

The Danger of Adding to the Gospel

Scripture: Galatians 2:11–12

Code: 48-9

Let's open our Bibles now to the second chapter of Galatians; Galatians chapter 2. We are coming to a text this morning that on the surface is the kind of text that no one would choose to preach on. But we don't have that choice, since we go through the books of the Bible verse by verse, and we take what comes, and it usually turns out that those which would be usually ignored by a preacher who might be picking and choosing texts become some of our favorites. This may be that for you. Let me read you Galatians 2:11-13.

"But when Cephas" – that is the Aramaic word for Peter. *Peter* is the Greek word; *Cephas* is the Aramaic - "when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy." It's a rather shocking passage: the apostle Paul confronting the apostle Peter to the face, opposing him because he was to be condemned.

What is behind this confrontation? In actuality, what is behind this confrontation is what is behind the book of Galatians. And what is behind the book of Galatians is Paul's desire to defend and declare the true gospel in the face of certain men who have come into the churches of Galatia and propagated false gospel. This is a polemical book. It is a fight. It is a defense of the true gospel against those who were purveyors of the false gospel. Now with that in mind, I want to back up a little, and we'll start at altitude, and then we'll come down and land on these few verses.

Why does religion exist in the world? It's a big question. Why does religion exist in the world? Materialists tell us that there is nothing but the material world, there is no supernatural world. But, still, religion exists. Why does it exist? And why is it so universal? And why is it so personal? And why is it in every period of time, in every location, and in every culture, every society, every ethnic group that's ever lived? Why also does religion take so many forms? Why is there religion everywhere, and why are there so many kinds of religion? Those are longstanding questions.

Now let me define religion, just in a dictionary definition. Religion is the connection between human beings and supernatural beings; that is what religion is. It is a system of belief that connects people to their deities. It is a bridge to the supernatural.

It is universal. Why is it universal? There are just a couple of very obvious reasons. It is universal because all people are created by God and in the image of God. All people are in some way a reflection of the divine God. They bear the image of God, and they feel innately that connection.

Someone once said, "It's like the blind boy who flies a kite. He can't see it, but he can feel the tug of the string that he holds in his hand." It is the tug of the eternal. It is the tug of the divine.

In Romans 1 it defines it this way: “The knowledge of God is *in* them.” “The knowledge of God is *in* them.” It’s part of being human. The Bible says that all societies feel after God. It’s an internal impulse built in. Not only is that impulse toward God part of being human, but the law of God – that is to say, standards which God has ordained - are also built into every human being. It’s Romans 2 that tells us “the law of God is written in the heart.” We know what is right and wrong, and that knowledge triggers our conscience to either excuse us or accuse us.

That answers the reason why there is religion, because man is made for God, and his something has something innate in him that drives him in the direction of God, and the law of God is written in his heart, so that he has a sense of fear when he violates that law: fear of the Judge, the God who made him. That is what it means to be human.

But that doesn’t answer the question, “Why are there so many forms of religion?” That only answers the question of, “Why has man a religious longing built in by God?” But why are there so many forms of religion? That is not answered by looking at God; that is answered by looking in the other direction at Satan.

Satan knows the true and living God. Satan knows the truth about God. Satan knows God is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Satan knows who Jesus Christ is. He knows the gospel. Even when our Lord was on earth, the demons themselves, as well as Satan, knew who He was and responded accordingly.

Why does Satan then devise so many false religions? He is the archenemy of God. He is the arch-hater of God. He, along with a third of the holy angels who rebelled and fell, compose the demonic forces. Those demonic forces do all evil that they can possibly perpetrate against the purposes of God and against God Himself. They give us the reason why there are so many false religions. There’s only one God. There are many, many, many demons – thousands, upon thousands, and thousands times thousands of demons concocting false religion.

That said, there are only two real religions in the world: that is the true religion of God and the false religion of Satan in its multiplicity of forms. Satan knows there is only one God, and one Savior, and one gospel, and one salvation, and one way to heaven. But he has proliferated human history and the world with as many religions as conceivable in the sinful hearts of men and the wicked minds of demons.

The earth is overrun with all kinds of forms of false religion. But boiled down, there really are two religions: the true religion, which God has revealed in Scripture, which is that salvation comes by grace through faith through believing; and all forms of false religion, which declare that salvation comes to man by man’s own effort, by his own achievement, by something he does – some morality, some religiosity, some ritual, some rite, some ceremony, some behavior. Either salvation is solely by God through divine achievement, divine accomplishment, or it is by man to a total degree or some kind of degree through human achievement. Satan’s religion is the religion of human achievement. God’s true religion is the religion of divine accomplishment.

Now I want you to understand this, because it’s how you define the whole world of religion. So go back to the book of Genesis, back to Genesis, and I want you to see this in its large context. Genesis 1 and 2, God creates in six days everything in the universe, absolutely everything in the

universe: the macrocosm of the universe, the microcosm of the universe created in six days. When He finished creating it, He pronounced this statement, verse 31 of Genesis 1, "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." "It was very good." A perfect creation, including man, a perfect creation. There's no sin.

Chapter 2, which recapitulates the creation of man on the sixth day, ends this way in verse 25: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." There was nothing to be ashamed of. There was no sin. You have a perfect universe, and you have a perfect man and a perfect woman – sinless. There is, therefore, no religion. There is no bridge to God. There is no way to God, because there is no barrier, there is no alienation, there is no separation.

Adam and Eve are living in the garden in the fellowship of God. It is a full, blessed, pure, righteous fellowship. There's no alienation. There's no separation. There's no need for a religion, no need to find a way to reconcile with God. God is not alienated; the sinner has not yet sinned.

Come to chapter 3, and immediately Satan finds Eve, Eve finds Adam, they disobey God. You remember the Fall occurs there. Now sin has entered the world. Immediately there is alienation and separation. Go down to verse 7: "The eyes of both of them were opened, they knew that they were naked, and now all of a sudden they are naked and there is shame; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." Now we have gone from communion to alienation, fellowship to separation. Sin has separated man from God. Now we have the need for reconciliation.

What did Adam and Eve do? Verse 7, "They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings." That is the launch of false religion. That is the launch of false religion. That is the symbol of false religion. That is the first act of man to create a way in which he himself could deal with his own shame, in which he could cover his own iniquity. And then he hides, because he hasn't yet found a way to face God.

This is the birth of false religion: men make ways to cover their own sin. But it does not salve their guilty conscience, and so they hide from God. False religion is a form of hiding from God, hiding from His true presence. That is the symbol of all false religion, that a guilty, dying sinner can make a covering for his own shame, and that somehow he can cover his shame and hide himself from God. He hides himself in his own self-made coverings.

That can't work, as we see immediately, "The Lord God," in verse 9, "called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.'" Now what once was a sweet communion with God is over. He fears God, because his conscience is accusing him strongly of sin. That's why he felt shame. That's why he and his wife covered themselves. They are now not anxious to commune with God. They are afraid of God.

They are hiding from God. God has become fearful, terrifying to them. Why? Because God said, in chapter 2, verses 15-17: "Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And if you eat, you will die." God has now become their hunter. God is stalking them to kill them; that's what they feel.

Their relationship to God has dramatically changed, and that is the relationship to God that every human being since has. And religion comes along and says, "Make some leaves. Make yourselves some covering for your shame." It doesn't work. It doesn't work. God exposes their sin, and then God begins to curse them. He curses the serpent, curses the woman, curses the man, and the curse is unleashed. That curse in that moment went to the end of the created universe. It touched every molecule of matter, every element of infinite space. The curse went instantaneously to the ends of creation. Everything was cursed - everything, including man. The coverings that man made are useless: they do not cover his shame, they do not hide him from God, and they do not remove him from divine judgment.

And then verse 21: "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." Here is the first act of true religion. If the sinner is to have a covering it has to come from God, and it has to come by death. It has to come from God, and it has to come by death. This is the first death since creation began. This is the first death, and God is the killer. This, of course, is the primary reason in the book of Genesis that you cannot put evolution in chapter 1 and 2, because nothing dies. The theory of evolution is simply an elongated series of deaths.

But there are no deaths in Genesis 1 and 2. The first death is an execution by God, and it's an amazing thing to think about, because God said to Adam and Eve, "In the day you eat, you'll die." And they were ready to die. They were covering themselves to hide themselves from God for fear that their death was coming. And they saw a death, but amazingly it was the death of an innocent substitute. And here at the very beginning, in the garden itself, is the introduction of the Christian doctrine of substitutionary death. An innocent animal gives its life to provide covering for sinners who cannot cover themselves. So in the garden, you have the beginning of false religion, in the covering that Adam and Eve made; and the beginning of true religion, which is the covering that only God can make through death, through death.

From that point on those two religions have never changed. There is the true religion that requires death, the death of the substitute. There were many animal deaths through all of Israel's history. None of them could atone for sin; but they all pictured the one who would die as the Lamb of God and take away the sins of the world. But they communicated the message that the bridge to God - true religion, the way to God - is through the death of a perfect sacrifice. Turned out that that perfect sacrifice was Jesus Christ. True religion has always realized that the sinner deserves death, that God will provide a substitute, that God will forgive and mete out His punishment on someone else who is innocent. That's what the sacrificial system communicated.

False religion has always said, "Make something to cover yourselves and hide." True religion is based on faith in what God will provide. False religion is based on the works that I provide. True religion, the religion of Scripture, is the religion that trusts what God provides; and all false religion by any name, any title, in any form, language, or structural, social context is always the same: "You provide your own covering to somehow satisfy the deity."

Now, immediately, Adam and Eve got together and had two sons, chapter 4. "Man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I've gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.' Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

Now you know this, that there were not a whole lot of lessons that Adam and Eve would have taught

their children; they were the only two people on the planet. But there were some lessons that were very, very clear in their minds. One had to do with sacrifice: that we're sinful, we're cursed, the sentence of death is on our heads. Don't offer God something of your own doing. There must be a sacrifice. There must be a sacrifice to please God. You know that Adam taught his sons that lesson, because that is *the* one lesson they learned that's recorded here in Genesis.

So it came time for the offering. Verse 3: "In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground." This is exactly what his parents did the first time. He's going to bring something that he received, that he harvested from the work of his hands, and he's going to try to come before God and cover his sin in that way.

"Abel," verse 4, "on his part also brought, but he brought of the firstlings of his flock" – that means the best of the flock – "and their fat portions" – a full, fatted animal – "And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard."

Now here again you see the two kinds of religion. God accepts the sacrifice, because sin requires a death. The death of an innocent substitute God will accept if the heart is right. The other religion is the religion illustrated by Cain who brings something that he himself has plucked up out of the ground. The plants symbolize false religion and man's efforts; that is covering without death, without the death of a substitute. Animal death symbolizes true religion and God's provision by death - a death acceptable to God in the sinner's place.

Cain then is the prototype of false religion. Cain is the prototype of false religion. Abel is the prototype of true religion. Abel brought a sacrifice. Cain offers the fruit of his labor; that becomes the endless pattern of false religion. Abel offers an animal sacrifice, because he knew he had nothing in and of himself to give. But he knew God would accept a death in the place of his death. That's how it has to be. Salvation would come by the death of an acceptable, innocent substitute.

The story turns very, very sadly to murder. Verse 5: "Cain became very angry, his countenance fell." He started to feel the guilt. "The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?'" If you had done the right thing, if you had done what you were instructed to do you wouldn't be in this condition where you're both angry and feeling guilt and remorse. "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

"Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." And here is the other thing that you need to learn from this: true religion has always been slaughtered by false religion. Look at the world. It is always false religion that leads the massacre against the true people of God - false religion in some form. The way of Cain is the way of works and hates the way of faith; the way of Abel is the way of faith that obeys God. They way of Cain trusts in himself; the way of Abel trusts in another. The way of Cain doesn't need a death; the way of Abel demands a death.

And as the history goes from there at the Tower of Babel, the people followed the way of Cain. They would build a tower to God, and judgment came. On the other hand, there was Noah who followed the way of Abel, but it was only Noah and his sons and daughters, and the rest of the world was engulfed in the way of Cain, and consequently engulfed in the death that came to them through the

global Flood. Even after the Flood subsided and life began again, the way of Cain, the way of Satan, dominated the world.

Then you come to Abraham, the story of Abraham – incredibly wonderful story. God calls out a people to follow the way of Abel, the way of faith, the way of sacrifice. Cain's way was the majority way in the world; it still is. Abel's was the small believing remnant that came through Abraham, and initially constituted the nation Israel. But even in the nation Israel, there were both religions existing within the framework of Judaism.

And you need to keep that in mind, that false religion is not just outside the boundaries of true religion. It is both outside and inside. There were forms of Judaism that were false, as there are forms of Christianity that are false. Satan doesn't just do his work as anti-Christian; he does his work as subtly pretending to be Christian.

The whole nation of Israel, by way of illustration, was involved in the sacrificial system. The whole nation was involved in it. Sacrifices were given every single day, and repeated sacrifices on special occasions. The whole nation was part of that system, and yet they still were engulfed in false religion, because there were many of them, most of them, the majority of them, going through the sacrificial motions, but not with a pure heart, not with a repentant heart, not like the publican in Luke 16, pounding on the chest, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." They were trusting in their works, trusting in their religion, trusting in their Jewish heritage, trusting in the covenants God had given them in the past.

The world had gone the way of Cain. Most of Israel had gone the way of Cain; and most of Israel, having gone the way of Cain, ended up killing the prophets who were going the way of Abel. Even in Judaism, the religion of Cain was killing those who were in the religion of Abel. It's been the same in Christianity. True Christians, through the history of Christianity, have been massacred by false Christians.

So the two religions were side-by-side in Judaism as they are side-by-side in Christianity even today. The prophets exposed that repeatedly. You can read many of the things the prophets said in denouncing not only the nations around them and their false religion, but denouncing the hypocrisy of Israel. Isaiah does it repeatedly; they all do it. I think about Amos chapter 5 where Amos says, "Stop your festivals, stop your sacrifices, stop your offerings, stop your music. Your hearts aren't right. I hate what you're doing."

To offer a sacrifice was the right thing to do, but it had to be done with a right heart; and a right heart said, "I know I'm a sinner. I know I can't earn my salvation. I trust You God to be merciful to me, to be gracious to me, and to provide a substitute in my place to take my punishment," even though they didn't know who the substitute was.

Paul picks this reality up in Romans 2 when he says, "Not all Israel is Israel. Not every Jew is a true Jew." There are Jews who are Jews outwardly, and there are a lot fewer who are Jews inwardly – that is who really trusted God, and to whom salvation came, because they believed like Abraham, and it was counted to them for righteousness.

You come to the time of Jesus and you meet some of the true Jews: Zacharias, Elizabeth, Joseph,

Mary, Simeon, Anna – very few. The nation at the time of our Lord was hypocritical, massively hypocritical. Judaism was basically defined by the Pharisees who would say, “I thank You that I’m not like other men. I’m not a sinner like this publican over here. I tithe, I fast” – et cetera, et cetera – “I’m worthy to be received by You, O God.”

The Bible is clear that the Jews trusted in themselves. They did it through their whole history. They certainly did it at the time of our Lord, and even the time of the apostles. They had literally developed an apostate form of Judaism, which was basically designed and defined by rabbinic tradition that had replaced the Word of God. Achieving right relationship to God was done by strict obedience to Mosaic rules and ceremonies, epitomized by the scribes and Pharisees who were the proud, boasting purveyors of that hypocritical, apostate religion.

Then Pentecost comes and the church is born. Now you’ve got Jews in Jerusalem who have become Christians. This is a problem for some Jews. Out of that vast, vast mass of legalistic, proud Jews, rises a group called the Judaizers – Judaizers because they wanted to Judaize Gentiles. In other words, they said this: “We believe in Christ, and we believe He’s Messiah. We believe in His death and resurrection. But we don’t believe you can be saved by simply believing in Him. You must be circumcised, and you must adhere to the law of Moses and the ancestral traditions.” They did not believe that the atoning work of Jesus Christ was all-sufficient. They believed it was necessary, but you had to add your works.

That essentially is what all false forms of Christianity also say today. They denied, rejected the sufficiency of the atoning, substitutionary death of Jesus, and demanded that Gentile converts be circumcised and adhere to Mosaic rules and traditions. They were so adamant about this that they trailed the apostle Paul in his ministry and went into the churches that he founded and began to propagate this and tell the Gentiles, “You are not truly saved unless you are circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic rules. You are not truly saved.” It is in the face of this – and now you can go back to Galatians – that Paul wrote Galatians, the first of his thirteen letters.

Is it true? Do Gentiles have to go through Mosaic formulas: circumcision and ritual and rules? Do they have to be circumcised? Paul writes Galatians to say, “Absolutely not.”

He said it in Romans - we read it, didn’t we - in chapter 4. Abraham himself believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness before he was ever circumcised. Circumcision plays no role in that. And the Mosaic law didn’t come until long after Abraham.

Paul sees this addition to Christ: “Yes, Christ. Yes, He died and rose. But it’s not enough. You have to be circumcised. You have to adhere to the law.” Paul saw that as a false gospel. And in chapter 1, verses 8-9, he pronounced a curse on anybody who preaches that as we’ve been seeing. Paul is fighting now – this is a polemical book - he’s fighting for the true gospel: the gospel of grace alone, through Christ alone, received by faith alone.

Let me sum up what Paul would say based on what we read in Romans 4 and what’s before us. At no time, at no time in history has any person been saved, made right with God, been forgiven, escaped judgment because of anything that person has done - at no time. No one has ever been saved by works, never. That is the way of Cain. No one ever saved by works. That is why faith is so much the subject that dominates Paul’s letters.

So he's writing because the Judaizers have gone into the region of Galatia. They've gone into the churches of Lystra, Iconium, Derbe, and Antioch, and they've taken this false gospel, this damning gospel, in and they've confused the people. It's not that the believers have lost their salvation; you can't lose it. It's that they've become confused about what the gospel really is; and because they're confused about the gospel, they're subject then to proclaim a false gospel. Paul is not trying to save them as if they could be lost again. He is trying to save their usefulness by making sure they understand the true gospel.

Now the Judaizers, in order to get the people in Galatia to lean their way toward this false, Judaizing gospel, had to try to discredit Paul. So they denounced him, said he was a false apostle. So Paul has to open this book defending his apostleship. He opens the book defending his apostleship.

Now we've heard him give a defense in chapter 1. And what was his defense in chapter 1? That, "I was called an apostle not by men, I was called by God. I was called directly by Jesus Christ." We saw that in the Damascus Road experience; he met the risen Christ.

He says, "I didn't go to Jerusalem. I didn't learn my theology from the apostles. I went into the desert in Nabataean Arabia for three years. For three years I was tutored by Jesus Christ, just as the twelve apostles were tutored by Him for three years when He was on earth. For three years I learned everything out of the mouth of Christ, not from the apostles. I am a true apostle taught by Christ."

His first defense in chapter 1 is his own personal encounter with Christ. His second defense in the opening of chapter 2 is, "I did finally after fourteen years" – actually seventeen if you add the three in Arabia – "I finally went down to Jerusalem for a prolonged visit, and the apostles affirmed me, and said, 'The gospel you preach is the true gospel'" – you see that in verse 9 – "I met with James the brother of our Lord, Cephas" – who's Peter – "and John. They were the pillars, and they gave to me and Barnabas my companion the right hand of fellowship, so we might go to the Gentiles. They didn't change our theology."

"So I tell you I am a true apostle because of my encounter with Christ over three years. I tell you I'm a true apostle because of the validation of the apostles in Jerusalem." But here, friends, is the final devastating proof: "I opposed Peter to his face." Paul says elsewhere, "I don't come behind any apostles." And he didn't. He took on Peter.

Let's come down to verse 11. "When Cephas" – or Peter – "came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned." Peter had come to Antioch, Antioch of Syria where the first church was and where Paul and Barnabas were pastors, along with a group of other men mentioned in the twelfth chapter of Acts. Peter had come there, and he'd stayed a long time. Peter obviously must have been the center of attention. "Tell us about Jesus." Can you imagine that? "Tell us about Him. Tell us, What was it like when you walked on water? Tell us all the things that we've heard." Remember the gospels haven't been written yet, and an eyewitness with Christ would have meant everything to these Gentile believers up in Antioch in a flourishing gospel church. Peter would have been some kind of icon, some kind of hero to them.

Why would Paul oppose him to the face? And it's very strong language. This is the clash we'll call it, the clash. "What do you mean 'oppose him'?" That's a term that – it's an interesting term, [???

anthistémi. It means “to stop somebody in the direction they’re going.” Peter is doing something that has to be stopped.

It could be translated, “I forbid him. I set myself against him. I play defense, stopping him in his tracks; and I did it to his face, eyeball to eyeball, because he stood condemned.” I mean that’s just shocking. How do you do that to someone like Peter? Where does Paul get this boldness? Is this some kind of personal jealousy? What’s going on here? No. Peter had done something that Paul saw as an attack on the gospel: the gospel of grace alone, faith alone, apart from works. And so he condemned him. This is an apostolic clash of massive proportions.

First half of the book of Acts is all the preaching of Peter. Second half’s all the preaching of Paul. What’s going on here? Why the clash? Well, the cause is in verse 12: “For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.” Wow.

What’s going on? Is this personal jealousy? Not at all. Let me unfold this for you.

“Prior to the coming of certain men from James.” James is the head of the Jerusalem church, the brother of our Lord. He’s kind of the leader there; we see that in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. So here comes some men. I don’t think James sent these men. I think they said they were from James, and they had some connection to the Jerusalem church. At this time, that’s the mother church, that’s the church. So somehow they were associated with it. And prior to the arrival of these men who came from the Jerusalem church and said they had a connection with James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles.

Now why is that a big deal? Because Jews didn’t eat with Gentiles. Just as a normal rule of life, Jews didn’t eat with Gentiles. Forget Christianity, forget the gospel, forget the church; Jews didn’t do that. A Gentile was unclean; a Gentile home was unclean; a Gentile utensil was unclean. They couldn’t go near Gentiles. They couldn’t eat off the dish a Gentile offered them. And these were rabbinic standards that were iron-fisted laws. It was believed that all Gentile food was contaminated by being unclean, to say nothing of that which was not kosher, not according to the standards of the Mosaic dietary laws. So what you had was the Jews holding to their own dietary laws and a kind of developing racism toward Gentiles. We saw the racism even in the day of Jonah, where he didn’t want to see Gentiles repent. Jews resented, hated Gentiles; and they kept separate.

Peter was raised in that environment. He comes to Antioch; he’s in a Gentile church. And what does he do? He does what a Jew would never do. He used to eat with the Gentiles. What is that saying? That he knows that the lesson he learned in Acts 10, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” There’s nothing unclean anymore, nothing unclean anymore - the dietary laws are over. In Christ, the middle wall is broken down. Jew and Gentile are one, and Christ is neither Jew nor Greek. That’s all over with. That’s all over. He knows that.

He also knows that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. And when he eats with them, it’s not just a meal; it’s the love feast; it’s the Lord’s Table. He’s just living life with the Gentiles. He’s with them all the time. They’re being served the same food. He’s finding out what it is to eat all the stuff that Jews could never eat. He’s been liberated.

He is turning his back on the [???] *halakhoth*, the list of elder traditions that prescribed certain kinds of food. And the fact that you couldn't eat certain kinds of meat. You couldn't eat meat that was butchered by a Gentile, or that was, a part of it was offered to idols, or violated the laws of Moses, or had been in the hands of Gentiles, or served on Gentile plates, and all of that. And all of a sudden that's not even an issue. Peter's having a great time. He's discovering all kinds of foods that he'd never eaten before, eating with Gentiles, his brothers and sisters in Christ, until certain men show up. And he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof. He pulled back.

They would have criticized him mercilessly for eating with those Gentiles. And they would have said this: "Not only are you not to eat with Gentiles, they're not believers, because they haven't been circumcised, and they don't adhere to Mosaic rules. So you're eating not only with Gentiles who are unclean, but you're eating with nonbelievers." And they obviously intimidated Peter.

"He began to withdraw and hold himself aloof" - and there's no questioning the motive - "he was fearing the party of the circumcision." That's the Judaizers. "The party of the circumcision" they became known as. He was afraid of them. Good men, great men - for the sake of pride and self-protection, self-preservation, popularity - compromise. They compromise.

Peter just can't get out of his own shadow, can he? I mean it's just a history of this guy doing this. He's an illustration of how sanctification works. It's not a straight line upward. It's a few steps forward and a few steps back, and a few steps forward and a few steps back. And it's where we all live, isn't it?

All of a sudden now he doesn't want to be with them, the Gentiles. He won't eat with the Gentiles. He pulls back from the Lord's Table. He pulls back from the love feast. He pulls back from the normal fellowship around the meals. He pulls back, fearing.

Peter afraid? It could cost him his reputation. He wants to be liked, he wants to be accepted. He also knows that he's supposed to take the gospel to the Jews; that's his particular calling. And now if he offends them all, what's going to happen?

What he did was so influential, verse 13 says, that, "The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy." Peter became a hypocrite. He acted like he agreed with the Judaizers - *devastating*. And so did the rest of the Jews that were there, and so did Barnabas. And now what you have is a fracture in the whole church.

And what is this more than that? This is not about disunity; this is an assault on the gospel of faith, because now Peter is acting as if the Judaizers are right. "For that," Paul says, "I opposed him to his face, because he was to be condemned."

If you deviate from the gospel in what you say about the gospel, or if you deviate from the gospel in how you act, you're in violation of the purity of the gospel. It's hard; I understand. It's hard to be bold for the gospel when you're with people who compromise the gospel but also talk about Christ. It's hard to talk to someone in a form of Christianity that is apostate, heretical, outside the bounds of the true gospel. It's hard to talk to a Roman Catholic or somebody in some cult or some fringe group, or any kind of "Christian" organization that has a view of the gospel that's in error.

It's hard to be bold, because you want to be accepted by them. And maybe you say, "Well, you know, they're not going to listen to what I have to say if they don't" – it's hard. And the fear of men brings a snare, doesn't it. Even Peter had to be confronted to the face.

Don't attack the gospel. Don't attack it by changing it in its content, and don't attack it by siding with people who have a false gospel. You can't do that. Paul is saying to the church at Galatia, "We have to have the gospel clear; that's why we're in the world."

Lord, we thank You that we've been able to look at this fascinating moment in the life of Paul and Peter. We know that as time went on, Peter grew in his love and respect for Paul, and even called the writings of Paul Scripture. But in this moment we see the importance of recognizing Paul as an apostle. He is an apostle to the degree that he is more faithful to the true gospel than even Peter, who was the head of the twelve. He is an apostle because he will defend the gospel.

Peter wanted to avoid persecution. He wanted to avoid unpopularity. Paul never did that, never did that. He wouldn't compromise the gospel no matter what. Peter needed this rebuke. He needed to have someone he could look up to, and that someone was Paul.

Father, help us to be faithful to the gospel that we proclaim; and even in our relationships, make clear where we stand. May there be no hypocrisy that compromises the true gospel. May we not be intimidated into affirming those who preach a false gospel, who add works to the gospel of grace and faith. Do Your work in and through our church and through our lives, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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