

The gospel ranks over human status (Galatians 2:11–14)

Though Paul and Peter agreed on the gospel, there was an occasion in Antioch when Peter failed to live out that gospel message and Paul had to confront him. Confrontation was necessary for the sake of the gospel and it was the gospel that was most important. The gospel was the basis on which Peter's conduct was judged. His conduct was a defection from the gospel. Though an apostle, the gospel through Paul corrected Peter's conduct.

I. *Peter's Defection*

1. At some point after the famine visit (Acts 11:27–30), but prior to Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:39–40) Peter visit Antioch in Syria.
2. While in Antioch Peter initially joined in eating with the Gentile believers, a freedom he had learned earlier (Acts 10:1–11:18) based on the free gift of salvation to Jew and Gentile alike (cf. Acts 15:7b–11). Such fellowship around a meal including the Bread and Cup was important, picturing the unity of the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17).
3. Then certain men arrived "from James", that is, either from the Jerusalem church or with some assignment from James. These Jews may have been some from those insisting on circumcision for Gentiles (cf. Acts 15:1) or merely "zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20).
4. The arrival of these men caused Peter to fear, perhaps fearing disapproval or a negative report about him.
5. As a result Peter began drawing back, separating himself from the Gentile believers and not eating with them.
6. This then impacted the other Jews, who followed his example. And that influenced even Barnabas who had helped establish the church and seen God open a door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). The separation of Jew and Gentile which Christ removed (Ephesians 2:14–15), was being wrongly re-instituted.

Be careful of the example you set for others. Beware of following the crowd rather than adhering to the gospel and the Word of God.

II. *Defection's Analysis*

1. Peter "stood condemned" (v. 11), that is, his actions were self-condemning.
2. Peter and the other Jews acted hypocritically (v. 13), that is, they acted differently than they truly believed. Peter would have confessed that Gentile and Jew alike come to Christ by grace alone through faith alone, but his conduct said that Gentiles had to become like Jews.
3. Peter and the other Jews did not walk "in step with the truth of the gospel." The gospel is the standard to measure a "straight walk", and they were not keeping in line with it (cf. NIV).

III. *Paul's Response*

1. *Personal confrontation*: Peter's conduct was an assault on the gospel and Paul responded in kind, fighting for the freedom which the gospel brings. Paul opposed Peter to his face, granting Peter the correction he needed, at the time point that it was needed for him and the entire church, and in a manner that most helped everyone. Since Peter's conduct was self-condemning, it was an act of love toward Peter to confront him. It was also necessary for the sake of the gospel and the Gentile believers.
2. *Public rebuke*: Paul rebuked Peter publicly (v. 14) because Peter's conduct was public, because he had a public following which also needed correction, and because his actions had a public affect on the Gentile believers. Paul's rebuke pointed out the illogic of Peter's actions. It is illogical that a Jew who could live like a Gentile should force a Gentile to live like a Jew.

Though Peter was an apostle, his conduct did not align with the gospel he believed and proclaimed. His actions spoke loudly and Paul, by the authority of the gospel, confronted him to preserve the truth of the gospel for others. Paul fought to preserve the message of freedom, a freedom gained by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Who might be observing you and following your example?
- Does your conduct consistently line up with the gospel? Are there areas in which you might be tempted to measure your acceptance with God by how you perform?
- Would you accept someone confronting you with inconsistent behavior? How should you and how would you respond?