

A Gospel Consultation and Confrontation

Galatians 2:1-16

Intro: Why does this matter?

Imagine going to a garage sale and finding a beautiful painting by a fairly well-known artist – and it was being sold for \$30. You were a bit of an art buff and you could quickly tell that this painting was an original and worth quite a bit of money. But the home owner clearly wasn't aware of what she had and she happily accepted your money and you excitedly took your new treasure home. You did a little more research and estimated the painting was worth about \$100,000. So, you proudly displayed it in your living room and when people would ask "is that a genuine Chagall?" you would assure them it was and happily tell them the story of how you found it. When they asked you what it was worth, you demurely told them you weren't sure, but guessed somewhere around \$100,000 ... more or less.

Well, one day, the Antique Road Show came through town and you decided to take your painting in to get a professional appraisal. You showed it to the man and explained how you had come upon it. You couldn't wait to have him tell you what an incredible find this was and then astonish you by naming a value much higher than you had even dared to hope.

But that's not what he did. He assured you that it was a beautiful piece but then said, "Unfortunately, it isn't authentic. It's a knock-off." And he showed you the tiny, but irrefutable evidences that proved it was in fact a fake. He told you it was worth about exactly what you had paid for it at the garage sale. That would be a devastating thing.

But what if that painting was the gospel? In other words, imagine having discovered the gospel truth and you found it to be the most beautiful, valuable message you had ever heard. And you excitedly took it home with you and you happily told others about it. It was the best thing that ever happened to you. But then one day someone explained to you that the gospel you so loved wasn't authentic. It was a knock-off. The good news you had believed wasn't in fact true.

That's what's on the line in the first two chapters of Galatians. Is the gospel proclaimed by Paul the true gospel or is it a close imitation? The false teachers were suggesting the

latter. They were teaching that Paul's gospel was not authentic, that it lacked the approval of Peter, James and John – the real Apostles down in Jerusalem.

As we have already seen, Paul is writing this letter out of the anguish of his soul. The churches he planted on his first missionary journey are turning away from the gospel he had preached to them. These false teachers were insisting that the only way a Gentile could be truly saved was to be circumcised. In other words, you had to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. You needed to obey the law of Moses was before you could receive the grace of the gospel. And in our text this morning, it seems as though they were correct. Peter seemed to agree with them. The authenticity of the true gospel is being challenged. So what does Paul do? He affirms the authenticity of his gospel by first telling them of an apostolic consultation and secondly and apostolic confrontation.

I. An Apostolic Consultation. (vs 1-10)

After 14 years of ministry, Paul went to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles there – most notably Peter, James and John. He went there in order to set before them the gospel he was proclaiming among the Gentiles (vs 2). However, Paul not only *told* them about the gospel he proclaimed, he brought along a powerful illustration. He brought Titus. An uncircumcised Gentile believer. It was a bold move.

Titus was a litmus test. Would the apostles accept Titus as a full, Spirit-filled, loved by God, saved by Jesus, brother in the Lord? Or would they require him to be circumcised? Paul was not subtle. He put the issue directly in front of them in the person of Titus.

It caused quite a debate! Paul says that there were some “false brothers, secretly brought in – who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery.”

When Paul thought of a sinner saved by grace alone – he saw a free man! Free from the curse of sin and death. Free from the wrath of God. And free from the tyranny of the law - free from the impossible task of trying to be good enough to earn God's approval. Paul had walked that road and it was nothing but spiritual bondage. So, when he saw these false brothers trying to impose the Mosaic law on Gentile believers as *necessary to being made right with God* – it infuriated him. They were trying to enslave with law those whom Christ had set free by grace!

So what did Paul do with these spies??

:5 “We did not yield in submission even for a moment!”

Paul didn’t give them an inch! No compromise! No attempt to find a middle ground. He directly, doggedly opposed them. Why?

“so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.”

Paul saw the issue precisely for what it was. This was a battle for the truth of the gospel. To compel Gentile believers to be circumcised in order to be accepted as full participants in the church – was a denial of the gospel of grace itself. Sinners, both Jew and Greek, were either saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone or they weren’t. To introduce the requirements of the Mosaic law into the equation was to destroy the pure gospel of salvation by grace. There could be no concession on this!

Happily, the Apostles in Jerusalem agreed!

- They did not require Titus to be circumcised (vs 2).
- They added nothing to Paul’s message (6).
- :9 “They gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only they asked us to remember the poor – the very thing I was eager to do.”

And so, Paul’s consultation with Peter and James and John in Jerusalem was a tremendous success. The Apostolic leaders of the church were proven to be of one mind concerning the truth of the pure gospel. The false teachers who were seeking to drive a wedge between Paul and the others were soundly defeated and refuted.

But that doesn’t mean they or the issue went away. And that brings us to verses 11-14.

II. An Apostolic Confrontation

This is a stunning moment in the history of the church. Here we have one Apostle of Jesus Christ, publicly rebuking and chastising another Apostle in a direct, open, confrontation. When Paul visited Peter in Jerusalem, Peter gave him the right hand of fellowship. When Peter came to visit Paul in Antioch, Paul gave him a public scolding! What’s going on?

A. Peter’s Part

: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.

Peter, at one time, ate with the Gentile believers in Antioch. Now that might seem like an insignificant matter – but it was extremely important. One of the strongest Jewish taboos was eating with Gentiles. Gentiles were considered ceremonially unclean, spiritually unclean - and to eat with them made you unclean. But the gospel broke that barrier down by showing that everyone was unclean – Jew and Gentile alike, and that everyone who came to Christ in saving faith was made clean by Christ’s atoning death and victorious resurrection. So, when Jew and Gentile Christians ate together it was a profound and public statement concerning the core truths of the gospel.

Peter had been given a very clear object lesson in this very matter through a vision from the Lord. We can read about it in Acts 10. Peter had a vision where the Lord let down a great sheet from heaven. In it were animals of all kinds and a voice said “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.”

Acts 10:14. But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” ¹⁵And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call unclean.”

And then the Lord sent him to the home of Cornelius the Gentile and Cornelius came to faith and was filled with the Holy Spirit. God had clearly shown Peter that the old dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles was gone! And Peter got the message! He realized that he could no longer consider Gentile believers as unclean – God called them clean! And so, Peter had no problem eating with his Gentile brothers and sisters in the faith.

Then, why did he stop? Did Peter change his mind? Did he have some new revelation that convinced him that Gentile believers actually were unclean?? Nothing of the sort. Paul tells us exactly why Peter stopped eating with Gentile believers. One day some Jewish Christian men came to Antioch. And they were teaching the necessity of following the Mosaic laws – including the laws forbidding Jews from eating with Gentiles. And Peter was afraid of them! Paul calls him out on it!

What was Peter afraid of?? Remember, Peter was the Apostle to the Jews – these were his people. And he didn’t want to lose approval. Peter had ‘fear of man’ problem. Remember the little girl who accused him of being a follower of Jesus? Peter backed down from her! And the same here. So, he drew back. He no longer ate with the Gentiles. And he wasn’t alone. Verse 13 shows that all the Jewish believers followed Peter’s lead.

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

There was suddenly this very public, very evident, devastating division in the church in Antioch – lead by the Apostle Peter!

B. Paul's Part

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

Stuart Olycott, "What Paul did was precipitate a public showdown. The very thing that Christians today would like to avoid at all costs is precisely what Paul chose to do. He chose to have a public showdown because Peter was in the wrong."

Paul publicly called out Peter and publicly rebuked him.

¹⁴But 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?"

The core issue for Paul is that Peter and Barnabas were not "in step with the truth of the gospel".

There is an important distinction to be made here. Paul does not charge Peter with *proclaiming* a different gospel. If he were then Paul would have said, "Let him be anathema"! No. Peter was proclaiming the true gospel. The problem was that he wasn't living according to it. Peter *believed* the true gospel – that men and women are made right with God by grace alone through faith alone. But he was *living* as though sinners are made right with God by faith plus obeying the law of Moses.

That's why Paul labels his actions "*hypocrisy*". Peter said one thing and did another. If you had asked Peter – do you really think that these Gentile Christians are second-class citizens? He would have said "No". But his actions said "Yes".

One of the saddest things that can happen to a church is just this sort of hypocrisy - when the church proclaims the true gospel but does not live in step with it.

One of the saddest chapters in the history of the American church is the way white Christians treated black Christians, particularly in the South. I remember an old OPC Pastor talking with great remorse about growing up in the Southern Presbyterian church and the blacks were required to sit in the balcony. They weren't allowed on the main floor. They weren't allowed to use the same restroom or drink from the same drinking fountain. This was in a Reformed, Presbyterian church. They all sang out of the old Blue

Trinity hymnal. They all subscribed to the same Westminster Confession, they all professed the same gospel. But the white believers were living hypocritically. Their actions were a denial of what they professed. They refused to accept their black brothers and sisters in Christ as their equal – though God, in Christ, did.

Think of how much suffering and pain could have been avoided if the elders of the church had, like the Apostle Paul, opposed such behavior and began disciplining slave owners. Think of the testimony that would have been raised in a racist culture of the power of the gospel. Think of the blessings that would have followed if the white believers would have simply acted in line with the gospel.

And the same is true today – any conduct that draws lines between brothers and sisters in Christ – whether racial lines or political lines, or ethnic lines or economic class lines – all are contrary to the gospel we profess. We'll get to that more in Galatians 3.

III. Why This Matters

What if Paul had not done anything? What would have been lost if Paul had not raised this controversy? There are two great things that would have been lost.

A. The Gospel Unity of the Church.

Paul ignited this controversy not to cause division but to heal it. If the teaching of the Judiazers and Peter's hypocrisy had been allowed to stand there would be two churches in the world – a Jewish church and a Gentile church – both professing the gospel but the Jewish church refusing to accept Gentile believers as full heirs of Christ.

Stuart Olycott, "Paul stood against fellow believers and if he had not done so the fellowship of the Christian church would have been ruined. It is a lie to say that to stand against Christians believers is a breach of fellowship. The fact is, unless Paul had opposed them – the church would have been ripped in two. But because of Pauls' courageous stand – the church was restored to the foundation of the true gospel."

B. The Truth of the Gospel.

Paul was convinced that Peter, by his actions, was denying the core truth of the gospel.

¹⁵We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶yet 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.

The core truth of the gospel, the exact thing that makes the gospel good news is the declaration that sinners who deserve only judgment can be *justified* - declared legally righteous and innocent before the court of God in heaven – NOT by works of the law, but simply by faith in Christ Jesus. That’s the good news of the gospel.

There are three simple things we need to know to understand the gospel.

- The reality of a final judgement. The Bible teaches that every man, women and child who ever lived will one day stand before the judgment throne of God. God will review their lives according to his holy law and render His judgement on our lives: innocent or guilty – and your eternal destiny will flow from that judgement.
- The futility of trusting in your works. The Bible also declares that “by works of the law, no one will be justified.” In other words, no one will be declared innocent by God because of what they have done.
- Justification by faith. “so we also have *believed* in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law..” The gospel is the glorious news that Jesus died bearing our sin so that he could give us the free gift of his righteous life. And every sinner who confesses their sin and casts all their hope for salvation on Jesus alone, will be declared righteous before God as a free gift.

That’s the gospel and it’s a gospel worth fighting for. Martin Luther, fought for that gospel in the Reformation and explains what was on the line.

Martin Luther, “Let this be the conclusion of all together, that we will suffer our goods to be taken away, our name, our life, and all that we have; but the gospel, the faith, Jesus Christ, we will never allow to be wrested from us..... If we lose this, we lose God, Christ, all the promises, faith, righteousness, and eternal life,” (R 51)

But let’s not only fight for this gospel – let us walk in step with it. In other words, is the gospel you believe defining the life that you live? Are you living hypocritically – saying you believe the gospel but living as though it weren’t true? Are you living with unconfessed sin? Are you living with bitterness and anger – refusing to forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven you? It’s easy to say that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation – but is it powerful enough to humble you, to comfort you, to restore a broken relationship? The gospel we have is authentic. It’s the real thing. Let’s live like it.