



Galatians 2:11-21
The Cost of Compromise

Summary: When people look to other people for affirmation and approval instead of Jesus, division and departure and from the gospel follow.

We have been talking a lot about the gospel lately, the good news that you can have a before and after in your life. You're not stuck. You aren't broken. You aren't past your prime, you didn't miss your window, *because* the greatest thing you can do in life is to know God and enjoy Him forever, which means you can begin to fulfill your life's purpose right here, right now, and let all the other stuff you're worried about fall and settle where it may.

This is the message Paul was preaching and it was his personal experience. Jesus showed up and turned his life upside down and inside out. He helped Paul see that he had been living by his own rules, for his own reasons, trusting his own strength and smarts, and what he needed to do was repent - to stop living that way, and surrender his life and it's trajectory to God. He needed to accept that Jesus had fulfilled God's laws and requirements for him, and believe that now, even though Paul was still very flawed and sinful, he was completely accepted by God.

And Paul did. He received this good news, and it utterly transformed his life. Then he began to share it with others and they were transformed too. Until, some people came along and tried to say, "Well, it's all very nice and good that you have Jesus, but, you know, Jesus was a Jew, and if you really want to be like Him and find *full* acceptance from God, you need to become more like a Jew yourself and the first step is to be circumcised."

They thought it was kind of like when your parents help you buy something you can't afford on your own. They don't make you pay for the whole thing, because they know you can't earn that much on your own, but they make pay for a portion of it. That's kind of what these guys thought about salvation - that Jesus would take care of the down payment, and then you could take over the monthly payments. He would help you, but you're still going to do the work.

And Paul said, "No way!" If you have to add something to Jesus in order to please God, that completely spoils the good news that we receive salvation as a gift - it's a truth he's so convinced of, he actually called out the Apostle Peter, one of Jesus' best friends, publicly, to his face, accusing him of acting like a hypocrite over the issue. Read with me:

Galatians 2:11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; **12** for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. **13** And the rest of the Jews also played

the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Now, to understand all of this, you need to know a little bit about Antioch. It was the third largest city in the Ancient Roman Empire. You had Rome up north in Europe. Down south in Africa, there was Alexandria in Egypt. Antioch was over to the east, on the coast of Modern Turkey. It was a big city, with a diverse population, and God was doing amazing things there. Antioch became an early hub of the Christian church; in fact, it was there, in Antioch, that the followers of Christ were first called Christians, meaning little Christs, people who imitate Christ.

When the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, men like Peter, James, and John heard what was happening in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to see what was going on. When he showed up he quickly realized all these new Christians needed some leadership and discipleship, and so he brought in Paul and together they, and others, began to minister and serve and the church in Antioch continued to grow and grow.

Well, at some point, Peter came over to see things for himself and for a while he just jumped right into to what was happening. He made friends with men and women from diverse backgrounds. He hung out with them. He sat down and ate with them. They had what Christians call fellowship – they experienced the family of God - when you discover you have a place to belong, something to be a part of, because you have been adopted by God, and so has this other person, and now, even though your backgrounds are different, maybe your political leanings are different, maybe your educational background and professional achievement are different, you find common ground in Christ and discover that you can actually learn from each other, be blessed and encouraged by each other, and worship with each other.

You discover this strange reality that you actually have more in common, at a deeper level, with someone who grew up in an entirely different country or culture, than you do with someone who lives in your own neighborhood, shops at the same stores, and whose kids go to the same school as yours – because the person in your neighborhood doesn't know Christ, and yet this stranger you've just met worships with you and you experience Christ together.

Peter knew all of this. He had experienced it first hand, which was a mind-blowing experience for a guy who grew up in a small fishing town deep in Israel. This was a whole new world compared to the way Peter was raised. He grew up as a Jew and followed Jewish customs including keeping a social distance with people who were not Jewish. He followed

the Jewish law, which God had given to the people through Moses. But ever since he met Jesus, he's been understanding more and more and his world has been opening up wider and wider.

One thing he had to realize was that the law – all these rules and regulations the Jews lived by – they were never intended to be a process of salvation. They were never meant to be a formula you followed to get to heaven. Instead, the Law was meant to be a diagnostic tool – to show you what God required and to help you see that you could never measure up on your own, and then it encouraged you to look to God for the grace and forgiveness you couldn't earn on your own.

The Law showed you the sacrifices that were required, but also helped you understand you could never offer enough of them, because as soon as you offer one and you get straight with God, then you go out and blow it again and you need to make another sacrifice.

The Law was meant to show us the unreachable holiness, purity, and greatness of God and that we could never reach Him on our own, we need Him to reach down to us.

That's what happened with Jesus. He came to be the ultimate fulfillment of the Law – He did exactly what the Law required – He lived a perfect life. And then, even though He had never done anything wrong, He died on the cross, as a sacrifice for us – He was 'the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world' – one final, entirely sufficient, sacrifice for all time. And now, if we put our trust in Him, we can be saved.

This was the gospel that Jesus taught His disciples - like Peter. Only, they didn't fully understand it as it was all happening. So, after His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus continued to instruct them, lead them, and challenge them to grasp what it meant to no longer live by the old law, no longer live this separate Jewish life, but to reach out to others, to take the gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation, and increase the diversity of the Kingdom of God.

And then, when Peter and the other disciples gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast of Passover, with large numbers of Jews who lived all over the world in town for the feast, God poured out the Holy Spirit compelling Peter to share the gospel, and drew thousands to Christ. These new converts spoke different languages and had some different views on certain issues, but they were all still religiously Jewish, they were 'his people.'

Later, God used Peter to share the gospel with the Samaritans, an ethnic group that was only half-Jewish. That was a pretty big stretch for Peter, to understand that God was going to save people who weren't Jews - but it was pretty clear, that's exactly what He was doing.

And then, in Acts 10, we get this story of Peter praying and he receives a vision from God. Something like a sheet is let down from Heaven, full of all kinds of things that a good Jew who followed the Law would never eat. And Peter hears this voice telling him, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat, do not call anything common that I have made clean.' And it happens three times because Peter is resistant at first – this is hard to accept, but it's abundantly clear.

And as soon as it's over he meets some Gentiles, people with no Jewish background. They ask Peter to come and meet their boss, a Roman centurion who has been praying to God. Peter goes along, meets the man, whose name is Cornelius, shares the gospel, and Cornelius and his whole household are saved and Peter says, Now I understand what that whole vision was about: "God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from any nation who fear Him" (Acts 10:34-35). Again, it was a struggle to realize that God was saving people who didn't know the Law or relate to God that way, and yet it was obvious and clear – that's exactly what God was doing, so Peter spends several days with this Roman family, breaking all sorts of traditions and rules he grew up with, but enjoying their common fellowship in Christ.

Later, he went back to Jerusalem and told people there what happened, they questioned him for breaking all the traditions but he said, "Look, God did this, not me. What do you want me to do, resist God?" And they all agreed, it's completely new to us, but it's also undeniably obvious, God wants to reach everyone with the gospel and there's no need to keep up our old traditions.

So, it seemed like everything was good. And now Peter could show up in Antioch and hang out with people who didn't follow Jewish traditions and customs and he could share dinner with them and sit with them and even stay in their homes, because they were finding unity in Christ.

But there was this one problem, and it was a big one. Some habits are hard to break, and not everyone likes change. So, you had this group of people that said, "Can't we do both? Can't we keep all our old traditions, keep the law, stay distinctively Jewish and add some Jesus to it? Then people can come to Jesus, anyone can come to Jesus, as long as they move on through Jesus and receive the law of Moses too." They wanted down-payment Jesus, not paid in full Jesus. These were the people Paul opposed and these were the people who had come to Antioch.

Before they showed up, Peter had been hanging out with everyone, treating everyone equal, showing no favorites, adapting to the local culture.

But when they showed up, Peter felt the need to act differently in order to impress them or satisfy them, or prove that he was still one of them. We'd love to have more information and understand exactly what happened a little better, but this much is clear – he didn't change his mind on what he believed, *he just changed his actions* and played the hypocrite.

He stopped hanging out with the all the people from church who didn't follow Jewish traditions, he reverted to his old ways, the things he grew up with. And this new group of people, the ones who supposedly came from James up in Jerusalem – we learn later that wasn't true, they misrepresented themselves – but Peter started hanging out with them. And Barnabas joined them. And the Bible says that was because they were afraid.

Which is crazy right? I mean we're talking about Peter, big, bold, defiant Peter, the one who stood in front of the Sanhedrin and told them: "You tell me whether it's right to listen to you or listen to God." Peter, the one who worked miracles and preached to thousands, he's suddenly afraid of these men who just showed up.

Again, it's something we'd love to have more details on, but it reminds you in a really sad, tragic way, of the fact that he was super bold with Jesus before the crucifixion too. He told Jesus, 'I'm with You all the way, 110% boss! Everyone else may leave You, but not me!' And then what did Jesus say? "Tonight, you'll deny Me three times before the rooster crows."

So, Peter has this pattern of being bold and then crumbling, taking a strong, defiant, stance and then caving in order to please people.

Which, is probably something you can relate to, isn't it?

If you walk with Jesus for very long you're going to experience both boldness and timidity. There will be times when you feel like you could stand against the world, and times when you don't want anyone to know what you really think and you hope they don't ask.

You see, the sad truth is, we all know exactly what Peter is feeling. I won't ask you to show your hand if you've ever comprised your convictions because you were afraid of what someone else would say or think. I'll just tell you that if no one else raised their hand, I would still be raising mine, because the experience is real, and you do feel the pressure at times to conform.

But the pressure we feel in those moments is the result of having our priorities out of order. We're looking at, thinking about, people before we think about God.

There are times when you're going to fear what people think about you, what they say, or what they'll do. And that fear can be legitimate. We want to be accepted. We want to be liked. We want to be respected. And, we don't want to do anything that would compromise that, we don't want to do anything that would tarnish our image, or the image of our spouse, our boss, or our team.

But, we should have an even greater fear of God. And we should let that greater fear give us courage to stand for what we know is right. And it's important to remember: *Peter knew what was right*. But he downplayed it in order to reduce or avoid conflict with this other group.

In the process, he lost his integrity, he insulted the people he been hanging out with – all the sudden they feel like second-class Christians - and he's in danger of spreading a false gospel that encourages people to love Jesus and learn the Old Testament law so they can hang out with him and all the cool kids from Jerusalem.

And that's why Paul steps in and says something in front of everyone.

Now, some of you are familiar with the leadership principle that you want to praise in public and critique in private. That's actually Biblical, it follows the pattern for confrontation laid out by Jesus in Matthew 18, but here we see something happening publically and it affects a large group of people so Paul jumps right to a public confrontation.

Think about the courage that must have required. Peter is well known, well liked. He's got a solid reputation, he spent years with Jesus. He was a leader in the church in Jerusalem. It was easy to make a case that he was an important man. And if Paul confronts him and it doesn't go well, Paul could walk away looking really bad. Paul's opening himself up for criticism about the way he handled it, or what he said. People are going to feel sorry for Peter and rush to his side and say, "You know, I know what you mean, I know your heart, and it wasn't right for Paul to call you out like that."

Paul is taking a huge risk here, but notice why he does it – it's not to provoke a fight, it's not to make people choose sides, it's not to make a name for himself by taking on the big guy, it's because *he really believes the gospel is at stake*. He says, 'How can we do the wrong thing if we're just following Jesus? The law no longer holds us back, we're supposed to be connecting with even more people, not forcing them to become more like us:'

Galatians 2:17 "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Here's his whole point. If we have to go back to living that old way, the way that pointed us toward our need for a Savior, then apparently our Savior hasn't come yet, and Christ died in vain.

That's a huge claim. But, it gets right to the core of the issue because it makes us ask the question: how do you attain right standing with God?

Now, I know we've talked about a lot of foreign stuff this morning, names and places and religious ideas that might all be strange to you. And honestly, putting all of this together in a way that makes sense for everyone is one of the hardest parts of what I do. But no matter who you are, you can understand this question, and you need to ask it: how do you gain a right standing with God? How do you make sure that you're OK with God? Because that's what this blow up was all about.

Do you need to be a good person? And if so, what does that mean? And if you do something bad, how much good do you need to do to make up for it? What's the conversion rate?

Or do you need to live by certain rules? And if so, what are they? And what do you do if you break one?

Or, do you think God is just cool with everyone, that everything works, because He's a God of love and He knows you try? Well, again, what if you do something really, really horrible? Then what? Does anyone ever fall out of favor with God?

Now the thing all of these options have in common is that they depend somewhat on you doing or not doing things. They rest on some combination of your behavior and God's character. It's down-payment Jesus.

But the gospel says, actually nothing rests on you – [for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.](#)"

The gospel is meant to be a gift, God doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. So, which one do you trust in, which one do you depend on to make you right with God? Some mix of your good works and His good grace, like the people Peter was afraid of, or do you depend entirely and completely on God, trusting only in the work that has been done by Jesus? Do you want down-payment Jesus or paid in full Jesus?

This whole scene we've looked at this morning encourages us to depend on the paid-in-full gospel, doesn't it? After all, it shows us that even a very religious man, a very good man, can stumble and fall at times. He can be afraid of the thoughts and opinions of one group and then hurt the feelings of another. And if that can happen to Peter, what about us?

Well, the good news is, Peter was never accepted on the basis of his good record, and so he's not retained on that basis either. He was accepted by grace, and by grace he can be restored if he will repent.

Which is exactly how the story ends.

Paul speaks up, corrects Peter and takes a stand for the gospel. We don't know how it all defused from there, but we do know this – Paul and Barnabas would spend years together traveling around the region sharing the gospel together and Peter would continue in leadership in ministry as well. Paul would later write letters to the church in Corinth affirming Peter's ministry and the fact that Peter, James, and Paul all shared the same gospel.

And Peter would later write letters to the churches affirming Paul's ministry, he even wrote in 2 Peter 3:16 that Paul's writings were sometimes hard to understand, but they were on a par with all other Scripture. In other words, Peter humbly acknowledges the spiritual authority of the man who publicly humiliated him when Peter was in danger of confusing the gospel.

And so, here are the three things I want to leave you with this morning.

1. There is a very real temptation for us to complicate the gospel, to add things to it that God never asked us to add – to turn paid in full Jesus into down payment Jesus.
2. There is a very real temptation for us to compromise our convictions because we're afraid of what other people will think. But,
3. If the gospel is true, then when we fall to that temptation, we should come right back to 1 – the gospel is simple: if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In other words, it's not all resting *on you*, but it's all being offered *to you*, in Jesus Christ.

If you are with us this morning and you are not a Christian, I hope you'll become one. I hope, and I've been praying, that God will grab your attention with these things, even if they're a little hard to understand - just start with this: are things cool between you and God?

If you think they are, how do you know? And if you know they're not, what do you think you need to do to fix it? If you listen to Scripture, the answer is simple: confess that you have done wrong, ask for forgiveness in Christ, and ask Him, to teach you, how to live from this day forward in a way that pleases Him. If you have more questions, ask the person who brought you or reach out after the service to me or any of the leaders or staff, just go to the welcome table and tell them you want to speak to someone or come right down front here.

If you're with us this morning and you are a Christian, I hope you'll be encouraged to keep the gospel simple and clear – to confess that there have been times when you compromised, just like Peter, and times when you have tried to add things to your faith to impress God or other people. Confess that, and repent, and ask God to restore you, just like He did with Peter. Ask Him to make your future even better than your past as you walk with Him and trust in Him. Cling to paid-in-full Jesus and reject the idea of a down payment.

Let's pray.

Who do I need to see/check in on/check up with/thank?

What do I need to do?

How did the message go?

Who did I meet?

What do I need to do?

Any prayerful thoughts?