

## Convenient Convictions

Study #5 Galatians 2:11-21 by Bob Burrige ©2024

Nobody wants to be known as a *hypocrite*.

But that's what you are if you **deceptively do or say things against** what you really **believe**.

**Dishonesty** all by itself is **immoral**.

To be **dishonest out of fear** of what **others** might **think adds evil** to what's already wrong.

It puts **pleasing or impressing others above pleasing God**, so that kind of dishonesty becomes **a form of idolatry**.

We live in a **fallen world**, and our **human nature** is **far from perfect** this side of heaven.

Even the **Apostle Peter**, years after the death of his Savior, while ministering to the churches, fell into that **ugly sin of hypocrisy**.

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It was a time of hard adjustments for the Jews who believed in Jesus Christ.

**Galatians 2:11-21** tell about **a sad time** in the life of a **great Apostle**.

**Paul begins in verses 11-13.**

11. But when **Cephas** came to Antioch, **I opposed him** to his face, because he stood condemned.

12. 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.

13. And the **rest of the Jews acted hypocritically** along with him,

so that **even Barnabas** was led astray by their hypocrisy.

**Antioch** was the city where believers were **first called Christians**. (Acts 11:26)

**Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter**. They are both names based on the word for "rock".

He was called "Cephas" by Andrew in John 1:42.

**Peter** came to Antioch, **leading the way** for the Jews to **accept the Gentiles** as **equal partners** in the church.

It wasn't an easy lesson. There **were changes** that had to be made.

For hundreds of years the **Jews were used by God** to teach us about **his grace**.

They were **chosen from among all the nations** of the earth to be **the Covenant People**.

In order to teach us about how God separates out his people as special to him,

the Jews were told to **abstain from certain foods**, and make sure they followed **cleansing rituals**.

They were also the **trusted custodians of the written word** handed down by the Prophets.

**But the promises were fulfilled** by the **death and resurrection of Jesus**.

The **lesson taught** by the **ancient rituals and rules** was then **completed**.

But in addition to God's laws, the **Rabbis added** rules for the nation. They thought they were **superior people**.

They **went too far** by even **banning eating with non-Jews**.

They **demanded cleansing rituals** if anyone even **touched something a non-Jew handled**.

Those **man-made rules were never acceptable** to God.

The **Biblical mandates** for the **Jews as a chosen nation** were **truly binding** on them

but **only until** the coming of the promised **Messiah**.

After that, it was time for God's Kingdom to include believers from all races.

**Gentiles were coming to Christ** in humble **repentance** and **faith**.

The **dietary laws** were **no longer meaningful**, and **Christ** was the **final sacrifice**.

The office of the **Levitical Priesthood**, and the rituals of the **Temple** were fulfilled too.

The **only officers** of the new church were to be the ordained **Elders and Deacons** of the Congregations.

**New signs** were given for God's covenant:

Believers were **marked out** by **Covenant Baptism** instead of by **circumcision**.

The **Passover**, which dated all the way back to Moses, was **replace** by the **Lord's Supper**.

**Peter** had been the one **chosen by God** to be a **leader at the start of that new era**.

1. He personally **heard Jesus** teach that **non-Israelites** were to be **partakers of his blessings**.

2. He was given the **vision of the sheets** in Joppa where God explained

that the **dietary rules** were now **obsolete** and no foods were classified as "unclean".

3. He was **sent to the Gentile Centurion Cornelius** in Caesarea to witness his conversion.

Peter said to him in **Acts 10:28**,

"You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that **I should not call any person common or unclean**."

So when **Peter** came to Antioch,

he **welcomed the Gentiles** without burdening them with the former Jewish regulations.

He **ate with them**, and they were **included** as *equals* in the life of the church.

**But** when men came from James, **Peter went against what he knew was true.**

He was **afraid** of what **these Jews would think** if he ate with the Gentiles.

So he **separated himself from his non-Jewish brothers** in the Lord.

**Others went along** with his *hypocrisy*: the other Jews there, even Barnabas.

**Our own customs**, the way we're used to doing things, **shape our choices and understanding.**

It's **hard enough** to **abandon** what we've been taught is **right and good.**

But when the **people we're with** every day **hold to those old familiar customs**,

there's a **strong temptation to want to fit in.**

It's **easy to give up** or to **hide** our **convictions** when it's **not comfortable.**

But that's the **essence** of what we call *Hypocrisy*.

That **English word** comes right from the **Greek word** Paul uses here in Galatians 2:13.

It's the Greek word "hupokrisis" (ὑπόκρισις) which translated the old Hebrew word כְּהַנֵּף. (khanef)

The **Greek word** came from the **Greek dramas**

where people **put on masks to play the part** of some **fictional character.**

**That's what Peter was doing** when those associated with **James** came to town.

There's **no reason to believe** that the **James** actually **continued to separate from Gentiles**,

**or** that he **didn't believe** the **ritual laws** were **done away** in Christ.

**But** these who were *associated* with that group **made Peter think** he should **hid his convictions.**

**What he knew** Jesus taught **wasn't comfortable** to him when he was around them.

**Personal fears**, totally unjustified, made him **put on a mask** and **hide his true beliefs.**

Peter had to be corrected in Antioch for this hypocrisy.

**Paul** tells the Galatians what he had to do to **repair the damage** Peter had done.

**Galatians 2:14,**

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?"

**Paul needed to correct Peter's poor public example.**

**Peter knew that as a Christian**, he wasn't bound any more to the **ritual laws.**

That's the way **he'd been living and teaching** before that group from Jerusalem arrived.

**Now he was abandoning the clear lesson of God's word.**

It **implied** that **Gentile believers** should **adopt** the **old customs** of the Jews.

It was **pure hypocrisy** -- and it was **teaching** something that was **very wrong.**

Paul's explanation that follows is a little hard to follow because of the **style** of ancient Greek.

But the **meaning is very clear.** Paul writes in Galatians 2:15-16,

15. We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

16. 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.

**Paul didn't mean** that the **Jews weren't also sinners.** (He disproved that at length in Romans 2-3.)

**He meant** that those born to **Israel** had an *advantage*.

They were **raised** under the **special protection** of God's **Covenant promises.**

They were the **keepers of God's written word** and knew the **history of God's workings.**

The **Gentiles** were born **outside the Covenant**, without its influence, teachings, protection.

**But even the Jews**, and Peter particularly, **should have known** how God's people are **justified.**

They weren't ever made **righteous by keeping laws** of any kind.

**God's law wasn't given for that purpose.**

They're **forgiven** on the basis of the **future death of Jesus** in their place.

**Being "good" can't remove the guilt** of your sins.

**But those whose sins are forgiven -- strive to be good.**

The **law** rightly understood **reminded** them they were **hopeless sinners** aside from God's grace.

It **showed** them how to **honor God** by **living morally** and by **believing and trusting in what's true**.

They **obeyed** because they were **thankful**, and **wanted to be holy** as God is holy.

**We love God's law, not as the way to salvation, but as the way those already saved should live.**

We **also know** the *purpose* of the **temporary ceremonial laws**.

They were given **to teach in advance** about the **work of Christ**,  
and about the **nature of the Church** after his resurrection.

Therefore, since the **Jews were justified by faith** in God's **promise, not by the laws**,  
certainly the **Gentiles couldn't be justified by ceremonial and dietary laws** either.

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Next Paul pointed out how destructive Peter's behavior was.

Galatians 2:17-18

17. 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!

18. For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

It's as if he was saying to Peter,

**"What you're doing here isn't God's way. It's not what Jesus came to produce in us."**

The word translated "*transgressor*" here is "para-ba-taes" (παράβατης.)

It more precisely means "*opponent*", someone who is **against someone**.

It was used of the **soldier** who **walked next to the war chariot** ... a **combatant** to fight against an enemy.

It's someone who **aids those who carry out a battle**.

The Apostles had **worked hard** to **correct misunderstandings** about God's **law and grace**.

To **destroy this achievement** just to **get along** with and **defending** a certain group of **confused believers**  
**would make Peter an opponent** of God's plan, **instead of a promoter** of it.

Then Paul went into the detail in Galatians 2:19-20 of what Peter already knew was true.

19. For **through the law I died to the law**, so that I might **live to God**.

20. 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.

At one time in his life, **Paul lived** with a **total distortion of God's law**.

He saw the **regulations** of the Bible and of the Rabbis as **his way of salvation**.

He **understood them** in the way that was **very popular** then.

He had a **low view of God's law**. He saw it **as something** he could **keep well enough** to satisfy God.

**But** when the **Holy Spirit worked** on his heart,

the **word of God** in the Scriptures took on a **different meaning**.

He **finally understood** what the **law was really saying**. It **showed him his lostness and depravity**.

He'd been **living without the true law** of God, all the while he **thought** he was **keeping it**.

In **Romans 7:9-12** Paul said the same thing,

"I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

God's law is **good** and has a divinely appointed **purpose**.

Paul came to have a **high view of God's law**. It was something **no mere human could keep**.

**Only Jesus**, God the Son, **could keep it** and **fathom its depths**.

Those **who believe** we **can earn forgiveness** by our own **obedience** and **kindness**

have a **cheaped** and **diminished view** of **God's law** and of **God's holiness**.

At the **same time** they have a **dishonestly exaggerated view** of themselves.

But once a person is **born-again** by God's regenerating power, he sees the **real lessons** in **God's law**.

It **proves our spiritual death**. It **condemns** us.

It **points to the Savior** who **alone kept it** and **paid it's infinite penalty**.

It sets the **high goal** we humbly strive for, so that we **do what's moral**, and **believe what's true**.

It shows us how we who are redeemed can aim at being holy as God is holy.

It's done by **grace alone**, through **faith alone**, because of **Christ alone**,  
as revealed in **Scripture alone**, for **God's glory alone**,

**Paul, and Peter, had died to the law -- by the law -- to live by faith in Christ in fulfillment of the law.**

Our Saviour took the place of his believing children.

He took up their death and gives them his life. He represented them on that cross.

We who are his children by grace were in him on that cross -- being crucified.

So now the life we live here isn't our own.

As the *Heidelberg Catechism* says in the answer to its first question, "... **I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.**"

It goes on to say, "... He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him."

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God's work of grace should never be minimized in our hearts.

In verse 21 of Galatians 2 Paul writes, "**I do not nullify the grace of God,**  
for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."

If all the Gentiles, or even the Jews, had to do -- was obey a cheapened version of God's law,  
and that could save them, then **why would the Savior have to come to suffer so greatly?**

God provided the only possible way to rescue you from your guilt --  
he came in human form to die in your place, and to give you his own righteousness.

This is the gospel, the great truth Peter had championed and taught as Christ's Apostle.

He taught the Jews to receive the Gentiles because it's grace that saves -  
it's the undeserved and infinite mercy of God.

So to abandon these brothers in Christ to avoid being uncomfortable -- was *inexcusable hypocrisy*.  
Peter should have known better. He knew that Jesus fulfilled the ceremonies,  
and explained that the exaggerated rituals of the Rabbis were *never* God's ways.

But when Peter was afraid of what other important people thought, he became a *hypocrite*.  
He gave in for the fellowship, for the easy way, for the comfortable moment.

It's good to ask, do we live by what we believe? everywhere? no matter who's there?  
Are our convictions mere conveniences? Do we lay them aside when we're uncomfortable?

The same is true for all the teachings of God's word.

It's all part of the same gospel message.

God's true law, that *high unattainable standard of holiness*,

tells us what we should believe as true, and how we who are saved by Christ should live.

All around us the world confused forms of religion tempt us to blend in.

The Bible teaches the unpopular truth of **human depravity**, and the fact of **salvation by undeserved grace**.  
It shows how **families and neighbors** should live in God's world.

It teaches the **sacredness of human life**, of honesty in the **work-place**, of proper **Christian worship**  
including the right administration of **Baptism** and the **Lord's Supper**.

It tells us to **look to our Good Shepherd** when we're sick or afraid.

It gives us **moral standards** for our **entertainment**, and how we **spend our money** and **free time**.

If Peter, the great Apostle, could lapse into hypocrisy, certainly any of us could too.

We need to **Pray and Obey** so that we **don't compromise** with the world

as if Christ wasn't completely successful, and as if God's holy ways are just trivial things for us to do.

**Don't go against** what you know is **God's truth** for the sake of *convenience*, or to **fit in with the crowd**.

If our convictions only direct us when it's *convenient*, they aren't convictions at all.

God calls us to **stand strong** for our Savior. **Promote** his **truth and ways**.

We should **never let** our convictions give in to **convenience**.

## Galatians 2:11-21 ESV

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12. 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.
13. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him,  
so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.
14. 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?"
15. We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;
16. 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.
17. 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!
18. For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.
19. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.
20. 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.
21. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

### Greek Text:

11. Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθε Πέτρος εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν, κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην, ὅτι κατεγνωσμένος ἦν.
12. πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν· ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον, ὑπέστειλλε καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἑαυτὸν, φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς.
13. καὶ συνυπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὥστε καὶ Βαρνάβας συναπήχθη αὐτῶν τῇ ὑποκρίσει.
14. ἀλλ' ὅτε εἶδον ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθοποδοῦσι πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, εἶπον τῷ Πέτρῳ ἔμπροσθεν πάντων· εἰ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων ἐθνικῶς ζῆς καὶ οὐκ Ἰουδαϊκῶς, τί τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις Ἰουδαίειν;
15. Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἀμαρτωλοί,
16. εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἶναι μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, διότι οὐ δικαιωθήσεται ἐξ ἔργων νόμου πᾶσα σὰρξ.
17. εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ εὐρέθημεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀμαρτωλοί, ἄρα Χριστὸς ἀμαρτίας διάκονος; μὴ γένοιτο.
18. εἰ γὰρ ἂ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ, παραβάτην ἑμαυτὸν συνίστημι.
19. ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα Θεῷ ζήσω. Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι·
20. ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ.
21. Οὐκ ἀθετῶ τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ· εἰ γὰρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη, ἄρα Χριστὸς δωρεὰν ἀπέθανεν.