



One Page Sermon

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September 24, 2023

Peter and Paul

Recap of sermon from September 24, 2023

Scripture: Galatians 2:11-16

It is pretty easy to forget that Peter and Paul were real people. They got angry. They had anxiety. They were worried about what other people thought of them. Well, Paul might not have worried about that. We have a tendency to think of Peter and Paul as these twin pillars of Christianity. They belong in stained glass, renaissance art, frescoes, and statues. They belong frozen in time, stoic, stalwart, unyielding symbols of faith and spiritual enlightenment.

Then we read Paul's letter to the Galatians and realize that Peter (or Cephas, as Paul calls him here) and Paul were real guys with a real disagreement, and perhaps Peter had gone back on an agreement that he had made with Paul.

Peter and Paul agreed that they would eat with Gentiles. They agreed that for the sake of the gospel, they wouldn't follow strict kosher dietary laws because it produced a gap between the Jewish followers of Christ and the Gentile followers of Christ. They understood that as soon as the church was divided at the table over food laws, it was no longer the church of Christ. Paul understood a lesson that the United States government would learn centuries later: "separate but equal" is never equal.

At one point, it seems as though Peter agreed with Paul. The problem however, came when Peter was around the "VIPs" of the Church. The first followers of Jesus—all of whom observant Jews—did not bend the dietary laws. So when Peter was with them, he didn't either. It seems as though Peter was acting one way when he was with a group of Gentile believers, but then acted as if he was towing the hardline with the VIPs from Jerusalem. This infuriated Paul.

It is also a remarkably related phenomenon. I remember when I was a kid I had a friend who I loved to hang out with when we were together. But when he was with other people, he wasn't as much fun. When we were alone, we talked about geeky stuff. We played pretend. We played board games. But then when he was around other guys, he pretended he was too cool for that kind of stuff. He joined in on the meanness and the mocking that we never did when it was just the two of us. He acted one way with one group and an entirely different

way with another. It was infuriating.

Yet for Paul and Peter, it went deeper. As far as Paul was concerned, Peter violated not only their agreement, but was denying the good news of Christ.

Which way was it, Paul wondered? Did Christ live and die for us? Did he set us free from bondage to sin? Did Christ, through his life, death, and resurrection, show us the path to eternal life? Or does the Law?

Paul believed that forcing people to follow the Law was to erase Christ. He writes, "However, we know that a person isn't made righteous by the works of the Law but rather through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ."

It was the faithfulness of Jesus Christ that set us free—not anything that we have done or even believed. It was the faith of Christ that led him to the Cross. It was the faith of Christ that helped him rise from the Garden of Gethsemane and face his accusers. It was the faith of Christ in the power of non-violent resistance that gave him the courage to face Herod and Pilate. It was the faith of Christ that let him know that death and violence would not have the last word.

For Paul, these followers of Christ were hedging their bets. They were revealing that they didn't trust Christ in the same way Christ trusted them. It was the faith of Christ that led him to build his church upon Peter. It was the faith of Christ that woke Paul on his road to Damascus.

And now the followers of the one who had faith in them could not trust in that grace. They didn't trust in the grace that Jesus offered. They didn't trust in resurrection and eternal life. As far as Paul was concerned, that is the only reason they would go back.

Paul was angry. His letter to the Galatians was angry. His relationship with Peter was clearly damaged. Yet they remained in Communion with each other. Peter and Paul are remembered as Saints of the Church, but might be helpful to remember that they weren't perfect. When we fail to trust fully, maybe we can take solace in the fact that neither did Peter. Yet we can be reminded by Paul that it is our trust that always matters. It is the faith and trust of Christ that sets us free.

Next Week: The First Creed
Galatians 3:19-29