

INTRODUCTION

Someone sent me a list of popular sayings third graders were asked to complete. Their surprise endings made me smile.

1. Better safe than *punch a fifth grader*.
2. Strike while the *bug is close*.
3. It's always darkest before *Daylight Savings Time*.
4. Don't bite the hand that *looks dirty*.
5. A miss is as good as a *mister*.
6. You can't teach an old dog *new math*.
7. An idle mind is the *best way to relax*.
8. A penny saved is *not much money*.
9. Laugh and the world laughs with you. Cry and you *have to blow your nose a lot*.
10. If at first you don't succeed *get new batteries*.

Those kinds of surprises make us smile, but most Christians don't smile when they discover a surprise in the Bible. You're probably familiar with the names Peter and Paul (and Mary), but you may be surprised to learn there was a time when Peter and Paul had a major confrontation. Paul, the newcomer, publically reprimanded Peter for being two-faced. Are you surprised to learn these two Christian heavyweights went toe-to-toe and face-to-one-of-Peter's-faces? Paul, the champion of grace, was saying, "Come on, Peter! You're too graced to be two-faced!"

So don't be surprised to learn there was a disagreement between these two spiritual giants.

Galatians 2:11-16. "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, [the pastor of the church in Jerusalem] he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [Paul is employing sarcasm here] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.'"

To understand this historic confrontation between two of the most important Christian leaders in history, let me give you some background. Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, was the main center of Gentile Christianity. Acts 11:26 tells us believers were first called Christians in Antioch. There was a strong church there, comprised of two groups of people. Jewish Christians had been raised keeping the dietary Law of Moses, and Gentile Christians came out of the pagan religions where there were no dietary regulations.

One day the Christians in Antioch got exciting news. The great apostle, Simon Peter, was coming to visit! Peter who had walked on water; Peter who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the grave; Peter who preached on the Day of Pentecost and had 3,000 converts. He was the Christian rock star of this time—and he was coming to visit the church in Antioch.

His visit to Antioch sets the stage for the confrontation between Paul and Peter. As we examine this issue, I want to talk about three of the principal characters, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. We'll learn a spiritual truth about each of them, and then a personal lesson we can apply to our lives.

1. PETER: Great saints can go astray

Paul wrote, "When I saw that they were not acting in line [*ortho-podia*] with the truth of the gospel... 'How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'" (Galatians 2:14)

The entire disagreement had to do with what Peter ate, and with whom he ate. It was a food problem and a fellowship problem. In Acts 10 God gave Peter a dream where he saw all kinds of unclean animals. God said, "Kill and eat." Peter said, "Never, Lord! Those are unclean." God had said, "Don't call unclean what I call clean." After that Peter understood that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. He went to the home of a Roman Centurion and ate with him. So this was an issue Peter had already settled.

To help you understand the issue, let's imagine that when Peter arrived in Antioch the church served a welcome meal for him. The menu was barbecue, and the church cooks served beef brisket for those Jewish Christians who still preferred the Jewish dietary rules. But they also served pork barbecue for the Gentile Christians. When Peter went through the serving line first, everybody was watching. He loaded down his plate with both beef and pork barbecue. Then he sat down and ate at the same table with Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. Everyone sighed with relief. They rejoiced to know that the gospel of grace had eliminated all the tedious rules and regulations of the Old Testament.

Everything was fine until some other Jewish VIPs came from the Jerusalem church. When they arrived, Peter suddenly changed his behavior. He arrived in the fellowship hall and when he saw the pork he was indignant. "What are you doing serving pork? Don't you know that it's unclean according to the Law of Moses? I'm a Jew, and I don't eat pork! Get rid of it!"

And Paul wrote that Peter "forced" the Gentiles to follow Jewish customs. Perhaps Peter turned to the Gentile Christians and said, "And I don't want you eating pork either! Don't you know your Bible? Furthermore, the Law of Moses forbids Jews and Gentiles eating together. So, those of us who are Jews are going to eat together in here, and the rest of you can eat at the picnic tables outside."

When Peter changed his behavior, I imagine the Antioch Christians (Jewish and Gentile) were standing there with their empty plates thinking, "What bee got in his bonnet? What up with 'dat? Peter has been scarfing down pork and eating with us for the past month! Why the sudden change?"

Peter was being two-faced. He acted like someone set free by grace when he first arrived. But when the Jerusalem Jews arrived, he reverted back to Old Testament rules and regulations.

Paul wrote that Peter acted like that out of fear of the "circumcision group." In other words, these were the Pharisaical Christians from Jerusalem who demanded Gentile men be circumcised before they could be saved. He was afraid they might report his behavior to Pastor James. So once again we see the same old fearful Simon Peter who denied Jesus three times on the night Jesus was arrested.

Peter's behavior didn't line up with the gospel. Paul used the word *ortho-podia*. *Ortho* means "straight" and "*podia*" means, "foot." There is a field of medicine called orthopedics that comes from this very word. Orthopedic medicine is concerned with the correction or prevention of skeletal deformities. When two bones are out of line, an orthopedist is called in. Paul was a Christian orthopedic surgeon. When he compared the gospel of grace and Peter's conduct he said, "These two don't line up! Peter, your walk doesn't match your talk!"

One of the strongest evidences of the Divine authorship of the Bible is the fact that the Bible doesn't try to gloss over the mistakes and failures of the main characters. If ordinary people had written the Bible, they would have covered up the faults of the heroes. But this book is full of the stories of great people who failed tremendously. That should give hope to every one of us who have ever failed. We've all made poor choices and dumb mistakes, but God can still redeem your life and use you. One of my seminary professors used to say, "God can strike a mighty lick with a crooked stick!"

Personal lesson: God's grace frees me from racial distinctions

Peter's sin wasn't a sin of the flesh. He didn't lie, cheat, or steal. It was a sin of hypocrisy. Peter showed one face to the Antioch Christians before the VIPs came, and he showed them a different face when they arrived. It was also the sin of racism. His conduct demoted the Gentiles to an inferior status to the Jews. When Paul observed Peter's conduct, there was something inside of him that made him ask, "What's wrong with this picture? It doesn't line up!"

I had a similar eye-opening experience when I was a boy growing up in South Alabama. As you know, during the 1960s Alabama wasn't as a model state when it came to racial equality. When I was in the 7th Grade I started working on Saturdays at our local feed and seed store. I'd work from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Mr. Gamble owned the store and he paid me \$4.00 for the 10 hours I worked every Saturday. Mr. Gamble was a deacon in our church. He was also my Sunday School teacher. I looked up to Mr. Gamble because he was a businessman, church leader, and teacher. One Saturday I was busy stacking bags of fertilizer when I heard a commotion happening near the back of the store. I looked up just in time to see Mr. Gamble slug a black man with his fist. He hit him with a right uppercut to the jaw that literally lifted him off the floor. The black man didn't get up. I ran back there to witness the excitement myself. As the black man lay there groaning, I asked, "What happened? Did he try to rob the store? Where's the gun?" Mr. Gamble was still red-faced with anger and adrenalin. He said, "No, he didn't try to rob the store. I caught him going into the toilet that says 'whites only.' I wasn't about to let him get away with that." Then Mr. Gamble picked him up by the collar of his shirt and threw him out the door.

I had been raised in a culture of prejudice where the “n” word was used a lot. But, even as a 7th Grader, I was trying to live for God and I knew enough of the Bible that I realized this was no way to treat another human being. Like Paul watching Peter’s behavior, something in my mind said, “What’s wrong with this picture? His walk doesn’t match his talk. Here’s a man who puts on a coat and tie every Sunday and teaches the Bible, and yet if a man whose skin is darker than his tries to use a men’s room, he deserves to be knocked out?”

In that moment, I had to make a choice. Was I going to continue to respect a man who treated black people that way, or was I going to stand with the gospel. I made my choice. In one day, I lost all respect I had for Mr. Gamble. I didn’t challenge him or speak up, because I had been taught to respect my elders. But every Sunday after that when I heard him teach the Sunday School lesson, I didn’t take him as seriously. He taught about God’s love for all people, but his behavior proved him to be two-faced.

We’re in the 21st century, and some say the age of racial discrimination has passed, but we must examine our hearts to see if there are any vestiges of racial discrimination. In our community we are predominately Anglos, Hispanics, and African-Americans. As Christians, we say we say we don’t treat people differently, but we still tend to stereotype different groups. Does your walk match your talk about how we are all one in Christ Jesus?

2. BARNABAS: Good folks can be led astray

Paul wasn’t afraid to name names. After mentioned Peter he wrote, “The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.” (Galatians 2:13)

The word “hypocrite” or “hypocrisy” is used twenty-three times in the New Testament. Of those twenty-three times, Jesus used it twenty. Peter used it once in first epistle, and the other two times it appears is here in Galatians 2:13. Jesus used the word because there was a famous Roman theatre near Nazareth, and many scholars suggest that, as carpenters, Joseph and Jesus probably built sets for the dramatic productions. A hypocrite was an actor who used a different mask to play different characters.

Like an actor with a mask, a hypocrite is someone who is two-faced. They wear one mask about what they SAY they believe, but they wear a different mask for their actions. Hypocrisy is contagious. Peter’s two-faced hypocrisy influenced the other Jewish Christians, including Barnabas, to act the same way. Barnabas is an important Christian leader in the book of Acts. His name was actually a nickname. His real name was Joseph. We first meet Barnabas in Acts 4. We read, “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:36-37)

He was such an encourager that people called him by that nickname. He is seen elsewhere encouraging the apostles to accept Paul after his dramatic conversion. He was Paul’s encourager on the missionary journeys. But in spite of all the good things about him, he followed Peter’s bad

example and behaved as a hypocrite in front of the Jerusalem Jews. Paul would have said, "Come on Barney! You're too graced to be two-faced!"

Personal lesson: I can't be led astray if I'm following Jesus

We need to learn that even the godliest examples like Peter and Barnabas can fall under temptation. If you are following anyone but Jesus, you're setting yourself up to be disappointed.

Jim Jones was a preacher who founded the People's Temple. They started out by helping the poor, but he later disavowed the Bible and claimed to receive direct revelations from God. We all know the people who followed him ended up dying in South America after drinking his poison Kool-Aid.

David Koresh, who grew up here in Tyler, started out as a Seventh-Day Adventist, but he broke away and formed the Branch Davidians. He claimed to be the Messiah. And we all know his followers died in a horrible fire outside Waco. Those are two extreme examples. But they serve as a warning to us that we should never blindly follow any human leader. The only way we can know we aren't on the wrong path is when we follow Jesus.

And just let me confirm what you already know: I'm not an infallible leader. The only time I speak infallibly is when I'm quoting or reading the infallible scripture, the Word of God. I'm trying to follow Jesus, and if you're following Jesus, we'll be going in the same direction. So, let's all keep our eyes on Jesus because He is the only perfect leader.

When you talk with someone who doesn't believe the Bible, or attend church, you'll have to deal with all of their criticism about churches and Christians. They love to bring up examples of Christians who acted in an un-Christian way. Don't try to defend the church or Christians. Just point them to Jesus and ask them to find any fault in Him.

So when someone says, "I knew a preacher who stole money from his church and then gambled it away." Just say, "I don't doubt that, but let's talk about Jesus. Why do you think Jesus went to the cross?" When they say, "I knew a woman who went to church every Sunday, and she was the most vicious gossip I've ever known." Just say, "Yep, I think I might know her myself. But let's talk about Jesus. He was buried and three days later, the tomb was found to be empty. What do you think happened to the body of Jesus?"

Non-Christians love to point out that the church is full of hypocrites. Sometimes when I invite someone to Green Acres, they respond, "Oh, that church is full of a bunch of hypocrites." I always smile and say, "You're exactly right, but come on anyway. We always have room for one more!"

3. PAUL: Graceful people help those who are going astray

Paul wrote, "I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'" (Galatians 2:14)

Notice how Paul confronted Peter. First he confronted him publicly. When I read this passage for the first time I remember thinking, "Why didn't Paul go to Peter one-on-one?" After all, didn't Jesus give us a plan for reconciliation in Matthew 18? He instructed us to go to our brother one-on-one, and then if he won't hear you, take someone else. And then if he still won't listen, then you take it to the church. Why didn't Paul do that?

If someone has personally offended you or sinned against you, then you should go to them privately. But Peter's hypocrisy didn't just affect Paul: It affected others. And it was a public sin against all the Gentile Christians in the church. That's why Paul confronted him publically.

Second, Paul confronted him gently. He didn't blow his cool and say, "Peter, you're a rotten hypocrite! Your behavior isn't in-line with the gospel!" Paul wrote these impressions years after the confrontation. Notice Paul simply asked Peter a question. He said, "You're a Jew, but you've been living like a Gentile. WHY are you forcing Gentiles to live like Jews?" We don't know how Peter answered the question. He might have denied his behavior, or excused his behavior. It wasn't Paul's job to "fix" Peter. It was his job to simply point out to Peter the inconsistency between his beliefs and his behavior.

Later in the same letter Paul gives us some specific directions about helping someone who is going astray. He wrote, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted. Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1) What is the law of Christ? Jesus only gave us one law, and it has two parts. He said to love God with all of your being and to love your neighbor as yourself. Love requires us to help someone when they are on the wrong track.

Personal lesson: Grace frees me to be true-faced to those who stumble

Instead of being two-faced, why don't we strive to be true-faced toward others? When we notice a fellow believer on the wrong track, we should speak the truth in love. If I see you driving toward a bridge that is out, the kindest, most loving thing I can do for you is to tell you to stop and to go in another direction.

Most of us don't like confrontation or conflict and we avoid it like a plague. A Native American chief had two arguing tribal members come to him. The first man explained his position and the chief said, "You're absolutely right." The second man explained his side of the issue and the chief said, "You're absolutely right." When they left the chief's wife said, "Those men had two absolutely different stories. They both can't be absolutely right!" The chief turned his wife and said, "You're absolutely right!" None of us enjoy confrontation, but sometimes it is necessary.

Solomon wrote, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

There have been plenty of times in the 35 years I've been pastoring when I made the wrong call about something. I've made plenty of mistakes and I'm sure I'll make some more. But as I reflect on those failures, I thank God for the friends who came alongside me to help me see the truth. So, be a friend when you see a friend who stumbles. Help them get back on their feet and point them in the right direction.

So, what happened to these three leaders? Did they separate over this issue? No. The Bible indicates they worked through it and continued to be partners in the gospel. Later Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth and named Peter as one of the important Christian leaders. In 2 Peter 3:15 Peter called Paul, "Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him." Barnabas continued to be Paul's partner in their missionary journeys. The goal of loving confrontation is to unite, not to divide, and that's what happened in this case.

CONCLUSION

Someone said, "Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in his shoes. That way when you criticize them you're a mile away and you have their shoes."

Of our three characters today, whose sandals are you wearing? Are you like Paul and you need to help someone who has stumbled? Or are you in the sandals of Barnabas and you're following the wrong leader? Take your eyes off a person and put them on Jesus.

Or perhaps, like Peter, you need to examine your life and make sure your conduct matches what you believe about the gospel. Do you need some gospel orthopedic help today to get your lifestyle back in line with your lip-style?

A man was sitting at a traffic light behind another car. The light turned green, but the driver in the first car didn't go because he was distracted looking at a map. The guy behind him waited a few seconds and then tapped his horn. The first driver still didn't move, so the guy behind him laid on his horn. By the time the driver in the first car looked up, the light had turned red again. The fellow in the second car was so angry that he started pounding his steering wheel. He rolled down his window and shook his fist at the guy in front of him and yelled, "You stupid jerk! Are you blind? Green means go, you old fool!"

The angry driver didn't notice a policeman parked next to the intersection. The policeman approached the second car and asked the driver to step out of the vehicle and show him his driver's license. The guy said, "You can't arrest me for yelling at that jerk!" The policeman escorted him to the back seat of the police car, and asked him to wait. After a few minutes on his radio, the policeman returned and said, "Okay, you can return to your car." By this time the guy was really mad. He said, "I know my rights! You can't arrest me for getting mad. Why did you take me out of my car? You haven't heard the last of this!"

The policeman said, "I didn't detain you because you were hollering. I couldn't help but notice you had a little wooden cross hanging from your mirror and a bumper sticker that said, "Jesus is coming soon." I assumed this car belonged to a Christian. So when I saw the way you were acting I suspected that you had stolen this car." Ouch!

Let's make sure that our actions are consistent with our beliefs. After all, we're too graced to be two-faced!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes