

## Chapter 7

### WHEN PETER CAME TO ANTIOCH

*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 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. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. 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? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 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. 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. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I [was] 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 do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:11-21)*

At this point in Paul's letter to the Galatians, he related an event to them that must have taken place when he and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria after their first missionary journey into Asia. Luke tells us, *And there they abode long time with the disciples.* It must have been

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during this period of time that Peter came to Antioch. Paul does not tell us why Peter came to Antioch at this time, but his visit and the events associated with it were very important to Paul's interest in showing the truth of the gospel to the Galatians. It is not unreasonable to assume Peter came to meet with Paul and Barnabas after their return from their missionary journey to hear of all the Lord had done through their ministry in Asia.

The reason for Peter's visit is not so important as the fact he came to Antioch at that time, to the city where he and the church at Jerusalem had sent Barnabas after Peter believed the Lord concerning the Gentiles and responded to the vision at Joppa. Antioch, as we have seen, was the city where Barnabas brought Paul after the gospel door had been opened to the Gentiles and where they had ministered for a whole year to both Jews and Gentiles. Antioch was the city where believers were first called *Christians*, and it was the city from which Paul and Barnabas had embarked on their first missionary journey into Asia and the region of Galatia.

About five years before this visit to Antioch, Peter had been reticent to obey the vision at Joppa. Even so the Lord persuaded him to believe it and to preach in Caesarea to the household of Cornelius. This had not been an easy thing for him to do, because upon his return to the church in Jerusalem, Peter faced the accusations of zealots within the church: *Thou wentest to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them*. Nevertheless when Peter testified of his vision and of preaching to Gentiles who believed and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, the accusers were silenced. Peter's ministry to the Gentiles and the giving of the Holy Spirit had proved: *What God hath cleansed, call not thou unclean*. When Peter came to Antioch, he came with the same spirit of obedience to the Lord that had initially taken him to the Gentiles.

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At this point (verse ten of Galatians chapter two), there is a gap of about four years between Paul and Barnabas' departure from Jerusalem in verse ten and Peter's arrival in Antioch of Syria in verse eleven, but there is not a break in the subject. Paul was still dealing with the problem of reestablishing his authority with the Galatians. Consequently he wrote of the events associated with Peter's arrival in Antioch, because they were at the core of Paul's purpose. These events clearly illustrated that the churches of Jesus Christ were not responsible to a centralized authority in the church at Jerusalem, but each individual church and each individual believer were responsible to the revealed will of God through His Word. No church, or man of God, possessed authority over any other church, or man of God, but by the authority of the Word of God. The faith and practice of each church was subject to the authority of a *rightly divided* Word of God. Those churches and individuals who held positions contrary to *the doctrine of Christ* (i.e., the fundamental principals of the Person and work of Jesus Christ) were to be exposed. Thus Paul wrote the Romans:

... mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Romans 16:17-18)

Even so the church is not to receive an accusation against an elder (pastor) *but by two or three witnesses*. Given this criterion, the primary accusation that might be brought against a pastor is: if he preaches contrary to the truth of the Word of God, or if he acts contrary to the truth of the Word of God. As with Peter's situation at Antioch, sound fundamental pastors can be improperly motivated. At Antioch it seems Peter was less interested in the truth of the gospel than he was with his status with *certain who came from James*. Consequently Paul revealed the

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situation at Antioch, respecting Peter, to the Galatians, not to be malicious, but because it proved the matter of his authority. So:

... when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 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. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. 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 the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Galatians 2:11-14)

Peter's visit to Antioch and the events associated with it probably started out okay with the brethren (both Jew and Gentile believers) assembling themselves together for daily meals and times of fellowship in the truth of the Word of God. These sessions probably allowed Barnabas and Paul the opportunity of relating to the church the many events which occurred along their route into Asia (from Antioch in Syria to Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe).

They undoubtedly told of the events on the island of Cyprus; the conversion of Sergius Paulus and the cursing of Elymas the sorcerer; they may have told of the departure of John Mark from their company at Perga in Pamphylia; they most certainly would have told of the establishment of churches (made up of Jews and Gentiles) in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe; and they probably would have told of the stoning of Paul at Lystra and of his miraculous recovery; and of much, much more that is not recorded in the Scriptures.

This activity continued until *certain came from James*. With their arrival, Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles. He did it for fear of the Jews and not for lack of understanding. This was a manifestation of an old problem Paul had experienced before in Jerusalem -- before he and Barnabas had gone on their first missionary journey. *They of the*

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*circumcision which believed* had entered the quarters of the disciples to *spy out their liberty*, to see if Titus had been circumcised. As we have seen, Paul withstood them in order to preserve the truth of the gospel.

At Antioch, however, the hypocrisy came from an unsuspected source. No one could have anticipated the reaction of Peter to the arrival of the Jews from James. No one would have suspected that their presence would unnerve Peter to the point of clouding his spiritual judgment and causing him to act contrary to the truth of the Word of God. This kind of action, by one in a position like Peter's, can be very damaging to the cause of Christ. This kind of action has been a major factor in aiding and abetting apostasy. As with many in this age, Peter's reputation gave credence to his actions, so that many of the Jews and *Barnabas also [were] carried away with their dissimulation*.

We do not know exactly what motivated Peter to act contrary to what the Lord had revealed to him at Joppa (in the household of Cornelius), except we know the arrival of these that came from James caused Peter to fear. From personal experience, we know that there have been times in the lives of all Christians when they have allowed unfounded fears to prevent them from speaking or standing for the truth. Like the man from La Mancha in the opera, we have all, at times, fought imaginary dragons. Peter apparently did the same thing because of these Jews:

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. (Galatians 2:12)

Paul appraised the situation quickly. When he saw the infectious nature of Peter's actions spreading to Barnabas and the other Jews, he *withstood him to the face, because he was to be*

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*blamed.* Peter's hypocrisy had created a situation where he, the other Jews and Barnabas were not walking *uprightly according to the truth of the gospel.* It was necessary, then, for Paul to assert an authority greater than that of Peter, any institution, or any other man. Paul spoke the truth of the Word of God for the sake of the gospel. The truth of the gospel countermands all human authority which stands in opposition to it. Consequently no matter the ecclesiastical position, or the claims of the individual, if one does not speak uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, he is out of alignment with the truth and has no authority from God. In other words, the authority of God is conveyed with a steadfast alignment with the truth. It is not conveyed with higher levels of education, degrees, or titles. These things have their place, but they have no authority to usurp the truth. Consequently Peter's position as an apostle did not give him authority over the truth of the gospel. This was the point of relating this event to the Galatians: when one speaks the truth of the Word of God, he speaks with the authority of *Jesus Christ and God the father, who raised him from the dead.*

Therefore Peter's actions could not go unchecked. Paul said to Peter, before them all, *If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?* The man of God, as well as all Christians, should walk according to the truth of the Word of God. Peer pressure sometimes causes us to violate what we know to be true. When this occurs, a man who has position may hide behind his position rather than admitting his error and aligning himself with the truth.

This is one of the reasons Paul rebuked Peter. Paul spoke according to the truth of the gospel, and Peter's ill-conceived behavior confused the truth of the gospel. There was no excuse

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for Peter's behavior. He had certainly been made aware of the relationship God intended between redeemed Jews and redeemed Gentiles.

Christ's blood had been shed for the Gentiles just as it had been for the Jews. They were to be unified around the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for the furtherance of the gospel. Thus Paul would later write:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both [Jews and Gentiles] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (Ephesians 2:13-18)

Thus when Peter acted the hypocrite, Paul did not argue with Peter, nor did he remind him of the vision at Joppa and his subsequent meeting with the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, but he spoke to him of their personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and how they both came to salvation. So Paul said:

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 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. 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. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I [was] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life 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 do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:15-21)

Peter had openly played the hypocrite. His hypocrisy had affected almost everyone present. Paul rebuked Peter *before them all, because he was to be blamed*. Nevertheless he spoke

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to Peter as if he and Peter were the only two present. Paul's remarks applied to all of the Jewish believers, but they were directed specifically to Peter and himself. Thus we could paraphrase Paul's remarks to read:

*Peter, you and I were born Jews. We were not born into the pagan systems of the Gentiles. Even so, you know as well as I, we could not be justified by the deeds of the law. We were both condemned by the law, as all men are, so that the only possibility for our justification was by faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law. How then can you expect the Gentiles to do what neither of us, nor our nation, could do? Now that we have been justified by faith, it is not reasonable to build again that system of law which has been abrogated, only to be condemned by it once again. The law proved us to be transgressors, but Christ is not a minister of sin. Therefore Christ has freed us from the curse of the law by a provision of the law in which we were counted to have died with Christ. I am dead to the law that I might live unto God by faith. I was crucified with Christ, yet I am alive. Consequently 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. Peter, I do not annul the grace of God. If our righteousness before God could have come by the law, then Christ died uselessly.*

We know Peter's heart must have been broken by these remarks. Whenever a believer finds himself in such a position as Peter's and realizes he has been fighting against the very grace that saved him, his heart is bound to be broken. We have seen Peter's hasty remarks the night before the crucifixion of Christ. We have observed his response at the sound of the *cockcrow*, and we know the feeling. Peter was not a heretic; he was simply presumptuous. This is proven by

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Peter's response at the Jerusalem council a few months after the incident in Antioch. Peter's remarks at the council agreed completely with the testimony of Paul to the Galatians. Peter's remarks at the Jerusalem counsel show us there had been a complete reconciliation between him and Paul in the truth of the gospel, because:

... Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. (Acts 15:7-11)

The inability of the Jews to keep the law and justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ for both Jews and Gentiles were at the core of Paul's message to Peter and of Peter's message before the council. Thus we know their reconciliation was complete. The incident at Antioch was a thing of the past.

Returning to the narrative, we find Peter apparently remained in Antioch for only a short period of time after this incident. He is not mentioned in the dispute between Paul and the Judaizers, which caused Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem for a meeting with the elders of the church. So Peter must have departed shortly after this incident and before the arrival of the messengers from Galatia with the news of the insidious work of the Judaizers.

We wrote earlier of Paul's emotions when he learned of the corruption of the gospel by the Judaizers. We offered the conjecture Paul probably spent a sleepless night after hearing of the problems in Galatia. God has, on occasion, used insomnia as a tool to accomplish His purpose in the lives of His people. He used the sleeplessness of Ahasuerus to preserve the life of Mordecai

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and bring about the death of Haman. God probably used the same tactics with Paul to bring him to meditation, prayer, and the resources of the Lord and His Word.

Many servants of the Lord have experienced similar emotions as those of the apostle when we have been disappointed or hurt by the rejection of the truth we preach. Insomnia seems to accompany these trials. Consequently we know, even though it is not written, what Paul went through when he received word from Galatia. In times like these, we find the only comfort is in the Word of God and prayer. We make our petitions known to the Lord through prayer, and He comforts us with His presence and through meditation upon His Word. It is likely Paul's prayers were answered before the night was over. This was done when the Spirit of God moved him in a special way. He was led of the Spirit to write the book of Galatians in the light of the revelation the Lord had given him in Arabia, in the light of his understanding of the Scriptures, and in the light of the things he had experienced since his salvation and during his ministry to the Galatians.

When this was done Paul probably called for the messengers who had brought him word of the heresy, to entrust them with the precious words the Lord had given him. He most likely would have had the epistle read to them and talked with them of its contents. When we consider the circumstances for this meeting, we know it could have been quite emotional. Thus with prayers and embraces the messengers were sent on their way back to the churches of Galatia.

Sometimes it seems one difficult thing piles upon another. At Antioch there were three trials which came one after the other. The first trial was when Peter played the hypocrite. This pressed Paul to deal with that situation until it was resolved. Then, some time after Peter had left Antioch, Paul had to deal with the Galatian heresy until the situation was resolved by the writing

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of the letter to the Galatians. Then, after an indeterminate period of time, *certain men* arrived from Judaea and disputed with Paul and Barnabas over the necessity of circumcision. Luke described them to Theophilus as *certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed*. We do not know if they were the Judaizers who had been at work in Galatia, but it is certainly possible they were. They may not have been the same men, but they were of the same mind. Thus in the book of Acts we read:

... certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter. (Acts 15:1-6)

Our Lord fought the errors of the Pharisees and the Sadducees throughout His entire ministry. He warned His disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and of Herod. The leaven of each of these groups was their false doctrines. The leaven of the Pharisees was legalistic self-righteousness. The leaven of the Sadducees was the denial of spiritual truth. The leaven of Herod was the belief that the kingdom of God could be obtained by political means. This doctrine was held by the Herodians, who believed that Herod and the Roman government would bring in the kingdom. In addition to these, our Lord also warned the disciples of false prophets who would come to them *in sheep's clothing*. These would be counterfeit ministers of the gospel. Our Lord lumped all of these into two categories: *thieves and robbers*.

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Thieves and robbers do the same work, but they do it differently. A robber confronts his prey directly, whereas a thief does his work covertly by stealth. Since our Lord used thieves and robbers to describe false prophets, we know there are false prophets who openly deny fundamental principles from the Word of God. We also know there are false prophets who come to our churches claiming they are believers in Jesus Christ. They are clever enough to outwardly agree with much of the truth and to hide their false doctrines until the right moment. These are the *wolves in sheep's clothing* our Lord described.

The characteristics of both thieves and robbers were found in the Judaizers. Some of them made a strong frontal attack on the doctrines of the apostle Paul, and others were more subtle. Even so they were both equally dangerous to the truth of the gospel. Surprisingly the leaven of these Judaizers was not met with as much objection as one might have supposed. The old animosity between Jews and Gentiles was not completely eradicated with the truth of the gospel. Prejudices and biases are not easily overcome, even when we know better. It was not a completely repugnant idea to the Jewish believers that the Gentiles should have to become Jews before they could become Christians.

When Paul dealt with Peter over the matter of his hypocrisy, it was not difficult to persuade Peter of his error, because he was sensitive to the authority of the Word of God. Consequently Paul spoke the truth of the gospel to Peter, and Peter conformed to the truth. However the Judaizers were another matter. They were arrogant and self-willed and would not submit to the authority of anyone like Paul and Barnabas or the Word they preached. The *dissension and disputation* between them and the apostles became so great that they determined to go to Jerusalem

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to the apostles and elders about this question.

This, again, is a matter of authority. We have seen that there is no authority great enough to countermand the authority of the Word of God. We know Paul's testimony to the Judaizers was the truth of the Word of God. Even so they could not be convinced, because they were not attuned to the Word of God. Nevertheless they were, apparently, at least on the surface, willing to submit to the authority of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Therefore they determined to go to Jerusalem about this question of circumcision and law as necessities for the salvation of the Gentiles.

Thus the apostles and elders came together to consider this question so that the truth of the gospel might stand. It is obvious, from Paul's proclamation of the salvation of the Gentiles to the churches on the way to Jerusalem, there was no doubt in the mind of Paul what the outcome would be. It is equally obvious, Paul was not going to Jerusalem to gain authority for his gospel. He already possessed that authority by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul agreed to go to Jerusalem, because he knew the outcome in advance and that the outcome would enhance his ministry among the Gentiles.

Consequently after the testimony was in and the council made its decision under the leading of the Spirit of God, all that Paul had already written to the Galatians and testified before Peter, the church and the Judaizers was corroborated by the council. Nothing new came out of the council. The council simply confirmed the gospel which had been preached unto the fathers in shadows and types and which was fulfilled by the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the council's corroboration of the testimony of Paul to the Galatians and the

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letter they wrote gave Paul cause to prepare to go again among the Gentiles and preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. This he did in his second missionary journey into the region of Galatia.

The council's letter and the results of the council's decision prove that Paul wrote the book of Galatians before the council met. Since the result of the council was a complete corroboration of Paul and his gospel, it would be inconceivable for him not to mention it in the letter to the Galatians, if in fact the council had met before the writing of the book of Galatians.

Finally as we have already seen, the letter of the council was the basis for Paul's second missionary journey into the region of Galatia. During this journey *he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches*, as he had done in Antioch of Syria upon returning from Jerusalem after the adjournment of the council. Thus the churches were confirmed in the truth of the gospel, which Paul had been preaching unto them from the beginning.