

**“And I oppose him to his face, because he stood condemned...”:  
Galatians 2:11-14 as a Model of Telling Truth to Power**

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**Abstract**

*Galatians 2:11-14 records Paul’s confrontation of Peter in Antioch. Because of the embarrassment that this incident presents to the legend of Pauline and Petrine traditions, attempts have been made in the history of its interpretation dating back to the Church Fathers to offer reconciliatory interpretations. This essay exposes Paul’s uncompromising confrontation of “the men from James”, and with them Peter their vacillating Patron, for engaging in an action that would have discredited “the truth of the Gospel”. It highlights how this incident helped in shaping the identity of the early Church and shows how imitating Paul’s courage in speaking truth to power may be among the possible antidotes to the realities of our time where corruption abounds (in the sacred as well as the profane arena) because of lack of courage to confront its principal perpetrators.*

**Keywords:** Paul, Cephas/Peter, Galatians, Jerusalem Conference, Incident in Antioch, Truth of the Gospel

**0. Introduction**

Galatians 2:11-14 is part of a long line of arguments deployed by Paul in defence of the legitimacy of his apostleship and the authenticity of his “truth of the Gospel”. Paul started the Letter with a defence of his apostleship by stating that his call was not of any human origin or commission, but by divine appointment (1:1). He rebuked as “false teachers” worthy of being anathematized/accursed those circulating among the Galatians preaching a distorted gospel (1:6-9). He rejected their attempts to force circumcision and law-observance upon his Gentile converts (Acts 15:1, 5; Gal 2:3-4); and countered their allegation that his

gospel is human-made and human-pleasing (1:10) by declaring that his turn-around was virtually independent of human beings, since Christ revealed Himself to him and in him (1:13-16). Rather than looking to the apostles in Jerusalem for approval for his message and ministry, he had little contact with them, visiting the Jerusalem Church only twice in 17 years (1:18; 2:1). Even at this, he did not even stay long; meeting only with three of the apostles – Peter, James, and John (cf. 1:18-19; 2:2, 9). Rather than seeking their approval, he only expressed the desire to work in harmony with them. In contrast to the Judaizers, who insisted that Titus be circumcised, the apostles did not demand it. On the contrary, they fully accepted Paul and Barnabas as partners in the gospel and offered them the “right hand of fellowship” (2:1-10).<sup>1</sup>

Galatians 2:11-14 is Paul’s last historical proof of both his independence and the authenticity of his “truth of the Gospel” as well as the logical continuation of his argument in favour of his apostleship in the first two chapters. Not only did he not seek the approval of the apostles (1:18-2:10); Paul actually rebuked them publicly when they were inconsistent with the “truth of the Gospel” (2:11-14).

Chronologically, the incident seems to follow the major events<sup>2</sup> in Paul’s argument which are introduced by *epeita* (then, next).<sup>3</sup> It is also the immediate *Sitz im Leben* of the theological discussion of Gal in 2:15-4:31. In the rest of the letter, Paul deployed theological arguments to show that the Judaizers<sup>4</sup> sought to use the OT law in a way that it was never intended to be used (Galatians 3-4) as well as proffered arguments to show that his “truth of the Gospel” can produce lives in accordance with the Spirit and apart from the law (Galatians 5-6).

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Ukwuegbu, “Paul’s Vision of “Neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal 3:28a) and the Quest for the Coming of Age of the Local Churches in Africa” in Annakutty V.K.

Findeis, Bernard O. Ukwuegbu et al (eds.), *He is not Far from any of Us: Festschrift für Hans-Juergen Findeis* (Bonn: Bier’sche Verlagsanstalt, 2014), 219-236 (222-223).

<sup>2</sup> The first visit to Jerusalem (1:18), Paul’s sojourn in Syria and Cilicia (1:21), and the second visit to Jerusalem (2:1).

<sup>3</sup> D. Matak, “Another Look at the Antioch Incident (Gal 2:11-14)”, in *Kairos - Evangelical Journal of Theology*, vol. VI. no. 1 (2012), 49-59 (50).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion, see the Excursus on the identity of Paul’s opponents in Bernard Ukwuegbu, *The Emergence of Christian Identity in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, *Arbeiten zur Interkulturalität* 4 (Bonn: Borengässer Verlag, 2003), 184-185.

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This essay reads this incident as among the clearest instances of speaking truth to power recorded in the NT, albeit within the framework of the early Church. Paul’s rebuke of Peter, the essay argues, was neither an effort to make Peter look bad nor to make Paul look superior. Rather, Paul’s entire motivation was to stand up for the “truth of the Gospel” when there was a danger to compromise on it by those “reputed to be pillars” (Gal 2:6) and their cohorts of cheerleaders. While the incident, at face value, was very uncomfortable for the early Church, it ended up being of tremendous help in defining the universal nature of the mission of the Church.<sup>5</sup> Such audacious move, the essay suggests, when replicated by the ‘Pauls’ of today, can also augur well for the mission of the Church in a time and society ridden with corruption, abuse of power and cowardice to challenge the powerful.

## 1. History of Interpretation of Galatians 2:11-14

The incident at Antioch has been variously interpreted through the centuries, with the most heated discussion occurring among the early Church Fathers in the first five centuries.<sup>6</sup> While the Ebionites blamed Paul<sup>7</sup> and Marcion attacked Peter,<sup>8</sup> Tertullian saw it as an instance of Paul’s overreaction.<sup>9</sup> The opinion Clement of Alexandria, deduced from the unfavourable tenor of the narrative as bearing upon Peter that the person meant is not the apostle but a certain Cephas, an inferior person and one of the seventy disciples, was refuted by Jerome<sup>10</sup> and Origen.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Roger D. Campbell, “Galatians 2:11-14 – Lessons from Paul’s Rebuke of Peter”, in <http://klangkirchenchrist.org/galatians-211-14-lessons-from-pauls-rebuke-of-peter>, accessed July 21, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> McHugh, J. “Galatians 2:11-14: Was Peter Right,” in M. Hengel/U. Heckel (eds.), *Paulus und das antike Judentum: Tübingen-Durham Symposium im Gedenken an den 50. Todestag Adolf Schlatters*, WUNT 58 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 319-327.

<sup>7</sup> See “The Clementine Homilies,” in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1950), 324.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest, Evans (ed.), *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.20.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, *Tertullian*, 5.3.

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History: The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 19 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), 1.12.

A popular theory that was started by Origen and elaborated by John Chrysostom<sup>12</sup> attempted to downplay the embarrassment the incident presents to the *legend* of Pauline and Petrine traditions. According to Chrysostom, the reproach was a prearranged scene by Paul and Peter made for the purpose, not of discrediting Peter, but those Jews that forced him to renegade from his earlier (and proper) behaviour.<sup>13</sup> McHugh's re-presentation of Chrysostom's arguments here merits detail quotation:

Peter, just as much as Paul, wished to set the visitors from Jerusalem free from any scruples over the law. So by allowing Paul to explain that even he, Peter, had lived in Gentile fashion until their arrival and was now being publicly blamed because he had been afraid to hurt their feelings, Peter had presented a powerful case for a rethinking of the legalist position; and by his silence, Peter pointed out to the people from James that Paul was right. Peter's acceptance of Paul's remonstrance would constitute a powerful argument for all other Jews to accept it in a spirit of equal generosity; and quite clearly, it would be a most effective plea to the Judaizing Christians in Galatia.<sup>14</sup>

Ingenious as this attempt seems, McHugh argues from the controversy that later ensued between Augustine and Jerome over the proper understanding of this incident, that Augustine was right in rejecting it and in insisting that the incident is a genuine conflict in which Paul established the higher claim of the "truth of the gospel" over the rank and office of Peter. As McHugh rightly concludes: "Certainly, in the Latin West and from this time onward there has been a general consensus that Peter, however well-motivated, made a bad mistake; and that Paul was right to reprove him."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Ruiz Bueno, *Contra Celso* (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1967), 2.1.

<sup>12</sup> John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Galatians*, MG 61, 633-648 as cited in McHugh, "Galatians 2:11-14", 319-327.

<sup>13</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 64.

<sup>14</sup> McHugh, "Was Peter Right?" 320ff.

<sup>15</sup> McHugh, "Was Peter Right?" 321-322.

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Equally unconvincing is the thesis that Peter was right and that although Paul at the time opposed him, Paul later came to accept and to recommend Peter’s manner of acting.<sup>16</sup> This thesis relies on later developments in the Antiochian Church and the connection of Peter with the gospel of Mark (especially with chapter 7 and its agreement with traditional Jewish purity laws).<sup>17</sup> It is also built on Paul’s later adaptation to Jewish practices as reported both in Acts 16:1-3 (Timothy’s circumcision) and in Acts 21:23-26 (Paul’s agreement to meet the expenses of the four Nazirites), on Paul’s statements as to his becoming a Jew to the Jews in order to win the Jews in (1 Cor 9:20-22) as well as on Paul’s earnest plea to those who are strong not to distress the weaker brethren over matters of food (Rom 14:1-3 and 15:1).

At stake here is an issue that fundamentally affects the “truth of the Gospel”, namely: whether the Gentiles are to be “*compelled to live as do the Jews*” in order to be justified (v. 14). What Peter and his cohorts seem to have compromised by their conduct is the freedom of the Gentile Christians “in Christ”. The matter is made worse by the fact that Peter had stood up for the true principle at the Jerusalem Conference, and for the liberal practice at Antioch before the arrival of the Judaizers. It is this tendency in Peter to subordinate expediency to principle, a tendency that is also not lacking among leaders (sacred or profane) today, that Paul addresses in this passage.

## 2. The Incident in Antioch<sup>18</sup>

Prior to this passage, Paul has narrated his own version of how the pillars and himself resolved the first crisis on the relationship between his overtly Gentile Christians and Christians of Jewish extraction (Gal 2:1-

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<sup>16</sup> McHugh, “Was Peter Right?” 322.

<sup>17</sup> See Dunn’s contribution to the discussion in Hengel/Heckel, *Paulus und das antike Judentum*, 328.

<sup>18</sup> For a richer discussion of many of these issues, see Ukwuegbu, *The Emergence of Christian Identity*, 219-221; J.D.G. Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch” in idem, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 129-183; J. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, SNTSMS 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 150-157; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 104-112.

10). But it does seem that the issue was only partially resolved in Jerusalem; otherwise it would not have reared its head once more in a very practical manner on how this affects table-fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. Again, Antioch was to be the catalyst of the controversy.

Antioch played a crucial role in the formation of the identity of the newly established spiritual community. According to Acts, “those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews” (Acts 11:19). After the mission was extended to the Greeks and “a great number that believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21–22), Barnabas was sent by the Church in Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:25–26). It is believed that Paul arrived in Antioch around 43 CE. From Antioch, three missionary campaigns commenced: 47–48 CE (Acts 13:1–3); 50–52 CE (Acts 14:35–36); and 53–57 CE (Acts 18:22–23). Thus, Antioch became the centre of the Christian Church’s outreach program. It was also in Antioch that the first serious disagreement arose between the Christians from Judaism and those with a Gentile background. This tension instigated the summoning of the Jerusalem Conference where the compromise was struck that allowed Gentiles to be admitted into the Christian community without circumcision and observance of the law.

Despite the Jerusalem compromise,<sup>19</sup> there were some Jewish Christians still concerned about the developments taking place in the Antiochian Church with respect to Gentile admission and who still retained the conviction that it was necessary for the Gentile converts to keep certain Jewish laws.<sup>20</sup> These *zealous* Judaizers went on to Antioch after the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 11:20–26) where they witnessed what appeared to them extraordinary awkward: i.e., the receiving of people into the Christian communion without circumcision. With their usual prejudice, they explained away (at least to their own satisfaction) the force of the Jerusalem Conference’ decision and demanded that the

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<sup>19</sup> The phrase Jerusalem Compromise is from Michael E. Okoronkwo, *The Jerusalem Compromise as a Conflict-Resolution Model*, *Arbeiten zur Interkulturalität 1* (Bonn: Borengässer, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> K.A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 49.

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Gentiles, at least, take on other law observances if they want to be part of the emerging Christian community.

Indeed, it can be said that in it was in Antioch that the Jerusalem compromise was put to its true and practical test. The issue at stake here is as high as it is volatile. Given the fact that the Gentiles could be accepted into the new community without circumcision in accordance with the Jerusalem compromise, what exactly would be their relations to the Mosaic Law? Would they also be excused from all the 613 commandments, including especially the sanctification of the Sabbath and the dietary laws? This is what was at issue in the incident in Antioch.

### **3. The Presumed Status Quo from the Jerusalem Compromise**

Paul begins his account by briefly stating the facts concerning the incident. It happened “when Cephas came to Antioch” (2:11). Determining the exactly dating of Peter’s arrival at Antioch has been shrouded in controversy.<sup>21</sup> According to Longenecker, the event took place “after the meeting narrated in 2:1–10”.<sup>22</sup> Paul does not state why Peter was in Antioch. A lot of suggestions have been made to this regard, ranging from an occasional stopover visit on the way to another place<sup>23</sup> to a final move from Jerusalem to Antioch on account of the unfavourable circumstances in Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup> There are even suggestions that the phrase in Acts 12:17: “And leaving he went to another place”, refers to leaving Jerusalem and moving to Antioch. This will imply that by the time under discussion, Peter had left the Jerusalem community under the pastoral care of James, the brother of the Lord, and moved to Antioch.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 24.

<sup>22</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Luke suggests several of such visits between Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 11:19-27; 14:26; 15:1ff, 22, 30; 18:22) that correspond to available Jewish sources. Cf. Betz, *Galatians*, 105, note 438; Kraeling, C.H., “The Jewish Community at Antioch”, in *JBL* 51 (1932), 130-160.

<sup>24</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 104-105.

<sup>25</sup> E. Haenchen, E., *Die Apostelgeschichte, neu übersetzt und erklärt*, KEK 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 380ff.; V. Martin, *A House Divided: The Parting of the Ways between Synagogue and Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 86.

Whatever is the reason, the arrival of Peter at Antioch generated a new problem. What will now obtain when the ‘apostle of the circumcision’ finds himself in a mixed community of the circumcised and uncircumcised? Given Paul’s theological perspective, his position on this is clear. There is no reason for Christians coming from different backgrounds but united “in Christ” (Gal 3:26-29) to avoid sharing food and company at dinner. Paul had no qualms in advocating that Jews should adapt themselves to Gentiles, and not vice versa, when it comes to sitting together at table, not only for ordinary meals, but also for the “Breaking of Bread” which was still celebrated as part of regular meals.

This practice of mixed table-fellowship was also considered proper by the Jewish members of the Antiochian community, irrespective of the fact that it implied the crossing of the line drawn by the Torah covenant as understood by their Jewish contemporaries. To them, this appeared natural, because it was understood to be the proper consequence of the dawn of the new age encapsulated in such formulas like “neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal 3:28) or rules like those found in Gal 6:15 and Gal 5:6.<sup>26</sup>

According to Paul’s narrative, Peter himself did not find any impropriety with this position either. Upon arriving in Antioch, and seeing how Jewish and Gentile Christians ate and socialized together, he too joined them. “For prior to the coming of certain men from James, *he used to eat with the Gentiles*” (Gal 2:12). The tense of the Greek verb translated as “used to eat” is imperfect, which implies that this was something of a habit. That Peter ate together with the Gentiles, certainly means that Peter and his other Jewish colleagues in Antioch had eaten the non-kosher food of the Gentiles; otherwise, there would have been no violation of the law at all.

Perhaps, Peter remembered how the Pharisees and scribes used to accuse Jesus by saying: “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). Again, in the remarkable vision which he saw before his visit to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48), he has learned that God designed to break down the wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles; and he familiarly associated and ate with them. This evidently means that he had disregarded the peculiar laws of the Jews about meats and drinks,

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<sup>26</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 107.

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and had eaten the common food which was in use among the Gentiles. In this, he showed his belief that all believers were to be regarded as on the same level.

#### **4. Peter’s Vacillation on account of Pressure from the Men from James**

All this, however, changed with the arrival of “certain men from James”. The identity of this group is a question that has attracted enormous literature in Pauline scholarship. Among the questions raised include whether they were sent by James, the brother of the Lord; whether they belonged to a group that used his name; whether they come from Jerusalem or somewhere else; what (if any) is their relation with the false brothers of Gal 2:4-5, etc. Probing into their identity is beyond the scope of the present inquiry. Sufficient here is to assume that irrespective of their origin or connection with the Jerusalem community, they were representing the traditional Jewish stance that insists on defining Christianity in terms of national and ethnic-oriented movement within Judaism, in opposition to Paul’s universal and broadening attempt.

Paul’s perspective, however right, was apparently new and untried. The delegates from Jerusalem had a different theology according to which the previous accords of the Jerusalem Conference has also confirmed the continued validity of Jewish rituals and customs for Christian Jews.<sup>27</sup> Since apparently there was no agreement regulating table fellowship, the Jewish Christians were caught in an embarrassing dilemma. Arguing from the standpoint of the Jerusalem compromise, they might have insisted that the separation of the mission to the Jews from that to the Gentiles would imply that Peter retains his Jewish way of life, and this includes, first of all, keeping the dietary and purity laws. As a result, cultic separation would have to be observed also during table-fellowship with Gentile Christians. Peter yielded to their arguments, convinced that given the theological presuppositions of the Jewish Christians he was

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<sup>27</sup> According to Hans D. Betz (“Paul between Judaism and Hellenism: Creating a Space for Christianity,” in *idem, Antike und Judentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze IV* {Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998}, 244-266), the situation at Antioch seems to presuppose that Gentile Christians were hosts and that Peter and other Jewish Christians were invited guests (257).

expected to represent, his table-fellowship was indefensible.<sup>28</sup> As a result, Peter and even Barnabas retreated to what they and the delegates from Jerusalem agreed to be a safe ground.

## **5. Paul Twofold Condemnation of Peter**

Peter's action was so grievous that Paul had no other option than to confront him (Peter) personally and publicly. "I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned" (v. 11). Peter was singled out because even in his wrong-doing, he was a leader. To correct Peter's conduct was to correct the problem. His action, and that of those who followed him, was clearly identified as sin; and Paul's boldness in rebuking Peter and the other Jewish Christians at Antioch was due to the seriousness of this sin.

### **5.1. Peter's Hypocrisy**

Paul was very passionate in his account of the effect of Peter's action:

But when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity (Gal 2:12-13).

Behind this is the idea that Peter's shift in position must have come as a result of the insinuations from the "men from James," i.e., he feared those who were of the circumcision (*phoboumenos tous ek peritomēs*). This was the real reason for Peter's cowardice. It was not that Peter had changed his views from the Jerusalem resolutions. It was pure fear of trouble to himself as in the denials at the trial of Christ. This is a sad illustration of Peter's characteristic trait of mind. We see in this act the same Peter who trembled when he began to sink in the waves (Matt 14:29); and the same Peter who denied his Lord at the time of the crucifixion despite an earlier pledge of allegiance even unto death (Mark 14:29).

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<sup>28</sup> As a matter of fact, both sides of the conflict might have based their conflicting positions on their different understanding of the Jerusalem compromise. See Betz, *Galatians*, 108.

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From the analysis of Paul’s use of language here,<sup>29</sup> it is evident that he was very enraged. Almost all the verbs he chose to describe the activities of Peter and his opponents were highly negative. Among the most significant are *hupestellen* from *hupostellō* (“to withdraw”) taken from the arsenal of military and political language;<sup>30</sup> and the accusation that Cephas ‘separated himself’ (*aphōrizen heauton*).<sup>31</sup> That both verbs are in the imperfect tense suggests a gradual change in Peter’s conduct, rather than a glaring, instantaneous change.

Paul was also very clear of the proximate effect of Peter’s action. Those Jews who were converted to Christianity and who had also been convinced that the obligation of the Jewish ritual had ceased, seeing Peter act this part, and also fearing those “of the circumcision,” separated themselves from the converted Gentiles and acted so as to convince the Jews that they still believed the law to still be of effect. It is probable that they were induced to do it by the example of Peter, as they would naturally regard him as a leader. Even Barnabas, Paul’s long-time companion in labour, was infected by their “double dealing”. That so much was at stake for Paul here can be seen from the fact that Paul did not hesitate, as a result of this singular incident, to part with Barnabas<sup>32</sup> and, most likely, with the entire Antiochian mission.

The double accusation of v. 13 using the verb *sunupekrithēsan* (acted insincerely) and the noun *tē hupokrisei* (insincerity/hypocrisy) should also be understood in line with Paul’s polemics. Parallel appearances of

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<sup>29</sup> P. Borgen, “‘Yes’, ‘No’, ‘How far?’: The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults,” in Engberg-Pedersen, T. (ed.), *Paul in His Hellenistic Background* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 30-59.

<sup>30</sup> Betz (*Galatians*, 108) points out that the verb occurs as a description of military and political manoeuvres of retreating to an inconspicuous or sheltered position. The term takes Cephas’ move to have been a tactical manoeuvre: he had the same theological convictions as Paul, but did not dare to express them.

<sup>31</sup> Betz (*Galatians*, 108) sees this as a Jewish technical term describing cultic separation from the unclean (cf. 2 Cor 6:14).

<sup>32</sup> Contrary to Luke’s account (cf. Acts 15:36-41), the reason for the separation between Paul and Barnabas was not the issue of whether or not to take John Mark along in their missionary journey, but as a result of the position adopted by Barnabas during the controversy in Antioch. Cf. M. Hengel/A.M. Schwemer, *Paulus zwischen Damaskus und Antiochen*, WUNT 108 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 313-340.

the wordings of the accusation suggest a dual background, one political<sup>33</sup> and the other theatrical.<sup>34</sup> The various usages of this word-stock in antiquity always imply a negative connotation. This is true, to a limited extent, for the classical authors; and almost without exception in the Septuagint, for the first-century authors like Philo and Josephus and elsewhere in the NT. Although not meaning the parade of ‘virtue as a disguise for wrongdoing’ dominant in its synoptic gospels’ usages, classical usages of hypocrisy suggest reprehensible play-acting, the disjunction of intention and action in serious matters.<sup>35</sup>

The effectiveness of the word choice comes out very clearly when applied to Cephas’ act of withdrawal. It conveys the sense that Peter, Barnabas and the other Jewish members are acting a part that does not accord with their true intentions as revealed earlier when they did engage in table-fellowship with the Gentiles. Peter here is now playing another role as before the arrival of the men from James, and with him “the other Jews”. Their earlier intentions and actions were in accord with the truth of the gospel, in which they exemplified the freedom of the Gentiles from the demands of the Mosaic Law which characterised Paul’s apostolate.<sup>36</sup> With their observance of, and compliance with the Jewish

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<sup>33</sup> Betz (*Galatians*, 109-110) cites an example from Polybius who made similar observation about human attitudes in the political sphere: “For all men are given to adapt themselves and assume a character suited to the times, so that from their words and actions it is difficult to judge of the principles of each, and in many cases the truth is quite overcast.”

<sup>34</sup> The Greek theatrical background of the hypocrisy accusation gives a meaning akin to “role-playing.” A classic example of this cited by Betz (cf. *Galatians*, 110) is Epictetus’ description of a certain individual trying to impersonate a Jewish identity: “For example, whenever we see a man halting between two faiths, we are in the habit of saying, ‘He is not a Jew, he is only acting the part’”. Such people he calls “ostensibly Jews, but in reality, something else, not in sympathy with our [i.e., their] own reason, far from applying the principles which we [i.e., they] profess, yet priding... upon them as being men who know them.” Cf. Epictetus, *Diss.*, 2,9, 20. The translation here is adopted from Betz, *Galatians*, 110.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 114; Engberg-Pedersen, T., “1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation”, in *JBL* 110 (4, ’92), 679-689 (688-689).

<sup>36</sup> Significant to note here is that even Luke’s Acts of the Apostles is unclear and in part contradictory on the evidence on Peter in this regard. According to Acts 10:14, he had never in the past eaten prohibited food, but after his vision and the gift of the Spirit, he

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food laws, Peter, Barnabas and the other Christian Jews have, sociologically speaking, given themselves out as champions of the continued validity of the Jewish symbolic universe with the inherent separation it maintains between Jews and Gentiles. This is more so because circumcision and observance of the law remain among the most characteristic points of references with which the Jews distinguished themselves from the uncircumcised Gentiles as the chosen people of God (cf. Acts 7:8).<sup>37</sup>

Paul’s open rebuke of Peter was based solely on the standard set by the gospel: “*When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel...*” (v. 14a). The fact that Paul describes the actions of Peter and the others in terms of infidelity to “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:14) is significant in determining the nature of their aberration. Paul has employed the phrase “the truth of the Gospel” only once in the entire Galatian correspondence (Gal 2:5). In this other context, the phrase refers to the true Gospel of freedom that the “false brothers” are falsifying in their advocacy of circumcision and the law (Gal 2:4).<sup>38</sup> By once more using this phrase in his account of the situation in Antioch, Paul presents the Antioch conflict as a conflict, not between two conflicting apostles, but about whether or not Peter and other Jewish Christians would submit to the independent authority of the one Gospel and embrace the symbolic universe that it introduces, as Paul has done during the moment of his paradigmatic change.<sup>39</sup> By withdrawing from table fellowship with the Gentile Christians, Peter and the other Jewish Christians are putting to doubt the equality that the community of those “in Christ” experienced at the moment of their initiation into Christ (cf. 3:26-29).

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did eat with Cornelius (10:48; 12:3). According to Acts 15:10, however, Peter found these regulations intolerable and presumably had not observed them; yet in the decree he consented to the prohibition of improperly slaughtered food (15:29).

<sup>37</sup> R. Heiligenthal, “Soziologische Implikationen der paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre im Galater am Beispiel der “Werke des Gesetzes,” in *Kairos* 26 (1-2, ’84), 38-53 (42).

<sup>38</sup> Philip F. Esler, “Making and Breaking an Agreement Mediterranean Style: A New Reading of Galatians 2:1-14,” in *Biblical Interpretations* 3 (3, ’95), 285-314 (306).

<sup>39</sup> J. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, SNTS.MS 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975), 154; Friedrich, Lang, “Paulus und seine Gegner in Korinth und in Galatien”, in Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger and Peter Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte - Tradition - Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 7. Geburtstag*, vol. 3. *Frühes Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 417-434 (429).

## 5.2. The Pressure of Peter's Bad Example

Paul's objection to Cephas' action is formulated as a dilemma in the form of a question stating his position as one of self-contradiction: "If you, though a Jew, live/are living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" Obviously, this dilemma is Paul's own evaluation. Interesting here is the literary formulation. The fact that Paul uses the present tense of the verb *zēs* ("you are living" or "you live") sharpens the point of Paul's attack. It insinuates that Peter's present manifestation of Jewish zeal in withdrawing from the Gentiles is merely a pretence, since his adoption of Gentile ways really represents his true position. Again, the present tense implies much more than an act of table-fellowship with Christian Gentiles. It suggests that the table-fellowship was only the external symbol of Cephas' total emancipation from Judaism. For a Jew to live like a Gentile is the same as to be outside the *boundaries of God's holy people and it means a loss of identity*.<sup>40</sup>

There is, however, a narrative gap in Paul's formulation of his accusation against Peter. How do we explain the transition from the report of Peter's 'passive' act of withdrawal to the 'active' accusation of compelling the "Gentiles to live like Jews"? One possible explanation (and the one adopted by Betz and most others) is to appeal to the argument of the pressure of bad example. According to this view, Paul's evaluation of Peter's activities could be taken as a *post factum* evaluation that assumes a number of intermediate considerations.<sup>41</sup> By his practice of eating with Gentile believers when he came to Antioch, Peter had already demonstrated that even as a Jew, he has complete liberty to "*live like a Gentile and not like a Jew*". In other words, his convictions permitted him to be free from Jewish food regulations. Separating himself now from table fellowship with the Gentile believers implies forcing Gentiles to *follow Jewish customs*. So, while Peter, a Jew, had the freedom to live like Gentiles, his recent act of separation from Gentiles

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<sup>40</sup> E.J. Christiansen, *The Covenant in Judaism and Paul: A Study of Ritual Boundaries as Identity Markers* (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1995), 96.

<sup>41</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 112.

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robbed them of their own freedom to live like Gentiles if they ever hope to remain in the same Church with the Jewish Christians.<sup>42</sup>

What is more? When he gave up the observance of the law, Peter also admitted that, as a Christian, one could be saved without the observance of the law. Returning to law observance cannot simply eliminate the first step of denying its necessity; it as well expresses the judgement that living outside the law, even for Christians, is the same as living like “sinners from the heathen” (2: 15-16). For Paul, therefore, Cephas, by his act of withdrawal, is explicitly or implicitly making a demand upon Gentiles to become partakers of the Torah covenant. By attempting to preserve the integrity of the Jewish Christians as Jews, he has destroyed the integrity of the Gentile Christians as believers in Christ. Instead of welcoming them as converts to Christianity, he wants to make them into converts of Judaism.<sup>43</sup>

## **6. Galatians 2:11-14 and the Quest for the Definition of Christian Identity**

Seen from the viewpoint of the identity question, one can argue that at stake in the entire discourse on the incident in Antioch is the question of the dominant identity for the new Christian community. Peter and those who followed his example ‘wanted to act out’ (in the language of Paul) two identities at the same time: one Jewish and another Christian. They might have supported their position with the argument that inasmuch as in accordance with the Jerusalem compromise, the Gentiles must not have to become Jews in order to become Christians, the Jews must not have to lose their Jewish identity as well.<sup>44</sup>

Paul, on the other hand, approaches the situation from another point of view. It is not about retaining or giving up particular identities. It is about recognizing a *common* identity within which all differentiating aspects of previous identities cease to apply. When identity conflict arises – having

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<sup>42</sup> The verb translated here as to “live like Jews” would be more accurately translated as “to become Jews”.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Betz, *Galatians*, 112.

<sup>44</sup> C.K. Barrett, “Paul: Councils and Controversies,” in Hagner, D.A. (ed.), *Conflicts and Challenges in Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 42-74 (54).

to choose between Jewish/Gentile on the one hand, and the Christian identity on the other – Paul insists that the Christian identity should dominate over the divisive ethnic identities of Jews and Gentiles. For him, belief in the centrality of the death of Christ and faith in Him as the way to righteousness have broken down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. This breaking-down of barriers was powerfully symbolized in mixed table-fellowship. To discontinue such a practice or demand circumcision as the price for its continuance inevitably means opposing a basic incident and effect of the salvific nature of Christ’s death.

Paul has never been a half measure man. For him, life has always been lived in its margins, the margins of Judaism and the margins of Christianity. His pre-Damascus life had been exemplary with regard to zeal for the law and attempts to beat his recalcitrant Jewish brothers and sisters back to shape in the preservation of the ethnic and ritual purity of his father/motherland. But his Damascus encounter led him to the realisation that “in Christ” all the divisive dimensions of ethnic identities have been superseded. His acceptance of Christ meant a willingness to surrender the Jewish heritage he had previously valued as of primary significance. Precisely what he had done on account of “the truth of the Gospel” is what his Jewish colleagues find difficult to undertake.<sup>45</sup> For him, by their action, by their – so to say – wanting to cling to their former identity as Jews, they were not acting in consistency with “the truth of the Gospel.” Paul had no other option than to condemn Peter in so strong and polemic terms (v. 14).

Direct information on the outcome of the incident at Antioch is rare, because Paul, most glaringly, is silent about who won the battle. Subsequent events in his career, however, provide some clues. Paul soon undertakes lengthy mission into Asia Minor and Europe without Barnabas.<sup>46</sup> He returns to Antioch only once for a brief visit (Acts 18:22). He never wrote to the Antiochians and never mentioned Syrian Antioch again in his letters. We can reasonably infer from these chains of events that Paul lost the argument, a loss that he will not only decry in

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<sup>45</sup> Jonas Holmstrand, *Markers and Meaning in Paul: An Analysis of 1 Thessalonians, Philipians and Galatians*, Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series, 28 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997), 154-155.

<sup>46</sup> Hengel/Schwemer, *Paulus zwischen Damaskus und Antiochien*, 329.

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strong terms, but one that will lead to his radical isolation from the Jerusalem Church and to the beginning of his independent missionary activities (cf. Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:15-16).<sup>47</sup> Convinced that he had received a special mission from the risen Jesus himself, he started crisscrossing Asia Minor and Greece in an independent mission and with new fellow workers,<sup>48</sup> forcing the Jesus Movement to leave the bosom of mother Israel and establish a number of Gentile churches alongside the Church of the Circumcision.

The resultant break with Jewish Christianity and with mainstream Judaism was not an easy decision for Paul to make. On the contrary it was one he would rather have avoided but could not on account of “the truth of the Gospel”. Paul, however, did not sever his relationship with either the Jerusalem Church or with the members of his race. With the Church of the Circumcision, he remained in contact through the collection<sup>49</sup> earlier on agreed in the first meeting as an expression of *koinonia*; and with his brothers and sisters by birth through several efforts he made in each of the places he went to speak to them in their synagogues.<sup>50</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

Galatians 2:11-14 describes Paul’s confrontation of Peter for his hypocritical behaviour. Though Peter has declared agreement that salvation is by faith in Christ and not by the law, he was reluctant to live

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<sup>47</sup> Bend Wander, *Trennungsprozesse zwischen Frühem Christentum und Judentum im 1. Jh.n.Chr.*, TANZ 16, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 199), 208; Lang, “Paulus und seine Gegner”, 420.

<sup>48</sup> D. Zeller, “Die Entstehung des Christentums”, in *idem* (ed.), *Christentum I: Von den Anfängen bis zur Konstantinischen Wende*, Die Religionen der Menschheit 28 (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln: Kohlhammer, 2002), 93.

<sup>49</sup> J. Gnllka, “Die Kollekte der paulinischen Gemeinden für Jerusalem als Ausdruck ekklesialer Gemeinschaft”, in R. Kamplingand T. Söding (eds.), *Ekklesiologie des Neuen Testaments: Für Karl Kertge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 301-315 (313).

<sup>50</sup> Heiligenthal, “Soziologische Implikationen”, 39. There is strong evidence (both from Acts (14:1-6; 17:1-15; 18:4-7; 21:21, 28) and from Paul’s letters (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 5:11; 4:29; 6:12-13; 1Thess 2:15; 2 Cor 11:24) to suggest that Paul was treated with very great suspicion in the Diaspora as a Jew who undermined Jewish fidelity to the law. The synagogue beatings suggest that Paul tried to maintain his contact with the Diaspora communities, but was convicted on several occasions for serious breaches of the law.

out this truth before disapproving others. His choice to step away from eating with Gentiles led all the Jewish Christians in the room to do the same. For the sake of the “truth of the Gospel”, Paul has to oppose Peter to his face.

The record of this painful incident, while placing Paul’s apostolic authority in the strongest light and therefore germane to his purpose in the opening chapters of his letter, is a precious heritage of the Church and an everlasting monument of the grace of God. Despite the disagreement, Paul never attacked Peter’s apostolic authority. Neither did he question Peter’s position in the Christian Church. Similarly, it seems that Peter, from all indications, was never that mad at Paul’s admonitions. Both apostles had graduated from the school of humility and were courageous enough to endure hardship for Christ’s sake.<sup>51</sup>

For those overtly worried about the harsh nature of Paul’s confrontation, it suffices to remark that the two great apostles were at heart agreed, taught and influenced by the same Spirit, and zealous for the same truth. This is evident by the touching allusion that Peter, or whoever wrote in his name,<sup>52</sup> subsequently made of Paul:

Look on our Lord’s patience as the opportunity he is giving you to be saved, just as our dear brother Paul wrote to you, using the wisdom that God gave him. This is what he says in all his letters when he writes on the subject. There are some difficult things in his letters which ignorant and unstable people explain falsely, as they do with other passages of the Scriptures (2 Pet 3:15-16).

This remark is all the more striking because the letter in which it occurs is probably addressed to the Galatian converts among others. Who knows, may be coming to grasp with the harsh condemnation of Paul for

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<sup>51</sup> Matak, “Another Look at the Antioch Incident”, 57.

<sup>52</sup> 2 Peter is traditionally attributed to Simon Peter of Galilee. And according to Patrick J. Hartin (“James, First Peter, Jude, Second Peter”, in *New Collegeville Bible Commentary* {Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2006}, 57), in spite of the many researches that suggest otherwise, contemporary scholarship has not successfully refuted the traditional position on the subject matter as regards Peter being the author. For opposing view, see Duane F. Watson and Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 135.

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the Antioch incident was among the “difficult things” that Peter/the author of 2 Peter had to swallow. This notwithstanding, he still was able to recognise that Paul wrote “using the wisdom that God gave him”. How different will things be in our Church and in our society should those in authority learn to recognise that not all hard-truths-tellers mean evil; and that some are also partners with them in the task of advancing the “truth of the Gospel”?

If there is anything that this incident brings to light, it is the legitimacy of the right and duty of protest against authority (sacred or profane), even the highest, when Christian truth and principle are endangered. From what is happening in our Church and in our society, it is obvious that Christians of this generation lack the kind of courage manifested by Paul. This is more so given the top-down authority structure under which most of us operate as members of the Church and citizens of our society. The fact that our identity and self-worth are oftentimes determined by the expectations of significant others, especially those who have positions of authority, makes imitating Paul a very difficult task today. For many, being perceived as a loyal soldier in one’s thinking and external behaviour is of vital importance. As such, much care is taken to guard against personal convictions that are incongruent with the controlling institutional authority culture. The result is the tendency to sing the praises of everybody in authority, and to avoid all instances of telling hard truths to those in power. How else could we explain the pervasive and persistent corruption in and outside the Church, if not by acknowledging that everybody is doing his/her best to compromise cherished Christian values for the sake of personal expediency? Paul’s courageous stand in the text under review should inspire us to take our own stand against those who repeat Peter’s mistake today, in the Church as well as outside the Church.

Any such attempt at speaking the truth to power, especially in the Church, however, should not be based on one’s position, and never on personal convictions, preferences or perspectives. It must always be based on God’s principles. In Gal 2:1-14, it was the principle of “the truth of the Gospel” that warranted the rebuke, even when those in error were those who held the position of authority. In the same way, Christians are called to be men and women of principle who seek to protect “the truth of the Gospel”; regardless of our position, and regardless of the position of those whom we must rebuke.