

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: Operation Liberation!**

#### **Truth Matters**

(Galatians 2:11-21)

Study #4

#### **Introduction:** A (spiritual) Grand Unification Theory...

I received an email from an old friend this week. Andrew Goetz wrote to see how I was doing, to say he missed Northwest, just to catch up.

Andrew and Erica Goetz were a wonderful part of our church for several years a few years ago. They now live in Dallas and are busy with their two daughters and the fast-pace of life in the Metroplex.

But hearing from Andrew dredged up great memories of several trips he and I took together to teach at a Bible College in Kursk, Russia.

Andrew is a really bright guy, conversant in all sorts of realms of knowledge, including Scripture, computers and more esoteric things like physics.

On one of our Russia trips, Andrew was waxing eloquent about a theory being bandied about by scientists called the Unified Field Theory. He explained that it's also referred to as the Grand Unification Theory (GUT) and the Theory of Everything (TOE).

According to Andrew, the Unified Field Theory is all about finding the unifying force in the universe that explains everything. Wouldn't that be nice...

How often have you wanted something like a Grand Unification Theory, A Theory of Everything, for your life?

On any given day you may be presented with a dizzying array of complex issues that require deep thought and split second decisions. Our black and white minds want "yes" or "no" answers to questions laced with ambiguity. And we are confronted with a world on a rheostat, rather than an off/on toggle switch.

Well, this morning I'm going to suggest that something close to a (spiritual) Unified Field Theory surfaces in the book of Galatians. The Apostle Paul put it to good use when the pressure was on. The Apostle Peter didn't, and the damage left in Peter's wake was enormous.

Last Sunday, you and I spent time viewing an exciting episode from the early years of the church.

We saw the inspiring story of one man, the Apostle Paul, who stood firm for the truth of the Gospel and the freedom it brings against a group of men who wanted to put another man in bondage to Law.

Sadly, this morning, we see another story that highlights the tragedy of another man, another apostle, who caved to pressure and risked re-shackling Christianity into the straightjacket of rules and regulations and laws. Here's what happened...

In the first century, excellent Romans roads made travel easy and people were on the go. The apostle Peter was one of those who did a good bit of traveling.

We know that he had traveled from Jerusalem north to Antioch and had established good friendships there. By the time we come to Galatians 2:11, he has left Antioch for unknown places AND has returned. As he rolls back into town, tension is in the air. You can feel it from the get-go.

#### **Drama in Antioch (vv. 11-14)**

##### **Apostolic Face-Off (v. 11)**

*[2:11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face<sup>1</sup>, because he stood condemned.*

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<sup>1</sup> Paul gives the Galatians further evidence of his apostolic authority by resisting Peter.

Peter - the “Rocky” of the Gospels - stood condemned? Why? What had he done?

Well, for the benefit of the Galatians (and us), Paul tells us what Peter had done.<sup>2</sup>

### **Apostolic Sin (vv. 12-13)**

*Peter’s hypocrisy (v. 12)*

First, fellowship in Antioch (v. 12a)

***[2:12a] For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles...***

When Peter first went to Antioch, he enjoyed great fellowship with the Gentile Christians there. He ate everything they served at their Love Feasts and pot-luck suppers.

He had perfect freedom to do this and knew that he no longer had to keep kosher dietary restrictions because of a vision God had given him, a vision recorded in Acts, chapter 10.

In that vision, God showed him a sheet lowered from heaven on which had been placed all kinds of animals identified as “unclean” under the Old Testament Law.

A voice told Peter three separate times, ***“Arise, Peter, kill and eat.”***

The message of this vision was that because of the work of Christ, nothing and nobody was to be considered unclean anymore.

He could eat anything he wanted to eat and have a clean conscience before God. He could enjoy table fellowship with anybody he wanted and not become unclean.

Because of the freedom he enjoyed as a result of that vision, Peter probably enjoyed culinary delights in Antioch he never had before - sausage (kiolbassa!) and hot dogs and bacon - and more.

BUT, Peter’s big-tent Gospel policy soon ceased and Paul tells us why.

### Peter Then, no fellowship in Antioch

***[2:12b]... but when they (the men from James) came, he began to withdraw<sup>3</sup> and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.***

These may have been the same men who had wanted Titus to be circumcised. But now they have a different message, one they relayed to Peter - either verbally or non-verbally - and which he received, loud and clear.

*“Peter, news has reached Jerusalem that you are getting pretty chummy with Gentiles. Now you know that Moses gave clear orders about diet and fellowship. Your behavior is causing grave concern to the brethren down south!”*

And, just like that, Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles in Antioch. From that point forward, Peter took all of his meals with the Jews or by himself.

Just think about how this withdrawal would have impacted the Gentile Christians in Antioch.

They would have felt so privileged to have been sitting at a table with Peter - Simon Peter! The chief of the apostles in Jerusalem was sitting down for meals with them, telling them all the Jesus stories from firsthand experience, laughing and telling jokes and eating their food and getting to know them.

Then it stopped.

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<sup>2</sup> And anyone who has read the Bible for the last 2,000 years knows exactly what Peter did. How would you like your greatest failures on public display for a couple of millennia?

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<sup>3</sup> Word used to describe the pulling back of troops in battle.

You can imagine their thoughts - “*Was it something we said? Did we do something wrong? Do we no longer measure up to Peter’s standards? Is there something wrong with us?*”

There was no way they could have avoided feeling snubbed, dissed, and ostracized. We understand the relational implications of Peter’s move.

And what is worse is that Peter’s actions had a ripple effect in the church.

*Hypocrisy’s contagion (v. 13)*

***[2:13] The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that EVEN BARNABAS (emphasis added) was carried away by their hypocrisy.***<sup>4</sup>

Even Barnabas - big-hearted Mr. Encouragement! - withdrew from fellowship with the Gentiles.<sup>5</sup> All of the other Jews in the Antioch church began to take their meals separately.

So what happened? You tell me.

Had Peter somehow become convinced that enjoying pork sausage with Gentiles was wrong, or that sitting down at table with Gentiles was wrong? NO!

He knew that the restrictions of the Law had been abolished because of that vision God gave him.

He simply feared the bigwigs from Jerusalem. There may have been other dynamics at work besides fear prompting Peter to do what he did. But fear was primary. He caved to peer pressure.

And the damage was profound.

In addition to the hurt feelings of the Gentiles in Antioch, there would have been, certainly, a growing rift in the church.

Had Peter’s behavior continued, there would have soon been a Jewish-Christian church and a Gentile-Christian church.

And then, while Peter no doubt knew perfectly well that the Law of Moses was no longer binding on him (remember, he had the vision), I would imagine that other Jewish Christians in Antioch were not so convinced and probably were thinking that they still did have to obey Moses. The Gentile Christians were probably beginning to think something similar.

So, to review, Paul was gone from Antioch when Peter blew into town for a visit with the Gentile church there.

Everything was going great for a while, and Peter was having the time of his life with his Gentile brothers and sisters.

Then, somebody objected to his eating habits and social interaction with Gentiles - and Peter started taking his meals with the Jews.

Then Paul returned.

Now Paul was a quick study. He immediately took in the situation and frontally addressed Simon Peter, chief of the apostles!

In what follows we have one of the most dramatic episodes in the New Testament - one apostle rebukes another apostle!<sup>6</sup>

**Apostolic Rebuke! (v. 14)**<sup>7</sup>

***[2:14] But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel,<sup>8</sup> I said to Cephas in the presence of all,***

<sup>6</sup> My impression is that the Apostolic council of Acts 15 convened in Jerusalem, was called in no small measure to solve the problem raised during Peter’s visit to Antioch.

<sup>7</sup> We don’t know when (or if) Paul’s statement to Peter ends, or if this whole passage is part of the quote to Peter, narrative, or a switching back and forth. My “take” is that he stops narrating at verse 15. (There aren’t any quotations marks in Greek.)

<sup>4</sup> Hypocrisy is concealing one’s real character, feelings, under the guise of implying something different. It is creating a false impression purposefully.

<sup>5</sup> “*The rest of the Jews*” refers to those residing in Antioch. Peter’s hypocrisy had effectively created a schism between peoples, creating a Gentile church and a Jewish church.

***“If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”***

Some have read Paul’s public words to Peter, and noted the humiliating harshness of it. They have gone on to fault Paul for being so insensitive to Peter, who had certainly known his share of failures already.<sup>9</sup>

But, Paul was more concerned for the unity of the church at Antioch that had been destroyed, and for the Gentile Christians who been treated as if they were second-class citizens of the Kingdom of God, than he was to protect Peter’s feelings.

Once more, review with me what it was that Peter had done. He had withdrawn from table fellowship with the Gentiles in Antioch. That was all. He moved to another table for meals.

And Paul accused Peter of not being straightforward about the Gospel of Jesus. He says that what Peter did was a manifestation of a perversion of the Gospel of Jesus.

Hmmm... Let’s think about that.<sup>10</sup>

In what follows (vv. 15ff), Paul shifts from re-telling what happened in Antioch to explaining the *point* of what happened in Antioch.

In other words, Paul now moves to tell us, *“THIS is what the events that happened in Antioch between Jews and Gentiles MEAN.”*

Contrary to what we might have expected him to say, he opens up with a claim that he and all Jews are categorically different than Gentiles.

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<sup>8</sup> Literally, Peter was not progressing toward the truth of the Gospel.

<sup>9</sup> I’m thinking primarily of Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus on the night of the Lord’s trials.

<sup>10</sup> This is the third time Peter and Paul had been together. They first met when Paul went to Jerusalem, recorded in Gal. 1:18 and Acts 9:26-30. Then, they saw each other again when Paul, Barnabas, and Titus brought the famine relief money from Antioch to Jerusalem. Now, at their third meeting, Paul rebukes Peter for hypocrisy.

## Works Don’t Work! (vv. 15-21)

### **The Difference that Makes NO Difference (vv. 15-16)**

*The advantage of the Jews over the Gentile (v. 15)*

***[2:15] We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles...***<sup>11</sup>

What Paul has in mind are the many blessings that the Jews had enjoyed throughout their history. He’s thinking of all of the privileges that came with being Jewish.<sup>12</sup>

They had received God’s covenants and the Law of Moses. They were given the Levitical priesthood. God had worked on their behalf through miracles and deliverances and mercies for centuries.

Because of these blessings AND in terms of basic morality, they stood head and shoulders above the surrounding nations.

BUT - and here is the thing - despite those advantages, there was one arena in which those advantages gave no advantage. When it came to establishing a relationship with God, the Jewish difference made no difference.

*Level playing field between Jew and Gentile (v. 16)*

### LAW condemns

***[2:16a]...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law...since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.***<sup>13</sup>

Jewish moral superiority, in the final analysis is worthless in the only game that really counts.

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<sup>11</sup> Paul is not claiming here that he and the rest of the Jews are not sinners. Just that they are not Gentile sinners.

<sup>12</sup> See Romans 2, 3, and 11.

<sup>13</sup> By mentioning “Not by works of the Law” 3 times in verse 16, *“Paul tries to beat it into our heads.”* (Martin Luther)

Be you Jew or Gentile, be you philanthropist or humanitarian or moralist, if you play the game of “law,” you’ll never be right before God.

Now if this is the first time you’re hearing this, it might sound kinda crazy. You’re thinking, “*So why did God give the Law in the first place if not to tell people how to get right with Him?*”

Well, the truth is that God never gave law to justify. He gave law to delineate right from wrong; to point out the way to live and to let us know when we step out of the way.

But it is not the function of law to justify or to save. Law’s function is to keep us in line and to condemn when we get out of line.

If you are a law-abiding citizen of the United States of America, you stay out of trouble. But your law-abiding ways *today* don’t guarantee you anything for the *future*.

If you get caught one time disobeying the law, you’ll pay the penalty, despite years of law-keeping. Break a serious enough law and you’ll be forever marked as a criminal.

God never intended that people would get right with Him by way of works and law. The way to God has always been through a different door, the door of faith.<sup>14</sup>

#### FAITH justifies

***[2:16a]...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law***

Christ came to the earth to provide a way of salvation through faith in HIS works independent of our attempts at righteous works.

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<sup>14</sup> In the Old Testament, the object of faith was the sacrifices and offerings which pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

OK. So the Christian faith is all about, well, faith. But if Christians (like, say, Peter) go around acting hypocritically and generally messing up, what does that say about Christianity?

We’ll grant that works can’t save. But, bottom line, does Christianity “work”? Do Christians live better, sin less, behave more righteously than those who are not Christians?

The reality is that Christians (truly saved people) do sin.

So, does that mean that there is something wrong with the whole system? Has Jesus just ushered in a whole new rationale for leading sinful lives?

That’s the question Paul addresses now.

#### **Christians Who Sin (vv. 17-18)**

***[2:17] But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! [18] For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.***<sup>15</sup>

I want to make crystal clear what episode prompted these words from Paul.

Peter, being fully convinced of the truth, intentionally violated a truth established by the Gospel.

He knew that there was no food was unclean and he knew that there were no unclean people. But, he succumbed to peer pressure and separated himself. This, as Paul correctly identified it, was hypocrisy, plain and simple.

The Apostle Peter engaged in the sin of hypocrisy.

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<sup>15</sup> Peter sought to rebuild what had been destroyed by both Christ (by His death on the cross) and himself (by his formerly eating with the Gentiles) - a system of laws (namely kosher) - and by so doing proved himself a transgressor of God’s method of dealing with people (justification by faith).

If you read through the Gospels you'll note the seriousness of the sin of hypocrisy. To engage in hypocritical action is not to commit a minor gaffe. Hypocrisy makes its way onto the list of very serious sins. Felony type stuff. Jesus reserved some of His harshest words for people who behaved hypocritically. (see Matthew 23)

Peter's actions didn't reflect well on Christianity. It was a terrible witness. But what Peter proves here is that it is possible to be IN the faith and yet not live consistently with it.

And please note: At no point does Paul call Peter's salvation into question.

By what he has done, Peter committed an act that was denounced by Jesus, that hurt others horribly, and that could have wrecked the work of God in Antioch. But Paul treated him as the brother in Christ that he was. Paul accused him of Christian wrongdoing.

The fact that Christians do wrong doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with the faith!

But Paul does have something very important to say to the Galatians, and to us about how to live this Christian way so as to not get tripped up like Peter was. In fact, he has three things to say.

In looking at what Paul tells us at the tail end of Galatians 2, I want to simply affirm the truth of three comments about walking with Jesus.

We know that Peter got it all wrong in Antioch. For one thing, Paul says that Peter would have lived much better if he had just remembered that he had died.

### **Three Truths to REALLY Live By (vv. 19-20)**

*#1 - I have died to the Law*

***[2:19] For through the Law I died to the Law...[20 I have been crucified with Christ...***

In the physical world, when someone dies, they are no longer subject to the laws of the state of Texas. Folks who have died don't get cited for vandalism or speeding or burglary.

Law simply doesn't apply to those who have died. They have passed beyond the realm of law.

Here, Paul says that he has personally died with respect to the Law. He means that the Law and its requirements no longer have a hold on him.<sup>16</sup>

When Paul put his faith in Jesus, who had been put to death by crucifixion, he joined Jesus in death. He says here he was ***"crucified with Christ."***

The old Paul, the alienated-from-God-under-condemnation-bound-for-Hell Paul, **died**.

And what that means is that the Law can no longer reach out and condemn him anymore than people who have literally died can be arrested for jaywalking.

Law as an operative principle that either condemns OR that regulates behavior no longer applies to Paul.

Now, let's add a little biography to our theology...

You are spiritually dead because of sin. That part of you that relates to God is dead.

Then, you hear the Gospel. You are convinced by the Spirit of God of the truth of that message and you embrace the Gospel - faith alone in Christ alone for eternal salvation and forgiveness.

The instant you believe, you are ***"crucified with Christ."***

What that means is that who you were prior to placing your faith in Jesus - that alienated from God, hell-bound, under the judgment of God person - is dead.

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<sup>16</sup> F.F. Bruce - The possibility that I constitute myself a transgressor before the law is now excluded FOR "I have died in relation to the law."

Your personality and talents and abilities don't all change at conversion. But that part of you that was controlled by and condemned by the Law is dead.

The moment you believe in Jesus, as it was for Paul, so it is for you. Law/law no longer has a condemning hold on you AND Law/law no longer has a regulating effect on you. You are not under law. You are no longer ruled by law and rules and formulas.

Starting to feel sorta free? No longer condemned by law. No longer controlled by law. Yeah. It feels like we can breathe a little bit.

Listen. There's more.

*Christ lives in me/I live*

***[2:19] For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. [20] I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...***

Before Christ, the only operative power Paul knew for trying to lead a God-honoring life was Law/law. "Shoulds" and "ought-tos" and "you betters" and "you better nots" were the name of the game.

Now, though, the operative power for leading a God-honoring life is, plain and simple - Christ!

Paul says here that Christ lives through him - and then twice says that HE, Paul, lives.

Here's the deal. For the Christian, in addition to the reality of death (co-crucifixion with Christ; death to the power of law), there is another and even greater reality: LIFE!

The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ is alive and active in the life of the believer. That was true for the Apostle Paul and that is true for you.

The same Jesus who modeled love and holiness and compassion and justice for the first disciples is within you, leading you into love and holiness and compassion and justice.

And if the question framing in your mind is something like, "Huh? I don't feel Christ living in me? I can't hear Him or see Him or touch Him. How do I access the energizing power of the living Christ within me?" the answer follows.

*I live by faith in Jesus who gave Himself for me!*

***[Galatians 2:19] For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. [20] I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR ME.<sup>17</sup>***

Let yourself be astounded by the love of Jesus, for the first time, or as if for the first time. Marvel that the Son of God "***gave Himself for [you]***"! Allow awe to flood your soul for the enormity of what Christ has done for you.

And then trust Him.

Don't look for a rulebook or a set of guidelines. Law is dead! The new operative principle energizing your life is FAITH.

And at the end of the chapter we come to some of the most frequently memorized and oft quoted words in the book of Galatians - if not the whole New Testament.

But, they don't make a lot of sense unless they are understood in the context of Paul reaming Peter out for his hypocrisy.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Wonder of the Grace of God (v. 21)**

***[Galatians 2:21] I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.***

<sup>17</sup> The words are essentially Paul's expression of wonder that he - of all people - should have received God's grace. The whole Christian life is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men. (James Denney, *The Death of Christ*, London, 1907)

<sup>18</sup> In these last words of Galatians 2, Paul wants us to know that Peter and the rest of the Jews in Antioch were nullifying the grace of God by not eating meals with their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ.

How might we nullify the grace of God? Well, we can do it like Peter did it.

We might truly receive God's grace and then go on as though it made no difference, that is, by continuing to live under law.

We might continue to live on the basis of rules and regulations and law, never discovering the freedom and the joy of walking by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

In Antioch, Peter, a true believer in Jesus was living - AS IF Jesus never died and rose again;  
AS IF the Law was still in effect;  
AS IF the name of the game was still "*follow the rules.*"

But the name of the game is NOT "follow the rules". The name of the game is FAITH!

### **Conclusion:**

Imagine two married people, either husband or wives. Each of them is married to someone else. Both of them are being hammered each day at work by a co-worker who entices them, urges them, to a "harmless" fling. "Nobody will ever find out. It'll be fun!"

One of these married people who is being tempted, thinks to himself/herself, "You know, I really shouldn't get involved with someone to whom I'm not married." The other one thinks about how much his/her spouse loves him/her.

Which one of these two are more likely to stay true to their vows?

Now imagine two students. Both of them are being hammered every day by classmates urging them to go out drinking, smoke their first joint, carouse.

One of these students thinks to himself, "I really shouldn't go out drinking. I know I shouldn't do drugs." The other thinks of the love of her parents for her.

Which one of these two are more likely to say "NO!"

Now imagine two Christians. Both of them have golden opportunities to speak out for the Lord. Both of them are scared to death at the prospect! One of them thinks to himself, "I really should share my faith. I ought to witness." The other one thinks about how much the Son of God loved Him and gave Himself up for him.

Which one of these two are more likely to share the Gospel with others?

Bottom line? Grace WORKS better than Law!

The *Spiritual* Grand Unification Theory is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth of the Gospel is the Holy Grail, the key that unlocks the door to ethics and morality and the knowledge of God.

It centers us. It explains life to us. Everything is made clear in the light of the Gospel.

Galatians teaches that there is no problem - moral and ethical - that cannot be resolved when you apply the Gospel and its implications to that problem.

There is no relational problem that cannot be resolved when the Gospel's truths are applied by both parties!

Galatians also affirms that there is nothing but trouble where the Gospel is not believed and applied.

Paul kept the Gospel and its implications at the forefront of his mind, and was equipped to love powerfully. In Antioch, Peter abandoned the simple truths of the Gospel, stumbled, and in his stumbling, hurt others and the work of God.

Our actions will always betray what we really believe about the Gospel. And, our understanding of the Gospel will always dictate how we behave.