



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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In the Messiah Galatians 2:11-21 Fr. William Klock

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We're all familiar with the image of the two masks, side-by-side, representing tragedy and comedy—one face frowning and the other smiling. The image represents the theatre, whether it's on playbills, or carved on the outside of a building, or use to mark the location of a theatre on a map. That image is something that goes all the way back to ancient Greece. Back then all the actors were men, there was no makeup, and many people sat far enough away that it was hard to see who was who. So that the audience would know who was on stage and what they were about, the actors held masks in front of their faces—a bit larger than life and with exaggerated features and expressions. The Greeks had a name for this sort of acting and it's come straight into English: *hypocrites*—hypocrite, hypocrisy. By St. Paul's day the word had evolved beyond describing actual actors in a play. It still did, but it commonly referred to someone who was playing a deceitful game of false pretences and pretending to be someone they really weren't.

As we move on in Galatians 2, Paul levels this charge at Peter. Not very long before Paul got word of what was going on in the Galatian churches and wrote this letter, Peter had travelled up to Antioch from Jerusalem. This was a church of both Jews and gentiles and that may be why Peter visited. As we saw last week, Peter and Paul had agreed that Peter had been sent to the Jews and Paul to the gentiles, so here's Peter going to visit the Jews in Antioch.

You would think after what had happened when Paul visited Jerusalem, after he stood firm against the "circumcision party" and found that he and Peter were ultimately in agreement with each other, you would think this

visit to Antioch by Peter would have gone smoothly, but it did not. Look at what Paul writes in Galatians 2:11-14.

But when Cephas [again, that's Peter's Greek name just like Paul is Saul's Greek name] came to Antioch, I stood up to him face to face. He was in the wrong. Before certain persons came from James, Peter was eating with the gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcision people. The rest of the Jews did the same, joining him in this play-acting. Even Barnabas was carried along by their sham. But when I saw that they weren't walking straight down the line of gospel truth, I said to Cephas in front of them all: "If you're a Jew, but you've been living like a gentile, how can you force gentiles to become Jews?"

This issue of Jews and gentiles just wouldn't go away. Paul thought it was settled after his visit to Jerusalem, but then it happened again when Peter came to visit in Antioch, and now, like a cancer, it's spread to the churches in Galatia. No doubt, the agitators in Galatia had already told the churches there their version of what had happened in Antioch, so now Paul tells them what really happened.

Before all this, Jewish and gentile believers in Antioch—and Galatia, for that matter—gathered as one people to worship, to pray, and maybe most importantly, to eat the Lord's Supper. It helps to remember that in those early days, the Lord's Supper was part of or at least attached to an actual meal where the people would fellowship with each other. This gathering together, this *eating* together was a profound living out of the power of the gospel. When Jesus died and rose again, he dealt with sin and that put everyone, Jew and gentile alike, on an even footing. There was no longer clean and unclean, just and sinner: all in Jesus were clean and just. And this bringing together of the two peoples, it was God's new creation made visible in the life of the early church—a *powerful witness of the gospel itself*.

We might not think much of it, but it was a big deal. Jews had been raised, steeped in observance of the law. Gentiles were sinners and their food was unclean—even their fellowship was unclean. Think of Peter and his vision in Acts of the sheet let down from heaven full of unclean animals and the Lord telling him to eat. Revulsion had been instilled in Peter from his birth. There was a massive "ick" factor. Our culture, in contrast, has become so accepting of everything that there's not much left we can compare it to, but maybe you can think of the current conspiracy theories about Klaus Schwab telling everyone to "Eat ze bugs". It gets people worked up, because of the deeply ingrained revulsion we have in our culture to eating bugs. It would have been something like that for Jews to fellowship with, to eat with gentiles.

On the other end of things, the gentiles knew full well about those Jewish weirdos and their over-the-top purity laws. Jews were everywhere spread through the Greco-Roman world, so the pagans encountered them regularly in daily life and in business and were well aware of the revulsion they had to eating with them. So, that the early Jesus people were not only gathering together to worship and pray, but also gathering together around the same table to share bread and wine. It was a *really* big deal. It got everyone's attention.

And so Peter came to visit Antioch and, Paul says, he worshipped and he prayed and he came to the Lord's Table with his gentile brothers and sisters. Everything was fine. And then the cancer that Paul thought had been stomped out in Jerusalem, the cancer came to Antioch. Certain people from James came. Paul doesn't elaborate on what that means, since the Galatians probably knew who those people were. Maybe they were sent by James. Probably they came and claimed authority from James that they didn't really have. Whatever the case, they carried the cancer with them. Paul calls them "circumcision people". They had some connection with the pseudo-family members who had been smuggled into the meeting in Jerusalem and who had insisted that Titus be circumcised. And Peter caved into their pressure. He

“drew back” and “separated himself” and then when the other Jews in Antioch saw Peter do that, they followed suit. Even Barnabas. We get a sense of Paul’s shock and dismay that *even* his partner Barnabas whom he knew knew better, even he went along with this sham. This is where Paul uses that play-acting term. Peter and Barnabas and the other Jews acted like hypocrites. They knew better. But under pressure from these agitators they withdrew and gathered separately. They put up masks to placate the agitators and in doing that—not realising what they’d done—they become the people-pleasers so despised by their tradition. They were gospel people, but to keep the peace they held up anti-gospel masks in front of their faces.

Paul knew that this wasn’t the real Peter—or the real Barnabas for that matter. They knew better. Peter had known this for years before Paul had. The real Peter behind the mask, the real Peter knew in his bones that the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection created one family in which Jews and gentiles stood on equal footing in the Messiah. This new reality wasn’t easy for Jews steeped for a lifetime in *torah* to adjust to. There was a massive “ick” factor to overcome. But the gospel is a powerful thing and so is God’s Spirit and adjust they had. And now, inexplicably to Paul, Peter and the others were dividing what Jesus had made one.

Paul says that they weren’t walking the straight line of gospel truth. The word is *orthopodeo*—where we get our word “orthopaedic”. The gospel draws a straight line and they should have been walking it, but they weren’t. So Paul says to Peter, “Look here, you’re a Jew, but you’ve been living like a gentile.” He means that Peter’s been eating with gentile believers and that almost certainly also means that Peter’s been eating gentile food that was off-limits to Jews. “So then,” Paul asks, “How can you force gentiles to become Jews.”

Peter probably would have answered that, no, he wasn’t trying to force anyone to be a Jew. They could each

just do their own thing. But that brings up images of the temple, where Jews could enter the temple court, while gentiles were stuck outside in the Court of the Gentiles—they weren’t really members of the community, of God’s people. That’s why Paul is so insistent here. There is one people—and Peter knew this and Paul knew—there is one people in Jesus the Messiah, not two. In the Messiah. This new community is defined not by ethnicity or ethnic markers but messianically by faith in Jesus and nothing else. If we’re going to divide it up again, well, what’s the point? To do so undermines the gospel itself and we might as well just throw in the towel.

So beginning at verse 15 Paul lays out the argument he gave Peter, because it’s this same gospel-killing cancer that has infected the Galatian churches. They need to hear it too. So Paul writes in verse 15:

We are Jews by birth, not “gentile sinners”.

For Jews there were two groups of people on this earth: the just or righteous—the Greek word carries both those meanings—and sinners. Jews were the just, the righteous, chosen by God and marked out by obedience to the *torah*. Everyone else was a sinner and this is why they kept themselves separate. But, Paul goes on:

But we know that a person is not declared “righteous” by works of the [Jewish] law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah.

So God had chosen the Jewish people and then gave them his law so that be living it, they’d be set apart. It’s what marked them out as different from gentile sinners. And they expected that one day, the Lord would send his Messiah and the Messiah would vanquish the gentile sinners and lead the righteous into God’s new age. But instead—and this was what Paul had to work through after meeting the risen Jesus—instead, the Messiah came and sinners crucified him. That wasn’t how anyone thought the whole Messiah thing

would go. Ordinarily, being crucified would mean Jesus wasn’t really the Messiah. Other men claimed to be the Messiah, they were killed, and that was the end of their messianic claims. But then God raised Jesus from death. In doing that he overturned the charge of false messiah laid against him and proved that Jesus was, in fact, the real deal, the Messiah. Jesus did, in fact, inaugurate God’s new age, his new creation. So why did he have to die? That’s when Paul—and the others—realised that as much as *torah* provided both a righteous way of living and a means of atonement when they failed to be 100% obedient—there was more to righteousness that *torah* could never provide. The very fact that *torah* was necessary to set apart God’s people, highlights that both Jew and gentile alike are subject to the slavery of sin and death. So Jesus the Messiah let sin rise up and do its worst at the cross, then rose triumphant over it. Jesus did something that *torah* could never but do, but in light of Jesus Paul realised, it was something *torah* had been pointing to all along.

Now, there’s an unspoken subtext going on here that we need to understand. Remember that Messiah mean’s God’s anointed king—the king. And for Jews, a king represented his people. So what was true of a king is also true of his people. This is why godly kings brought blessing on Israel and wicked kings brought curses and ultimately exile. A king represents his people. Paul likes to talk about being “in the Messiah” and when he says that, this is what he’s getting at. We’ll need to know this as Paul goes on.

So as much as Paul and his fellow Jews had always thought that righteousness came through the law, it turns out that God had something greater in store. A greater righteousness, true righteousness comes through the faithfulness—through the faithfulness of the Messiah. Jews had been faithful to *torah* and to the Lord’s covenant and that faithfulness marked them out as the “righteous”, but their faithfulness to God was but a shadow of the loving, gracious, self-giving faithfulness to God that Jesus

displayed on the cross. That's the faithfulness that has created a new people of God, a new and "righteous" or "just" people defined by faith in Jesus. So Paul goes on:

That is why we too believed in the Messiah, Jesus: so that we might be declared "righteous" on the basis of the Messiah's faithfulness, and not on the basis of works of the [Jewish] law. On that basis, you see, no creature will be declared "righteous".

Peter and now the Galatians had forgotten what it was all about. Peter seems just to have wanted to avoid conflict—which we see is a problem in other places in Peter's story, not least at Jesus' trial. For the Galatians it was likely fear of persecution. Remember that in the ancient world, "religion" wasn't some nice box you opened up on Sunday, and then closed up the rest of the week. It wasn't something you did in private. The gods were everywhere and a part of every aspect of life. The fastest growing cult of the time was the cult of Caesar and if you weren't part of that, well, you were disloyal and unpatriotic. Jews had a special exemption from all this pagan stuff, but these gentile converts to Christianity were in a tough spot. When they became Christians they withdrew from all this paganism. They stopped going to the temples and offering incense to Caesar and doing all the other little things people did throughout daily life and that got them into trouble. So since Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and following him was sort of a new way of being Jewish, they claimed the Jewish exemption and pretty soon the "real" Jews were insisting that if they were going to call themselves Jews, they'd better at least be circumcised. But once they did that and strayed off the straight line of gospel truth, they started to forget what the gospel was all about.

So Paul reminds Peter and he reminds the agitators in Galatia: this greater righteousness found in the faithfulness of the Messiah, remember, *this* is why we believed in him! In light of Jesus death for sins on the cross—remember?—we realised that in the end,

torah won't cut it. Righteousness is found in the faithfulness of King Jesus. He goes on in verses 17 and 18:

Well, then, if in seeking to be declared righteous in the Messiah, we ourselves are found to be sinners, does that make the Messiah an agent of sin?

This is the accusation of the agitators and of the "people from James". As part of living out the life of the gospel, Paul and Peter have been eating and fellowshiping with gentiles. The agitators, stuck in the old, pre-Jesus and pre-gospel way of Jewish thinking, for them that makes Peter and Paul and all the others to be "sinners"—because they're disregarding *torah* and the boundary markers that have always been there. If eating with gentile believers for the sake of the Messiah makes them sinners, then that would make the Messiah an agent of sin. Paul's trying to show them how absurd their accusations are. No, he's saying:

Certainly not! If I build up once more the things which I tore down, I demonstrate that I am a lawbreaker.

They've forgotten that Jesus has changed everything. Jesus' death has dealt with sin—for both Jew *and* gentile. Gentile believers are no longer sinners. They're clean. Paul's reminding them that the boundary markers of God's people have changed because of that. What now counts is being "in the Messiah". They're trying to rebuild what the old walls and in doing so they're undermining the very saving gospel in which they've trusted. It's a senseless thing to do. It's like calling the police chief to help you bury the body of the guy you just killed. It's not going to end well for you.

So now, finally, we get to Paul's familiar and glorious text about incorporation into Jesus the Messiah. Look at verse 19:

Let me explain it like this: Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. I am, however, alive—but it is no longer I;

it's the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I think the best way to see this is as Paul telling the story of the Messiah's death and resurrection as his own story. This is what it means to be "in the Messiah".

Notice how Paul doesn't just dismiss the law, *torah*. One of the first heresies—and one that pops up perennially in church history—was the teaching of Marcion who dismissed the law and the whole Old Testament as irrelevant. For Paul, though, you can't have the new covenant without the old. *Torah* was building towards Jesus and the cross and the giving of the Spirit all along. So Paul doesn't just say he died to law—which we might think means the law doesn't matter. He says that *through* the law, he died to the law. In Jesus the law fulfilled its purpose and so in Jesus, Paul is now fully alive to God. How does that work. Well, Jesus was crucified and in that he dealt with sin. Remember, again, that the king represents his people. So Paul says, he has been—in Greek it's literally—"co-crucified" with the Messiah. Through faith in Jesus, through identification with the Messiah, Paul has died to sin. And then he says, "I am—however—alive." Of course he is. If he is in the Messiah, if he has been co-crucified with the Messiah, then he has also been co-raised with the Messiah. I am alive—but—it is no longer I; it's the Messiah who lives in me.

Brothers and Sisters, notice how Jesus has changed Paul's identity. That's what he's getting at here. By faith he has been incorporated into the Messiah so that even though he still lives in the flesh—that final day when we will be made completely new still awaits us—but even though Paul still lives in the flesh, because he is in the Messiah, he now lives within the faithfulness of the Messiah—the son of God—and now Paul makes it more personal—not just that the son of God died, but that he *loved me and gave himself for me*. This isn't just abstract theology. Jesus, the

son of God, was faithful to fulfil *torah*, and gave himself not just generally for humanity (although that is true), but he gave himself for *Paul*—for *me*—for *you*—out of love, again for you, for me. Sometimes we need that reminder. All the theology, all the explanation, all the argumentation to bring false teaching and false gospels to heel is necessary, but in the midst of all that, never forget that Jesus died for *you*, for *me*, because *he loves us*—not just that he loves humanity as a whole in some general sense, but that *he knows and loves each one of us*. He died for you. He rose for you. And he’s baptised you into his own Holy Spirit so that you can share in his resurrection life.

Paul drives home this very personal aspect of the gospel. Peter knew this. The Galatians new this. And that makes it all the more powerful when he ends his argument saying in verse 21:

I don’t set aside God’s grace. If “righteousness” comes through the law, then the Messiah died for nothing.”

He’s reminded them that in his grace, God sent his son to die *for you*. But if you start rebuilding that old wall, if you start acting like “righteousness”—he means membership in the community of God’s people—if you start acting like “righteousness” comes through the law and the old boundary markers, then what you’re really saying is that Jesus died for nothing. Whether Jews and gentile would eat together might seem like a small thing, but it wasn’t. Eat separately undercut the very foundation of the gospel. That’s not really an issue for us today—although there are some modern-day groups that do add *torah* to Jesus. But Paul would have the same thing to say to anyone today who would divide up the people of God or who would exclude these people or those people based on something added to the gospel. Our identity, Brothers and Sisters, whatever it was in the past or whoever the world around us tell us we are, our real identity, the identity that matters is in Jesus the Messiah and nothing else. We have died and now live in Jesus.

This is especially relevant to us today in the mist of our post-modern culture. Our world is rapidly tribalizing over identity: things like race and sex and sexual orientation. The new thing is creating our own identities contrary to those that God had given us. In other cases we’ve turned our sins into identities. And we find these identities so powerfully defining that we bring them into the church and we hyphenate ourselves. We’re black-Christians or we’re white-Christians. There’s an ongoing controversy about those who call themselves gay-Christians. But Paul reminds us that if we are by faith in the Messiah, we have but one identity. We have died with the Messiah and while we still live, it is no longer we—whatever our colour or language or sex or past sin—it is the Messiah who lives in us—because he loves each of us so dearly that he gave himself for us. Brothers and Sisters, that’s the straight line of the gospel. Come to the Tablet this morning. Eat the bread and drink the wine and be reminded that Jesus died and rose again for you and that in him, you have died and been raised. His life, his faithfulness, his love and grace and mercy are now your identity. No more masks, no more play-acting, just Jesus the Messiah.

Let’s pray again our Collect: Lord, give your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*