

## **The Test**

### **A Series on the Letter to the Galatians**

Message 2 – “Why is the teacher silent during...The Test?”

Galatians 2:11-21

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown

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Well, good morning! Does it feel good to be back in? And for those of you who haven't seen it yet, our backdrop is new. We've changed a few things. It's amazing what can happen in four months. And as we gather together, whether on-line or in person, we give thanks to God. In fact, as we prepare for God's Word would you join with me in prayer?

Gracious Heavenly Father we give you thanks today. For the awesome gift of being able to listen to your Word and to apply your Word to our lives. To experience the fellowship of your Holy Spirit, whether in person as we regather or in our homes as we gather in new ways. Familiar ways, and Lord we pray that you would pour out your Holy Spirit on us. Open us up to your Word and open your Word up to us. Lord teach us what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this Lord I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

I don't know about your count, but according to my count we are about to begin week 17. Week 17! So, for four months we have been having to reorient ourselves to what this thing called 'Church' is. Even as we are doing the very same thing out in our world. Trying to reorient how to do relationships, how to worship, how to live together in masked and unmasked fashion. How to engage as followers of Jesus in a time when we are listening for the voice of God to direct us and maybe for some of us we're only hearing silence. Silence.

Now, I have to be honest...I'm a relational guy; it's good for us to be together. I feel that, and I feel something more that I want to share with you today. I feel that God is actually birthing something new. God is birthing something new and we want to be a part of whatever God is birthing. We don't know what it looks like yet, but by faith we're trusting that as we ride this ride we're going to have an adventure. That we're going to have the journey of a lifetime. Provided that we trust the God of Hope. For there is Hope in the midst of all of this. Even though the weight of the pandemic and the weight of all of the racial tensions and the weight of all of what looks like brokenness in our world is out there and it's very prevalent, it's very palpable.

The reality is we serve a God who is re-defining. We serve a God who creates order out of chaos. And what looks like chaos to us and what feels like chaos to us is just birthing space for God. And we've got to trust Him with all of that wonderful Hope.

Alright, so while we're waiting for all of that rebirthing, the Church I believe is facing what I've been calling a test. A test. I don't know about you, but maybe you're like me as soon as I hear that word 'test' today as a 58 year old guy I don't like that word 'test' because it means Doctor appointments or other kinds of appointments. But when I was younger that word test sent ripples of fear up my spine. You know how that was, you know the day you walked in and you heard, "Today is a pop-quiz", "Today is a test time"? You know that scared me. But tests were important. It communicated to the teacher how effectively the teacher was in communicating the basics of what they were teaching us, but it was also communicating to the teacher how much we were getting it. How much we were actually absorbing, how much we were learning, how much we were integrating into our lives all of what they have been pouring out for us.

Now, I still have yet to find a way as an adult that I'm using Calculus. I'm still waiting. I haven't seen anything like that yet. But I've applied Physics, I've applied Geometry, I've applied some of those other things we had to suffer through - I mean... learn through. But Calculus? I'm still waiting to see how to apply that. And for those of you who are really into Math in your professions, God Bless You! Somebody's gotta' do that! You know, I actually got an A in Calculus - back then. Today if you were to show me Calculus I, I don't know what those little symbols mean anymore. I don't know what they stand for, I don't know how to do any of that stuff. It is all foreign, it's a foreign language. So, if they were to test me today on what I got an A on back then, CLEARLY I'm failing the test.

So, what we introduced was a series that we are calling The Test. And the basic principle of that test we introduced last week was the principle that it's during a test that the teacher is actually silent. So in the midst of this test that we're facing into as a global community but also more specifically as a Church, we may be looking or listening for the voice of God but if it's a test, if it's a true test, that teacher - our Divine Teacher is going to be silent for a little while.

And the test is designed to see if we have integrated, if we have learned what He has been teaching us. And for all intents and purposes, that test is not new to us. God has been doing that kind of testing, oh, for the Church all the way back to the day it was birthed. That's what Galatians is all about in my opinion. Galatians is kind of like Paul, the apostle who's writing this

letter - it's his way of handing the test paper back to those early Christians. And as we learned last week, there's a big, red F on the top of that page. And like any good teacher however, instead of just putting the grade at the top of the page, he's actually taking the time to list out all of the details, all of the comments, so that the Galatian class can get the basics. Can get it and try again, and ultimately that's what it comes down to, it's that whatever we're doing, whatever test is before us - it's not to judge us, but to equip us. God wants to equip you and me. Not just for us to succeed, but for the sake of our witness to the world. He wants us to get the basics. Because whether we realize it or not, the world is watching us.

Now quite honestly, what are they watching? They're watching whether or not we are going to be consistent with what they are hearing the Church preach. They are watching us. You see, they've been hearing, (probably for a long time) the Church describe LOVE as the heartbeat of who we are. They've been hearing us talk about FORGIVENESS as the basis of everything that is who we are. And so now they're watching us, they're watching how we treat one another.

They've been hearing us talk about and live out what JUSTICE looks like. How we are going to treat each other is going to give a testimony to whether we are a people who believe what we say we believe. And they're going to watch our behavior.

It's really very critical, and last week we learned from the apostle Paul in Galatians chapter 1 that there are some basics that he wants us to get, and those basics clearly are:

1. **Jesus is the ONLY way.** It's not Jesus "plus" anything. As soon as we tack on anything to Jesus we begin to nullify the Gospel. Our salvation is connected to only Jesus. Only Jesus. Not Jesus "plus".
2. Second, we learned that **Genuine Love Sacrifices.** And that the basis of genuine love is embodied on that cross which is leading us to the third basic and that is
3. **Forgiveness Substitutes The Cross For Pain.** And what we learned last week was that at the foot of the Cross, both the offender and the offended are equal in the need of God's grace.

I don't know about you, but when it comes to learning those basics, I still have miles to go. Not number one, number one for me Jesus is the only way. Anything that I add to Jesus actually gets in the way, gets in the way of my own personal life journey, it confuses me. So in the midst of all of that we gotta' take it a step further and as we take it a step further, let's look at Galatians chapter 2. Paul the apostle is actually going to teach us a

little bit more about some of the dimensions of what we need to learn, and that is - CONFLICT.

I know it's purely hypothetical, because conflict doesn't happen in the Church! The Church is made up of people who love each other, right? But I'm a firm believer in that Biblical principle that whenever there are two or three gathered in Jesus' name, what? There's bound to be a fight, right? That's who we are, we're human beings caught in the trappings of living life together and trying to figure out that journey - but in doing so, sometimes we forget who we are, why we're here and where we're going. And when that happens, when we do forget, we tend to trip over each other. And, quite honestly, we trip over ourselves.

So, today we're going to talk a little bit about conflict specifically because that's what Paul brings about in chapter 2 of Galatians. In order to talk about it I want to give you a working definition of the word conflict. That working definition of conflict I'm actually borrowing from another book that I read a number of years ago called Church Fights. Church Fights - a great book, and I've adapted slightly that working definition. Basically,

**Conflict occurs when two bodies of matter  
try to occupy the same space at the same time.**

Now, why do I use the phrase "bodies of matter"? I use "Bodies of matter" because quite honestly, conflict is not always just between two people. Sometimes it's between concepts. Sometimes it's between belief and belief structures and frameworks - ways of thinking. So, Pastor Matt and I might be the best of friends and we might be diametrically opposed on the issue of abortion. (We're not, by the way.) But, in principle we could be really tight relationally and every time we talk about the issue of abortion we'd get very tense and we'd get argumentative. Alright, so concepts can break down relationships. Whenever those two bodies of matter, whatever the matter may be, try to occupy the same space at the same time, we can get into pretty tense, anxious times.

So, I have a question to ask you:

- Can we be Christians and come to church with masks on?
- Can we be Christians and come to church without masks on?
- Can we be Christians and support Black Lives Matter?
- Can we be Christians and not support Black Lives Matter?
- Can we be Christians and walk with those who are following the causes of the LGBTQ community?
- Can we be Christians and not support that?

So, here's the dilemma. Any time we have two bodies of matter trying to occupy the same space at the same time, we have to figure out who we are and why we're here and where we're going together. And none of this is new. The names have changed, the content may have changed, but the contexts of Christians trying to live together in the forgiveness of their sins is not new. That's what we're reading about in Galatians chapter 2.

In Galatians chapter 2 for example, we see that the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter are actually in conflict with each other. Now, you can't get higher up the "food chain" than Peter and Paul. You can't get any more powerful people in this birthed movement called the Church than Peter and Paul. Now, what we're reading about in Galatians 2 is that the two of them were clashing.

What were they clashing about? Let's look: It says,

*"When Cephas..."* and by the way, Cephas is just a Hebrew name for Peter so we're gonna use Peter just so that we don't trip over that. So,

*When Peter came to Antioch I opposed him, (Paul says) I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (Galatians 2:11)*

In other words what Paul is saying is, "I'm right and Peter's wrong."

*For before certain men came from James...(Galatians 2:12a)*

Let me pause there for a second. James is the brother of Jesus who at this point in the story, is the head guy, the head Pastor over the Church in Jerusalem. Now, the Church in Jerusalem, what we need to know about that is that the majority of the people in the Church in Jerusalem were Jews who heard the message of the Gospel and gave their lives to Jesus. So, they have a Jewish background. They are Hebrew in religious orientation that now are followers of Jesus.

So, James apparently sent this entourage to meet Peter. And so it says,

*For before certain men came from James, he (Peter) used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they (the entourage) arrived, Peter began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. (Galatians 2:12)*

Now, we're going to talk about circumcision in a few weeks. You can mark your calendars, right? So, but I've gotta say this, that phrase - "The

Circumcision Group” doesn’t that just like tattoo nicely on the arm? Wouldn’t you want to be a part of “The Circumcision Group”?

Well, what that phrase captures is that those Jewish believers in Jesus, those Hebrew people who gave their lives to Jesus, they wanted to claim that Jewishness needed to be part of the journey towards accepting Jesus. Ok, so what this is saying is that Peter, who had previously gotten to a place where he was welcoming Gentiles (non-Jewish people) as Christians who had given their hearts to Jesus had changed his approach. At first welcoming Gentiles into the Church but now all of a sudden, he was pushing them away. What’s that about? I’ll tell you what it’s about.

When we track that history, it takes us back to a story that we read in Acts chapter 10. Acts 10 is really pivotal for us to understand what’s going on here in Galatians 2. I don’t have time to read through all of that with you, but I encourage you to do so. As you look at Acts chapter 10, two story lines are happening almost simultaneously. The first is that we have a Roman Centurion, a Gentile, a non-Jewish person. He has somehow heard the messages of God through the Jewish testimony and he and his entire family have been faithful to that message. They had been giving to the poor, they had been great at hospitality, they had been praying daily. His name is Cornelius. Cornelius, while he was engaged in his daily journey has a vision, and in this vision an Angel from the Lord comes to him and says to him, *“Cornelius, I have seen and heard all that you are doing to honor me.”* This was a message from God. “Now I want you to go to this particular house in the village of Joppa and find a man whose name is Peter and I want you to listen to him.” So, what does Cornelius do? He sent a group to go find this Peter. (**Acts 10:31-33**)

Simultaneously, while that’s going on, Peter happens to be at his home and he’s hungry. He’s gone up to the rooftop to pray but he realized he’s hungry. So, he sets his family members to work at preparing the meal and while he’s up on the roof praying he has a vision. And in this vision, (it’s a complex vision) he sees this sheet dropping down from heaven and in this sheet are a number of different animals, and he hears this voice saying, *“Peter, kill the animals and eat.”* Now what we need to realize is that all the animals depicted in this sheet are animals that had been forbidden for Jewish people to eat. And so, in the vision Peter says, *“No, Lord what are you asking me to do? I’ve never eaten things that are against the Law of Moses to eat. Why would I do that now?”* But he hears the voice of the Angel, the voice of God saying, *“Don’t declare anything that I have created as unclean.”* (**Acts 10:9-16**)

And so Peter realizes in that moment that his ministry needs to welcome those who are Gentiles. This is a pivotal time for Peter and so just then, the entourage from Cornelius arrives, they connect and the next day, Peter leaves with them and they go to Cornelius's house.

Picture this, according to Acts 10 Peter stands at the threshold of Cornelius's home and says to the group, "You realize, that I'm violating the Law of Moses just by being here. But you also have to know that *God spoke to me and He said that there is no favoritism for God. There is no Jew or Gentile, male or female*, so he takes that step into Cornelius's house. (**Acts 10:24-43**). So what we read about is that Cornelius is so excited about the apostle Peter coming. Wouldn't you be? An Angel tells you to go find this man and this man has something to share with you? So he opens up his whole home for family and friends. By the time Peter walks into the living room, the living room is packed with tons of people who are all associated with Cornelius whether its family or friends and Cornelius says to Peter, "*I've been waiting for you, I've been waiting for you. Now speak to us the message that the Lord has placed on your heart.*"

That's a preacher's dream, right? To walk into a crowded room that you didn't expect and have someone say, "Hey, we came here to hear you preach." Woah! And so what does Peter do? He tells them about Jesus. All these individuals had heard about God, now Peter tells them about Jesus. And what we read about in **Acts 10:44-48** is that before Peter has even finished, the Holy Spirit rushes in upon them and in one sweeping moment in time the Holy Spirit changes their lives. They start speaking in different languages and they start living out an intense moment with God. Peter sees all this happening and it says those members of the Circumcision Group who were with Peter saw what the Holy Spirit was doing to the Gentiles and they were amazed, they were astonished. In that moment Peter in the midst of the crowd says, "*Is there any reason why we should not baptize these believers with water?*" (Because obviously, God has already baptized them with the Spirit.) And so he does, and in that one moment in time, Peter has crossed the line and has united the Church and Jew and Gentile are together. Peter sat and ate with them all.

So, back to Galatians chapter 2. That's why this verse is so difficult for Paul to grab his handle around. Peter is changing his direction and he doesn't understand why. So he calls him out. It continues in verse 13, "*The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy,*" the phrase "the other Jews" is really another phrase for that group of circumcised believers, those Hebrew followers of Jesus. "*The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.*" Now, Barnabas was one of the Pastors, the main guys over at the Church in Antioch. A dear friend of

Paul's, who helped Paul start many churches. Even Barnabas, Paul says was led astray. Can you imagine what Paul was feeling in this moment? So, it continues,

*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 sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of 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 the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. (Galatians 2:15-16,19).*

But then the wonderful verse, verse 20, Paul says to the Galatians:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)*

He says,

*I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Galatians 2:21)*

So, conflict. In essence, Paul is calling out Peter. You can't get further up to the top of the chain of command. Two major leaders in this movement of God's great Gospel who are disagreeing with each other. Why would Peter do this? Why in the face of an entourage coming from James and the Jerusalem Church, the Hebrew Church, the Hebrew Christian Church, why would Peter, the Rock, the best friend of Jesus! Why would he begin to back pedal? Why would he begin to do what he was doing? He had been uniting the Church, Jew and Gentile in background were coming together in Jesus Christ. Now with this entourage, Peter was separating them again. Why would he do that?

I have a suggestion. It's something that I have experienced in my own journey and all of my research as well. It's that "Under Stress, We Regress."

### **UNDER STRESS, WE REGRESS.**

When the emotions get high, when the anxieties get high and no doubt from what we are reading, Peter's anxiety was pretty high. When that anxiety gets high, we tend to regress, we tend to go to the path of least resistance.



In other words, when facing situations of emotional tension and conflict, we tend to use old ways of coping in order to get rid of our anxiety.

We go the path of least resistance. It is what I call our "Pre-sets". You know on your radio in your car you have those buttons, sometimes 5 sometimes 6 or more, depending on whether your car is digitized or not. That you can pre-set buttons to your favorite stations. This is where you push the buttons and no matter where you are on the dial it goes back to that favorite station. That's what we're talking about here. Every one of us has "Pre-sets" and those "Pre-sets" kick into gear when we get anxious. When the emotions ride high, and I think that Peter allowed himself to go the path of least resistance. Maybe he was tired, maybe he was scared of his own reputation. Doesn't make sense - this is the guy who put himself on the line in front of the Roman Officials saying, *"You know, you can do whatever you want to me, I've got to preach Jesus."*

So, what would make him face into this? We don't know, but what we do know is that a pre-set occurred and it forced him to live against what he had been proclaiming. Hence why Paul uses the word "hypocrite". We have our pre-sets, but the Gospel requires that we live differently. We must live differently. The Gospel requires for example:

### **Honest Humility**

We need to come to the Lord, to each other, whether we are facing conflict or not, we need to come together with honest humility. Jesus taught it early on –

*...before you take the speck out of your brother or sister's eye remove the log from your own (Matthew 7:5)*

I've got to be honest with you, the test that the Church is facing, not just St. Paul's, but the Christian Church globally, what we're facing is a test that plays itself out on social media. As Christians are caught up in this same dilemma. Oh, its content is different, it looks like whether you are really strong enough in your faith if you feel the need for a mask. Or "you must be ignorant or not loving of others if you choose not to wear one." Or "I can't believe that you are marching in the protests with those of our African American friends". Or "I can't believe that you're not supporting Police Officers" or you're not supporting Black Lives Matter. Or supporting this or supporting that or you're not doing this or you're not doing that. Social media is a frenzy of sisters and brothers in the faith in the household of God that are pitted against each other, and what we are learning that two bodies of matter are trying to occupy the same space at the same time. Just like in the days of Peter and Paul, we have to approach one another with Honest

Humility. Friends, I implore you for all those who are listening, whether on-line or in person. I implore you: **we have to lead with Love**. As soon as we start judging each other, the same measure of judgment will be turned onto us.

In addition, the Gospel requires:

**Gracious Accountability.**

So, my one push back to Paul, is that he faced Peter publicly. If Paul was a friend of mine today, I'd coach him to go one-on-one, face-to-face with Peter first, so that Peter would have a chance to rectify what he was doing. We don't do that often enough. What happens even on social media, is that we have to be right. And we put the emphasis on being right rather than doing what is right. We want all the world to hear us defend the cause without realizing that our words hurt the greater cause.

We also need:

**A Cross-Based Integrity.**

That everything that we do, everything that we say needs to be filtered by the Cross of Jesus Christ who died for all. He died for all of us. You know when we look at it from that vantage point, Paul's words from Galatians 2:20 ring true.

- Do they ring true for you? Do they ring true?
- Have you been crucified with Christ?
- Is Christ living in you more than you and your needs and wants and preferences?

At some level that integrity must shine, so friends I really believe it's time for us to re-set our pre-sets. And our pre-sets need to be Honest Humility, Gracious Accountability and a Cross-Based Integrity. Only then will we pass the test.

**Our pre-sets need to be Honest Humility,  
Gracious Accountability and a Cross-Based Integrity.  
Only then will we pass the test.**

Let's pray.

Father God I thank you for the gift that You are to us. And the call and the challenge to be faithful to a message that is life transforming. Lord help us to get out of our own way and allow You to transform our lives. We need You, Holy Spirit, we need You. Work through us and heal Your land in Jesus' name we pray - and all God's people said together, Amen.