

## Galatians 2:11-14 – Gospel Matters

Exegetical Big Idea: Paul sees Peter acting contrary to the gospel and corrects him publicly, out of concern for Peter, the church, and the glory of the gospel.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The Church must be concerned with gospel matters, because the gospel matters.**

Fallen Condition Focus: It's not always easy to see the distinction between disputable matters and non-disputable matters, but for the sake of the church and the glory of the gospel, the church must be clear about gospel matters.

Background:

If you remember from last time we visited Paul's letter to the Galatian church, she was a church to the North of Israel. When we say "a church" what is actually probably the case is a number of churches in the area of Galatia. These churches would have been planted by Paul on his first missionary journey. Paul is writing to them now because he has somehow received a report about them that there are dangerous things happening.

These churches are largely Gentile churches, meaning that they are mostly non-Jewish Christians. Yes there is a small population of Jewish believers there as well, but likely the vast majority of the church is made up of non-Jewish Christians, or what were called Gentile Christians.

However, there is some disturbance. Jewish legalists have made their way up to these churches and they start preaching a message that different than Paul's. Paul preached that a person is saved from their sin and adopted into the family of God and given the hope of eternal life by faith alone in the saving work of Christ. These people however, added to that. They were preaching that Paul made it too easy. They were preaching that God required all people to become Jewish first, and *then* once they were obeying the Jewish traditions, then their faith in Jesus saved them.

Paul writes to remind them of the freedom of the true gospel. It is Faith alone in Christ alone that saves someone. Today's message at first seems awkwardly placed. Previously Paul was writing to argue his legitimacy as an apostle, and now he all of a sudden recounts a time when he opposed another apostle. Well Paul is not getting side tracked, he's recounting this story for a very important reason.

Intro:

The windshield in my van has a crack in it. It actually started out as a chip. I remember when it happened a few years ago actually. The rock hit the windshield and chipped. It wasn't bad. It was on the bottom corner and didn't make it hard to see the road and so I did what many men do. I pretended like it wasn't there. Isn't that how things work? If you pretend hard enough that something isn't there it goes away right? Well it didn't. It did last a few years, but just a few weeks ago Alana noticed that it turned into about a 6-inch crack. Then it grew to about 10 inches. Now it's most of the way through the windshield. So there's no ignoring it now. But that doesn't stop me from trying. Alana has been asking me for a few weeks now to get it fixed. I assured here that it's perfectly safe and yes I will call to get it replaced but maybe not right away. Well I googled it and it turns out, it's actually not *completely* safe. Sure, it's not going to explode, but the crack does makes the windshield weaker.

So now I have to take it in and get it replaced. It didn't have to be like this! If when, a few years back I acted quickly and dealt with the chip, then likely I could have had it filled in and avoided the crack and avoided being wrong about the "perfectly safe" windshield.

Because of my mindset of "what's the big deal?" I am now having to replace the whole thing.

The passage that we are looking at today has that feel to doesn't it? It's an awkward passage where Paul seems to think that Peter is acting sinfully, and that kind of awkward because Peter is also an apostle and do apostle's even sin? Aren't they supposed to be special and be building the early church? And what's the big deal? So Peter is having a meal with some Jewish Christians by themselves, who cares?

But Paul sees it differently. He sees it as a chip in the gospel. That chip is going to turn into a crack and that crack is going to be very very dangerous.

There are lots of things in the church that we have differing opinions on. There are some things that if we believe differently, that's ok! But there are some things that all Christians must hold. In these matters, I'll call them "gospel matters", we must be concerned with them. The Good News of Jesus, what we call "the Gospel", on a very basic level is this: Your sin has separated you from God and if not dealt with will send you to an eternity in hell. But if you trust in Jesus, all of your sin is placed on him as he died on the cross, and you are forgiven, accepted by God because of what Jesus has done for you, and you now have the hope of being with him forever one day in heaven. It's infinitely deeper than that, but it's not less.

There are some things that left uncorrected, crack the gospel, and that can have devastating results.

**The Church must be concerned with gospel matters, because the gospel matters.**

**VV. 11-12 – The Good News of Christ requires Christians to confront sin.**

This passage begins with Paul explaining that at some point Cephas, we know him better as Peter, came to Antioch. We're not exactly sure when this would have been, but it certainly would have been *after* Peter had his dream about the sheet being lowered down from heaven full of unclean animals. You might remember this from Acts 10. Peter is in a place called Joppa and in the middle of the day Peter goes up onto the roof of the house (not unusual in those days) to pray while lunch is being made. Well he falls asleep and God gives him this dream of a sheet being lowered down from heaven, and inside this sheet is all kinds of animals that the Old Testament laws deemed to be unclean. Peter hears God's voice say "Peter, kill and eat". This is very strange for Peter and he says "no way! I've never eaten anything unclean before". But God answers back "don't call anything unclean what I have made clean". Three times this happened and three times Peter says no. So Peter wakes up and there is a knock at the door. Who's there? It's a Gentile named Cornelius and God has sent Cornelius to hear the gospel from Peter.

Peter realizes that his dream was not about unclean animals at all! God was teaching him that no longer should the Gentiles be considered an "unclean people". The Good News of Jesus is not just for the Jewish people, but for Gentiles too! In fact, there is now no dividing line between Jews and Gentiles, but in Christ, they are one people. Peter now realizes that God does not show favoritism to a certain people group, but is called all people to himself in Christ.

Understanding this is essential to understanding the next part.

Paul writes in verse 11 that he had to oppose Peter to his face! Why? According to Paul he stood condemned. Meaning, Paul sees that Peter is doing something sinful. Whatever Peter is doing, it is clearly wrong and acting in opposition to the gospel of Jesus. So what is Peter doing?

Well, Peter was in Antioch and was eating freely with the Gentile Christians there. This is a big deal! Peter is acting in accordance with the freedom of the gospel, a good thing! He is freely associating with the Gentile Christians as one of them. He might very well be enjoying some food that was previously “unclean”. Maybe he’s eating pork! Not only this, but this likely also means sharing in the Lord’s Supper with the Gentile Christians. This is good! This is how it is supposed to be. Peter, a Jewish Christian, and the Gentile Christians are one people in Christ.

But then...certain men came from James. James was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, and as you might have guessed, the church in Jerusalem was made up of predominantly Jewish Christians. So these men come and Peter fears what they might think of him eating with Gentiles. We don’t know exactly the motivation, but clearly Peter thinks that the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem will not think that what Peter is doing is good. So he shrinks bad, and eats only with the Jewish Christians.

Why is this important? Why does Paul get mad at this when he sees it?

[We can think of it like this. Suppose you’re having a party and you invite a bunch of people to the party. But you have this one friend. He or she is a bit weird, and not many people like this person, but you do. You enjoy spending time with them and really like them even though they don’t have lots of friends. You know that people make fun of this person behind their back and you know it’s wrong. You choose instead to be friends with that person because you love them and care about them and recognize that they are made in God’s image. So the day of the party comes and your friends start to arrive. You’re having a great time and visiting with everyone, when the one friend shows up. But suddenly you’re afraid. You realize that if you make it look like you’re friends with the “weird” person, then everyone else will think you’re weird too! So you don’t even answer the door when they come in. You don’t say hello. You don’t offer them any cake. You don’t invite them to play any of the games. What is your friend going to think? He or she will think that you don’t like them anymore! Because you were afraid of what the other people at the party would think, you communicated that you do not like your friend. You didn’t even have to use words, but you did speak loudly.]

Peter basically did the same thing. He knew better! He knows that the Gentiles and Jews alike are one in Christ Jesus, but because he feared the Jews, he did not act according to his conviction.

Paul can’t stand by it, because by doing this Peter is making a crack in the gospel.

So Paul confronts Peter and opposes him to his face. The question is...what is Paul’s motivation?

If it were me, I’ve got to be honest I might do it out of pride! Here we have “The Rock”. Peter is like the best of the best apostles. Here is my chance to show Peter that I’m right and he’s wrong. Then everyone will know that I’m just as much an apostle as Peter, or maybe even better.

Is that Paul’s motivation? Absolutely not. Look back at verse 11. He opposes Peter because he “stood condemned”. He recognizes Peter’s sin and it breaks Paul’s heart. Paul knows the destructive nature of sin, and he sees his brother stumbling in at the moment. He sees the enemy at work to chip and crack

away at the gospel and Paul is moved to godly action. Paul knows that the Good News of Christ requires him to confront this sin here. And he does.

Nobody wants to be confronted with their sin. It doesn't feel good. It hurts our pride. But it can be life-giving. First of all confronting sin clarifies the gospel! The gospel is a proclamation of freedom from sin. What does it say when sin is left to run wild in the church? What does the world think when we proclaim a message of freedom from sin, and yet are ok with it in our own lives? The world is confused. We must be crystal clear about what the gospel is.

Sin kills. Absolutely nothing good comes from it. It condemns us to hell. But the gift of Christ is freedom from sin, forgiveness, and eternal life.

Not only does it clarify the gospel, but it promotes church unity. I know this seems counter intuitive, but speaking to a brother or sister in humility and honesty about their sin, out of love for them and love for the glory of the gospel is a beautiful thing. When a person is shown how their sin is hurting them and turns from it and embraces Christ, unity is built in the church, not destroyed! Unity is built because we are saying to each other "walk with me, with Christ". We do this together, because we are heading to the same place.

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#### **V. 13 – Sin has the tendency to be contagious.**

We must be concerned with gospel matters because sin has the tendency to be contagious. Paul is not only concerned with Peter but there are others who are being led astray. Paul tells us in verse 13 that the "rest of the Jews acted hypocritically". What was happening was that before these Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem, the small group of local Jewish Christians in Antioch were eating and having fellowship, along with Peter with the Gentile Christians. Presumably they were enjoying some delicious seafood and pulled pork, and celebrating the Lord's Supper with each other. And again, this is good! This is what the gospel does!

But when Peter starts to shrink back and separate himself from the Gentiles, do the local Jews. They too act in hypocrisy.

And then Paul says, even Barnabas. You remember Barnabas. His name literally means "Son of Encouragement". He was called Joseph before, but he was such an encouragement to the Church that the apostles renamed him Barnabas. Barnabas was the one who was first convinced of Paul's conversion and brought him to the apostles and vouched for him when the rest of the church was skeptical of Paul. Even Barnabas shrunk back and ate only with the Jewish Christians.

I think we get a sense of heart break in Paul's writing as he remembers that even his beloved Barnabas was led astray into hypocrisy.

Sin has a way of being contagious. It kind of reminds me of all the people in the story of the Emperor's new clothes.

[There was once an emperor who considered himself to be the most important, most amazing, most wise of anyone in the world. He went to his tailor one day and asked for a special set of clothes that would match his amazing awesomeness. The quick thinking tailor told the emperor that there was a

special magical fabric that I just got in. This fabric was magical because only the most important and amazing and wise people could actually see the fabric. But of course no such material existed. The tailor was lying to the emperor. The tailor “shows” the king the fabric, and to the king’s horror he can’t see it! But he cannot admit that he can’t see it because admitting to such would mean he is not as amazing as he thinks he is. So he lies and pretends he can see it. He then turns to his officials around him and asks them if they like it. Nobody wanted to admit that they too were unable to see the fabric so they all lie as well and say they can see it and speak of how wonderful it is. The emperor leaves the store with his new clothes and decides the best thing to do is to have a parade for himself, to show off his amazing new magical outfit. The day of the parade comes and here is the emperor walking down Main Street in nothing but his underwear. It is announced that the king’s clothes are made of the magic fabric that only the most important and wise people can see. Soon everybody on the streets are lying as well and pretending that they can see the wonderful clothes. Everybody does this except a young boy, who yells out for everyone to hear “Look at the emperor in nothing but his underwear!” Well it turns out it took that little boy snap everyone back into reality, and soon they were all laughing at the humiliated emperor.]

The point of the story is that people affect each other! If we make company with those who are ok with sin, we may too become ok with sin! And this is especially dangerous for leaders.

Think of Peter. He knew best of all in that church that the Jewish and Gentile Christians were one people. He had the responsibility of leading others to that same gospel freedom. And instead, imagine the confusion of the local small Jewish community of believers, as Peter seemed to be changing his mind about this issue. I think the fact that Paul focuses more on Peter than he does the entire groups shows the responsibility that Peter had.

It’s not uncommon to see a pretty healthy church led astray by a leader who starts to compromise on gospel matters. It should sadden us, warn us, and even anger us, but not surprise us when soon the church itself is led down a path of compromising on gospel issues if the leader is not corrected or removed.

Sin has a tendency to be contagious, but thank God so does righteousness! The New Testament is full of passage encouraging the church to build each other up! We are called to meet with each other, exhort each other, and carry each other’s burdens. We are called to call each other to delight more and more in Christ.

I know there’s often a perception that the pastors are always living the most holy lives, always being obedient, always thinking about God and delighting in Christ. Believe me I wish that were always the case. The truth is, your delighting in Christ is contagious. There are many of you, that when I see your faith in God amidst great difficulties, or your joy in the Lord regardless of what is happening around you. When I hear of what you’re discovering in the Scriptures or how you’re finding sweet time with the Lord in prayer. I hear that and look at you and I think to myself “I want more of that”. Thank God that he made the godliness of the church contagious as well!

And it’s contagious to the world as well! As we live our lives to the glory of God and in the joy of being forgiven and having the hope of eternal life, God does a funny thing. He attracts people to himself through us. And so then we have the opportunity to hold out the gospel to those around us so that they too can have the hope and joy that we have. That’s called evangelism.

If we want to be contagious in our delight in the Lord then...

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**V. 14 – The answer to sin, is always the freedom of the gospel.**

So what exactly is Paul hoping to accomplish by opposing Peter here? He's hoping to return the attention of the church to freedom of the true gospel.

Look at verse 14. He see that their conduct was "not in step with the truth of the gospel." The image here that Paul is going for is the idea of walking straight towards something. Literally he says that he sees that they are not walking straight towards the truth of the gospel.

[This reminds me of our pet dog that we had when I was a kid. Her name was penny and she was a lean dog but she was fast and strong! As kids we would often have the chore of taking the dog for a walk, and for a while I got the bright idea of strapping on my rollerblades and instead of walking Penny, I'd let Penny pull me. Across from our house was a path that made a huge loop around a park and it was perfect. I was relatively small, and Penny was strong and lean and sometimes we got going really fast! It was a ton of fun. But Penny was also easily distracted. And in particular, she was distracted by squirrels. When she spotted one, we had a problem. The problem was of course that I wanted to stay on the path, but she had other plans. She did not care that my rollerblades did not roll on the grass, and as she would dart towards the squirrel, I'd face plant into the grass. She veered off course, and it wasn't fun!]

Peter and others had veered off course! How were they veering off course? Paul tells us in the second half of verse 14. He writes "if you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

What is Paul saying here? At first this seems confusing, but let's break it down.

Well first he is saying that Peter is Jew. That's just a statement of fact. Peter was born Jewish, and carries with him all the traditions and history of the Jewish religion and people. But, Paul goes on, he says that Peter actually is living like a Gentile and *not* like a Jew.

"Living like a Gentile" in this sense is not meant as a bad thing. The Gentile have no food restrictions, no Sabbath laws, nothing like that. And Peter has been eating and mingling with the Gentile Christians in Antioch. He has been making no distinction between Jew and Gentile in Christ. So in that sense, he has been living like a Gentile. He has been living in the freedom of having to abide by these laws for being in relationship with God.

But, Paul continues, Peter is somehow forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews. How is Peter doing that? By shrinking back and separating himself from the Gentiles, he is communicating that the Gentile Christians are in a sense "not enough". It's not enough that you believe in Christ, if you really want to be part of God's people, you need to abide by Jewish traditions. In this sense he is forcing the Gentile Christians to live like Jews.

And here's what that means. If faith in Christ is not enough, and there are laws to obey to earn salvation and being in relationship with God, then you can't just keep some of the laws, you have to keep them all! If faith alone in the grace of Christ alone is not enough to be saved, then the only other option is absolute obedience to God's entire law.

But that's not freedom is it? That's slavery. And if you're going for that, give up now cause you've already lost. There is no hope.

But there is an alternative. And this is the main point that Paul is addressing in his letter to the Galatian church. In the Good News of Jesus, there is freedom. The freedom of the gospel is that you cannot be right with God by obeying his law, but you can be right with God by trusting in Jesus who obeyed it for you!

His perfect obedience is applied to you if you believe in his sacrifice on the cross. In his sinlessness he did not deserve to die, but he traded places with you. He took your sin, and exchanged it with his perfect righteousness.

And here's the best part. You can obtain this righteousness by one way alone. Faith in him. Faith means to believe that he took your sin, and that he offers his forgiveness as a free gift of grace.

That's freedom, and Paul will go on in the next bunch of verses to give even more good news that anyone who receives this gift from Christ live a new life of joyful obedience to God.

Peter needed to be reminded of that freedom that he already had in Christ. And we know how it ends. Peter and Paul's relationship was restored, they continued together to preach the gospel of freedom in Christ.

What else can do that but the gospel of freedom? What else can restore and make alive and embolden for obedience but the gospel of freedom in Christ Jesus? What else can take someone like Saul who is filled with nothing but hatred towards God and his people and give him a new heart and new life? What else still takes sinners today, and turns them into saints by faith alone in the grace alone of Christ alone? Nothing can. That's why the gospel matters. And that's why

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