

Contending for the Truth

Text: Galatians 2.11–14

Theme: When the gospel's truth is compromised confrontation is necessary.

Introduction — Passage to consider this morning is Galatians 2.11–14

- page 1051 in your pew Bibles
- read Galatians 2.11–14

Pray

Imagine it...at a church potluck even!

- it's not supposed to happen this way, right?
- but there it was: two leading men of the church, fighting...yes, you heard me right: fighting
- not fisticuffs, no punches thrown, but nevertheless, it was still a powerful confrontation
- at a meal shared together, this happens...how?

Peter and Paul, two pillars of the church, two apostles joined in one mission with one message

- this was unexpected!
- since they first met, not all that long ago, the right hand of fellowship had been given
- but now, here is Paul, confronting Peter, face-to-face, in front of a crowd

Many have been exceedingly uncomfortable with this passage for centuries

- some try to explain it away using a variety of made-up scenarios
- some will tell you the breach was permanent, the two never reconciling
- that seems unlikely given how Paul talks about Peter & Peter about Paul later in their epistles

What we have here, however, was breathed out by God, worked through the Holy Spirit

- it was recorded and preserved even for our benefit, as for those readers in Galatians
- this text of the altercation between these two great Apostles is here for a reason

Paul has been presenting his case for authority and independence of his gospel proclamation

- it was not received from other human beings—1.11–12
- it was received directly from Jesus Christ Himself
- Paul had received a direct calling from God for this gospel proclamation
- only explanation for it is change from persecutor to proclaimer of the gospel because of Jesus Christ on road to Damascus
- Paul didn't get his gospel from Apostle Peter; didn't meet him for three years following conversion
- even then, when the two did meet, they only met for fifteen days 1.18
- the church in Judea did not give Paul his version of the gospel
- they didn't even know him face-to-face — 1.21–24
- it was fourteen years later when Paul came to Jerusalem, bringing Titus with him
- having heard Paul's gospel presentation, they knew it to be true
- and they did not force Titus to be circumcised, nor add anything to Paul's gospel
- instead, they all agreed to the one mission, one message and ministry to which they'd been called

Now, Paul continues in 2.11–14

- in his letter he now shows that his gospel stands on its own
- it had been ratified by the Jerusalem apostles

- it even stands as an authority over any apostle who departs from it: case in point—Peter
- it doesn't have to be only in Jerusalem or in Galatia: the gospel stands everywhere
- thus we see that the gospel is THE gospel in all times, in all places
- and when that gospel's truth is compromised in any way, confrontation is necessary

What we see first is...

I. THE PUBLIC REBUKE

- “But when”...indicates a different time from previous in 2.1–10
- difficult to date specifically
- may have been sometime after miraculous deliverance from prison (Acts 12) and before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15)
- also in the timeline: famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11.27–30) and relief brought by Paul & Barnabas, 2.1–10
 - this precedes Jerusalem council of Acts 15
- Peter's withdrawal here seems to make more sense if before Council since afterward, it would be hard to figure that Peter did such a thing
 - although, given the human heart's nature, even when redeemed, it still is possible

Keep in mind: Paul not interested in replaying his relationship with Peter

- nor is he concerned to make it out to be superior to Peter
- after all, he has already said that God is no respecter of persons
- the account of his rebuke simply shows that Paul stood alone, not under apostles' authority nor to their version of the gospel
- this is also not to be construed as Paul losing his temper and flying off the handle at Peter
- no, Paul rebukes because Peter stands guilty in his behavior before God AND man in cutting off fellowship with the Gentile believers
- let this be a reminder that none of us gets off the hook for sinful behavior, when committed publicly and stand in need of correction, reproof, or rebuke.

Should Paul have done this in private instead of publicly?

- this is warranted because it is committed publicly, had public consequences, others followed his example and sinned in the doing, so public rebuke is necessary
- if left alone, this sin would have had far reaching consequences and divided the church, the very thing Paul was not willing to do

Racial overtones, to use a modern phrase

- Cotton Patch Bible on Gal. 2.11–13: But in spite of all of this, when Rock [Peter] came to Albany, I had to rebuke him to his face, because he clearly was in error. For, before the committee appointed by Jim [James] arrived, he was eating with Negroes. But when they came, he shrank back and segregated himself because he was afraid of the whites. He even got the rest of the white liberals to play the hypocrite with him, so that even Barney [Barnabas] was carried away by their hypocrisy.”
- this American-ized version shows quite accurately the ethnic issues of Paul's day

Old Testament food laws were one of the ways for Jews to show they belonged to God

- table-fellowship means fellowship before God, everyone shares as one
- these were sacred times, not simply for the sustenance of people

Antioch: perhaps a city of half a million

- only 10% were Jewish
- yet early church there grew, was strong, and included both Jew & Gentile
- it is where believers were first called “Christians” — little Christs

Antioch Church had to wrestle with these food laws and table-fellowship

- already, in Jerusalem, Apostles had agreed: Gentiles belong to the church
- they did not have to keep OT laws to be saved
- yet, still appropriate for Jewish believers to keep some of their ceremonial laws
- so, Christian Gentiles could still behave in godly Gentile manner
- Jewish believers behave in godly Jewish manner
- but what about when they came together?
- yet this posed problems: how could Jews remain kosher (clean) at the table with Gentile?
- it seems the salvation issue had been settled (Gal 2.1–10)
- but what about practical events, behaviors?
- Gentile believers did not need to keep law to be saved
- but Jewish believers not required to give up ancestral way of life
- so how can they mix together? Share table-fellowship?

Acts 10–11 tells us the answer...

- Peter receives vision from Lord Jesus to eat and go to Gentiles
- initially stunned, but told to do so for liberty was now in Christ, not in Law
- comes to Jerusalem to report, Acts 11.1
- circumcision party grumbling and complaining about this
- Peter relates entire account of his vision and visit with Cornelius
- describes proclamation of gospel, reception of gospel, and celebration because of gospel
- then in 11.17, he says: **“If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”**
(Acts 11:17 ESV)
- response to all thing new here: **“When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”**
(Acts 11:18 ESV)

Peter has travelled to Antioch, a very prominent church

- Antioch was flourishing, growing, sending missionaries
- significant center for God’s work: key location, key church
- when Peter arrives, he feels at liberty to eat with Gentile Christians
 - verb is: continued to eat with them
- after incident of Acts 10, Peter knows he is free to eat all sorts of food once forbidden
- he has witnessed to, seen the conversion of, and eaten in celebration with a Gentile, Cornelius
- so, Peter carries on this new “habit” here in Antioch

v. 12: “certain men came from James”

- this would be James, half-brother of Jesus
- why did he send them? Not told
- may be to simply report on dealings there
- but they seemed to either have been given some authority to address matters there...
- ...or they assumed authority they have not been given
- it may be that word of Peter fellowshiping, and especially eating with Gentiles reached ears in Jerusalem
- why would eating be an issue? It signified full-acceptance and reception of those you were eating with
- perhaps Jerusalem was concerned that unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem would hear and believe it to be scandalous
- may have troubled believers in Jerusalem as well; still so new to all this

Clearly, they see what Peter is doing, condemn him for doing so

- and Peter capitulates to them
- it seems difficult to believe that James would have commanded this
- 2.1–10, if indeed prior to Peter’s coming and eating, would make that next to impossible
- these men may have simply come and assumed authority they had not been given, throw their weight around, seem more important than they truly were
- note that Paul says nothing about sending a rebuke to James, therefore this only involves Apostle Peter
- **“...but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.”**

(Galatians 2:12 ESV)

*Well, now let’s consider...***II. THE SERIOUS PROBLEM**

- Key here: Peter’s theology hasn’t changed
- he responds out of fear of those of the circumcision party
- “fear” is the reason he did this
- fear of what? Censure from them?
- Being called unclean, even though he should have known better?
- how many times have we done something sinful, disobeyed a clear command of God, or gone against our own beliefs and theology, even when we knew better?

Who are these “of the circumcision”?

- **“And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.”**
(Acts 10:45 ESV)
- **“So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying,”**
(Acts 11:2 ESV)
- **“For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.”**
(Titus 1:10 ESV)
- may merely be a reference to Jews in general
- in Acts, Jewish Christians, emphasizing conservative connection to OT
- Titus reference is to false teachers, most certainly Jewish

Here, most likely referring to Jewish Christians or to Jewish unbelievers, one of the two

- if Jewish Christians? Then the same ones connected and sent from James
- if so, Peter fears what James and others would think
- but probably unlikely
 - doubtful Paul thought James responsible for Peter’s lapse
 - also, would mean Peter feared James, which is highly unlikely
- were they Jewish Christians from Antioch who thought circumcision was necessary (Acts 15.1)
 - doesn’t seem likely, for Peter sided with Paul in Gal 2.1–10 that these were false brothers seeking to enforce OT laws on salvation by grace
 - in Acts 15, Peter opposes such as these (Acts 15.7–11)
- were they unbelieving Jews?
 - in Acts 11, Peter does not fear Jewish Christians at all
 - there, he explained to them what God had done and was doing with Gentiles

- however, if these are unbelieving Jews who would persecute Jewish Christians who departed from OT law, then easier to understand Peter's fear
- may have been reports from James that Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were suffering because word of Jews (Peter) eating with Gentiles and eating unclean foods reaching Jerusalem
- Peter may have feared consequences of HIS actions upon other Jewish believers
- this seems more likely than previous two alternatives

But here we, in v. 13, we also see why this problem is so serious it needs a public confrontation

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

(Galatians 2:13 ESV)

- impact of Peter's behavior was immediate and palpable
- other Jewish Christians stopped fellowshipping with Gentile believers
- Pete's influence extended even to Barnabas, who seemed nearly “untouchable” by such nonsense
- whatever all the reasons were, Paul clearly identifies the problem as hypocritical
- Paul's friends did not act out of conviction but out of fear — fear of man

What is good to note here is this

- Paul & Peter do not part ways here; not a theological debate, but a practical one of behavior
 - Paul confronts because Peter acted AGAINST his convictions
 - even though it is not mentioned specifically, appears Peter repents
 - if not, then these two pillars of truth part ways, and Paul's efforts in 2.1–10 are for nothing
 - why isn't Peter's response recorded here?
 - because Paul isn't primarily concerned with telling of Peter's response but of the authority of the gospel; Paul is defending this against the accusations of the Judaizers
 - here, we see Paul rebuking Peter, over the truth of the gospel
 - most likely, Peter responded well in repentance BECAUSE OF the truth of the gospel
- **“But 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?’”**

(Galatians 2:14 ESV)

What Paul does here confirms that he truly is an apostle on the same level with the Twelve in Jerusalem

- he corrects Peter for deviating from the gospel
- Peter's actions were compromising the “truth of the gospel”
- Paul has already stressed the importance of this truth of the gospel—2.5
- what Peter does—impose food laws upon Gentile believers—is no different than those who wished Titus to get circumcised
- for Paul, gospel is at stake, because Peter seems to require Gentiles to observe food laws to be truly saved—that is what would get communicated by his behavior
- Peter was “not in step with” the truth of the gospel
 - this gets translated differently, depending upon the Bible translation
 - one says straightforward
 - another says, acting in line with
 - here are a few others, just so you get the key point here:
 - not walking a straight path in line with

- walking uprightly
- not really obeying the truth
- not maintaining a steady, straight course
- not following the truth

Paul's confrontation: Peter, you, a Jew, live like a Gentile as you eat and share fellowship with them

- why on earth would you make them live like a Jew then, something they are not?
- your behavior sends the message that they have to do something more than believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved
- the Judaizers tried to force—compel—Titus to get circumcised and we deemed it unnecessary
- how can you now seek to compel by your behavior the need to be forced to live something they are not?
- this is a deviation from the truth of the gospel—get back on track with the gospel

Conclusion – This text serves to teach and warn us

- our behavior can undermine our belief
- we can believe the gospel, confess it with our mouths, yet deny it with our lives

During Civil War, Southern Presbyterians had to face this truth and warning

- it was a custom for those churches to issue tokens to those qualified to take Lord's Supper
- sadly, African slaves not given these silver tokens, but one made of lead or iron
- while they could take communion, had to wait until all white parishioners partook
- this, unknown to, or willfully neglected by them, destroyed the one, true fellowship of partaking together of the Lord's Table
- that which is to signify our union with Christ together was used to divide it
- they all believed the gospel
- but their behavior undermined the truth of that gospel

What do our actions say?

- do our friendships, our dinner invitations, our ministry partnerships speak the gospel?
- or does our behavior undermine the unity and community we have in Christ?
- are we staying in step with, on the straight path forward to the truth of the Gospel?