

Galatians: Free in Christ

Living the Gospel

Galatians 2:11–21

It's always awkward when a fight breaks out at the church potluck, but what if the two parties are apostles? This is the rumble in the New Testament church. Because Paul is faithful to publicly confront Peter, and Peter is faithful to repent, the gospel continued to thrive. We learn that the gospel—the truth about Jesus' life, death and resurrection—is not only something to believe, but something to live. It even affects the people we eat with, and even the apostles were not above stumbling.

Peter's Hypocrisy

Paul has established his independent calling and unity with the apostles (1:1; 2:3, 9). Now he demonstrates his willingness to stand against apostles when the gospel requires it (1:8). Normally hypocrisy is the difference between a high standard of what someone does in public and the sin they actually do in private. Many politicians say they are servants of the people and their families, but secretly they are greedy and unfaithful. Peter's sin is different. He believes in justification by faith alone and the equality of Gentiles (Acts 10-11), and he stood with Paul in Jerusalem (2:9). But when "men from James" came down to Antioch, he lost his nerve and would no longer eat with the Gentiles (v12). Paul calls this hypocrisy and points out that the other Jews and Barnabas went along with it (v13). Peter believed correctly but "play-acted" otherwise, and it was a form of denying the gospel (v14). Refusing to have table fellowship with other believers, at the Lord's Supper and elsewhere, is a denial of justification by faith alone. Some parts of all branches of the church do this, but ironically Protestants do it citing justification by faith alone as the reason. On an individual level, Christians deny God's work in a believer's life whenever they refuse to eat, fellowship, do business or associate because of past sin, tradition, political or secondary theological differences. Peter had the fear of man; we have many fears.

Paul's Confrontation

Paul tells the Galatians that he confronted Peter to his face and before them all (vv11, 14). Was he showing off or trying to establish his apostolic authority? Luther: "Paul reproved Peter for no trifle, but for the chief article of Christian doctrine, which Peter's hypocrisy had endangered." Paul takes the leader of the apostles to task in front of everyone because they all witnessed his sin and were lead astray by it. Peter was willing to live like a Gentile, so it wasn't right for him to compel the Gentiles to live like Jews (v14). This seemingly harmless seating arrangement in Antioch set up another way to be right, to really be "in" with God. When Paul says we Jews are "not sinner of the Gentiles" (v15), he puts "sinners" in quotations. If Jews schooled by Christ know that people are justified by faith

NOTES:

Galatians: Free in Christ

Living the Gospel

Galatians 2:11-21

and not the works of the law, how could Gentiles be forced to keep the law? Many Christians are not comfortable with Paul confronting Peter, which is a failure to understand the nature of the gospel and what is at stake in denying it. If a false gospel is allowed to stand, the death of Christ is useless (v21). We like to describe ourselves as “non-confrontational”, but when God calls us to stand for Him and we don’t, we should confess our cowardice and lack of love. In the confrontation, Paul loved Peter, the Jews, the Gentiles, even the men from James, all because he loved Jesus Christ. This is why his confrontation was fruitful. It doesn’t look like the men from James repented, but Peter did and he is the first one to address the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1, 7). Paul wouldn’t sacrifice truth for the sake of “unity”, and his confrontation restored the truth and fellowship of the apostles.

Crucified & Risen with Christ

The lawmongers were apparently disgusted that God finds Gentiles *and* Jews to be equal sinners. Does this make Jesus an advocate for sin? May it never be (v17). John Piper compares the law in the Old Testament to a railroad track leading Israel in obedience. The engine pulling the car is God’s grace, which is powered by the Spirit, emphasizing that salvation is all of God. But the fallen heart is not flattered by this, so the Pharisees tossed the engine and set the track up vertically as a ladder to heaven, pretending they could climb up. Every rung was earned by the works of the law. Paul destroys this perversion of the law (v18). Both Jew and Gentile must die in Christ to the law. What is dead and buried with Him is also raised with Him to new life (vv19-20). We don’t need extra hoops and religious rules to sanctify people; we need the unadulterated grace of God. The humble will receive and live in the gospel, and the self-righteous will reject it. In order to be saved, you have to die on the cross. If that’s true, then live in Him by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you. This is God’s unmatched grace.