"Confronting Hypocrisy"

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Galatians 2:1–14 (ESV)

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¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" ¹

This is the third week of the current sermon series, "What Is Christianity?" Each week, we're looking at a different passage from the book of Galatians, which is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in a Roman province, Galatia. As we look at this letter, I'm asking the question, What is Christianity? Another way of asking that question is, What is the gospel? In other words, What is the message of Christianity and why is it good news?

As I've said the past two weeks, the gospel is the message that though we all have rebelled against a perfect God who made us, he has given us a way to be reconciled to him. That way is Jesus, who lived a perfect life of righteousness that we're not capable of living and died a

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

death to pay for our sin. Those who are united to Jesus by faith are credited his righteousness and are forgiven for their sins. They are put back into a right relationship with God.

But Christianity is not just about forgiveness of sins. It's also a way of life. The gospel isn't just about "getting saved." The message of Christianity has implications for the rest of our lives. The gospel isn't the ABC's of Christianity. The gospel is the A through Z of Christianity.

The gospel should also lead us to a life of integrity, not hypocrisy. Integrity refers to wholeness—all the parts of our lives should match. Our entire life should be shaped by the gospel. Hypocrisy is literally "to create a public impression that is at odds with one's real purposes or motivations." A hypocrite puts on a show. He acts against his beliefs, even if he's not completely aware that he's doing so. No one likes a hypocrite. We see in this passage that those who come to believe in the gospel must live in line with the gospel. When Christians fail to do that, they are hypocrites.

Last week, we saw that Paul got his gospel directly from Jesus. It didn't come to him from anyone else. After he received it, he spent three years in Arabia, and then made a quick trip to Jerusalem, the city where Christianity started, before going to Syria and Cilicia. He then spent a number of years there preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. After that time, he came to Jerusalem. This time he had two of his associates, Barnabas and Titus, with him. We see this in verses 1 and 2:

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

The first trip that Paul made to Jerusalem is described in Acts 9:26-30. This trip to Jerusalem is described in Acts 11. Before going to Jerusalem, Paul spent a year with his associate Barnabas in a key city called Antioch, which is about 400 miles north of Jerusalem, in what is now southwestern Turkey, right near Syria. Antioch was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire at the time, behind Rome and Alexandria. It was very much a Roman city. That means there were a lot of Gentiles in that city. Paul and Barnabas were Jewish men, and the church in Antioch was filled with both Jewish and Gentile Christians. In fact, it was there that believers in

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² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1038.

Jesus were first called Christians, which means "belonging to Christ." These people were not regarded as Jews or Gentiles, but as something new.

In Acts 11:27-30, we see that Paul made a trip to Jerusalem to help Christians there who were suffering because of a famine. This was probably in the year 46.

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). ²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

So, that is why Paul made the trip to Jerusalem. But while there, he also set before the apostles the gospel that he was preaching. In other words, he told them what he was teaching the Gentiles. He did this in order to make sure that what they were teaching matched what he was teaching. If they were teaching something else—perhaps that in order to be right in God's eyes, one had to first become a Jew and then also believe in Jesus—then the people Paul taught might think Paul was teaching something false. Paul may also have thought that if there two different versions of the gospel, it would discredit Christianity, or it would separate Christians into Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Paul knew that all of these things were wrong. There is only one gospel message, the one that he taught. There is only one people of God, and they shouldn't be divided.

Now, before I continue, I have to take a step back. Why does all this matter? What's the big deal concerning Jews and Gentiles? It matters because the Bible has something very important to say about racism and nationalism. These things are contrary to the gospel. A lot of people talk of racism and see it as a problem. But on atheistic account of humanity, it's hard to see what racism must be wrong. However, the Bible gives us good reasons to see that racism is an offense to God, who created all people in his image.

Here's a quick overview of the Bible story. In the beginning, God made humans. They weren't Jews. They weren't Gentiles. They didn't belong to any particular country. We don't know what skin color they had. They were just people. In the beginning, there was no division among people.

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³ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 273.

But when sin entered the world, people started to be divided. People started killing each other. And people spread out all over the world into different nations, speaking different languages. We see this after the famous tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11.

Then God chose one man, Abraham, to work with. God promised Abraham that he would bless him and he would bless the world through him. God made a promise with Abraham. All the blessings of the world would come through a promised offspring. Part of the covenant God made with Abraham was circumcision, the removal of a man's foreskin. This marked Abraham and the people of Israel. I think it also showed that the promised offspring would come through the procreation of Israel, Abraham's descendants. Later throughout the Bible, God's people are told that they don't need physical circumcision. Instead, they need circumcised hearts. That means they need to have God perform heart surgery on them, so that they would love and obey God properly (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:23-26). God then continued to speak to and bless Israel.

God commanded the Israelites to be separate from other nations. They weren't supposed to live like other nations. They weren't supposed to eat like other nations. And they weren't supposed to worship the false gods of the other nations. God gave them all kinds of cleanliness laws. There were foods they could and could not eat (Leviticus 11), they were supposed to be ritually clean to be part of the assembly of God's people, and there were even laws that said they couldn't sew different kinds of seed in a field, or wear a garment made of two different kinds of material (Lev. 19:18). These laws were object lessons, meant to teach the people that they were supposed to be separate from other people. They had to be special, devoted to God. They weren't supposed to marry Gentiles, because that would lead them into idolatry (Deut. 7:3-4). Jewish tradition added to the Bible said that Gentiles could contaminate Jewish foods. In one place in the Babylonian Talmud, a book of later Jewish oral laws and a commentary on those laws, it says that wine that was touched by Gentiles would be rendered unclean: "As soon as the wine trickles from the grapes, the touch of a heathen renders it unallowable."

If Gentiles wanted to become part of God's people, they had to become Jewish. Men had to be circumcised, and they had to observe all the laws that were given to the Israelites through Moses.

⁴ See also Romans 2:25-29; Philippians 3:3.

⁵ b. Abod. Zar. 4:8; Michael L. Rodkinson, trans., *The Babylonian Talmud: Original Text, Edited, Corrected, Formulated, and Translated into English*, vol. 18a (Boston, MA: The Talmud Society, 1918), 122.

The Jews in the first century had three important boundary markers: circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary laws. When Jesus came, these three things were transformed. Circumcision became a matter of the heart (Rom. 2:25-29; Phil. 3:3). Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath because he gives rest to Christians (Col. 2:16-17; Matt. 11:28). Christians started to worship on the first day of the week, Sunday, which became known as the Lord's Day because it was the day that Jesus rose from the grave. And Jesus himself declared all foods clean (Mark 7:14-23). This was also made abundantly clear to Peter when the gospel message went out to Gentiles. You can read about that in Acts 10.

What matters now is not what a person eats, but what is inside a person's heart. What matters now is not the country where someone lives or where someone is from, but whether they are united to Jesus by faith. What matters is not when someone worships, but who and how someone worships. We must worship God through Jesus, in spirit and in truth.

This is all very easy for us to understand from our vantage point in history, but it was hard for the early Christians to figure all of this out. And at first, there seemed to be some discrepancies in how they acted.

It seems that the apostles in Jerusalem readily agreed with Paul that circumcision was not necessary for Gentiles to become Christians. Let's go back to Galatians 2. I'll read verses 3-10:

³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶ And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

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⁶ "From the Maccabean period onward, the boundary markers of Judaism (circumcision, Sabbath, and food laws) were at the forefront of Jewish consciousness." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 140.

Titus was a Gentile, but the apostles in Jerusalem did not insist that he become circumcised. Yet there were some "false brothers" who spied on Paul, and apparently they didn't agree about the whole circumcision business. But Paul says that he didn't give into them. Why? In order to preserve the truth of the gospel! If Paul gave in to their demands, he would be communicating that circumcision was necessary for salvation. That's why these people were "false brothers." They didn't believe the one true gospel. They insisted that you had to add something to Jesus in order to be saved.

Paul then says the apostles agreed with him. He says they "seemed to be influential," but Paul wasn't impressed by their lofty status. Paul was just as much of an apostle as they were. Paul saw Jesus after his resurrection and he was commissioned just as much as Peter and John and James were. The apostles agreed that Paul was commissioned to preach to the Gentiles, the uncircumcised, while Peter was commissioned to preach to Jews. If you read the rest of the Acts and Peter's letters, you know that Paul also preached to Jews and Peter preached to Gentiles. Still, Paul was primarily sent to Gentiles and Peter was primarily sent to Jews.

The pillars of the church⁷ recognized the grace that Paul was given by God. They recognized that God had given Paul a special ministry, and this was a gift. They considered him as one of their own. All they asked of him was something he was already eager to do: give to the poor. Throughout his ministry Paul made sure that wealthier Christians gave to poorer ones.⁸

Now, before I look at verses 11-14, let me point out some interesting things in this passage. First of all, Paul makes it clear that the gospel he preached was the same gospel the other apostles were preaching. All that one needed to do to be saved from one's sins and the wrath of God was to repent of those sins and trust in Jesus. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. Circumcision wasn't necessary, and neither were any other religious rites. As we'll see in the rest of Galatians, a person doesn't get a relationship with God by obeying the law. All of that may seem foreign to us, but there are some people today who think that if you don't say this prayer, or walk down the aisle at an altar call, or join this particular church or this particular denomination, or use this particular translation of the Bible, you can't be saved. The

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⁷ This phrase is probably borrowing from the temple metaphor that runs throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, the temple in Jerusalem had pillars. In the New Testament, the true temple is Jesus and his body, the church. Therefore, the church is a pillar and buttress of truth (1 Tim. 3:15). What this means here is that Paul is hinting at how the temple, one of the badges of Judaism, has become the church, and the apostles in Jerusalem were a major part of this temple.

⁸ See Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Catholic Church teaches that to ensure salvation, one must observe the various sacraments of the church. But the apostles agreed that what saved a person was a relationship with Jesus and the transformation that comes with that relationship. And this relationship is a gift from God. It's all grace.

We also see something interesting here. Paul says, in verse 6, "God shows no partiality." He's talking about how he's equal to the apostles in Jerusalem. But the truth is that God doesn't show partiality to Jewish Christians over Gentile Christians. It would be hypocrisy to say that all Christians are children of God and regarded as being clothed in Jesus' righteousness in God's eyes, and then turn around and suggest that some of those children were better than others. God doesn't show partiality to American Christians over against, say, Russian Christians, or Chinese Christians or African Christians or South American Christians. God doesn't favor rich Christians or poor Christians. God doesn't care what skin color you have. Skin color and ethnicity are not moral issues. Remember, Adam and Eve weren't of a particular tribe or nation, and we don't know what skin color they had. It's simply not an issue. All those who are in Jesus are regarded the same—they are all forgiven of their sins and credited with Jesus' righteousness (see Gal. 3:28). What about you? Do you look at Christians from other countries, Christians who look different than you do, or perhaps Christians that come from a different socioeconomic class, or who behave a bit differently than you as though they are less than you? If you've been racist, or harbored hatred for people simply because they look different than you, you must repent.

Besides the equality that Christians have, there's another important implication. The gospel of Jesus Christ leads to generosity. The apostles and Paul thought that taking care of the poor was a big deal. Why? Well, one answer could be as simple as this: throughout the Bible, God shows great concern for the orphans and widows and poor people. But a concern for the poor has a more specific connection to the gospel. Salvation is a gift of God. When the Son of God became man, he gave everything he had. Jesus gave his life on the cross so that we could be reconciled to God. We didn't deserve this or earn this. God even gives the gift of faith and repentance to his people. If you truly understand this grace of God, it leaves you to be generous. You don't have to cling to your stuff, because if God gave you his Son, he'll take care of the smaller needs. And greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5), because it's an act of putting faith in money and possessions and not in God. Do you realize how generous God has been to you? Has that made

⁹ Eph. 2:8-10; Phil.1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25.

you a generous person? Are you giving to the church? To other Christians? To the poor? If you have received much from God, it would be hypocrisy to be stingy with God and with others.

Let's now move on to the next four verses in Galatians 2. This is an episode that happened after Paul's second trip to Jerusalem. Here, Paul finds Peter acting like a hypocrite in Antioch. Here are verses 11-14:

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

We don't know exactly when this episode happened, but it must have happened shortly before Paul wrote the book of Galatians. When he arrived at Antioch, he found that Peter wasn't eating with Gentiles. More specifically, Peter wasn't eating their food. He was back to eating according to dietary laws of the Old Testament. According to Paul, he had been living "like a Gentile" (v. 14). But then some people from James, an apostle, the brother of Jesus, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem came, and Peter separated himself from the Gentiles. Why did Peter do this? He may done this because the people that James sent thought that Jews and Gentiles shouldn't eat together. They may have thought that it was acceptable for Gentile Christians to ignore the Old Testament dietary laws, but that Jewish Christians were bound to obey them. That's certainly possible.

Another possibility is this: Peter was afraid of the circumcision party (v. 12). This was not a group of Jewish Christians. This was a group of unbelieving Jews. Jewish people who weren't Christians could persecute Jewish Christians. We see hints of this in the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner says, "Perhaps the men from James arrived and said that the threat of persecution against Jewish Christians was increasing because of reports that Jewish Christians in Antioch were departing from food laws and eating with Gentiles." ¹⁰

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¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 144.

One more possibility is that Peter was concerned about how Jewish Christians would be viewed by other Jews. Paul was concerned not to offend other Jews so that he could reach them with the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9:20, he writes, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law." He didn't want Jewish people to think he was disobeying God. It's possible that Peter was afraid that if other Jews heard he was eating like a Gentile, they wouldn't listen to the gospel message.

Whatever the exact reason for Peter's actions, he was wrong. He didn't act of out of gospel beliefs. He acted out of fear. Paul says his actions were condemned by God (v. 11). He was acting against his beliefs. He was acting like a hypocrite. Peter should have been pleased to eat with his Gentile brothers and sisters. By not doing that, he probably made them feel like second-class citizens. They probably felt like they were still unclean in God's eyes. They probably felt that in order to be truly received by Jewish Christians, they had to become Jews through circumcision (for the men) and observance of Jewish law.

Since Peter was acting against the gospel, and since he was leading many others astray, Paul confronted him. He said he "opposed him to his face" (v. 11). In verse 14, Paul says he spoke to Peter before the whole group. This was no small error that Peter was making. He was not in step with the gospel.

That's how Paul tries to motivate Peter to act the right way. He doesn't just say, "You've broken the rules." He doesn't yell at Peter and simply say, "You're wrong!" No, he tells Pete that his conduct doesn't line up with the gospel. The phrase that's translated "their conduct was not in step with" literally is "they didn't walk straightly with." Their behavior didn't line up with the truth of the gospel, and therefore it had to change. The gospel says that all who are redeemed are one. There are no first- and second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. In the new creation, we will all feast together in the presence of God. In this case, Paul believes it was more important for Peter to consider the feelings of the Gentile Christians in Antioch than what anyone else might think.

What about you? Are there other Christians you wouldn't want to be seen with? Or perhaps there are people who aren't Christians yet that you wouldn't dare to be near. Think about

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¹¹ In this case, the NIV's rendering is better: "they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel." The Greek verb, $\dot{o}\rho\theta\sigma\pi\delta\epsilon\omega$, is where we get the word "orthopedics" from. Similarly, orthodontics refers to the straightening of the teeth, orthodoxy refers to right praise (and right belief), and orthopraxy refers to right practice.

this: Jesus ate with sinners. He associated with some down-and-out types. And some people didn't like it. In Mark 2:16, it says, "And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" The Jewish religious leaders didn't think Jesus should hang out with tax collectors, who were known to be dishonest and who were regarded as traitors, as well as other sinners. Jesus didn't care about appearances. He wasn't a hypocrite. He had integrity. In Luke 7:34, Jesus said, "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" Jesus ate and drank—he feasted!—with sinners, and he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. He wasn't either of those things, but he did eat and he surely drank wine. He even made wine. He didn't care what people accused him of. He knew he was in the right and he was trying to reach out to people who were far from God. Do you care more about what others think or what God thinks? Don't be a hypocrite. Don't put on a show. Live to please God and don't worry as much about what everyone else thinks.

To recap, there are a number of important points in this passage: One is that Christians should be united. Again, there are no second-class Christians. We should never be embarrassed to be with other Christians, even if they are very different from us.

Another important point that Paul makes here is that there is a way to live in light of the truth of the gospel. We should live lives of integrity. Our conduct should line up with the fact that we are now children of God. The message of the gospel is simple enough that a child can understand it, and someone can come to believe it in a minute. But the ramifications of the gospel, and how it shines light into every corner of our lives, takes a lifetime to understand. Paul says that being united with our brothers and sisters is part of living in light of the gospel. So is giving to the poor, or realizing that God doesn't show partiality. There are many other ways to live in light of the gospel. Be thankful to God for your salvation, and live in a way that he wants you to live. As an exercise, try reading Ephesians 4-6, which begins with these words: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." In those three chapters, Paul talks about a lot of very practical things: life in the church, Christian character, life in the home and at work, and fighting against evil.

Of course, another implication is hypocrisy. There are a thousand ways to be hypocrite. Part of the sinful human condition is that we are prone to be hypocrites. If your actions line up with what you profess to believe, you won't be a hypocrite. You'll live a life of integrity. You'll care about truth and grace. You won't show favoritism to some Christians over against others. You'll be generous because God has been generous to you. You won't use God's grace to sin more. You'll act like your Father and your older brother, Jesus.

It's time to end this sermon, but I do want to add a couple of thoughts here. There are some illegitimate ways to apply this passage. One wrong way to apply this passage is to suggest that Christians don't have to obey. But there are plenty of commands in the New Testament. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Paul says that if we understand God's grace, we won't keep on sinning (Rom. 6:1-2, 15). God will not be mocked by those who celebrate things he hates and then turn around and sing "Amazing Grace."

Another illegitimate way to apply this passage is to talk about Christianity as being "radically inclusive." Like almost anything else, Christianity includes and excludes. It includes people who believe in Jesus and repent of their sins. Christianity doesn't care where you're from, what you've done, what you look like, how much money you have, and so on. Christianity includes and excludes in ways that are very different from the world. But you must believe in the true gospel. Paul cared a lot about truth, just as he cared about love and hope and faith.

Another illegitimate way of applying this passage, or any other passage that deals with Jews and Gentiles, is to say that sexual orientation is just like race or ethnicity. They are not the same. The whole story of the Bible shows that ethnicity and skin color are not moral issues. Yes, God worked with one ethnic group for a time. But that time was limited. However, from start to finish the Bible is very consistent on the issue of marriage and sexuality. We don't know what skin color Adam and Eve had, and there was no such thing as ethnicity, but we do know that God made man and woman to complement each other and to marry each other (Gen. 2:24). That is the one true definition of marriage: one man and one woman in a covenant union for life, as affirmed by Jesus (Matt. 19:4-6). Race and sexuality are two very, very different things, and they cannot be likened one to another.

The gospel is that God loves his people so much he sent his Son to die for him. God cleans his people of their sin and gives them the Holy Spirit to guide them. Will you line up your life with the truth of the gospel? Or will you be a hypocrite?