

Chapter 4
Living Out the Gospel
Galatians 2:1-14

Main Idea:

Paul explains that there is only one gospel, and those who believe it should care for the poor and fellowship with all types of believers.

- I. Gospel Centrality (2:1-9)**
 - #1: Preservation (2:1-5)
 - #2: Responsibility (2:6-7)
 - #3: Empowerment (2:8)
 - #4: Partnership (2:9)

- II. Gospel Compassion (2:10)**
 - #1: Unity
 - #2: Priority
 - #3: Eagerness
 - #4: Motive

- III. Gospel Conduct (2:11-14)**
 - A. The Gospel Crushes Superiority
 - B. The Gospel Creates Humble Boldness
 - C. The Gospel Creates Diverse Community

One of my daughters was telling my wife Kimberly about a bad dream she had. Kimberly told her that when she was a little girl, she would try to change the channel in her mind. She would turn to the one where she and Jesus were together and happy in heaven. My daughter Angela said, “What channel is that on?” Good question!

We need keeping our minds on the right channel. The Galatians were considering “turning” to the wrong channel (Gal 1:6). In chapter 3, Paul says that it was as though they were under a spell (3:1). They were “bewitched.” Why? The message that sinners can be forgiven by grace through faith in Christ alone has always come under attack. False teachers were attacking the message and the messenger, distorting the true gospel. They changed the channel on the Galatians. But Paul is pushing “Go Back” button on the theological remote control, turning their attention back to the pure gospel that they were originally focused on.

The church must remain focused on the gospel. It will address the issues, sins, and idols of the congregation because it is so powerful and applicable. Keller notes, “Because the gospel is endlessly rich, it can handle the burden of being the one ‘main thing’ of a church” (*Center Church*, 36). Paul’s task was to put the main thing back in the center of the Galatian community.

Only One Gospel. In Galatians 2:1-10, we see that Paul and the other apostles were in total agreement on the nature of the gospel, and the need to care for the poor. In chapter 1, Paul described how his message came from Jesus and not from any man (1:11-12). He explained how

he received his message independently from the other apostles through revelation from Jesus (12). Because of this, he was no second-class apostle. In chapter 2, Paul describes how even though he received his message independently from the other Jerusalem apostles, his message was identical to the other apostles' message.

To prove that his message was identical to the other apostles, Paul stresses how he paid a visit to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion. At this meeting, Paul's gospel was endorsed and approved by the apostles (Stott, 40).

However, there was a conflict later between the apostles. Paul's biography continues in 2:11-14, as he describes how a conflict between him and Peter. By refusing to eat with Gentiles, Paul accuses them of not living in step the gospel. From this episode, we see the need to work the gospel into our hearts daily. Even the best of Christians fall into the trap of living out a works-based salvation lifestyle, even though professing to believe in salvation by grace.

Let us consider the nature and outworking of the gospel under three headings: (1) Gospel Centrality, (2) Gospel Compassion, and (3) Gospel Conduct.

1. GOSPEL CENTRALITY (2:1-9)

A Missionary Text. While not every Christian would classify himself or herself as “a missionary,” we need to remember that Christianity is a missionary faith. From the beginning Abraham's call, we know that God had a purpose for bringing the nations to faith in Christ. Israel was to be “a light to the nations” (Isa 49:6b). Then, God sent forth Jesus the true Israelite, as a missionary into this world, who “went about doing good,” (Acts 10:38) in “word and deed” (Luke 24:19). He proclaimed “good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18a), and showed us what it looks like to care for our neighbor. Before his ascension, he commissioned his disciples to go to the nations with the good news, and we see that lived out in the book of Acts. If you are a Christian, then you are a missionary. In the words of Spurgeon, “Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter” (“A Sermon and a Reminiscence”).

Notice the “missions flavor” of this passage. Paul uses “commission language” in verse 9: “that we should go to the Gentiles.” He uses “people group language” in verse 7: “uncircumcised and circumcised.” The very idea of an “apostolic ministry” in verse 8 carries the idea of planting the gospel into new areas, as a “sent one.” In classical Greek, the word “apostle” was actually of a naval expedition sent off on a long and arduous mission. It can be used in a particular sense for the original, not-to-be-repeated apostles. But it is also used in a general sense, for we are all sent as missionaries (cf., Jn 13:16, Phil. 2:25, 2 Cor. 8:23).

It is important to notice this missions flavor, as it relates to the message of the gospel. The gospel is an announcement. It should lead us to do good to our neighbor, but neighbor love itself is not the gospel. The church has a mission to proclaim this gospel to the world. Consider four words that summarize the centrality of the gospel, and the need to announce it to the nations.

#1: Preservation (2:1-5)

Paul shows us that we must protect the purity of gospel as we reach different cultures. We have to make sure that we understand the true gospel, and that we are not exporting a false gospel. To be a good missionary, you must be a good theologian. You need to know the gospel. This biographical report provided by Paul in verses 1–9, illustrates the importance of getting the gospel right.

In verses 1-2, he speaks of this historic meeting in Jerusalem. He says, “After 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem” (1a). Previously, Paul had only visited for fifteen days (1:18). The fourteen years probably refers to his time since his conversion. He had been in Arabia for three years (1:17), and then in his home regions (Syria and Cilicia) since that time. This visit to Jerusalem is probably parallel to the events described in Acts 11:25-30 with Paul’s “famine visit” that he and Barnabas made to give relief to the poor (George, 136; Stott, 41; Schreiner, 120).

Paul adds that he was “with Barnabas, taking Titus along also” (1b). Barnabas, a Jew, was with Paul when he originally evangelized the Galatian region. He was Mr. Encouragement! Early on, Barnabas took Paul when Paul was rejected (Acts 9:27). He was incredibly generous, giving the proceeds of a sale of property that he made (Acts 4:26-37). He was the type of guy who loved grace. I love what is said of him in Acts 11:23 concerning his visit to Antioch, “When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad.” Thank God for a Barnabas! He was not perfect (as we will see in the next section), but he was a faithful servant.

Titus was a “son” to Paul (Ti 1:4). He was a Greek, which is important. He was a product of the Gentile mission. He was an uncircumcised believer.

Paul answers our question, “Why did he go to Jerusalem?” in verse 2. He says it was “because of a revelation” (2a, ESV). Once again, Paul acts because of a revelation not because of any man-made reason. What this revelation was, we do not know, but the reference may have been to Agabus’s prophecy of a famine, as a result of which Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to give relief (Acts 11:27-30).

What was the aim of his visit? He says it was to “set before them [the other apostles] ... the gospel that I proclaim to the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain” (2:2, ESV). Paul wanted to confirm for practical reasons that he and the apostles were preaching the same gospel. He did not need their approval; for he already has stated that his message came from Jesus. He did not doubt the substance of his fourteen years of preaching. He wanted to make sure he was not running in vain for practical reasons, not theological reasons. He needed their fellowship in order to execute his mission effectively. A division between his mission and the mother church would have been disastrous. It is no exaggeration to say that this was one of the most important meetings in the history of the world. So they had a private meeting.

Let us notice in passing, the way the apostles handled this matter: a face-to-face meeting. What a good example for leaders. We must get together to handle important matters, even if that means having some awkward conversations at time.

In verse 3, Paul says that Titus served as an example for proving his point that he and the others were preaching the same gospel. Here is a Gentile convert. Paul says, “But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek” (ESV). This is the first of many references to *circumcision* in Galatians. Since the day of Abraham, this act had been a visible sign of belonging to the community of faith. In the past, if a Gentile wanted to become a Jew, he had to be circumcised (Gen 17:9-14, See Schreiner, 123). Then Paul comes along with his law free gospel and says, “You do not have to become a Jew to be a Christian; you need only to believe.”

However, the false teachers were saying that salvation was Jesus + circumcision. In the book of Acts we find some teachers saying, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:2). So Paul has Titus with him. What a great test case! So, the argument from the false teachers was that to be a Christian you needed to be circumcised. But Paul says, “What about this guy?” It was a great move. He says, “I have a flesh and blood example here.” Was Titus a Christian? Uh, yes. He has a book of the Bible named after him! If you get a book named after you, then you are probably a Christian. Just saying. He later goes and pastors in Crete. What was their answer to the circumcision question? It was, “No, Titus does not need to be circumcised.” This was revolutionary. Tim Keller says, “Paul’s opponents were saying, ‘Not all Jewish persons are Christians, but all Christians must also be Jewish.’” (“The Centrality of the Gospel”). Paul was saying that the gospel is for every culture.

As you read this text, you might find it strange to talk about circumcision. It does not seem to be a matter of great debate today. You are right, but it is all through Galatians, so we will deal with it. But it is relevant, for this reason also: people still want to mix cultural ritual and rule keeping with the free gospel of grace. This debate about circumcision is powerfully summarized at the end of the letter, “For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation” (Gal 6:15). Salvation is about inward change not external rituals.

Titus was not circumcised, but Timothy was circumcised. Why Timothy? Timothy’s story represents another important missionary dynamic; namely, the need to adapt to culture without changing the message. Timothy was circumcised (Acts 16:3) but not for salvation; he was circumcised for propagation. It was done so that he could minister in the synagogues. It would be like me being asked to wear a Yamaka. If some Jewish friends asked me to come and talk about why I believe Jesus as the Messiah, but insist on me wearing Yamaka, then I would be happy to do it. Consider some other examples of adaptation. In some countries, the pastor sits down to teach. I am happy to do that in their country. Or, in some places, they teach with their legs crossed sitting down. That may hurt me, but I would be glad to do it! The issue is that Christians will adapt to culture, so long as we avoid sinning, and so long as the message is not changed.

Titus ministered mainly to Greeks; Timothy went with Paul into the synagogues. Because circumcision was not a sin issue for Paul, he says, “Do it, not to be saved, but so we can minister.” However, he did not tell Titus to be like the Cretans who were “evil beasts, lazy gluttons, and liars.” Why? It was because that would be sin. Paul summarizes this concept of contextualization to the Corinthians saying, “I have become all things to all people, so that I may every possible means save some. Now I do all of this for the sake of the gospel” (1 Cor 9:22b-23a).

From his true brother Titus, Paul shifts to speak of the “false brothers” in verses 4-5. He describes how distorted the message. But Paul says, “[W]e did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved” (ESV). In every age, there are those who oppose the gospel of grace. Here they are again in Galatians, “false brothers” slip into the meeting. Because this is a private meeting, we do not know all the details. Apparently, while the meeting was going on (or later?), some false brothers slipped into the meeting, to “spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, that they may bring us into slavery” (4, ESV). They were like undercover agents and conspirators who hated the gospel of free grace. Notice what Paul implies here. He says anyone who adds works of the law to the gospel of grace is promoting slavery.

However, the apostles held their ground and did not yield. The truth of the gospel would not have been preserved if they had yielded to their demands for Titus to be circumcised. In summary, Paul’s ministry was not “in vain” for they all agreed that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone, not from works of the law. The gospel was preserved.

As a church, we must not add to the gospel. The Galatians were promoting social and racial rules, mixing the gospel with these socio-ethnic agendas. Let us be careful not to insist on endorsing a particular culture or political party. Rather, let us promote the true gospel. As missionaries, it is absolutely essential that we get the gospel right. It is not enough to send missionaries. We must send them with the preserved gospel. Do not change it; simply communicate it.

Any group can send missionaries. Different religions send missionaries. What we must maintain is the purity of the gospel as we send out our missionaries to foreign lands. Jesus railed against the Pharisees, not because they did not “do missions,” but because they did not have the right message. He said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (Matt 23:15, ESV). Obviously, there are missionaries in other religions that are not preaching the gospel (Islam, Mormonism, etc.). When I was in Australia, they thought I was a Mormon because their missionaries were everywhere. When I was in Nigeria, I talked with people who said that the prosperity gospel had taken over their area, because a false gospel was being exported there. The greatest need around the world is for the nations to be saturated with the pure gospel.

#2: Responsibility (2:6-7)

In keeping with the aforementioned emphasis, Paul goes on to highlight the responsibility of delivering the true gospel (6-7). Verses 1-5 focused on the message itself; now, Paul speaks of being faithful stewards, “entrusted” with this message to deliver it to the nations.

Before commenting on this “sacred trust” in verse 7, notice that Paul says a curious thing in verse 6, “those who seemed influential (what they are makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)” (ESV). Paul respects the authority of leaders, but he does not idolize them. Leaders must be respected, but not idolized. They should be honored, but not above the gospel. Paul had seen the risen Christ, so the apostles were not that “spectacular” anyway! When you behold Christ, as your supreme object of worship, it puts your view of people in proper perspective.

He goes on to say, “they added nothing to me” (2:6b). What does this mean? It means that they did not correct him or add to his message, but rather acknowledged that he had been preaching the same message.

Then we get to verse 7. Paul says, “On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised.” Paul recognizes that each apostle had his own responsibility, his own stewardship from God. In street language interpretation: If you heard Peter preach, or James or John or Paul, they would not be preaching a different gospel, but the same gospel to different groups of people. Paul says to Corinthians, “Therefore, whether it is I or they, so we proclaim and so you have believed” (1 Cor 15:11).

Like the apostles, we have been “entrusted” with the gospel. We have been charged to not only preserve the gospel, but also to pass on, to our neighbors and to the nations (cf., 2 Tim 2:2; 1 Thess 2:4). Paul says that God has “entrusted to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19). A faithful steward takes the message, and presents it to others in the same way he received it. We do not add to the message or take away from it, but showcase it to the nations. To be “entrusted with the gospel” is the highest conceivable responsibility, and the highest privilege in the world.

We may use different avenues to get the gospel to people, and have our own people groups, but we have the same stewardship. For example, a friend of mine was speaking on the campus at a Christian meeting in Colorado. After speaking on getting the gospel to the nations, he was encouraged by follow up conversations with the students. He was asking the students were studying, and he noticed a common theme. One said, “Yeah, I’m studying biology. I want to be a biologist in Indonesia.” Another said, “I’m studying education. I want to teach school in China.” Why? These students were taking the gospel to the different people groups, as responsible stewards of the gospel.

#3: Empowerment (2:8)

A third important missionary subject, mentioned in the text, has to do with God’s power. To do mission, we must rely on God’s power at work in us. Paul touches on this principle saying, “since the One *at work in Peter* for an apostleship to the circumcised was also *at work in me* for

the Gentiles” (8, my emphasis). These men were good missionaries because of God’s power was in them. The next passage shows that they were not perfect men! God used them because he had changed them by his grace, and energized them by the Spirit. Schreiner says, “God had worked in Peter so that he was qualified to serve as an apostle to the Jews. In the same way, God worked in Paul so that he was qualified to serve as an apostle to the Gentiles” (129).

Before you think education alone is sufficient to be a faithful missionary, consider Luke 24. When Jesus appears to the disciples he tells them that the Old Testament points to him; he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures; he tells them about his death and resurrection; and he tells them to preach repentance and forgiveness to the nations, as his witnesses (24:44-48). Got it. You have heard this too, correct? But there was more. He says, “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (49). Later in Acts 1:8, he reminds them of the necessity of the Spirit’s work. Think about this. No one had a better three-year seminary degree than the disciples. They learned under Jesus. Yet, they were still in need of something; namely to be clothed with power. We too need God to “make his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20).

#4: Partnership (2:9)

We have already touched on this principle, but verse nine underlines again the importance of uniting with others in spreading the gospel. The Jerusalem leaders affirmed “grace had been given” to Paul so they give him the “right hand of fellowship” (9a). The Jerusalem pillars recognized the unity that they shared in the gospel and that they were partners with Paul and Barnabas. Paul said they agreed “that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised” (9b).

The Jerusalem apostles recognized that Paul and Barnabas had a special calling. They were to go into Gentile lands, while the others would go to the Jewish people. We should not make the distinction too rigidly, for there was overlap (Paul ministered to Jews too). It is more of a distinction in emphasis. So there is partnership here. Paul is a partner with Barnabas and Titus in the Gentile mission, the Pillars in the Jewish mission. Together, they are on the same team taking the gospel to the nations.

2. GOSPEL COMPASSION (10)

As missionaries, we must proclaim the gospel, and we must also remember the poor. Paul says, “Only, they asked to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do” (ESV). This verse probably has to do with the events in Acts 11:27-30; that is, with the famine relief for the poor saints in Jerusalem. If this is indeed the situation, then Paul had already been taking up money for the poor. Notice four truths about the apostles’ compassion for the poor.

#1: Unity

The apostles agreed on the need to care for the poor. Paul says “They” asked us to care for the poor, and Paul was in complete agreement. So, not only did the apostles agree on the gospel, but they agreed on doing mercy (Jas 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18; 2 Cor. 8-9; Acts: 4:34).

The “poor” here refers to poor believers in Jerusalem specifically, but Scripture teaches us to care for the poor in a broad sense, also. Paul says later in Galatians, “Let us do good to everyone, and especially those who are of the household of faith” (10, ESV). We are to care for *everyone* (believer or unbeliever), and *especially* those in the family of faith. So our concern is big. Paul even said that we should feed our *enemies*! (Rom. 12:20) True, there is a distinction between the lazy who will not work and those who are really poor and in need. But do not assume that all the poor are unwilling to work, for that is not true. I have in my mind the millions around the world who are in real poverty, who could be greatly helped by a micro-loan, or some initial help to begin a business. I have in my mind millions of children, who need the basics of bread and clothing and care.

Another myth about caring for the poor is that it minimizes evangelism. This is a myth because in many places the poorest of the poor are the least evangelized people in the world. Many of them are orphans! John Piper quotes a study on the poor saying:

Half of the least developed countries are also the least evangelized countries. The other half has very few Christians. One study of poverty and spiritual need expressed this observation: The most dominant impression one gains from looking at the world in this way is that the poor are the lost and the lost are the poor. Whether one approaches the data from a desire to learn where the Good News needs to be heard, or a desire to find the poorest of the poor, the answer is the same. (in “Good News to the Poor”)

With that said, let us also remember the poor in our neighborhood, not just around the world. We should be practicing “Good Samaritan mercy” caring for our local neighbors as ourselves. We should practice Luke 14, “invite those who cannot repay us to dinner” (12-14). We should work hard to aid the poor holistically, as Corbett and Fikkert point out in *When Helping Hurts*:

Step 1: Relief – “Stop the bleeding”

Step 2: Rehabilitation – “Restore people and communities”

Step 3: Development – The process of ongoing sustainable change, promoting a local empowerment process (104)

One of the traits that made the early church different was the poor. The apostles agreed to do it. Let us agree to do it. Who can we care for this week?

#2: Priority

Notice how the apostles placed care for the poor right after the purity and proclamation of the gospel. Luther said, “After the preaching of the gospel, the office and charge of a true and

faithful pastor, is to be mindful of the poor.... A faithful pastor must have a care for the poor” (*Galatians*, 55).

Think of all that could have been said in verse 10. They could have talked about worship styles, polity, or buildings. But they talk about the poor. Why? It is because this priority is so obvious in the Bible. God always desired for his people to care for the poor, the orphan, the stranger, and the widow. “There will be no poor among you” (Deut. 15:4). Proverbs is filled with this ministry focus (cf., Prov 31:8-9; 31:20; 3:27; Prov. 21:13).

Is caring for the poor a priority in your church? Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon called “Christian Charity.” In it, he said, “This duty is absolutely commanded, and much insisted on, in the Word of God. Where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more absolute urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor?” You are not a “liberal humanist” if you care for the poor. You are simply a biblical Christian.

I want to be that church, loving and living like Jesus. Do you? Many of the world’s poor are not only poor; they are powerless, and often abused. Who should be known for caring for them? Should it not be we who were spiritually poor and powerless, before Christ rescued us?

#3: Eagerness

Quickly, just notice that Paul said that this was not a burden, but something that he was thrilled to do! Paul had a lot going on! He wrote about 13 letters in the New Testament, evangelized pagan cities, started churches, established and equipped leaders, got thrown in prison, dealt with ongoing problems in the churches, and more. Yet, Paul says he was “eager” to care for the poor.

Are you eager? Are you too busy to care for the poor? Do you view it as a blessing to care for the least of these, or a burden? The Psalmist says, "Blessed is the one who considers the poor" (Ps 41:1). Work the gospel into your heart, and pray for eagerness to serve the poor.

#4: Motive

This final point is not explicit in the text, but I think it is true: The apostles were motivated by their observance of the life of Jesus, and their understanding of the gospel itself. Where does compassion come from? Christian compassion flows from one who understands the life and ministry of Jesus. The apostles watched Jesus for three years. They observed his care for the poor personally, and they heard his teaching on this subject (cf., Matt 25:35-36; Luke 4:18; 14:12-14; 19:8-9). And compassion flows from one who has been changed by the gospel of grace that grace has been revealed in Jesus.

When you get the gospel, you realize that you identify with the poor. You are not better than the poor. You are the poor. We were all in spiritual poverty (cf., Matt. 5:3). No one comes to Jesus as the “middle class in spirit” but as the “poor in spirit.” The gospel only comes to those

who say, “I have no power and I must rely on the sheer grace of Jesus” (cf., Isa. 55:1-2). Remember the poor because Jesus remembered us when we were spiritually bankrupt crying out like the thief on the cross saying “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 24:42). And remember the poor because Jesus became poor for your sake: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV)

Jesus Christ, the rich one, became poor - a suffering servant, born in a manger, homeless, rejected, cast off. He rode in to Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. He held the Last Supper in a borrowed room, and was placed in a borrowed tomb. He died naked and with nothing. Only because he did this, can we be saved. What motivates compassion for the poor, looking at the life of Jesus, and understanding his grace.

When you get the gospel, you will gladly pour out your life for the poor. If you are tight fisted, and not generous, it is evidence that you have not worked the gospel down deep. Tim Keller says, “Only if you see that you have been saved graciously by someone who owes you the opposite will you go out into the world looking to help absolutely anyone in need” (*Generous Justice*, 77). This spirit is conveyed in the words of this hymn:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.
(Toplady, “Rock of Ages”)

We come to Christ the same way a kid in poverty from India comes for food: desperate. Once you begin to see that you identify with the poor, once you begin to get grace, you will be *eager* to care for the poor. Praise God that Jesus was eager to care for us when we were in spiritual poverty. Let us proclaim the true gospel faithfully, and aid the poor compassionately.

3. GOSPEL CONDUCT (2:11-13)

One could spend a long time on this important paragraph. Paul shifts from a meeting in Jerusalem to a meeting in Antioch. Antioch was where the Gentile mission began, and where disciples were first called “Christians.” This episode serves as a bridge to the next passage (2:15-21). A controversy ensues over table fellowship, and Paul takes this situation as an opportunity to articulate justification by faith alone in the following paragraphs (2:15-21; 3:1-29).

Paul is not addressing gospel doctrine, for the apostles agreed on that (2:1-9). Nor, is he addressing gospel compassion (the need to care for the poor) for they agreed on that also. Here, Paul has to talk about “gospel conduct” (14) This is without doubt one of the most tense and dramatic episodes in the New Testament. The two leading apostles are at odds with one another

in complete open conflict. Paul says that he opposed Peter “to his face, because he stood condemned” (11).

What was the reason for this dispute? Meals. Table fellowship. It is hard for us realize how important table fellowship was. It was one practical way to show that the gospel tears down the division between “Jew and Gentile; slave and free” (cf., Gal 4:28). Table fellowship between Jew and Gentile marked a new era of redemptive history.

While the apostles believed that the gospel should unite everyone, some were denying it in practice, by refusing to eat with Gentiles (12). Paul sees this is a big problem that must be confronted. Previously, he says that Peter was eating with Gentiles, but when “certain men came from James,” he “drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (2:12, ESV). He adds that Peter was not the only culprit. Others were involved, including Barnabas (13). Consequently, he confronts Peter over his hypocrisy saying, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile [free from justification by works of the law], how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (14b, ESV).

Paul’s charge is that “their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (14a, ESV). That is an important phrase.

Our acceptance of the gospel is intended to bring a new way of life, not just morally but socially. Our relationships should change as we dwell on the gospel of Christ. Notice briefly four ways the gospel changes our conduct when we understand it and apply it rightly.

The Gospel Crushes Superiority

When Paul says “certain men came from James,” this does not necessarily mean that James sent them, or that they represented James’s teaching. This probably is an example of a poor representation of what James believed (Acts 15). They were posers. More importantly, they were *persecutors*. Why did this men try to intimidate and persecute? This characterized their life because they believed in a salvation by works system. If you believe salvation is by works, then you will *feel superior* to others. You will have to somehow elevate yourself above them. Additionally, you will live with constant *insecurity* (Keller, “The Centrality of the Gospel”). You will never know if you have done enough. In effort, to find security, you will try to elevate yourself above others.

If spiritual superiority does not make you persecute others, it will make you *separate* from others. You will not want to associate with certain people because you have think you are better than them.

The gospel keeps us from being persecutors and seperators. It crushes any feeling of superiority. In place of superiority, the gospel gives us humility. If you are a proud individual, boasting in your works, then you do not understand the gospel. It creates love, not hate, and welcome, not seperation.

The Gospel Creates Humble Boldness

This first point highlights the Judaizers mainly, but consider now the attitude of Barnabas, Peter, and Paul. Another way the gospel should change is that it should create a willingness to confront others, and take a stand for truth. Barnabas represents a timid attitude that should not characterize believers. Just because we must avoid superiority, does not imply that we do not stand for truth. The gospel should do both: it should give boldness to the timid (without making them arrogant), and it should humble the superior.

Paul shows us the approach. He confronts Peter publically for his public sins. He confronts him because he sees that the gospel is at stake here. He does not let it pass. If the issue would not have been dealt with, then there might have been two churches, a Jerusalem church and an Antioch church.

Chances are, you are either more like a Judaizer or a Barnabas. One type of person tends toward pride. The other leans toward compromise. The gospel makes us walk a different way. We are to be humble truth tellers for the sake of the gospel.

The Gospel Creates Diverse Community

The good news about Jesus is not just personal; it is also corporate. God is creating a people, called the church. That people is a diverse people (Gal 3:28). Instead of celebrating this diversity, Peter, Barnabas and others resisting diversity. They were telling the Gentiles that we may believe the same message, but we are not going to do community with you. Paul says, you are denying the very gospel you preach.

One of the marks of a healthy church is that it celebrates kingdom diversity. That type of church realizes we have been invited to the King's table by grace alone. No one deserves to be there. The proper response to God's grace, is to show grace and welcome to others. When you see diversity in the church, it should cause you to give thanks to God. There is only one gospel, and that one gospel creates one new people.

Know the gospel. Display gospel compassion. Work in the gospel in your heart, so that your conduct reflects it.