

Living Out the Gospel of Grace
Galatians 2:11-14

Introduction: God calls us to live out a gospel of grace. This means that we must be careful to not conform to social pressures in ways that violate the gospel of grace. As well, we must not view anybody else in the body of Christ as second-class Christians just because they express their faith in a way that is different than us. Today, we are looking at a passage in Galatians that surfaces these issues for us. Yes, the issues facing believers in first century Antioch are different than what we face as Christians living in Manhattan, KS in the 21-century, but the principle is the same - we are called to live out the gospel of grace.

Opening Discussion: What impact did peer pressure have upon you as you were growing up?

Read Galatians 2:11-14

1. Why did Paul oppose Peter in Antioch?
2. What was the big deal about eating with Gentiles?
3. Who were the "certain men from James" (v. 12)?

Read Acts 10:1-28 (pre-dates the Galatians 2:11-14 event)

4. What does this passage reveal about how Peter, as a good Jew, had thought about eating?
5. How had God dealt with Peter regarding what is holy and unholy?
6. (Back to Galatians) How were Peter and the other Jews in Antioch not being "straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:14)?
7. How might Peter's actions have affected the church in Antioch when he withdrew from table fellowship with the Gentiles?

Steve said:

This passage suggests a couple of principles to consider. First, ***there are no second-class Christians***. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you are declared righteous; you are as righteous as you possibly can be; you are just as righteous before God as Jesus Himself. God doesn't show partiality or favoritism among His children. ***He doesn't play favorites***. Therefore ***we shouldn't either***. In the body of Christ, we are supposed to treat each other the way God in Christ has treated us. Therefore, we need to live with conviction that there are no second-class Christians. The issue for us isn't Jewish Christians viewing Gentile Christians as inferior. As I've listened to other people and as I've observed my own heart, in our day Christians tend to look down on others for a variety of reasons . . . Theological position (Arminian, Reformed, Dispensational, etc.) . . . Education . . . Socio-economic status . . . Political convictions . . . Sins (past or present) . . . Nationality and race.

8. Are there any subtle ways that you tend to look at others as second-class Christians? If so, how?

Steve said:

Second, ***the gospel of grace gives us freedom to live consistent lives***. This is what Peter couldn't do. He had the freedom to eat with Gentiles and enjoy any food they put in front of him. But when the Jewish believers from Jerusalem arrived, he withdrew his fellowship. He caved to the social pressure of pleasing men. The same thing can happen to us. We can feel that we need to be one person around one group of Christians and another person around another group.

9. Are there any ways in which you feel that you need be one person around one group of Christians and another person around another group?

Steve said:

This doesn't mean that you never limit your freedoms for the good of others. In Romans 14 Paul argued that you should limit your freedom (in terms of what you eat and drink) if it will cause another believer to stumble. But that's very different than caving in to someone else's legalism. This is a complicated topic and not every issue of theology or lifestyle is clean and simple. But the default position in the NT is to respect each other's freedom to live consistent lives. Of course we're not talking about the freedom to sin; we're talking about the freedom to follow the Spirit's leading on matters that aren't spelled out in Scripture.

10. What does it take to stand in the freedom of the gospel (i.e. not succumb to legalism), but also to express our freedom with love?