

We will be continuing our series on Galatians this morning. Before we get started let's back up a bit and review what lead up to this morning's text. Galatians began with Paul establishing his Gospel credentials, his steadfastness to preserve the Gospel, and his acceptance by early leaders of the church. And while he was accepted, Paul's ministry to the Gentiles has created some tensions with Judaizers in Jerusalem who wanted to impose the law upon Gentile Christians. In last week's message, Paul confronted these false brothers and gained the support of the early church leaders in a way that preserved both the unity of the church and the essential truth of the Gospel.

Introduction



An awkward incident...

Confronting by the Gospel - Galatians 2:11-21

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Having established an agreement on the freedom the Gospel gave to the Gentile believers we can understand how Paul would have expected that it was an issue that was settled. But as we will see shortly, Paul records what I might call an awkward moment that demonstrates there are still lingering issues with living out the Gospel. Perhaps we have all experienced a similar moment in our lives where the hope we had put in others brought disappointment instead of joy.

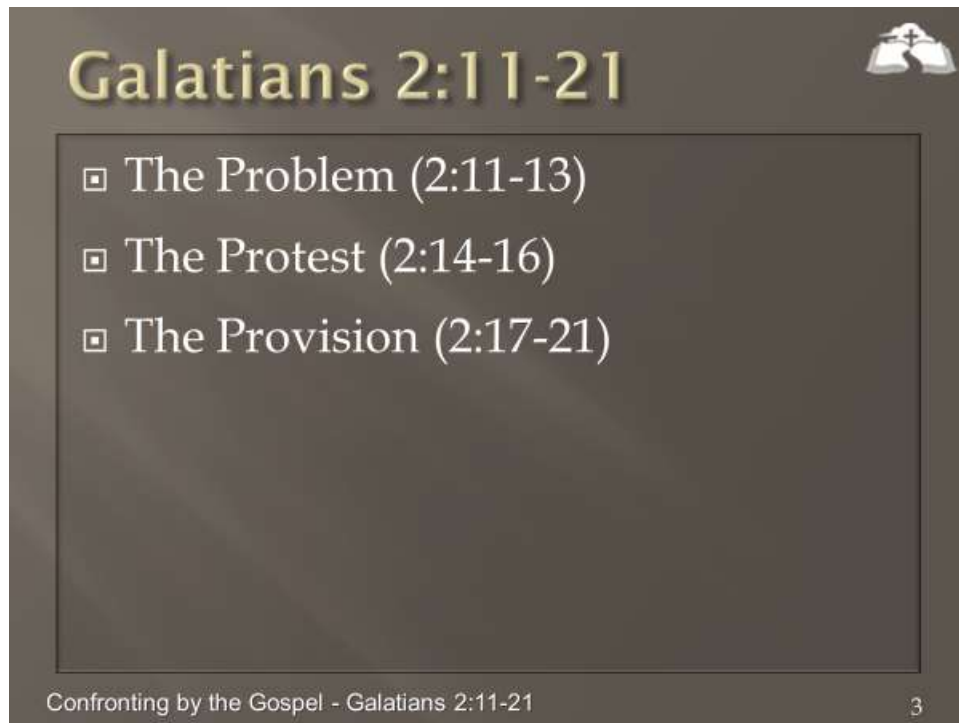
If you grew up outside the popular group in school, you know what it's like to want to be liked and accepted by the "in" crowd. And maybe one day you were lucky enough to make friends with one of the popular kids. It was great getting the attention and validation that you mattered. But then there comes that moment when your new friend must choose between you and their "in" friends.

Your moment may have been different, but it goes something like this. You're sitting down at a table in a crowded lunch room and you invite your popular friend to join you. They look around and see the popular group on the other side of the lunch room. And you realize that they are too afraid of what their friends will think to sit with you. And they walk away to join the popular group. It's awkward, uncomfortable, upsetting, and damages the relationship.

Our passage this morning is from Galatians 2, starting in verse 11. Paul writes here of an incident that occurred when Peter had come to visit the church in Antioch. And sadly, it's not all that different from the lunchroom experience I just described. But we should note that Paul is writing in the context of adults in the midst of living out church fellowship around a meal.

As in the first part of Chapter 2, Paul looks back in time to when a conflict developed between the Jews and Gentiles with the arrival of certain men from Jerusalem who were connected with

the Apostle James. Their arrival brings with it renewed scrutinization over keeping the Jewish law. Paul must now confront this situation for the sake of the Gospel. It is awkward, uncomfortable, and upsetting, with the potential to damage the unity of the Antioch church.



Galatians 2:11-21

- ▣ The Problem (2:11-13)
- ▣ The Protest (2:14-16)
- ▣ The Provision (2:17-21)

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Turn to Galatians Chapter 2. Before we read the text, note that the passage structure breaks down into 3 parts. In verses 11 through 13 Paul begins by giving us the details of the problem that had occurred in Antioch. In the next three verses, Paul records his protest. And in the final four verses, Paul reminds us of the provision of the Gospel. Hopefully, it will be helpful if you keep this simple outline in mind as we read and study this passage. Please follow along as I read Galatians 2:11-21. Here is what God's Word says.

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?" 15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. 17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved

me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The Problem (v. 11-13)

- ❑ A past situation within the church at Antioch
- ❑ From having worked out differences, Peter now stands condemned
- ❑ What happened to bring Paul and Peter to this point?
 - Peter stopped fellowshiping out of fear of the Jewish visitors from James
- ❑ What would this have looked like?
 - Likely it meant that he would refuse invitations join them for meals.

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To fully understand the problem that Paul is writing about let's go back a few verses. Look back at verse 9. Paul writes *"9 and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."* There are three things to note here. One, Paul was given the right hand of fellowship. Two, he was to go to the Gentiles. And three, he was to care for the poor.

And then we get to the first word of our passage this morning. How does verse 11 begin? With the word "but". It's one of those words that raises our interest and sometimes our apprehension. And with that one word, Paul abruptly drops us into the deep end of a major problem. Calling it a problem really does not do it justice. What had developed during this past situation the church at Antioch was ugly and dangerous.

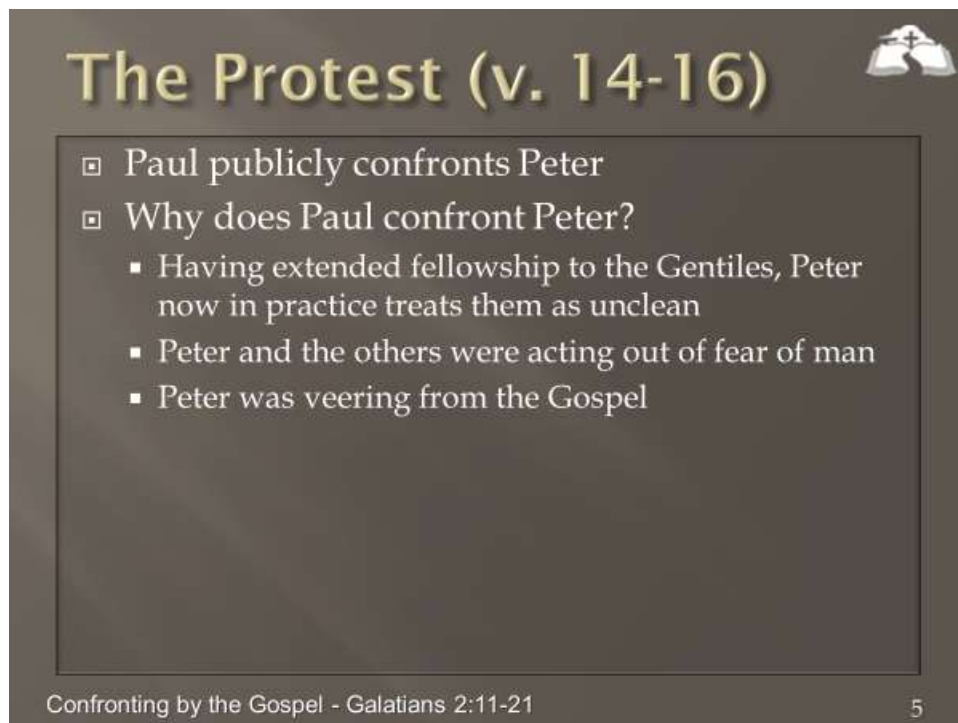
To add to this sense of abruptness, verse 11 provides no detail. We are taken to the result or confrontation of the problem. Despite having just given the right hand of fellowship, we suddenly find Paul opposed to Peter (Cephas) who is condemned for something we have yet to find out. If you put yourselves in the mindset of the Galatians hearing this read, in just a few sentences Paul has made a complete 180 degree turn. From seemingly having worked out their differences, Paul now tells us that Peter stands condemned.

So what happened to bring Paul and Peter to this point? Paul gives us the details in verses 12 and 13. After coming to Antioch, Peter openly shared in fellowship, eating and gathering with

the Gentile Christians there. But when some representatives from the Apostle James and church in Jerusalem came, Peter stopped fellowshiping with them out of fear for what the visitors would think and report back. In doing this, other Jewish Christians followed his example. Imagine Paul's sorrow that even Barnabas, his close friend was led to separate himself from the Gentiles.

What was it that Peter feared? At that time there were some Jewish Christians who still held that to fellowship with a Gentile would make you unclean as was taught by the law. Imagine the shock of the men from James to find Peter associated with uncircumcised Gentiles and practices of eating unclean food. What kind of Jew was Peter? He was slacking off in Antioch and was probably listening to heavy metal music and going out to movies with them too. And whether just by their presence or by putting on pressure, Peter distances himself from the Gentile Christians.

What would this have looked like? Likely it meant that he would refuse invitations join them for meals. He may have avoided meeting with them or perhaps even sharing the Lord's table. Keep in mind that this was during a time when the practice of the church was often to meet in homes. If Peter and the others withdrew from meeting in Gentile homes, it would have been disruptive to their gathering as a church.



The Protest (v. 14-16)

- ❑ Paul publicly confronts Peter
- ❑ Why does Paul confront Peter?
 - Having extended fellowship to the Gentiles, Peter now in practice treats them as unclean
 - Peter and the others were acting out of fear of man
 - Peter was veering from the Gospel

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Now why does Paul so outraged by this? He tells us in the next three verses. Let's look at verses 14 through 16. Verse 14 gives us the essence of Paul's protest. He says that he saw that their conduct was not in step (not in alignment) with the truth of the Gospel. Paul's concern is for the truth of the Gospel and the evident hypocrisy shown by Peter and the others. It is no trivial matter and Paul make his protest to confront Peter for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

Paul publicly confronts Peter and his cowardice to do what is right. He notes two problems with what Peter is doing. First, if Peter, a Jew, is free to live like a Gentile, how can he require the Gentiles to observe Jewish laws. Second, if Peter knew that no one is saved by works of the law, how could they add something beyond trusting the righteousness of Christ for salvation. Their actions contradicted what they believed. One commentator notes that "They did not really believe that Gentiles were second-class Christians, but they were acting as if they did." And more importantly, in their hypocrisy they were denying the Gospel.

Why does Paul confront Peter? There are a number of things that are going wrong here that move Paul. First, having extended fellowship to the Gentiles and accepted Paul's ministry to them, Peter now in practice treats them as unclean. Paul is fighting for the heart of the Gospel. If Christ had made them clean, then they were clean. To withhold fellowship from the Gentiles Christians was to be in opposition to the Gospel. In Christ they were all equal. And even though Peter and Paul were Jews, they were no better than the Gentiles.

Second, Peter and the others were acting out of fear of man. They were more concerned with what others would think of them than in upholding the truth of the Gospel. What they were doing was an act of cowardice and hypocrisy. The message to the Gentile Christians in Antioch would have been clear. Compared to the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem, they didn't matter. This was not just legalism. This was an ugly display of sin against their brothers and sisters in Christ. The command of Christ and the power of the Gospel was to love one another in ways that transcended cultural and religious boundaries. Their actions were destructive not only to their relationships, but to the body for whom Christ died.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Peter was veering from the Gospel. He was no longer in step with the path and pattern of the Gospel message. And in front everyone, Paul confronts Peter with an appeal to live according to what he believes. It is an appeal to not add anything to the Gospel. For nothing that can be added will bring about salvation. And it is an appeal to not take anything away from the Gospel. If all are saved in Christ, then Jews and Gentiles are equal before God and one another. To treat Gentiles as lesser Christians was sinful and dismissed the righteousness and grace that was given them in Christ.

The Provision (v. 17-21)



- ❑ Provision has been made not only for our righteous standing, but that we may live righteously
- ❑ Did Christ free them from justification through the law only for them to sin when they abandoned its rule over them
- ❑ In trying to keep the law by not fellowshiping with Gentiles they actually were sinning
- ❑ To go back to a righteousness through the law means that Christ died for no reason at all

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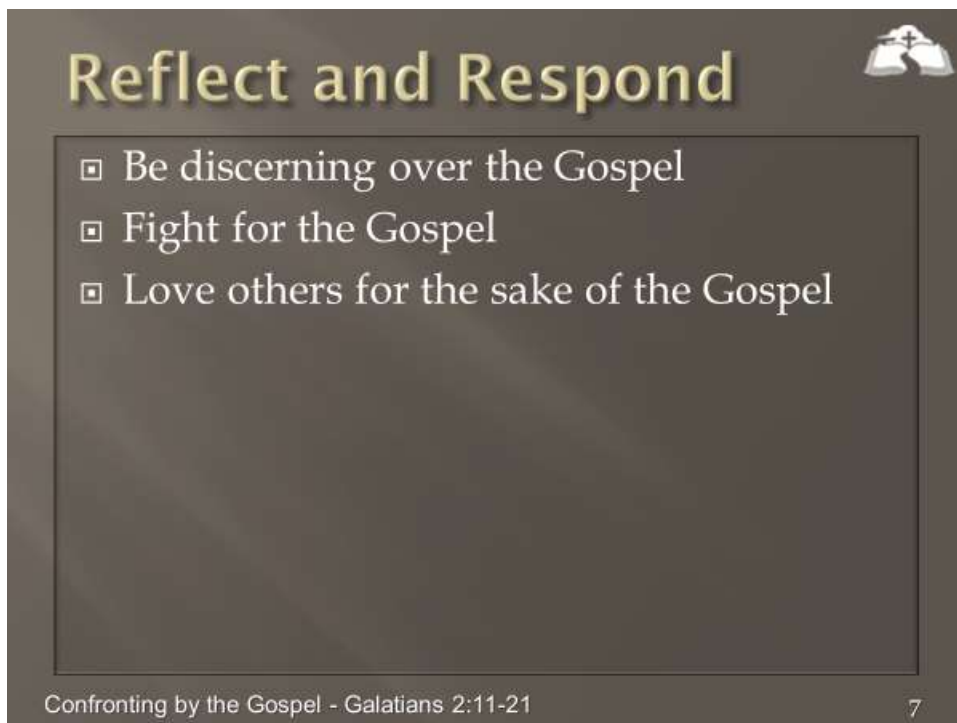
Paul goes on to explain why this is so important in the final four verses of this passage. It is important because our salvation hinges on the provision of the Gospel. In contrast to a righteousness standing dependent upon keeping the law, the wonderful truth is that we have been counted righteous through faith in Christ. And provision has been made not only for our righteous standing, but that we may live righteously, being transformed by that same faith because of Christ who now lives in us. Let's look at how Paul develops these thoughts in verses 17 through the end of the Chapter.

The condemnation of the Judaizers who had come down from Jerusalem was that Peter and the others had become servants to sin because they were behaving outside the law just like the sinful Gentiles. How does Paul respond to this in verse 17? If as Jews, they were justified in Christ and not through the law, it made no sense that they could then be considered sinners by abandoning those laws. In other words, Paul is asking did Christ free them from the law only for it to be considered sin when they no longer lived by those laws. Of course not. Why? Because if true, it would mean that Christ was a servant of sin having saved them for a righteousness by the law, yet that they must still obey. So although we are counted righteous and are being made righteous every day, it does not give us the cause or the freedom to sin.

The ugly irony here was, that in trying to keep the law by not fellowshiping with Gentiles they actually were sinning. And as we see in verse 18, in trying to live by law, they were in fact building back up what they were tearing down. Paul continues in verse 19 and 20 by saying that if Christ has satisfied the requirements of the law, then it has no power over Christians. We are in effect dead to or separated from its power and judgement. The law had no power to give life; only to threaten us with death. The provision of the Gospel is that Christ died in our place and in his death, we died to the law. The provision of the Gospel is that in His life we now live for God through faith in Christ.

Finally in verse 21, reminds them that to go back to a righteousness through and of the law means that Christ died for no reason at all. Can we be justified through our own works? No. Can we then live holy lives through our own works? Again, no. Provision has been made for our righteous standing before God and for living righteously before God in Christ. How? Through his death on the cross and his resurrection.

This is the heart of the Gospel. It is through Christ that we have been made new. We are alive with Christ and dead to sin. These are wonderful truths we should treasure within our hearts. And because they are dear to us, we strive to live obediently; enabled by faith and in the power of the Spirit. Why do we do this? That we may glorify and give ourselves to, the One who gave of Himself for us.



Reflect and Respond

- ▣ Be discerning over the Gospel
- ▣ Fight for the Gospel
- ▣ Love others for the sake of the Gospel

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Let's reflect on this passage as we draw to a close. What is it that Paul is so passionate about? I believe there are two things. First, Paul will not compromise the truths that are key to the Gospel message. When the men from Jerusalem and Peter with others called these truths into question, Paul was compelled to confront them for the sake of the Gospel. Second, Paul was also concerned about the damage these compromises would have on the church at Antioch. His opposition and defense were intended to correct the confusion and restore confidence in the Gospel. Distortions and dilution to the truths of the Gospel cannot be allowed because of the danger and threat they pose to the Church.

Let me encourage you to three responses to God's word this morning. First, **be discerning over the Gospel**. Here is why I think this is so important. The Gospel is to be present in far more areas than we often recognize. We may not face a crisis like Paul did in in Antioch, but many of the choices we make every day involve either upholding or compromising the truths of the Gospel.

This may take the form of what we read or allow to shape our thinking. Think about whether the truth claims being made align with the true Gospel. Does it add to the work of Christ on the cross? Does it take away and dilute the truths of the Gospel, taking Christ away from its center? We must always be on guard against anything that opposes the Gospel and undermines our faith.

It is important not only in what shapes our thinking, but also in what shapes our interactions with others. Now we may not refuse to fellowship or eat with someone because of who they are, but in subtle ways we can add our own requirements for righteousness to those around us; most often our spouse, our children, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. We establish our own laws and then punish others when they fail to live up to or standards. In doing so, we deny that their righteousness standing is found in Christ alone and that they too are being made righteous every day. May we treasure the grace and love present in the Gospel and may it cause us to be discerning in how we work the Gospel out in our own lives.

The second encouragement is for you to **fight for the Gospel**. My hope is that we would all be like Paul, with the courage to stand up and defend the Gospel. Think of what Paul was doing in confronting Peter before the Antioch church. Think of what was on the line for Paul. I think it would have been easy for him to say, "You know, I need James and Peter's support to minister to the Gentiles. This is really not the time to create a conflict and add difficulties to an already challenging work." But Paul's belief in the importance of the Gospel moved him to confront those who were undermining it whatever it cost.

Now let me add that there are two important aspects to consider here. First, we must fight for the Gospel and confront others in a way that does not cause us to sin. It must be done with the same kindness and love shown us in the Gospel. Fighting for the Gospel is not an excuse to use a sledge hammer when a gentle tap will do. Second, we must also be open to receive correction and accept it without becoming defensive. Our flesh may set itself against hearing godly confrontation, but the Gospel would have us focus first on our sins rather than the sin of others. Again, may we treasure the Gospel to the point where we will contend for it; instructing others in love and willingly listening to others who speak the truth into our own lives.

My third encouragement is to **love others for the sake of the Gospel**. Again, I believe Paul's example here reflects a true Gospel love for others. He was deeply and genuinely concerned for the people in the church. The threat to the Gospel was also a threat to the church. It was a threat to their unity, to their fellowship, and to their faith. Be concerned about your relationships and those of your brothers and sisters in the church. Work to bring healing those that are broken. Instruct those who are in the midst of conflict. And pray for those who are working through relational challenges for the glory of Christ.

Likewise, Gospel love will always be on the lookout for and protect against threats to those we truly care for. This applies not only to Elders and teachers, but to all who lead and serve in ministry. And it applies to all who mentor and disciple, especially those of us who are parents as we disciple and instruct our children. True love for the Gospel will naturally overflow into a love for others. A love that encourages one another to firmly and fully believe the grace and goodness of the Gospel. A love that challenges one another to hold fast and confident in the presence and power of the Gospel in our lives. May we love each other with a Gospel kind of love.

The Gospel



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.

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Here is the gospel we have been taught, we have received, and we hold fast to. Let us read this aloud together.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

[Let's pray]

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