

During the time I worked with my dad over a summer and Christmas break I got a chance to see what he did every day. He's an electrician, but not in the way you normally think. He works at a factory where they build the machines that make diapers. My dad builds and wires electrical panels that power those machines. I was only a college student with no electrical experience. But being around the machines I had to know about safety. When it comes to safety around electricity there's only one way to do it right. You either take the necessary safety precautions or really bad things happen.

It might seem strange having a story of one apostle opposing another apostle. Couldn't they get along? What was the big deal? Actually this opposition was extremely important. Even more important than safety precautions around electricity. Everyone needed the truth. **There was only one way to righteousness.**

Peter was the disciple who wanted to and did walk on water by a miracle of Jesus. It was Peter who boldly confessed that Jesus was the Christ. Peter also denied Jesus three times. But Jesus restored Peter. Forgiven and free Peter became an important leader in the early church. Peter's faith was strong. He traveled to Antioch, a second hub for Christianity north of Jerusalem. In Antioch some Jews as well as some non-Jews, or Gentiles, became Christians. Peter was a Jew. Normally Jewish laws would have meant staying away from Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles under Jewish law were forbidden to eat together. It would be like OU fans and OSU fans eating together on gameday, and even worse. But he exercised his freedom in Christ to live and move and eat among Christians of all kinds. **"He used to eat with the Gentiles."** A strong Jewish Christian eating with Gentile Christians made a huge statement. All believers were all equal in Christ.

Something changed when a group came from Jerusalem. Suddenly Peter didn't act the same. **"Certain men came from James...when they arrived, [Peter] began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles."** We just said Christians had freedom. So Peter was free in Christ to not eat with the Gentile Christians, choosing instead to follow the old Jewish law. He had that freedom. The problem was he had eaten with Gentiles so freely, publically declaring by his actions that the Jewish laws of keeping separate from Gentiles didn't apply anymore. Following that law and separating didn't make anyone right before God. It seemed that Peter was afraid these men from Jerusalem would carry word back and the group known as the circumcision group would find out. That group was a group of Jews who had become Christian but then felt the pull and tug of the old Jewish laws. They combined Jesus with the laws and said you needed both. Basically they believed there were two ways to righteousness, Jesus plus the law. Peter was afraid of what trouble they could give him, so he pulled back. It didn't go unnoticed.

Why was this such a big deal? So Peter didn't eat with Gentiles anymore. Who Peter ate with wasn't the big deal. This was a matter of law and gospel. Paul **"saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel."** Peter's action done in fear would give the impression the law was actually necessary to be saved. His actions would tell people, or at least confuse people, into thinking you had to be Jewish in order for God to like you and declare you righteous. Peter seemingly hadn't changed his mind. But he was a big figure in the early church. His actions would be studied and copied like people watch the president or members of congress. If people started thinking they had to go back to the laws of God and that those laws could in fact make people righteous before God, then what was Jesus for? If law could save why need the gospel? False impressions that the law can save and the gospel might be worthless, that's a very big deal. Paul had to say something for the truth.

I don't know that we have a problem with going out into the world and changing our minds about whether the law can save us or not. We learn and we reinforce the truth from the Bible very clearly that we can't be saved by the law. Do this, don't do that, doesn't get us any closer to God. Doesn't make us righteous before him. But...we may not change our minds, but our nature pulls us that direction. We want to believe deep down that actions we take, ways we live, the laws we keep are important. We may easily project confusion about the law. When someone sins against us we know only the gospel saves them and us. But we tell our kids they have to make up for what they've done wrong. We tell coworkers they need to work our extra shifts so we're square again. We tell friends we're going to have to wait to see if we can forgive them. By holding out for right actions we give the impression forgiveness is based at least in part on what we do, laws we keep. We give the impression that right standing before God only happens after certain conditions have been met.

We can even become hypocritical about old traditions like Peter. We know and believe one way, but our actions tell a completely different story. We know and believe that worship in certain styles isn't commanded by God. But by our actions we can leave the impression that if worship isn't in the style we like it's somehow not worship. We believe we have freedom in Christ. But we might give the impression by what we say that smoking cigarettes is sinful or watching TV is sinful or not giving a certain proportion of our money to church is sinful. It might not be loud and in people's faces. But the impression is left that some laws are just necessary to follow if we want to prove we're Christians. Traditions becomes law and law becomes gospel, and suddenly what we believe might not match up with what we say or do about the one way to get righteous before God.

My dad taught me proper behavior around electricity. He impressed upon me safety first. It's a big deal because touching the wrong part or doing the wrong thing at the wrong time could knock out power to the building or worse kill me. It was truth I needed to hear. Paul stood before Peter in front of everyone because this was a big deal. The truth had to be said. No one, even an apostle, was above needing to hear the truth. Peter's actions were wrong and needed correcting, not just for his sake, but for the sake of everyone in the church. So Paul took Peter to the truth.

Growing up with the law of God, Jews knew the law couldn't make them right before God. Its rules, sacrifices, eating regulations, all of it wouldn't make them righteous. **"We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ."** Faith in Christ was the only thing that justified a person; that is declared them not guilty before God and therefore righteous. Because of this God led them to put their trust in Christ. Observing the law would never make them righteous before God. They could only be justified by faith in Jesus. Paul said three times the law would never make them righteous. He said three times only faith in Christ declared them righteous. That's as clear as he could make the truth. Law never saves. Faith in Christ only saves.

A system of rules, the law, old traditions will never make you righteous before God. **"So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."** Christ kept the law for you. He kept it in your place. He was sentenced to death, crucified that you might live. Connected to his crucifixion the law is dead to you as a way to be saved. You are only declared righteous, free from sins, perfect before God through Christ. God poured out his grace on you. He works trust in your heart to believe what Christ did was for you. **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."** The truth of the gospel is that you died when Christ died. You live because Christ lives. And Christ lives in you declaring you righteous before God.

Law and gospel can't be mixed. Faith and works don't mix. Saved by works and saved by Christ don't mix. The gospel with its message of saved by faith through Christ is the only thing that works. Content of faith is key. Faith in what? Faith in Christ. Only Christ. **"The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** The truth is that you have been declared righteous before God through Christ, through faith connected to Christ.

Connected to Christ gives you proper viewpoint on traditions, laws, and rules. Worship style is a Christian freedom. The style can't save, the content does. Laws are seen for what they can provide. Stability in society, curbs to behavior, a guide for how to live life pleasing to God. Rules are good for disciplining children and keeping drivers safe. All of these are seen through Christ. God's love in Christ motivates us to obey. You want to obey, you want to live according to the rules. Not because it makes you righteous before God, but because God says it pleases him. You live a new life in Christ. Christ loved you, now you want to show love for him. It's the new life with Christ living within you that allows you to live by faith in the Son of God.

I was grateful for what my dad taught me. I knew basics about electricity, but hearing the truth from your dad, it sank in. To this day I respect electricity more because he taught me it was a big deal. Paul opposed Peter because it was a big deal. Faith was on the line, not just for Peter but for others too. Paul defended the truth of the gospel. The truth that there's **only one way to righteousness.** That's through Christ alone by faith alone.