

Galatians 2 (Part 2): 6-18 • The Power of Influence

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We've been in Galatians chapter 2, so go ahead and open your Bibles there. We're going to do a baptism this morning, and so I'm not going to talk terribly long, but I just want to remind you that the churches in Galatia were under attack because men from Jerusalem had come to Galatia and began to teach the people that Jesus wasn't enough to be saved. They must also submit to circumcision and obey the law of Moses and that was a problem, so Paul wrote this letter to counter those claims.

And, you know what, Galatians chapter 2 is all about influence. Before we get into this here, I want to ask you a question. And the reason, let me tell you what I'm basing this question on. One of the delights that I have with our internet ministry, having grown the way it has, is I get a lot of emails, as I've told you, from people all over the world. Lately, I've been corresponding with a young gal from India, Northeast India, far Northeast India, which I'm learning about is quite different from the India that we have supported and ministered in over a number of years.

But I've been walking with this gal through the scriptures through email and stuff, and I asked her the question, what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? She actually came back and said, I have no idea. I mean, as far as articulating it, I believe this gal is a Christian, but it got me thinking about it, which is always interesting. I ask questions, and sometimes the answers elude me as far as the articulation of it, but I got to thinking more and more about it. And I realized that what it means to be a follower of Jesus is that He is the one who is primarily influencing your life.

Let me let that sink in for just a second. He is the one who is primarily influencing your life. Here's the follow-up question. When you think back on your 2017, what or who influenced your life the most? Think about that.

When Paul wrote here to the churches in Galatia, he was countering the influence of these men who came to teach wrongly that you must also follow certain legalistic requirements of the law and so on and so forth. But he was also countering the fact that they were trying to bring greater influence onto the Church of Galatia by citing the influence of Jerusalem.

What they had been saying to the people of Galatia is, we're from Jerusalem, that's the mothership. That's where things got started, we're from Jerusalem. This is this Paul guy who knows where he's from, Tarsus? Where's that, sort of a thing? And so they were using the fact that they were from Jerusalem as a validation of their message. You see, we're from where the apostles are from, okay?

So, Paul was writing to them. If you look beginning in verse 6, because we really covered the first 5 verses last time, we were in Galatians chapter 2. He goes on and he says, *“And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.” (ESV)*

And what Paul is saying is, I went to Jerusalem, I talked to the apostles, I shared my Gospel with them, and to those who seemed influential, they added nothing to me or to my message. And what Paul is basically saying here is, we were in agreement.

These guys have come to you from Jerusalem saying, you need to listen to our influence over you because you see we're from Jerusalem. And Paul is saying, no, I went to Jerusalem. I shared my message with the apostles in Jerusalem, and they had no problem with it.

Look what he goes on to say in verse 7: *“On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised (that means Gentiles), just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel (to the Jews or) to the circumcised...”*

And then he writes parenthetically here, *“⁸... (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the (Jews) circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas (and that's another name for Peter) and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised (or to the Jews). ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”*

What's Paul saying here? He's saying, I went to Jerusalem, I met with the guys, they agreed with me. They offered the right hand of fellowship to Paul, excuse me, to Barnabas and me, and they were in agreement. And they said, you know what? The grace that's on you to take the gospel to the Gentiles is no different from the grace that is on our lives to bring the gospel to the Jews.

You see what Paul's trying to do here? He's trying to pull out the rug, as it were, from underneath their influence or, the strengthening of their influence by citing or dropping names.

Well, Peter, he's from Jerusalem, and we're from Jerusalem, and Peter's a pretty big deal. Wasn't he the first pope? No, I don't think so. In fact, you know what? Peter was not only fallible, Paul goes on in the next verses to talk about a time when Peter actually came to Antioch and Paul had to rebuke him publicly for compromising the gospel.

Look at what it says in verse 11: *“But when Cephas... (and when I come up to the name Cephas, I’m probably just going to say Peter, okay?)”* He says, *“I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”*¹² *For before certain men came from James...* And that means comes from Jerusalem, he says came from James. Remember James, the brother of Jesus was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. So, when he says they came from James, he came from Jerusalem.

He says, *“(Before these guys showed up, Peter) was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.”*¹³ *And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.”* Hey guys, stop there for just a moment, influence, influence, okay.

Verse 14: *“But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to (Peter) Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”*¹⁵ *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; (that’s what the Jews called them)*

¹⁶ *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, (so we also have believed that Christ Jesus, in order to be justified, excuse me) so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, (listen to this) because by works of the law no one will be justified.”* Stop there, let me explain what's going on here.

So, Paul is telling the people in Galatia that at some point, Peter made his way up to Antioch. Antioch was north of Jerusalem in Syria, and that really became the hub of Christian activity. Antioch became the moving happening place in the first century, it wasn't Jerusalem. And Paul lived there. Barnabas lived there. They were teaching in the church, which was growing wildly there in Antioch.

Peter comes up from Jerusalem to check the thing out, hey, let's go see how things are going on up in Antioch, right? Peter comes up, and Paul says that while Peter was there, he felt the freedom to eat and take his meals with Gentiles. Now, you need to understand something. That was strictly forbidden by the traditions of the Jews. You did not eat with Gentiles. And the reason is because you were believed to be made defiled, if you ate with a Gentile. Because back in those days, people ate with a common loaf and they dipped in a common bowl, that was the way they ate.

And you and I do a little dipping sometimes, we have rules in our homes, right, about double dipping. No double dipping! Right? That means you dip it in, you bite, you can't dip it back in, no, you got to grab a new, whatever. But they had no rules against double dipping. And so it was the belief of the Jews that when you and a Gentile are dipping back and forth into this common bowl, you're sharing stuff. I won't get into it, but you know what I mean? You know what I mean? And you are defiling yourself with this Gentile as a Jew, and so that was strictly forbidden.

The Jews never ate with the Gentiles. Okay. They believed they would be unacceptable before God. However, Peter's a believer now, he's come to Christ. He knows, he understands that God has cleansed the Gentiles, right? By faith, just as he did the Jews. Peter knew that there was now no difference between Jew and Gentile. He knew, he understood that yet, it says that during Peter's visit, some legalistic Jews showed up from Jerusalem, and once they got there, Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles, and he would only eat with other Jews when mealtime came around.

In fact, we're told that several of the Jews got sucked into this hypocrisy, including Barnabas who knew better as well. And Barnabas was a teacher. So, you've got Peter, who's a pillar, Barnabas, who's a teacher, and these guys in leadership begin to walk in this attitude of hypocrisy regarding the eating or the sharing of meals with Gentiles. What does Paul do? He recognizes the power of influence. He recognizes what these Judaizers are trying to do with the people in Galatia is to levy their influence over their lives.

And so what does he do? He calls out Peter in front of everybody, makes a public thing of it and confronts his hypocritical behavior. And you might be thinking, now, wait a minute, was that really necessary? I mean, what Paul, what Peter did, was it really so bad? I mean, maybe he just was having a bad day. But no, this was a very serious matter because, you see, it was more than just an honest mistake.

You got to remember, because you guys know your Bible, this is the same Peter who received a vision from the Lord, that and was spoken to by the Lord, telling him to go to the home of a Gentile. This is the same Peter who, when he got there, spoke to those Gentiles about Jesus and what he had done on the cross. This is the same Peter who witnessed the Holy Spirit falling upon those Gentiles, just as he had fallen upon the Jews on the day of Pentecost. And this is the same Peter who then went back to Jerusalem after speaking to these Gentiles and came under some pretty serious fire and criticism.

And then went on to tell these Jews how God had accepted the Gentiles by faith, just as He had accepted the Jews. What does all that tell you? It says Peter knew better, doesn't it? Doesn't that know what it tells you? Peter knew better. He knew, in fact, he knew better than most that Jesus had divided, had, excuse me, destroyed the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile.

Do you guys know that in God's economy, within the context of the new covenant, there is no Jew or Gentile? Do you guys know that? That's what the Bible says, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, nor slave, nor free. (Galatians 3:28) Right? Those just, in fact, in Christ, the distinctions between men and women don't even count. How's that? So, God, through Christ, has broken down those divisions, those barriers, Peter knew that.

But now by withdrawing at mealtime from those Gentiles, Peter was rebuilding the wall that Jesus had demolished. You see? And furthermore, he was, and this is the really serious part, by his actions, Peter was insinuating that Jesus wasn't enough to cleanse the Gentiles from their sin and that Jews still needed to withdraw from them in order to be acceptable before God. That's the implication of all that's going on. And essentially, Peter was in danger of throwing the whole gospel under the bus, and Paul knew it.

And so, number one, that's why Peter's actions were so wrong. Number two, that's why Paul felt the need to say something. So, what happened? What happened? Power of influence. Right, Peter just got worn down. There's these legalists who are like, no, you don't eat with a Gentile, and they just don't get it, they don't understand grace. And Peter knows better, he knows what grace is.

He understands that, he just got worn down. Do you guys understand that it's possible to get worn down? Don't show your hands or anything like that, but in 2017, did you get built up or worn down? That's a very important question. According to the influence that was in your life, were you built up or were you worn down? Because listen, there are all kinds of forces in this world that want to wear you down from following Jesus, from walking with Him, from being

influenced primarily by Him and walking out that influence. All these other forces come along, and in a situation like Peter, when a man like Peter gets worn down, it's a very serious matter because, see, he's a leader.

You might say, well, why do we treat leaders and other people differently? Because leaders have the potential of influencing others. Actually, we all have the potential of influencing others, but a leader has more potential because a leader assumes that he's got people following him, and if there are those who are following a leader and that leader becomes influenced enough to compromise what they know to be true (which, by the way, is the definition of hypocrisy—when you begin to live something other than what you know to be true), that's living hypocritically. You with me? When that happens at the hands of a leader, it's a very serious matter, and so Paul felt the need to publicly admonish Peter for what he was doing.

What's the message here? Well, the message is very simple, we've already basically outlined it. The power of influence is enormous. And Paul wanted the Galatians to know that they were having the same power of influence levied upon them, pressure to compromise, pressure to give in, pressure to let go of what they knew to be true rather than holding fast.

And boy, I tell you, guys, if we open our hearts to the power of a negative influence, whether it's coming from movies or books, television, or just somebody at work yapping in your ear constantly, whatever, whatever family members preaching at you or whatever, whatever influence is coming into your life. Listen, it's a powerful thing, and you can't, you and I can't underestimate it. And we cannot underestimate the need that we have in our lives to be influenced by godliness.

I hope that's why you're here this morning, at least partially. I hope you're here so that the Word of God can have a positive influence in your life. So that you walk away from this place saying, okay, I'm built up. I'm strengthened a little bit more in my walk with God. And I'm going to be able to stand better, you see, against the forces that come against me to try to get me to compromise. Right? I hope you can hear me because I can't. I've got cotton in my ears. I can't hear a thing. It's like, this is weird. It's like, that's what it sounds like to me. Anyway, I just wanted you to share that with me for a moment.

Look at verses 17 and 18, would you please, just for a moment versus 17 and 18 say, “*But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners (in other words, we mess up), is Christ then a servant of sin?*” (He says, no) *Certainly not!* ¹⁸ *For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a*

transgressor. ” What is this? What are these verses saying? This is a very common criticism that you see that Paul received by the legalists.

The legalists would tell Paul, you can't tell people that they don't have rules. You just can't do that. They're going to go berserk on you. They're going to consider that a free pass to live a life of sin. You can't go telling them they don't have— we got to have rules, you got to have laws. Boom! And you lay down the law and you tell them, you do this, you don't do that.

And you know what? A lot of Christian churches fell into that same error. And some of you were raised in Christian churches where your Christian life was nothing more than a set of rules. Christians don't go to movies. Right? Good Christians, anyway. Christians don't go to dances. What was that little saying that was cute? I forgot it. Christians don't do this. I'll forget it.

Anyway, see they, Paul taught, we're saved by grace, we're kept by grace, and holiness is refined in our lives through grace, not by works. (Ephesians 2:8-9) And that made the legalists crazy. And they basically said, you know what? All you're doing, all you're doing is you're telling Christians they can go out and sin all they want. And you know what you're doing? You're making Jesus a minister of sin, that's what they're saying to him.

And that's so when he asks this rhetorical question (this is a common question that has been laid at his feet). He says, if during our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we're found to be sinners. (Galatians 2:17-21) And by the way, I am assuming that most people in this room are Christians. Do you guys ever sin? Not me, pastor.

Of course, we all do, don't we? Every one of us. Does that mean then Jesus promotes sin? See, that's what the legalists were saying to Paul. Listen, if you're still sinning, then that means Jesus promotes sin. He says, is that really the case? Paul says, no.

He says in verse 18, listen, if I rebuild what I tore down. In other words, what he's saying here is, if I go back and wallow in the sin that I previously left behind, that's on me, that's not Jesus. You see, that's on me. By the way, you guys do know that after you come to Christ, you have freedom to go back and sin. Yeah, we all know that.

I think that probably surprises people when they, sometimes when they first come to Christ, they come to Jesus and it's all exciting and they're going through this wonderful honeymoon period with Him, and then they mess up major,

right? And they're like, what the heck? I thought I was a Christian. Well, yeah, you are a Christian. What's the problem? I sinned! Yeah, we do that sometimes.

But now we have an Advocate with the Father and the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from sin. Did you think that when you became a believer you wouldn't sin anymore? Is that, but there's this idea. And Paul's saying, listen, if I go back to a life of sin after I have put it behind me, that's on me. That's my choice because I still have that freedom, right, to go back and do that.

Jesus does truly set us free from sin, but we have the freedom to go back and wallow in it if we want to. And then these last 3 verses of the chapter, I'm going to read them. I'm not going to, well, okay, this is difficult. These last 3 verses of the chapter, I'm going to put myself on the line here, okay? I believe these are the most profound verses in the entire Bible. Ooh, did I just say that? I think I did.

Number 1, that makes me scared to death to even teach on them. But number 2, it makes me want to make sure that I don't just blow over them without really doing them justice. And I can't do that in the time we have left. But I am going to read them and I'll talk a little bit about it as it relates to what we're about to do in water baptism.

But, oh, these verses, verses 19, 20, and 21, you ready? *“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh (meaning in the body) I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

²¹ I do not nullify (that means to set aside, or to ignore, or to reject, or to simplify) the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

Listen, if we're saved by doing good things or being good people, then why did Jesus come and die? He came to pay the penalty of our sin. So, if being a good person matters about getting into heaven, Jesus died for nothing. Right? Do you guys agree? Right? If it depends on you and me to be good people, then Jesus died for nothing. That's what Paul is saying to the Galatians. He's basically dropped the gauntlet. He has laid down a line in the sand, and I need to sit down.

But you know what I'm saying? He has laid it out, guys, this is it, it's either we're saved by good works, or we're saved through the blood of Jesus Christ.

And if good works come into play, as it relates to earning salvation, then Jesus died for nothing. Wow. Paul writes here that when a person comes to Christ, they join with Him in His crucifixion in such a way that the old man is crucified, dead, and buried.

I love explaining to people before they get baptized in water that water baptism is kind of like a pantomime. They're telling a story without words. And they're talking about being identified with Christ. And first of all, I explain to people who want to be baptized in water that when Jesus came and began His earthly ministry, what was the first thing He did? He got baptized, didn't He?

And John couldn't understand why he showed up at the Jordan. Remember? John looked at him and said, I need to be baptized by you, and yet you've come here to me. And Jesus said, it's okay, let's do this to fulfill all righteousness. (Matthew 3:13-15)

Why was Jesus showing up at the waters of John's baptism? You guys know what John's baptism was. It was a baptism of repentance. What did Jesus have to repent of? He was sinless. There's no sin. There's no repentance needed. So why did He go? Why did He show up?

Because at the beginning of His earthly ministry, He was identifying with you, sinful man. He was standing in for a sinful man. He stepped in the place. This was the statement that He was making publicly, I'm standing in for you guys. I'm going to do this for you.

And then when we come to know Christ as Savior, what's one of the first things we're told to do is to identify with Him. We do it in the waters of baptism. And I explain to people getting baptized that you get into those waters. And when we lay you back in that water, that symbolizes death. And when you're under that water, that symbolizes burial. And when we don't leave you there, we bring you right back up, and that symbolizes resurrection.

And what you're doing is you're identifying with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Just like He identified with you at the waters of baptism as a sinner. Wow.

Paul says here that it's more than just symbolism, I have been crucified with Christ, and now I no longer live, He's talking about the old me. He's talking about the old sinful, selfish, going-to-do-it-my-way-or-else me. And the life I now live, post-resurrection, I live by faith, not by works, by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Isn't that beautiful?