
Walking in step with the Gospel

Overview

The Apostle Paul makes the most of his argument for the supremacy of the Gospel by bringing the implications of it to bear on none other than the Apostle Peter. Paul's Gospel (The Gospel) had been revealed by God, affirmed by the Apostles in Jerusalem, and even upheld against the sinful practice of Peter in Antioch. Far from being a squabble over social, political, or philosophical position, Paul's confrontation of Peter was a testament to the overarching implications that the Gospel has on every area of life.

Paul's progressive argument

- Gospel-Centered Fellowship
- Gospel-Centered Commissions
- Gospel-Centered Discipline

Consider this...

Legalism may take many different forms. From pious looking religious people to rebellious looking social outcasts, walls are built and the rules of engagement are established. It seems that we are inundated by this system of social conduct from the beginning. Elementary students organize into groups, Pre-Teens reorganize, and Teenagers begin to solidify social structures. With few exceptions, social, economic and ethnic demographics are the primary categories most of us use for our relational decisions. The Gospel, however, obliterates these distinctions, and we become truly equal.

Passage: Galatians 2:11-14

Application

- Only Gospel-Centered Community provides biblical, genuine and lasting fellowship
- Even the best of Christians have need of daily realignment
- Discipline in Christian Community is a natural occurrence if the Gospel is central

Tim Keller

"Galatians is all about the gospel – the gospel all of us need throughout all of our lives.

It's dynamite...

I pray that its powerful message explodes in your heart..."

Galatians 2:11-14

Intro: The Gospel message is not a superstitious item, an incantation, a spell, or a charm. It is not something that a person may simply add to their collection of beliefs and practices. The Gospel of Jesus Christ changes everything! The Gospel is a message to be embraced or rejected. The one who believes the Gospel *may* and *must* live according to the truths embraced, and the Gospel has something to say about everything. It may rightly be said that the Christian life is lived well by diligently seeking to understand all things anew in light of the pervading Gospel of Christ.

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

- **Paul summarizes the whole episode in this verse.**
 - *“when Cephas came to Antioch”*
 - Paul has taken his readers through his initial encounters with Peter and now he tells them of this significant development to demonstrate their relationship with one another.
 - Peter actually came to Gentile territory, and provides a perfect demonstration of what it looks like to “walk in step with the Gospel.”
 - *“because he stood condemned”*
 - Peter was obviously and publically inconsistent with the Gospel.
 - *“I opposed him to his face”*
 - Paul’s final argument for Gospel and Apostolic authority to correct the Galatian Christians comes in the form of an example.
 - “[In] Jerusalem, not only was Paul not commissioned by Peter, but his independent status and work as an apostle were also officially acknowledged by the “pillars” of the church; now at Antioch, he even opposed Peter to his face...”¹
 - “Paul is successively Peter’s guest (1:18-20), his fellow-apostle (2:1-10), and his critic (2:11-14).”²

¹ Fung, 105

² Fung, 105

12a For before certain men came from James, *he was eating with the Gentiles*;

- **Peter and other Jewish Christians were enjoying fellowship with Gentile Christians.**
 - *“he was eating with the Gentiles”*
 - “Under the old covenant [Mosaic Covenant], God had established certain dietary laws and other commandments intended to keep the Jews from intermingling with Gentiles and being corrupted by their idolatry and immorality... Gentiles ate certain foods that were forbidden (unclean) to the Jews, and even sitting at the table with the was considered by some to be impure... [because it was] a sign of acceptance and approval.”³
 - Mark 2:16 – “And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that [Jesus] was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”
 - “‘taking his meals’ no doubt includes a reference to participation in the Lord’s Supper”⁴ However, the reference does not refer exclusively to the ordinance.
 - It is no small thing that Christians are commanded not to “eat with” one who professes the name of Christ and yet lives in open sinfulness.
 - 1 Corinthians 5:11 – The Apostle Paul tells Christians that then are “not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one.”
 - The idea is meant to remind us of the significance of genuine fellowship and the essential nature of Gospel-centered Community.

It is significant, then, that Peter was eating with Gentile Christians... This was *walking in step with the Gospel*.

³ Platt, 41

⁴ Fung, 106

12b *but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.*

- **Jewish Christians from the cultural context of Jerusalem came to Antioch.**
 - *“when they came”*
 - When who came? The men ‘from James,’ the ‘circumcision party,’ or the Judaizers.
 - Acts 11:1-3 – “1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the **circumcision party** criticized him, saying, 3 “You went to uncircumcised men and **ate with them.**”
- **Peter disengages from Gospel-centered, missional living.**
 - *“he drew back and separated himself”*
 - Peter no longer ate freely with the Gentile Christians.
 - He separated himself from their cultural norms and picked up his traditional Jewish culture in their midst.
 - He indicated that their practical manner of living out the Christian faith was not sufficient – theirs was an insufficient Christianity.
- **Peter’s motivation was fear.**
 - *“fearing the circumcision party”*
 - Peter’s fear might have come from a sincere desire for Gospel success.
 - “Peter’s ‘fear’ may have been no more than a genuine concern lest he, who was head of the ‘home mission’ work of Jerusalem church, should appear to be (and be reported as) apostatizing from Judaism and thus prove a stumbling-block to those whom he was seeking to evangelize.”⁵
 - Peter was reaching Jews with the Gospel by allowing them to continue cultural practices (dietary laws and circumcision), which were subordinate to the Gospel.
 - Peter may have wanted to maintain a significant position of Jewish influence among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem for the sake of preaching the Gospel more accessibly to other Jews.

⁵ Fung, 108

- Peter's actions, one might argue, may also fall perfectly in line with the reasoning Paul uses elsewhere.
 - 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 – “19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”
- Peter's actions may have been motivated by a simple fear of man.
 - Peter had been accused of the same thing from the same kind of group before, and he was not above expressing fearful cowardliness (Matt. 26:69-75).

Whatever his motivation, Peter is now *walking out of step with the Gospel*, and there are serious consequences to the individual misstep.

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

- **The result of Peter's misstep is a horrible new course.**
 - *“the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him”*
 - Others followed Peter's poor lead.
 - Jewish Christians, not only those from Jerusalem, but also (presumably) those who were living in Antioch, were following the inconsistent lead of Peter's misstep.
 - This is a lesson to us all... Every pastor, elder, shepherd among a congregation is charged both with watching his own steps and those of others.
 - 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 – “26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to

others I myself should be disqualified.”

- *“that even Barnabas was led astray”*
 - Not only did Peter mislead other followers, but he also “led” another leader “astray.”

Walking out of step with the Gospel began with a small gesture, but it grew quickly and pervasively.

14a But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all,

- **Paul understood their conduct to be “out of step” with the Gospel, and acted appropriately.**
 - *“when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel”*
 - He not only observed their missteps, he understood the underlying assumptions and the meaning of them.
 - Paul exhibits true Christian wisdom as he demonstrates the ability to apply the Gospel to eating habits and table companionship.
 - **Walking “out of step” with the Gospel is sinful and harmful.**
 1. It is **PERSONALLY** harmful.
 - a. Peter/Cephas “stood condemned” and personally culpable for his misstep.
 - b. Peter gave in to fear, and thereby ensured that his fear would continue to dominate him
 2. It is **COMMUNALLY** harmful.
 - a. All of those who considered themselves friends of Peter “acted hypocritically along with him.”
 - b. “...even Barnabas was led astray...”
 3. It is **EVANGELISTICALLY** harmful.
 - a. The Gospel witness of Peter and all those who went along with him was, no doubt, thwarted among the Gentiles.
 4. It is **UNIVERSALLY** harmful.

- a. The Gospel message has implications for everything, to walk out of step with the Gospel in any area of life is to remain in sin... To do so comfortably and willfully would be evidence against a truly converted heart.
- *“I said to Cephas before them all”*
 - “Peter knew the gospel and believed the gospel, but his actions didn’t reflect the gospel, so Paul called him out.”⁶
 - **Gospel realignment is UNIVERSALLY BENEFICIAL!**
 - Personally, Communally, Evangelistically, and in every way, constant Gospel realignment is exceedingly beneficial.
 - “[It is] not legalistic for believers to confront sin and hypocrisy, even if it’s the apostle Peter who must be confronted.”⁷
 - Paul addresses Peter directly, but does not attack him personally.
 - A. Paul’s line of reasoning is Gospel-centered: “God did not have fellowship with you [Peter] on the basis of your race and culture (v 15)... Therefore, how can you have fellowship on the basis of race and culture (v 14)?”⁸
 - B. Paul’s rebuke is coupled with a strong encouragement, because of its Gospel centrality.
 - *Peter, you do not need to worry about acceptance or validation from these men from someone you perceive to be important. The God of the universe has accepted you on the basis of Christ’s righteousness and that never changes.*
 - C. Any personal attack would be a continuation of the legalism that Paul was attempting to combat.
 - “Legalism always results in pride and fear, psychologically, and exclusion and strife, socially.”⁹
 - If Paul had exalted his own liberty it would have

⁶ Platt, 43

⁷ Platt, 44

⁸ Keller, Timothy, 55

⁹ Keller, Timothy, 54

been just as sinful as Peter's legalistic adherence to cultural customs.

- "The serious public consequences of Peter's conduct - which 'would make a divided Church inevitable or a united Church impossible' - called forth the public rebuke by Paul, who explains in vv. 15-21 the deeper issues involved in this apparently mundane matter of having meals together."¹⁰

14b "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

- **Paul demonstrates the Inconsistency of *walking out of step with the Gospel*.**
 - The Gospel says that all are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! All who believe this Gospel must learn to live consistently with it.
 - "Galatians reminds us how easily we drift toward both legalism and hypocrisy. On the one hand, we think that by doing good things we earn favor before God, legalism. Then on the other hand, we claim to have the gospel of grace but live just like the rest of the world, hypocrisy."¹¹

My Prayers

- 1) May God renew our minds through the hearing and reading of His Word.
- 2) May God realign our thinking with the Gospel by the power of His Spirit.
- 3) May God grant make us a community of Believers that walk in step with the Gospel, and may God grant us the kind of genuine love for one another that motivates personal realignment.

¹⁰ Fung, 111

¹¹ Platt, 44

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