul's question helps us follow the logic of Paul's argument.

Galatians 2:11–2:21, 11But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12For prior to the coming of some men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and separate himself, fearing those from the circumcision. 13The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. 14But



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? 15“We are Jews by nature and not sinners from the Gentiles; 16nevertheless, knowing that a person is not justified by 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 works of the Law; since by works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 17But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Far from it! 18For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a wrongdoer. 19For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live for God. 20I 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. 21I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

Why would Paul tell this story? It serves the purpose of 1) elaborating on his argument against legalism, and 2)

it clearly shows that anyone, even the great Apostle Peter, as well as the Apostle Barnabas, can succumb to peer pressure to be legalistic.

Those are important reasons, but even more importantly for Paul at this juncture is that it 3) reinforces his point that he is not a second-rate Apostle. That only Jesus is the Head of the church and that the Truth, both personified as Jesus and as the oral or written Gospel Message, is “no respecter of persons.”

As Paul already said, it is all about the Message itself, not the messenger who delivers it. Likewise, when a Christian is wrong, they are wrong regardless of who they are. In making that point, Paul was reaffirming that the Message that he had given them and his authority to give them that Message was grounded in Truth. Again, grounded in Truth, both personified as Jesus and as His Gospel Message.

Paul’s most important point in telling the Galatians about this incident was to confirm that what he had taught them superseded any man, even Peter, or group of men, even the original church in Jerusalem. Paul’s teaching came from the Burning Bush and as such the

Galatians could be assured that it was the Truth from Almighty God.

Even though Paul has some important points to make in sharing his confrontation with Peter, many Christians over the centuries have had a really hard time with him doing so. Some take issue with Peter being painted as a less than perfect Saint.

Within Roman Catholicism, Peter is the first in a line of infallible Popes. Some scholars have suggested that Paul was creating a hypothetical parable, not narrating an actual incident. Others say that Peter intentionally acted this way so that it would be a teachable moment for the church.

I don't think we honor our predecessors enough. We should give far more respect to our Christian forebears than we do. Peter was a truly remarkable man, but he was just a man (as the Gospels make painfully clear).

Peter was infallible when actively inspired by the Holy Spirit as he was in writing his eponymous Epistles, but he was a completely fallible human being who frequently made mistakes, just like every other human being who has ever lived.

There is only One Who has ever worn a human suit and remained sinless. Only one person Who has not fallen short of the Glory of God and that includes His physical mother, Mary. Mary should be highly honored by us, but she was not without sin and so she needed a Savior every bit as much as anyone else.

Our attitude towards the heroes of the faith is usually either too cavalier, or too reverent. We should deeply admire and respect those who have served Christ and His church well, but at the same time, we should never enshrine them as super-saints.

There are many reasons for that... I'll give you two. First, when we elevate famous Christians to a tier above, we get the idea that we, as Christians of a lower order, don't need to live up to their example. Paul specifically told Christians to follow his example and then told them to, like him, to become examples for other Christians. The Biblical term saint applies to every Christian equally. We are all perfect saints in Christ Jesus, our desire should be to match our lives to that spiritual reality.

The second reason we should honor those who have paved the way without bowing down to them is the practice of turning respect into reverence leads to idolatry and witchcraft.

There are many who pray to the Saints and especially to Mary. All you need to do is ask the very simple question... Why? Why would anyone involve a Saint or Mary in their prayers?

Ultimately, there is only one reason. It is to get your will done in Heaven, instead of submitting to God's Will done on earth. For a hunter to ask Saint Hubert to help him get an elk, or a hiker to ask for strength from Saint Bernard, the man from Burgundy not the dog, and Burgandy the kingdom, not the beverage... Well, anyway, you get the idea.

To involve a Saint is to attempt to invoke the support of someone with influence on God who is more favorably disposed to your desire. Praying to Mary instead of directly to the Father as Jesus taught is the effort to get what you think is a kinder, gentler, more compassionate, and more generous mommy heart to hear your plea and go to bat for you with her son and

with the Father. In short, it is to move God towards giving you what you think is best.

It is idolatry because it shifts the prayer-time and devotion due to God alone to something else. It is witchcraft because it seeks to replace trust in God's Will with trust in our own. Trying to get the supernatural realm to orchestrate things the way I want them to go in the natural realm, is the definition of witchcraft. It also happens to be the basis of the Original Sin.

Like legalism itself this is the desire to get God to do what we want. Praying to Saints is a form of legalism. It is a very natural human tendency, and it is a prime feature of nearly all human religions. Appease the divine so it will grant you what you wish, or at least it will stop opposing your plans.

The best appeasing is done with some sacrifice, even if it is a certain number of prayers, or a promise, or lighting a candle, or something more to propitiate the divine to get your way. It's the same as the ancient story of King Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis so she will allow him to do what he wanted to do.

Even the most Biblically minded of us succumb at times. We beg and cajole, we plead and promise, we make little sacrifices, and we gather people to our cause, all in order to get God's attention, or to change His mind. We want what we want, and we assume that what we want must be what God wants, because what we want is good and of course God wants good.

Jesus taught us everything that we need to know about prayer. Without talking about that topic for the next 3 hours, let me simply say that prayer is to change us not God. Pray fervently, pray without ceasing, not to alter God, but so God can alter you. Talk to Him, pour your heart out to Him, and Trust Him.

Another issue people have with Paul's example pitting Peter as the antagonist in the story is that it sounds a lot like Paul undermining Peter through gossiping in the Letter about Peter.

There is nothing more Satanic, as in Satan-like, than the gossipy undermining negative talk about others, so it's an issue worth exploring. All badmouthing, backbiting, criticizing, undercutting, gossipers claim that they are merely relaying the truth – the facts of a

situation. They would let Paul off the hook here because he was just saying what happened.

There are actually several reasons that this activity is a heinous sin, not the least of which is the gossip is the judge. Here's another... this negative character defamation is always a lie. Satan is the Father of Lies and so he is the originator of gossip. In fact, one of the words translated as gossip is διάβολος (dē-ä-bö-lös), in English it is Devil, the Greek name of Satan. When you assassinate someone else's reputation, you are speaking Satan's native tongue and making sweet music to his ears.

Gossipers only ever tell the facts selectively and from their perspective. The target of their abuse is never given the equal and unbiased opportunity to give their perspective.

At best negative talk is partially true and therefore fully false in the impression it leaves, because let's not kid ourselves here, people gossip in order to sway others to their point of view, not to relay facts. It's not about Truth, it's about leverage. It's not reality, it is intentional, even if subconscious spin.



Is that what Paul was doing here? The short answer, as you might expect, is no, but what's the difference? It's a good question. I submit that Paul had Peter's permission to tell the story for the benefit of the Kingdom.

In his second epistle, Peter calls him, "our beloved brother Paul," and then goes on to acknowledge the wisdom of Paul, given to him by Christ, as well as confirming that Paul's Letters were Holy Scripture (II Peter 3:15&16). In addition, Peter and Paul were honored together as close associates and founders of Christianity dating back to at least the 200's A.D.

I doubt that Paul would use this example without the express consent of Peter. Beyond that, Paul's Letter here is either God-Breathed Scripture, as Peter himself taught, or it isn't. If it isn't we have much bigger problems than gossip, but if it is, then obviously the Holy Spirit was okay with the example.

Also, Paul doesn't use the story to advance his cause at the expense of Peter's cause. Paul is only interested in Christ's cause and that cause was to get the Galatians and all other people reading this Letter to grasp that Salvation is in Christ alone.

Finally, when you understand the way Paul tells the incident, it is completely obvious that Peter immediately recognized his own hypocrisy and repented.

One last complaint leveled against Paul is the public nature of the original rebuke. Peter erred, and Paul publicly took him to task. The complaint is that Paul should have done this privately. Yes! Under most circumstances I fully agree that you praise in public and correct in private. There are times when the error is both public and influential and evolving that immediate, public chastisement is the only appropriate response.

This was such a case. Peter's hypocrisy left unchallenged could have been disastrous for Christianity. Peter's momentary lapse in good judgment was serious and the effect was gaining steam. Even Barnabas had joined him. Paul's action was correct given the circumstances.

So, what were the circumstances? Peter visited the church in Syrian Antioch and stayed with them for a while, no doubt as a highly honored guest. Peter lived among them, worshipped with them, and ate together

with them in table fellowship. This took place between his miraculous release from jail recorded in Acts chapter 12, and the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts chapter 15.

I would guess that it was shortly before Paul wrote about it. As I indicated earlier, we can easily conclude from the Bible that Peter immediately recognized his mistake and fully endorsed Paul's position.

Some Jewish Christians were sent to Antioch by James the brother of Jesus, who had by this time taken over as the Bishop of Jerusalem and de facto leader of all of Christianity.

He had heard from Mark and perhaps others that Paul was teaching Christians that they did not need to obey the 613 Jewish Laws, including circumcision. He sent the delegation to Antioch. It is nearly impossible not to conclude that James was, in essence at that time, a Judaizer himself.

The marching orders of his representatives may have been overstepped, but they wasted no time in convincing Peter that he needed to follow Jewish Law including the dietary Laws. Jews didn't eat with

Gentiles, and they certainly didn't eat what Gentiles ate.

That was not only shunning table fellowship with people the Jews deemed culturally and ethnically degenerate, not only refusing food items that were religiously unclean, not only avoiding the impure preparation of it, but also denouncing the source of the food.

Much of the food that Gentiles purchased in the market was in one way or another, at some point or another put under the protection of or sacrificed to pagan gods, that the Jews knew were actually demons. We can't be doing that!

Add to the problem of eating things associated with idolatry, some of the things that Gentiles ate were repulsive to Jews as well as unlawful. Beyond all of that, the Gentile methods of cooking and preparing food made even clean food unclean for Jews.

The problem was that at this point in Christianity every worship service included Holy Communion in the form of a potluck meal taken all together. How could Jewish and Gentile Christians ever hope to make it work? The

right and reasonable solution was to have all Christians regardless of background obey Jewish Law, for religious reasons, but for practical ones as well.

The story is self-explanatory. Peter was hanging out with the Christian community in Antioch and then a delegation sent by James arrived. It wasn't just that they were personally appalled by the church ignoring Jewish Law, they were sent for the purpose of addressing that very problem.

The argument from them was that, if for no other reason, at least leaders like Peter and Barnabas should live right and scrupulously follow the Law as examples to the rest because if things continued in this way the "Circumcision" would create all kinds of havoc in the church.

Some scholars think that the "Circumcision" in this case was non-Christian Jews. That there was a kind of detente between Jews and Christians as long as Christians behaved like good Jews. Maybe, but regardless of whether they were in or out of the church, the "Circumcision" would cause trouble for Christians if they defied the Law.

That got Peter's attention. The last thing that he wanted to do was create problems for the church. Obviously, in this scenario, the church in Jerusalem would suffer the most. Barnabas evidently agreed. The two of them had already influenced both Jews and Gentiles to straighten up and fly right.

Neither of them stopped to consider the theological ramifications or the practical harm it would create for Gentiles. It was a reaction to what seemed like a strong argument. Of course, we can restrict our freedom in Christ to prevent tribulation for the church.

How do you avoid persecution? Compromise your faith.

Theologian Paul saw the deeper problem immediately and being Paul, he wasted no time confronting it head on. Peter was the head of this particular snake, so Paul publicly cut off his head, proverbially speaking.

Here's their interaction... Peter, if you, being a Jew, have lived like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you now compel Gentiles to live like Jews?

It is a rhetorical question that Paul then helps Peter answer by giving him a little lesson in theological reason and logic. It goes like this... Peter, we are Jews and so born children of God and yet we both gave that claim up knowing that no one can ever be justified before God by keeping the Law.

King David begged God in Psalm 143:2, “And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For no person living is righteous in Your sight.” If David, “a man after God’s own heart,” and the greatest King of the Jews ever, couldn’t be justified – who could? So, Peter, you and I, believed in Christ Jesus to be made righteous in Him.

Now verse 17, can either mean that in meeting Jesus we discovered that we were just as lost as Gentiles, or that by accepting Jesus other Jews think that we are sinners now. For many reasons, the first idea is more likely.

It means that anyone who seeks Jesus as their Savior does so only because they recognize that they are sinners in need of a Savior. Paul then takes the next logical step... If we chose Christ because the Law didn’t work, why would we go back to the Law?

Next step... Doing so would make us even greater sinners, either because we rejected Judaism in favor of Jesus, or because now we're rejecting Jesus in favor of Judaism. To go back to the Law makes no sense and would be blasphemy.

In verse 19 Paul gives us the purpose of the Law. It is to show that no one can be righteous in their own performance – everyone needs God to Save them.

Therefore, dying to the Law means that I stop constantly trying to justify myself, living for God means actually being who He wants me to be. Now, my life is His and I am an empty vessel through whom He operates as I yield to Him and His purposes through the faith in Him that He Himself has given me.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the Apostle Paul then said, The Son of God loved me... and so, He gave Himself over to crucifixion for me. It was true for Paul, and it is true for you. You can say that too. Go ahead, it is our Communion liturgy for today... The Son of God loved me... and so, He gave Himself over to crucifixion for me.



Paul knew that trying to be justified by doing this and avoiding that was actually nullifying the Grace of God. He refused to do that because, “if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

If I can be good enough to please God, I don't need Jesus. Praise be to God, His Law reveals that I cannot, but His Grace through Jesus has Saved me. According to the Bible, you can only choose one. You can choose your own worthiness and performance, or you can choose Christ. It cannot be both.