

Under Pressure

Galatians 2:11-14

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A. Challenged (vs. 11):

1. Came – Peter’s arrival at Antioch occurred about fourteen years after Paul’s ministry in Tarsus (Gal. 2:1). By this time, Paul had already been approved by the apostles to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:1; Acts 15). The stage was now set for Paul to be officially ordained by the apostles for this mission. Antioch was the church where Paul and Barnabas had previously served together—indeed, it was Barnabas who first brought Paul into active ministry there (Acts 11:19–26).
 - a) This was Antioch of Syria (distinguished from Antioch in Pisidia), a major trade center in the ancient world. Heavily populated by Greeks, it eventually became a strong Christian center. In Antioch the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).¹
 - b) Antioch of Syria became the headquarters for the Gentile church and was Paul’s base of operations.²
 - c) The time of Peter’s visit possibly took place after Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey in a.d. 48. Peter came to Antioch to learn about as well as to show support to this unprecedented Gentile outreach program launched by the Gentile-Christian church. “Came to Antioch” may suggest that Paul was at Antioch at the time of his writing of Galatians.³
 - d) They apparently came as an official delegation from James the brother of Jesus to meet with Peter, and perhaps over the issue of how to deal with the presence of Gentiles in the church at Antioch. Peter’s actions, says Paul, came from his fear of those from the “circumcision party” (Greek = *hoi ek peritomes*, cf. 1:7; 4:17; 5:10). Who were these people? According to Rom. 4:12, they were individuals who were drawn into the church by faith (Rom. 4:16) from the Jewish community that was observant of the Law and its traditions. They were among the Jews who also became followers of Christ by faith. Eusebius (ca. a.d. 320) uses a similar designation, *ek tes peritomes*, to describe those in the church who came to it as Jews.⁴
 - e) Interesting Paul, who was more steep in Judaism as a Pharisee of Pharisees has to lead the merging of these two believers. Paul made the adjustment while Peter struggled.

¹ [Life Application Bible Notes](#) (p. 1986). (2007). Tyndale.

² [Life Application Bible Notes](#) (p. 1986). (2007). Tyndale.

³ Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#). (Vol. 3, pp. 277–278). Zondervan.

⁴ McDonald, L. M. (2004). [Galatians](#). In C. A. Evans & C. A. Bubeck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon* (First Edition, p. 489). David C Cook.

2. Resist - Because Peter's actions were public, Paul confronted him openly before all the brethren. Paul's intention was to correct Peter's behavior, as it was causing division within the church and undermining the unity of the believers.
 - a) He withstood Peter because Peter's conduct gave the false impression that he was renouncing the stand he had taken at Jerusalem. The action of the council in the matter of the decree (Acts 15:28, 29) had opened the way for freedom of social intercourse between Jews and Gentiles in the church at Antioch, a freedom that Peter was glad to share. He even ate with the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:3). But the arrival of certain men from James, the acknowledged head of the church at Jerusalem, awoke fear in Peter's heart, for he remembered that the mother church had rebuked him for associating and eating with Gentiles in the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18). It is impossible to know in what relation these visitors stood to James and on precisely what mission they came. Peter separated himself from his Gentile brethren by degrees, as the original suggests, perhaps absenting himself from one meal one day, from two the next, and finally cutting himself off altogether.⁵
3. Because Peter stood condemned – Based on what was agreed upon in Jerusalem, Peter's actions could be seen as contemptuous and subject to judgment. Since Paul was ordained to minister to the Gentiles—after his Damascus experience and his period of testing in Tarsus—he was the Lord's appointed leader to the Gentiles. Peter's behavior threatened to disrupt the advancement of the Lord's agenda (Acts 1:8) and therefore needed to be addressed. This agenda remains consistent for all time.
4. Prior to the coming of certain men from James – What set off the course of Paul's actions was the arrival of those who came with James from Jerusalem to the church in Antioch.
 - a) It is clear that these men were sent by James, men of importance as is shown by the deference with which Peter treated them, and the obsequiousness with which he bowed to their requests. They were not from the ranks of the Judaizers, for James would not send men of that stamp, but Jewish Christians of Jerusalem who like James were still most scrupulous in their obedience to the Mosaic law. James, even after the decision of the council at Jerusalem regarding the relation of the law to Gentile converts to Christianity, still held to the view that the Jewish converts were under the law. James was the occasion of Paul's lapse when the apostle at his request took upon himself a Jewish vow to show the Jews in Jerusalem that he was still a strict Jew (Acts 21:18–26). Here he was the occasion of Peter's lapse when he

⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Ga 2:11). Moody Press.

sent this mission to Antioch with the purpose of enforcing the Mosaic law so far as the Jewish Christians were concerned.⁶

5. Peter began to withdrew - Peter regularly ate and associated with the Gentiles but when James came with the other brethren Peter, probably remembering what happened after he went to Cornelius's house (Acts 10:34-48), how the brethren in Jerusalem took issue with him (Acts 11:1-18), began to shrink back (like a ship lowering its sails trying to stop its course) in fear (something Christ constantly addressed in Peter's life) of what these believers may say, and stopped eating and associating with the Gentile brethren. Peter did this consistently as if this is now how he was going to behave from this point forward. All of this took place after Peter preached powerfully at Pentecost maintaining his commitment to Jesus no matter the abuse he experienced.
 - a) Peter takes an action that is perplexing and betrays his vacillating character. Presumably Peter is trying to avoid another direct conflict with these Jewish brothers. In 11:2–3 he was once criticized by the circumcision group in Jerusalem for eating with uncircumcised people.⁷
 - b) The word *withdrew* is from *hupostello* (ὑποστέλλο). This word was used frequently to describe strategic military operations. This suggests that it was part of Peter's strategy in the circumstances with which he was faced. Polybius used this word of the drawing back of troops in order to place them under shelter. This suggests a retreat on the part of Peter from motives of caution. The tense is imperfect, indicating that Peter did not start his withdrawal from the Gentile tables at once, but gradually, under the pressure of their criticism.⁸
6. Peter hold himself aloof - Peter consistently and deliberately sought to separate himself from the Gentiles. This was neither accidental nor due to language barriers; he intentionally and resolutely decided to cease associating and eating with Gentile believers.
7. Afraid – Peter clearly understood the authority and influence of the Jerusalem church, especially with James, its leader, present. Decisively, he concluded that it was in his best interest to maintain good standing with them and therefore ceased associating with the Gentiles. In doing so, Peter exhibited what can be described as “dreadful fear.”
 - a) By such actions Peter in effect was teaching that there were two bodies of Christ, Jewish and Gentile. And that was heresy. But why did Peter create this breach? Not because of any change in theology, but simply out of fear. Once, after preaching to

⁶ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 70–71). Eerdmans.

⁷ Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*](#). (Vol. 3, p. 278). Zondervan.

⁸ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 71–72). Eerdmans.

Gentile Cornelius, Peter courageously defended himself before the Jerusalem leaders (cf. Acts 11:18); but this time he capitulated to some Jewish friends.⁹

8. Afraid – Peter allowed his emotions and insecurities to govern his decisions, rather than following the guidance of God’s Word.
 - a) Peter had visited the Gentile church at Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were still ministering (Acts 15:35). In Acts 10, God had clearly revealed to Peter that no foods or peoples were unclean; but the apostle fell back into legalism just the same. When he first came to Antioch, Peter mingled with the Gentiles and ate with them; but after some visitors came from Jerusalem, he withdrew himself and put up the old Jewish barriers again. Even Barnabas fell into the trap (v. 13), amazing his missionary companion, Paul. The reason was fear (v. 12); for “the fear of man brings a snare” (Prov. 29:25, NKJV).¹⁰

B. Big Moments (vs. 13):

1. The rest of the Jews join in the hypocrisy – As a key leader, Peter began to foster division within the Lord’s church (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; Titus 3:10-11).
 - a) The word *but* introduces the contrast between the fellowship of Paul with the Jerusalem apostles and his attitude against them. The word *withstood* is from *anthistemi* which means “to set one’s self against, to withstand, resist, oppose.” This verb usually implies that the initial attack came from the other side. It was Peter, in Paul’s mind, who was the aggressor. Although not intentional, yet in effect it was an attack on the position which Paul was maintaining at Antioch.¹¹
2. The rest of the Jews join in the hypocrisy – The Jewish believers who once associated and ate with the Gentile believers followed Peter’s example and likewise separated themselves from them. As a result, they acted hypocritically – although their convictions that the Gospel was for both Jew and Gentile remained unchanged, their public actions failed to reflect this truth. Unlike the Pharisees, whose hearts were corrupt yet appeared holy outwardly, Peter did the opposite. Surprisingly, even Barnabas, the very one who introduced Paul to the Gentile ministry was carried away by this hypocrisy.
 - a) Paul, by characterizing their actions as hypocrisy, implied that there had been no real change of conviction on the part of Peter and the rest of the Jews, but only conduct that misrepresented their true convictions.¹²

⁹ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Galatians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 594–595). Victor Books.

¹⁰ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). [Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament](#) (p. 520). Victor Books.

¹¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, p. 69). Eerdmans.

¹² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, p. 73). Eerdmans.

- b) The word is from *hupokrinomai* (ὑποκρίνομαι), which speaks of the act of concealing one's real character under the guise of conduct implying something different. The word itself means literally "to answer from under," as an actor who speaks from under a mask. Our word *hypocrite* comes from this Greek word. It usually referred to the act of concealing wrong feelings or character under the pretence of better ones.¹³
- 3. Barnabas was carried away with the hypocrisy – Surprisingly, even Barnabas, who had brought Paul to minister to the Gentiles, acted in the same manner. Barnabas was the one who had stood with Paul and spoken up when certain brethren in Acts 15:1-5 argued with him. Yet under the continued pressure exerted by Peter and the other Jewish believers, he too faltered.
 - a) The pressure must have been great for Barnabas to succumb because he was from Cyprus, a Gentile center, and was involved in a missionary program with Paul to reach Gentiles with the gospel. All of them—Peter, the other Jewish Christians, and Barnabas—were guilty of hypocrisy because while confessing and teaching that they were one in Christ with Gentiles, they were denying this truth by their conduct.¹⁴
- 4. Barnabas was carried away with the hypocrisy – These two godly men demonstrate that, even when people understand God's Word and sincerely commit in their hearts to follow it, they can, under pressure, act politically rather than Biblically.
- 5. Barnabas was carried away with the hypocrisy – We do not hear of James or other believers joining Paul in this matter. Standing firm for God's Word and remaining steadfast, regardless of circumstances, can place us in lonely places.

C. Growth Required (vs. 14):

- 1. When I saw that they were not straightforward – After carefully examining the situation, fully understanding the facts, and evaluating the matter biblically, Paul confronted Peter. He asked pointedly, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10, NASB).
- 2. About the truth of the Gospel - Paul's focus was not on himself. His sole objective was to address the issue at hand—the hypocrisy occurring openly before all the brethren. This was his only motive; it was not based on his personal opinion or perspective, but on what the facts revealed. In other words, he was concerned with what the actions of

¹³ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 3, pp. 72–73). Eerdmans.

¹⁴ Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Galatians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 595). Victor Books.

Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jewish believers represented, especially since these actions were visible to many witnesses.

- a) The statement that Peter was not acting according to the truth of the Gospel needs explanation. He was a Jew and therefore not obliged to live after the manner of the Gentiles, as he had been doing in his table companionship. But now, having gone that far and then broken off, he was logically compelling Gentile believers to live as Jews, that is, to adopt circumcision and the dietary laws of the Jews and thus remove all barriers between themselves and men like Peter. But if the Gentile believers did this, they would sacrifice the truth of the Gospel, which had been affirmed at Jerusalem. The church had decided that no such burden of legal compliance was to be laid on Gentile believers. The whole principle of grace was at stake. The logical outcome of Peter's conduct was to make Jews out of Gentile Christians or else force the creation of a Gentile church alongside the Jewish church, which would break the unity of the body of Christ. So the truth of the Gospel was involved.¹⁵
3. About the truth of the Gospel - Many times, people are quick to judge a person's motives rather than their actions. Paul models for us that we cannot judge a person's motives (Romans 2:1-11), but only their actions. Paul believed Peter's heart was right, especially based on his testimony (Acts 10:24-48), and his conduct during the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), and therefore, confronted his behavior not his heart.
4. About the truth of the Gospel - Peter and the other brethren's actions directly contradicted the very message of the Good News of Jesus Christ - a salvation intended for the whole world, God's plan from Genesis 12:3, executed through Christ (John 3:16), and commanded by Him in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), and at His ascension (Acts 1:8). No one, regardless of position or experience with Christ, has the authority to interfere with His agenda. Paul saw it as his responsibility to confront and demand a change in actions, particularly from key leaders such as Peter, James, and Barnabas. He emphasized, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal 1:11-13; NASB)
5. I said to Peter in the presence of all – After careful evaluation, Paul confronted Peter openly, once and for all, in the presence of the entire assembly gathered for worship or service to God. This public approach was necessary because Peter had exhibited his hypocrisy before everyone, and the correction needed to match the public nature of his actions.

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Ga 2:14). Moody Press.

- a) What Peter had initiated created a public scandal and therefore deserved a public rebuke. Further, the defectors were not acting according to the truth of the gospel, that is, they were denying by their actions the truth that on the basis of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection Jews and Gentiles who believe are accepted equally by God. Paul therefore asked Peter before them all, "If you, who are a Jew, do not live like a Jew but like a Gentile, why on earth do you try to make Gentiles live like Jews?" (ph) It was a stinging rebuke. Peter's response is not recorded. He stood condemned. He was acting contrary to his own convictions, was betraying Christian liberty, and was casting a slur on fellow believers. Such behavior needed this severe reprimand.¹⁶
 - b) Having established that he was independent of Peter and the rest of the Jerusalem leaders, Paul showed his equality to them in God's power and authority. At this point, he recalled a time in which Peter failed to uphold the true gospel. First, Paul continued to demonstrate that he was not out to please men, not even the great Peter. Second, Peter was claimed as the great champion of Jewish Christianity (2:8).¹⁷
6. If you like a Jew live like the Gentile - Paul focused solely on the issue at hand. He confronted Peter by pointing out that, as a Jewish believer, Peter had previously lived and acted in daily life just as a Gentile would, before the arrival of the Jerusalem brethren.
 7. How is it Peter compel the Gentiles to live like Jews – Peter, through his actions and as a prominent leader in the church, persuaded—evidenced by Barnabas, who had brought Paul to the Gentiles and also went along with him—that the Gentile believers should adopt Jewish practices.
 - a) When Peter was eating with them, his action communicated a strong sense of acceptance and fellowship. Paul considers Peter's inconsistent behavior as an indirect way of forcing Gentiles to follow Jewish customs. The harm this might bring to these new Gentile Christians is immeasurable. This explains Paul's fierce reaction in challenging Peter. Arnold, C. E. (2002). Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon. (Vol. 3, p. 279). Zondervan.
 8. How is it Peter compel the Gentiles to live like Jews – We must be cognizant of how our actions can compel those around us feel forced to follow what we do, rather than what we say, potentially undermining the integrity of our message.

¹⁶ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Galatians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 595). Victor Books.

¹⁷ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [Tyndale concise Bible commentary](#) (p. 582). Tyndale House Publishers.