

Fight Against Compromising the Gospel

Galatians 2:11-14

Sunday, October 5th, 2025

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Scripture

Galatians 2:11-14

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. [13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Let's Pray

Introduction

Listen to the following two scenarios.

1. A boss walks into their Monday morning staff meeting and gives an hour-long speech about the mission of the company, direction for the next year, and talks through all of the hard work that everyone will need to do so that they can achieve their goals.

Then, in the following weeks, he's always late, never seems to dress professionally, and is always playing Candy Crush in his office with his feet up on his desk.

Despite his impassioned speech, how do you think his actions will begin to affect those workers?

They probably won't take the mission and the message seriously, and it will affect the quality of their work.

2. Imagine that it came to light that renowned climate activist Greta Thunberg was an avid consumer of store-bought bottled water, even though many in that community consider microplastics to be one of the leading causes of climate change.

What would that do to the validity of her message?

People wouldn't be able to take her or her message seriously because she doesn't seem to be living in line with what she believes.

The point of giving you these two scenarios is to highlight the truth that a mission and message can be severely compromised by how we live.

Or to put it another way: **The integrity and power of our words and beliefs can be damaged by what we do.**

This same principle can also apply to the heart of our faith which is the **one true message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

[FCF] Because the truth is that we all struggle with sin. We struggle with things like the fear of what others think of us or with a judgmental attitude toward those who seem to live differently than we do. And, if we aren't careful, these kinds of issues can either knowingly or unknowingly lead us to do things that compromise the message of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins.

In fact, this is the same kind of compromise that happened in our passage for this morning, as Paul recounts, for the Galatians, his confrontation with Peter in Antioch.

However, before we get into the passage and the main point for today, I want to take a moment to give you a brief overview of where we have been so that you will be able to see how this message fits into the main idea of the book of Galatians.

Look with me at the following slide: (And I want to thank Eric Mattie for taking the last 4 messages on Galatians synthesizing them into this easy visual.)

Here's what we've learned so far:

- We are not justified by works of the law, but by faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16).
- This means that we are saved and made right with God (Say this with me): **By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone...Not through adding our efforts or work.**
- Paul's concerns thus far have included:
 - The reality that false teachers exist in our hearts and in the world. Therefore, we need to protect our hearts and reject false teachers.
 - The good news that the gospel isn't manmade, for Paul received it directly from God.
 - That the unified gospel must be preserved so that it can be proclaimed to all people.

The one true gospel, the one that actually has power to save people, must be unchanged, protected, and preserved. **This is especially important to Paul as false teachers have come to Southern Galatia preaching, a different gospel, the Christ plus works gospel.**

In light of all of this, our main point for today is similar to the first 4 messages. But instead of focusing on how we are to preserve or protect the gospel from being altered, it will focus on making sure that we are not compromising its integrity.

Our main point is this:

[Proposition] Because there is only one unchanging gospel that saves people, we need to fight against compromising its message by our actions.

And as we walk through this short scene and confrontation in Antioch, we will identify 4 ways that we can and should **fight against compromising the gospel by what we do.**

Live in ways that are consistent with its truth.

Galatians 2:11-12

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Like last week, we are going to begin by going back to the book of Acts so that we can feel the full weight of what is happening here. If you would turn with me to Acts 10:1-5:

[1] At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, [2] a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. [3] About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." [4] And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. [5] And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.

We have this man named Cornelius who is both a Gentile and is a Roman commander. However, Luke tells us that he is also a devout man, which means he is a believer in Yahweh, and he gives generously and prays often.

One day, at about 3:00pm, God comes to him, and through an angel tells him that his giving and prayers have been accepted by God, and that he is supposed to go to Joppa to get a Jew named Peter.

Then, if we continue in Acts 10, we learn that the very next day, Peter, himself, also receives a vision from God.

In this vision, a sheet is let down from heaven that contains all kinds of animals, and a voice tells him to rise and eat. Of course, Peter being a good Jew says, ***"No Lord, I can't eat anything that is common or unclean."*** This is in line with Jewish dietary laws that are laid out in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

But the voice replies: ***"What God has made clean, do not call common."***

Now, if that wasn't perplexing enough, that same vision comes to him 3 more times. So now, he's sitting on a roof and is trying to make sense of what he has just seen.

But then God speaks to him again and says, **“Hey Peter, there are three men downstairs waiting for you. Go down, meet them, and go with them right away.”**

So he gets up, goes downstairs, finds out they are from this Gentile Centurion Cornelius. And even though he probably didn't feel comfortable about mixing with Gentiles (because in general Jews and Gentiles didn't mix socially, because Gentiles were seen as unclean), he went with these men because God told him to go.

Once Peter gets to Caesarea, he meets Cornelius, here's about his vision from God, and then finally understands what God was trying to tell him. As he says in Acts 10:34-35:

[34] ...“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, [35] but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Which means that he now understands that Gentiles are not unclean and can be saved just like Jews.

This leads Peter to preach the gospel to Cornelius and his house, the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they all get baptized, and he goes and reports the good news to the church in Jerusalem.

So then, with this information in mind, when we look at Galatians 2:11-12, it not only helps us to understand the situation, but it helps us to feel the full weight of Peter's actions.

Again, it says in Galatians 2:12:

[12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Peter, when he came to Antioch, was willing to eat with Gentiles because he not only knew that he was free in Christ to do so, but that Gentiles were no longer considered unclean because God had also granted them freedom and eternal life in Christ.

This means that Peter fully understood that they were both saved by Christ and were equal brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God. So it makes a ton of sense that he was associating with them, eating fellowship meals with them, and more than likely partaking of the Lord's supper with them.

But then come these men from James. And whether it was in an instant or over a certain period of time, he decides to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles.

Where before he was treating them like they were equals in the family of Christ, he's now distancing himself and is treating them like second class Christians, or worse, like unbelievers.

But the important thing to realize here is that Peter's understanding of the gospel hadn't changed. **He still knew that salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.**

And yet, because of these men from James, he made a decision to live in a way that was not only contrary to that gospel but also compromised the integrity of its message.

Because he was communicating through his actions that the Gentiles needed something else besides faith in Christ alone, to be full participants, with the Jews, in the body of Christ.

Application

What about us? Are there things that we each do that subtly communicate false truths about the gospel? Consider the following:

Do you find yourself continually working for the approval of other people when you already know that you are fully accepted by Christ?

Are there certain brothers and sisters that you try to avoid, even in this church, despite the fact you are united with one another in Christ?

Are you using **unbiblical standards** of “so called” right living to measure whether or not a person is saved, or a good Christian, even though you know that we are saved by “faith alone” and not by our works?

If you could identify yourself in one of the following questions, or others like it, then you, like Peter, might be compromising the integrity of the gospel by the way you are living.

Therefore, I want to encourage each of us to continually examine how we are living to make sure that **the gospel we believe and the gospel we live are in line with one another.**

Because if they are not, it not only will hamper our ability to share Christ with others, but as we will see in our third point in a little bit, it can lead other people astray.

But before we get there, I want to take a couple minutes to talk about the root of Peter’s problem. Meaning, what is it that led him to compromise the gospel in the first place? Look with me again at Galatians 2:11-12.

Keep a close watch on your own heart.

Galatians 2:11-12

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

So I freely admit, we don’t have all the details about the men from James. But if they are from the Apostle himself, then it’s very unlikely that he would have sent men from the circumcision party.

For the circumcision party is the same as the Judaizers. **They are Jews who claim that Gentiles need to believe in Christ and follow the mosaic laws and its regulations in order to be saved.**

And if you remember last week, James, Peter, and John stood with Paul and Barnabas against them and their “false gospel” when they tried to require Titus to be circumcised (Gal. 2:4).

So, there is a high likelihood that the men from James and the circumcision party or two different sets of people.

However, what Paul does make clear is that the root of Peter’s decision to act in a way that compromised the gospel is fear. **He was afraid of the circumcision party.**

Unfortunately, Paul doesn’t fully explain why he’s afraid of them, but here’s at least one plausible reason. It comes from Timothy George in his commentary on Galatians:

1. He’s afraid that devout Jewish Christians (Judaizers), in Judea, will be appalled by the fact that he’s so openly mixing with Gentiles. Therefore, he is worried that his position in the Jerusalem church will be jeopardized.

Peter was afraid of the repercussions that would result from his association with the Gentiles. In fact, this is the same kind of fear that led him to deny Christ when Jesus was arrested in Luke 22.

Now, if you remember that story, in verses 31, 32, and 34 of Luke 22, Jesus tells Peter that he will certainly turn away and deny him three times. But Peter insists that he won’t. As he says in Luke 22:33:

[33] ...“Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”

But we know how the story goes. Jesus is arrested, and three different times Peter denies being associated with Jesus because he’s afraid of the consequences that would come upon him.

Now, thanks be to God that Christ restored Peter, and used him in mighty ways to be a pillar of the first church in Jerusalem.

And yet, it’s pretty clear that Peter long standing struggle with fear, and particularly, his struggle with the fear of man, **is causing him to make gospel compromising choices.**

Application

I wanted to point this out because this is something that many of us struggle with. Whether we realize it or not, there are so many times when our choices are driven by fear and especially by the fear of what others think of us.

Choices surrounding how we spend our money, the people we choose to associate with or not associate with, at times our political stances, how we parent our children, etc...

And yet, we can lose sight of the most important question which is this: **“are our choices and actions in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ and are they driven by a desire to honor Him?”**

Now, there may be times where we choose to limit our actions so that we don’t make another believer stumble (that can be biblical), but the root desire in all of our decisions and actions shouldn’t be the opinions of others (**this includes my opinion as your pastor**).

Rather our greatest desire should be that the gospel isn’t something that we just talk about or say we believe, but that it is also lived out in our actions.

This means that we need to continually keep watch on our hearts. Because this side of eternity, there are sinful tendencies that each one of us will have to fight against, or we will end up compromising the gospel and our witness by our actions.

And as I said earlier, when we do this, it can have disastrous consequences and can lead others astray. This brings us to our third point.

Realize that our actions can lead other believers astray.

Galatians 2:13

[13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

This is what I like to call the face palm part of this passage. It’s the point where you just want to smack your hand against your face and say, **“guys, what in the world are you doing?!”**

I mean, Paul and Barnabas had been teaching and leading this mixed church for the past year. They had been helping them to apply the truth of the gospel within their lives, and they were getting these ethnically diverse believers to a place where they were able to see one another as brothers and sisters who were united together by faith in Christ.

And now, all of their hard work was in danger of being torn apart and meaningless.

Because when Peter, out of fear, chose to separate from the gentiles, his actions led all of the other Jews in that church to act **hypocritically** like he did.

The word **hypocritically** in verse 13 means that they were **“play acting.”** Like Peter, these Jews weren’t acting based on their genuine beliefs and convictions.

Instead, when they saw Peter change his tune on eating with Gentiles, they became afraid of what would happen to them if they didn’t follow suit. So, because of their own fear, they followed along with Peter, separated from the Gentiles, and compromised the gospel.

And to make matters worse, despite all the work that they had done together over the past year, even Barnabas, **who definitely knew better**, was led astray by Peter and the Jews to separate in the same way.

I can only imagine how much it must have hurt the Gentiles to first have the leader of the Jerusalem mother church turn away from them, followed by their own brothers and sisters in Christ. But then to have one of their leaders, maybe even someone who led them to Christ, turn away from them must have been confusing and heart-breaking.

If you didn't already realize it, the church in Antioch is in a pretty rough place. And if something doesn't change, the faith of the Jews, the Gentiles, and even possible future converts could be damaged, and the church could find itself in the midst of an ethnic split.

- These Jews might try to justify their actions and the actions of Peter and Barnabas and they might even begin to agree with the Judaizers that the Gentiles do need to be circumcised in order to be true believers.
- The Gentiles on the other hand could become angry enough to leave and split the church, and could begin to see any form of rules or right living as evil. So instead of believing that they are saved by Christ so that we would follow Christ, they might begin to preach the antinomian gospel which says, if you are saved by Christ, then you can live however you like. **(Your actions don't matter at all.)**
- And if this happened, those who would come to faith (whether they be Jew or Gentile) would end up believing a version of the gospel that isn't actually the gospel. **Which means that they would be believing in a false god who can't actually save them.**

Now, I know what your thinking, **“Well pastor Ryan, that didn't happen here, so everything your saying is merely a guess. You don't actually have hard evidence for what you're saying.”** You're right. I don't really know what would have happened had this situation not been dealt with.

But I do have 2000 plus years of church history to know that churches, movements, and denominations, have been utterly ravaged and destroyed by the sinful actions of their people and leaders.

Not to mention the huge toll it can take on the faith of individual believers.

Application

So even though you may not be a church leader like I am, we all need to remember that our actions are either substantiating or denying the truth of the gospel that we say we believe. **Which means that if we are giving into gospel compromising behavior, then we are running the risk of leading others away from Christ and into sin by those choices.**

Which leaves us with one final question. **How should we respond to gospel compromising behavior when we see it, either in the lives of individuals or within a church?**

Stand against gospel compromising behavior even when it's hard.

Galatians 2:11, 14

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

[14] But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

We don't know this for sure, but many scholars seem to believe that Paul was away from the church when all this was happening. If that's true, then this must have been a huge shock to see the fall out of Peter's decision when he returned.

In fact, for all we know, when Paul got back Peter and Barnabas could have tried to convince him of why they were doing the right thing. **But instead of following along with them, Paul was able to see their actions for what they really were, which is gospel compromising sin.**

This left him with no choice but to take a very public stand against Peter, because he was committing a very public sin. So, Paul calls him out right to his face and in front of everyone, because Paul knew that his conduct **"was not in step with the truth of the gospel."**

He basically shouts at Peter and says: **"You hypocrite. You've been living like a Gentile the whole time you were here. And now that these men came, you are trying to act like you are some sort of pious Jew. And because you're doing this, you are forcing the Gentiles to do the same thing in order to have fellowship with you guys again. Don't you see that your actions are promoting the gospel of Christ plus works? How dare you compromise the true gospel like this!"**

Now, for most of us, that probably sounds incredibly scary and hard, and it is. Any time you stand up for truth, when others are compromising, it will be hard, but it is necessary.

And even though Paul never gives us the outcome of his confrontation with Peter, we know that God used it for their good and the good of the gospel.

- After this incident, Barnabas stood with Paul for the truth of the gospel when the Judaizers came down to Southern Galatia in Acts 15.
- Also in Acts 15, we see that Peter is instrumental in the Jerusalem council's decision to not require Gentiles to be circumcised.
- Church in Antioch continued to thrive, and throughout the rest of Acts served as a launching point for Paul's missionary journey's.

All of this was made possible, at least in part, because Paul was willing to confront gospel compromising sin within Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the Jews in Antioch.

Conclusion

So my encouragement for all of us is to be on guard and to stand against gospel compromising behavior even when it's hard.

Stand against it in your own life and be sure that your actions are in line with the gospel. Keep a close watch on your heart and make sure that you are being motivated by Christ and not by the opinions of others.

Realize that your actions and the actions of others can negatively affect the faith of others and our ability to preach the gospel.

Finally, when you see others living in gospel compromising ways, love them enough to confront their sin and believe that God, by the power of his Spirit will bring them to repentance.

Because eternity is real and Christ is coming. Therefore, we want to make sure that the gospel we preach is the same gospel we live, so that God, by his Spirit, will use our faithful witness to draw people to the true gospel of Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. **Amen.**

Let's pray.