

“We Must Live According to the Gospel”

Galatians 2:11-14

Introduction:

1. What should we picture when we think of a Christian? I could take a large amount of time to present brief images of what a Christian looks like in the eyes of many. But I would like you to think for a few moments about this... Are you thinking? Do you have your picture? Now, your picture should look something like Jesus. If it doesn't look like him, you don't have a proper view of a Christian. You should see someone joyfully living out the story of the Father's glory in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. What we see in the second half of this chapter is a man who is passionately committed to reproducing Christ-likeness in everyone!
2. This incident is one of the most tense and important moments in the early history of the church. The issue unfolded from this point: Would the gospel's central teaching of justification by faith in Christ alone be the basis of the unity of the church? This is not some academic or speculative matter, as Paul makes clear. It deals with our lives.

Exposition:

- I. The nature of Peter's error (2:12)
 - A. It was practical; it concerned a change in his conduct.
 1. The tenses of the Greek text reveal a shift in how Peter related to Gentile believers. He moved from eating with them (which was a major way of showing acceptance of them as fellow disciples of Jesus) to concern about his reputation with Jewish believers in Jesus.
 2. Peter had not changed what he believed, since if he had, Paul could not have charged him and others with hypocrisy, and Paul could not have stated that Peter knew better (2:15-16). The problem was that the truth of Christ, the gospel and the new covenant was not controlling his conduct, especially his partnership with other followers of Christ. Something else was in charge of the inner person of his heart. Unless the fabric of your life is woven with those three strands, you will act like Peter and those he affected.
 - B. It sprang from the fear of people. Peter forgot the unity of Christ with all his people (Jews and Gentiles) and focused on what some of his people (Jewish) thought about him. We should not suppose that James sent these people or in any way authorized them to act or to

influence Peter and the rest as they did. The text simply points out that they were connected with James' sphere of influence. But that affected Peter greatly. He regarded their opinion too much. *Who they were* influenced him more than **Christ** in this matter.

1. People whom we regard as important to us can tremendously affect our behavior. We can quickly move from relying on Christ's acceptance of us to wanting some other person or people to accept us. We can observe this in the way we dress. We choose what we wear in conformity with the desires of people who influence us.

Illustration: Remember when we did our presentation on our trip to Mali? People interacted with us differently when we wore that attire. If I would have worn it today, you would be wondering what was going on. More likely, you would simply think I was acting weirdly.

2. God warns us against the fear of people in his word (Prov 29:25). Yet we do not listen to him. When Peter was afraid to offend these people from James, he deeply offended the Gentiles whom he had been fellowshiping with. Even more, he offended Christ, who died to save those Gentiles.

Apply: We must challenge ourselves. Who am I most afraid of offending—Christ or people? Does the truth of the gospel affect how I interact with people? Or am I more concerned about whether or not some person or people like me? Adults usually give teens a hard time about yielding to “peer pressure”, but are we more blameworthy than they? For example, are you avoiding meeting with other believers because of the opinion of ungodly relatives?

Apply: To say this differently, do you want to please the Lord or please people? Whose favorable opinion do you treasure?

II. The sad effects of Peter's error (2:13)

A. Peter led others into error.

1. “Paul calls their action *υποκρισις*, ‘play-acting’, because it did not spring from inner conviction (*υποκρινομαι* was used distinctively in classical Greek of the role of the actor on the Attic stage).” [Bruce] Peter and the others followed the easiest road, not the right road.

Illustration: At times our choices do not matter. You might enter Broad Street in Philadelphia into your GPS, and you might find it taking you by a different route than you might have chosen. But if you enter Broadway in New York City, you will find yourself in a totally different place.

2. Any leader, but especially a well-known and highly regarded leader, can pull many people down the wrong path, including other leaders. Paul was most concerned about Christ and his message, and so he knew that he must oppose Peter. It was not pleasant, but it was very necessary.

B. Peter's conduct tended toward a division in the church.

1. What Peter did led the Jews to think that Peter's and Paul's opinions were different. It led the Gentiles to think that Peter had changed his mind about God's acceptance of the Gentiles.

2. So then, how should these church members act toward one another? By his example, the Jews would no longer eat with the Gentiles. This was an act of rejection. How could the Gentiles get the Jews to accept them? Must they be circumcised in order to be accepted? The truth of the gospel was in danger.

Apply: The gospel, which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rm 1:16), binds real Christians together. We experience the same power of God operating in it. To fail to walk straight according to the truth of the gospel broke the bond of unity immediately. The gospel was replaced with human opinions, traditions and prejudices.

III. The right response to Peter's error (2:11, 14)

A. A right reason for Paul's response (2:11, 14a)

1. There was clear error. Paul says "because he was in the wrong" — literally 'condemned' (κατεγνωσμενος), not by any external authority but (as Paul saw it) by the inconsistency of his own conduct." [Bruce]

Point: Let us be sure that someone is in error before we rebuke him or her. How can we know? God's Word the Bible must be our final authority.

2. Paul was zealous for the truth. Even though Peter's error was practical, Paul perceived that the foundation of his practice was inconsistency with the gospel of Christ. The issue is, "How are people right with God? Are they right by faith in the gospel or by conformity with the law with its commands and regulations?" If they are justified by faith, then we must accept someone, recognize him or her as a partner and fellow son or daughter of God, share brotherly love with each other.

B. A right way for Paul's response (2:14b)

1. It was public correction for a public error. Since others became involved, this was necessary. Otherwise, he would have spoken privately to him. Yet, Paul at the same time speaks directly to Peter.

2. It was pertinent criticism. “Paul does not question their motives, but he condemns their conduct.” [Brown] The force Paul refers to was the force of Peter’s example. It was so powerful, it would compel Gentiles to follow Jewish customs if they were to stay in the church.

Apply: We ought to know all about this through what happened in American churches through the passion for a legalistic way of life, like “church standards”. The grace of Christ must replace such legalism. But this grace is only experienced through the gospel. Do you believe that the only way to be right with God is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ? The good news is that the Lord Jesus welcomes you today!

- David Frampton