



February 2, 2014  
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*RADICAL: rift*  
Galatians 2:1-14

I have a sister: Dana. Some of you might have been tortured in her Pilates class at the Y. Dana and I love each other, but she knows how to push my buttons and I know where hers are located, too. Any of you relate? Family members you love—for whom you would take a bullet—but there are times when you have knock-down, drag-out fights?

This morning, we discover such a family feud. Remember, Paul is ticked because, after nearly being murdered for preaching the gospel in Galatia, he hears rumors that false teachers have snuck in behind him. Questioning his teaching, his gospel, his credentials as an apostle...and these teachers are leading his new converts down a false path. Paul needs to do damage control. So he writes Galatians.

"Paul's not really an apostle... not like Peter or James or John!" That's what the false teachers in Galatia were saying. "Paul doesn't have the right to teach you the good news of Jesus because he wasn't one of the eyewitnesses." But that wasn't true. If you wonder why Paul spends so much time in Galatians on his autobiography, here's why: He was trying to prove to the Galatians that he was an eyewitness to Christ—that what he was teaching had been revealed to him directly by Jesus while in the desert—and that the gospel he was presenting absolutely was the same gospel being taught by the apostles in Jerusalem.

But after all this time—14 years since his conversion—Paul wanted to make sure. He wanted to be certain that the gospel he was preaching aligned with that preached by the other apostles. So Paul makes another trip to Jerusalem to meet with the boys.

Verse 2: "I went in response to a revelation—(in other words, "The Lord told me to go down and meet with the apostles in Jerusalem")—"and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles." [Notice: Even though he was adamant about being a legitimate apostle, he presented the first apostles the message he had been preaching for their review. Paul shows respect for their authority.] "But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain."

In other words, he came to have a discreet conversation with Peter, James and John, to make sure that their teaching aligned... that they weren't headed off in

different directions. He wanted to be sure they were in agreement. Even though he was preaching primarily to the Gentiles—and Peter was preaching primarily to the Jews—Paul really was hoping that their message of freedom in Christ, freedom not dependent upon good works of any kind but upon the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus... that that message was consistent.

Was it? Yes! They were called to different ministries, but it was the same gospel. They even shook hands on it. Paul had their stamp of approval. Great news, right? They were preaching the same gospel of freedom in Christ available to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike! Great news! So reassuring! Which makes the next part of the story so discouraging.

What is my nickname for you? The Sweetheart Church. I will always have a tender place in my heart for you, the church that took a risk on a young pastor. I love you and am protective of you. Do you know what Paul's Sweetheart Church was? Antioch! Antioch was the first church Paul served after a long time of hiding. When the Holy Spirit started stirring things up there, Barnabas tracked Paul down and brought him to Antioch to preach. And the church boomed! Then they felt led to plant other churches. They sent Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey to share the gospel with other Gentiles. We are Gentiles! Antioch is our mother church, and Paul got his start there! Even though he was a Jew, Paul was welcomed by the Gentiles in that amazing, Sweetheart church. He loved them and was very protective of them. That's what set up the rift we read about starting in verse 11.

The Jerusalem leaders wanted to know what was going on in Antioch. So they sent Peter to visit. And he was having a grand old time with those Gentiles... worshipping with them, hanging out with them, even eating with them. And remember, Jews weren't supposed to do that! They had strict rules about what they could eat and with whom they could eat and how they washed before they could eat. But Peter was so caught up by the genuineness of these Gentile Christians that he dove right in. It wasn't long before he was munching on Bacon, Lettuce and Tomato sandwiches along with all those pork-lovers. (Okay, maybe he didn't go that far. But he certainly wasn't trying to make these non-Jewish Christians live the way Jewish Christians lived. It was clear that they belonged to Christ, Jewish or not.)

Things were going along swimmingly, and then (duh, duh, duh!) along came a group from Jerusalem. We don't know who they were; they are just known as the "Circumcision Group." There's a catchy name. They called them the "Snippies" for short. (Makes you wonder what their team mascot was?) The Snippies had one message: You cannot follow Jesus if you are not Jewish. If you aren't circumcised, if you don't eat Kosher, if you don't obey all the Jewish rules you can't be a Christian.

Well, one night, while Peter and the gang were watching the game and munching on pork rinds, the Snippies walked in and caught Peter mid-munch... and it scared him. That's what the text says. There is nothing scarier than really religious people who are very, very sure that they are right and that everyone else is wrong. And even the great Peter—the Rock—found himself worrying about what the Snippies would say about him; what they might do to his reputation.

So what does Peter do? He pulls away from the Antioch Christians. He stops hanging out with them. He stops eating with them. In fact, he makes such a big deal about his change of heart that other Jewish Christians join in shunning the Gentiles. Even—ready for this—even Barnabas was led astray. Barnabas whose nickname was “Son of Encouragement” became a Son of Discouragement because of the pressure brought on by the Snippies... the Group that showed up and said, “All of these people here in Antioch who think they are Christians... they aren't Christians because they have to become Jews, first. They have to follow the rules or they can't join the club.”

Imagine this. I leave on vacation and invite a friend to preach in my absence. Cyndi and I come home early and sneak in to worship with you (which we often do.) And let's say the guest preacher stands up and says, “I know you think you are all Christians, but you aren't. You need to believe certain things, act a certain way... you need to be re-baptized if you want to be saved. Your pastor has it all wrong.” How do you suppose I would feel, sitting there, listening to that? And what do you think I would do?

Probably what Paul did! He called Peter out publicly. Why publicly? Because Peter's offense was public. At that point, every Gentile in the Antioch church was thinking, “Gosh, I thought I was a Christian, but I guess not. After all, Peter is the Chief Apostle. If he doesn't want to have anything to do with me, I guess I really don't belong after all.” Peter had shamed the Antioch folks publicly, so Paul offers a public smack down. He calls him out on what is one of the most despicable character traits you can find among religious people. What? Hypocrisy!

Hypocrite. Do you know who probably was the first person to use that word the way we define it today? Jesus! In Jesus' time, “hypocrite” was the Greek word for “actor.” A hypocrite was one who wore a mask, which is how they performed on the Greek stage. Jesus took that word and transformed it. He called the religious leaders—Pharisees and Scribes—he called them hypocrites... play-actors, mask-wearers. What he was saying was this: They appeared on the surface to be holy and righteous, but it was all a façade. Underneath, their hearts were wicked and filthy.

For Jesus, a hypocrite was anyone who pretended to be one thing when they were, in fact, something else—someone who was putting on a show to impress others. To Paul, in that moment, Peter was a hypocrite. Remember they had met in Jerusalem to agree on what the message of the gospel was. They agreed that

the same message—of freedom in Christ—could be preached to Jews and to Gentiles. They even shook hands on it! And when Peter visited Antioch, everything was going along fine... until the Snippies showed up. Suddenly, Peter was afraid. Suddenly, he didn't want anything to do with the Gentile Christians. Suddenly, he wanted to impress the hyper-religious group.

And Paul calls him on his hypocrisy. "How can you demand something of Gentiles that you, a Jew, are not even able to accomplish yourself? Why would you lay such a burden on them?" Once again, Paul goes radical! There is a radical rift between him and Peter—a public division between these two giants—because Paul was not going to let Peter get away with such hypocrisy.

Is there anything more heartbreaking than to discover a pastor you trust has cheated on his wife? Or embezzled money from his church? Or hidden his alcoholism from the congregation? What is the first word that springs to our mouths? Hypocrite! It is always such a disappointment to discover that someone is teaching one thing while in reality, living a completely different life... living a lie. It harms the message of Christ, it breaks the heart of His church and it gives ammunition to those who want to impugn all Christians and all pastors because of the behavior of some. We don't like hypocrites, do we? They make us mad, don't they?

I hate to break it to you, but every single one of us is a hypocrite to some degree. Every one of us pretends to be something we are not. For most, probably, it is less flagrant. But there is not one of us who lives up to the call of Christ in every part of our lives.

I know that's true for us because you said so. Do you remember the survey we took last summer? 36% of this congregation self-identified as being "Christ-Centered" which was defined this way: My relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides everything I do. That is the highest spiritual level possible on this survey—higher than the national average. 36%! Awesome, right?

Until you look at the rest of the data. Of that same that 36% of you who said you were "Christ-centered" and that Christ guides all your decisions, listen to what you said about other parts of your spiritual life. Half of you do not read the Bible daily. One third of you do not serve the church even 1 or 2 times a month. Two-thirds of you do not serve those in need. Half of you do not tithe; 16% of you give as able or give nothing. 60% of you do not share your faith in Christ with anyone. And these are our self-described Christ-Centered folks.

This is us! Not what someone says about us but what you—who self-identify as our most mature Christians—say about yourself. You say you are devoted to Christ but you do not serve Christ, do not share Christ, do not give to Christ, do not read about Christ. You say one thing, but you do another. What do we call

such a person again? Mahatma Gandhi was an admirer of Jesus. But when he was asked, "Why aren't you a Christian," he replied, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ." It's easy to cheer Paul when he's taking on other hypocrites. It's a little tougher when that knife cuts close to our bone, isn't it?

But here's the great thing about the gospel. Hypocrites are welcome! Jesus knows we can't possibly make our walk match our talk all the time. His job, the job of his Holy Spirit, is to take us hypocrites who admit that we are hypocrites and need his help—that's the key—to take us and change us from the inside out. But the starting point for that transformation is to recognize the hypocrisy in ourselves.

We are about to come to the Lord's Table. The price of admission is this: that you surrender your life to Christ... that you are humbly sorry, truly repentant for every hypocritical instinct that rises up from within you. You don't have to pretend before Jesus. You can take off the mask. He knows the truth. But he also expects better of us. He calls us to something more. He calls us out of hypocrisy—all of us—and into a life of honest, genuine discipleship.

In what way are you like Peter this morning... pretending you are one thing but living another way entirely? I would invite us all to spend some time in silence right now before we eat together, just as the Antioch church did. Admit to God who we are really—how broken we really are, how hypocritical we really are—and ask Jesus to help us to be the person we claim to be... the person he died to make us.

### **Sermon Questions**

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
  1. We still don't yet know WHAT the false teachers in Galatia were promoting, but we get two hints in this text. Can you find the hints?
  2. Obviously, there was conflict between the early Christian leaders. What evidence do you find? How did they deal with it?
  3. At the core of this issue, Paul would say, is Peter's hypocrisy. About what? Would you agree? What could you imagine might be Peter's side of the story?