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Bread of Life Baptist Church  
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## **Galatians 2:11-14**

### **The Consistently Gospel-Centered Community**

We are blessed to live in a country that recognizes God-given human rights and dignity every single person has. To be a citizen of America - to be a member of this national community - immediately grants you benefits and freedoms, since our constitution is designed to safeguard and protect our God-given human rights. But this is only true if a citizen - and if the stated values and beliefs of the community are consistently applied.

Imagine, for example, that it's the year 1940s and you're a black man living in Birmingham, Alabama. You were born in America. You're a citizen of America. You fought as a soldier for America. You even have the right to vote. But then, you walk up to a restaurant, and you're told that you're not allowed to eat in there, because it's Whites only, and you have to go somewhere else; you're not allowed to eat with your fellow citizens, just because your different skin colors. Even though you're a citizen and member of the national community by name, even in a community that claims to value equal dignity and rights for all citizens, these values aren't being consistently applied and lived out. You're members of the same community by name - and yet, if you can't even sit down and eat in the same restaurant together, then it certainly doesn't feel that way, does it? I think we all know that if we were in those shoes, we would feel a sense of outrage at the unfairness and injustice of segregation. And it's easy to see why: because even though you're being called a citizen of the country, this isn't being lived out consistently.

I think this is similar to what's going on in our passage this morning, *Galatians 2:11-14*. Here Paul tells us of a public showdown he had with Peter in Antioch. He shares the story very briefly to make his point: he rebuked Peter publicly because the way he was acting toward the Gentile Christians was inconsistent with the gospel. So the main point we see from this text is that faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ really is sufficient for us to be saved and be considered part of the one, true people of God. And it also shows us that we must live with each other in a way that is consistent with the gospel that we claim to believe. So our first point today just fleshes out this main point for us, and then I want us to see three other points that I think are applications that we can draw from this text for what it looks like to consistently live out the gospel in the local church, as a truly gospel-centered community. So first, let's unpack the main

point of this passage, by seeing how it answers the question: *who is truly part of God's people, and who can be saved?*

**I. Faith in the Gospel is Sufficient to Become Part of God's People and Be Saved (Gal. 2:11-14)**

Last week, we saw how in the previous passage, the “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem, including Peter, affirmed Paul’s gospel message and ministry to the Gentiles (all non-Jews). It is very jarring, then, that this passage begins with Paul telling us how Paul publicly “opposed” Cephas (just another name for Peter), publicly rebuking him since he “stood condemned”! So what could have led to such a serious, public dispute between Paul and Peter, these pillar apostles of the New Testament Church? Let’s walk through the story.

This story takes place in Antioch. As I said last week, Antioch was the first place to have a church where a large number of Jewish believers and Gentile believers started doing church together. This was something completely brand new. Jews were not allowed to fellowship with Gentiles in this way, and before this, Christ followers were initially seen as just a sect of Judaism. Jews certainly didn’t worship with pagan Gentiles! But as the gospel went forth in Antioch, and a church was started where Jews and Gentiles belonged to the same community of faith, people began calling them by a new word: “Christians.” This is what we see in Acts 11. And we also see there that Barnabas brought Paul there to be a part of the incredible gospel ministry in that church and city.

At some point, Peter came up to Antioch from Jerusalem, and he was fellowshiping with the Gentile believers. As verse 12 says, “*he was eating with the Gentiles.*” Peter had table fellowship with these Gentile Christians, eating at the same table, even eating unclean foods with them. And this was a big deal. According to the Law of Moses in the Old Testament, Jews couldn’t eat the “unclean” foods that Gentiles did, like pork and shellfish. No BBQ or shrimp cocktails. They wouldn’t even eat with Gentiles. Food remains to be one of the most visible signs of cultural differences, even to this day. That’s why we can talk about Mexican food, Greek food, Italian food, or Chinese food, and everyone knows the different kinds of foods I’m referring to, and the peoples and cultures that they represent. It’s a visible, tangible reminder of the *differences and distinctions* between people and different cultures. Sharing a meal together is one of the best ways to get to know someone, to build a relationship and spend time together. And the reverse is also true: refusing to share a meal with someone, or eat the same foods as them,

can be one of clearest signs of division and animosity between people. If sharing meals together is a sign of friendship, fellowship, and unity, refusing to eat together is a sign of discord, division, and disunity. Just think about family meals at holidays: they can be times of unbridled joy as family gets together and enjoys each other; or, it can be a painful reminder that uncle Bob and aunt Susie are still refusing to come to Thanksgiving dinner because they are still mad at Grandpa, or uncle Tim, or so and so.

And so it was with the Jewish food laws. They were meant to signify that only Israel was God's covenant people. They were set apart from among the nations; they alone were the people of God. All the other nations were unclean, under God's wrath as His enemies. And so, we see an inseparable relationship between being *part of God's people* and being *saved by the God's promises of redemption*. Being part of God's people and being saved from our sin and reconciled to God go hand-in-hand. You can't be reconciled to God without being part of His people; you can't be part of His people without being reconciled to God. And so, the differences about Israel, such as their food laws, made it very clear that only the Jews were God's people, receiving God's covenant promises of salvation.

But then, when we get to the New Testament, God's covenant promises to Israel were fulfilled: Jesus Christ, God's Son and promised Messiah, finally came! Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life and fulfilled the Law's demands; he died on the cross and bore God's wrath against sin; He rose from the grave on the third day, being vindicated by God and conquering over Sin, Satan, and Death! He offered the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, and God accepted it! And he didn't just do this for the Jews - he did this so that anyone, in all the earth, who repents and believes this good news, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, will be forgiven, declared clean and righteous, and will be saved to eternal life, all by God's grace through faith in Christ! And this means that anyone who trusts in Christ is part of the true people of God! IN fact, the true people of God *are those who trust in the gospel of Christ!* This means it's no longer based on being born ethnically Jewish, or being circumcised, or fulfilling the Law of Moses, or practicing Sabbaths and feast days, or abstaining from certain foods. We are cleansed and justified before God, part of his covenant people, and saved, purely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!

We see this very clearly in Acts 10, in the story of Peter (the same "Cephas" that we see her in Galatians), and Cornelius, a Gentile (a Roman) who became a Christian. Peter was sitting

on his roof, and received a vision from the Lord: he saw a sheet come down from heaven, with every kind of animal on it, and God told him, “Rise, kill, and eat.” But Peter replied that he couldn’t, because that would be to disobey the Law of Moses! But God repeated this three times, and told him, “What God has made clean, do not call common,” or, unclean (Acts 10:9-16). Even as Peter was thinking about what this could mean, men from Cornelius arrived, asking Peter to come and talk to Cornelius and his family about God. But there’s only one problem with this: Cornelius is a Gentile, and Peter’s a Jew! He can’t go to his house, that would be unclean! But then Peter realizes that this is what the vision was all about: God was making it clear that the food laws no longer applied because Christ broke down the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Yes, there were still ethnic and cultural differences - but being part of the people of God was no longer just limited to ethnic Israel. It was opened up to all the nations of the world! They no longer needed to abstain from unclean foods, or be separate from Gentiles, because being “clean” or “unclean,” being seen as holy, righteous, and accepted before God no longer depended on keeping the Law of Moses or being part of ethnic Israel - it’s all dependent upon *trusting in the gospel of Christ!* And all of this took place *before Galatians 2:11-14!* This is why when Peter first came to Antioch, he had no problem eating with the Gentile believers!

But then, something happened; after these “certain men came from James,” Peter “drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (v.12b). He stopped eating unclean foods, stopped eating with the Gentile Christians, and stopped having fellowship with them, separating himself from them. And not only this, but as we see in v.13, since he’s an influential apostle, he actually led the other Jewish Christians astray, causing them to do the same - even Barnabas, Paul’s co-missionary!

And so, Paul “opposed him to his face,” publicly rebuking Peter “because he stood condemned.” Verse 14 tells us how Paul responded and what this public rebuke looked like: “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?” Paul is telling us clearly that this is such a big deal because it is a gospel issue. The truth of the gospel is at stake, because these Christians aren’t living in a way that is consistent with the gospel they believe. They were acting like the Gentile believers needed to become good Jews and start doing different works - like only eating certain foods and being circumcised - in order to truly be considered part of the church and be saved! They were forcing

Gentiles to become Jews, as verse 14 says. But this is a denial of the gospel! This is saying we need to believe in Christ *plus do the works of the Law!* And this is a false gospel. Even though Peter knows the true gospel, his actions are not consistent with the true gospel, and lead others astray into believing a false gospel. So Paul rebukes him publicly to make it very clear that *faith in the gospel of Christ is sufficient for anyone to be part of God's people and be justified before GOD, being saved to eternal life!*

We are saved purely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! If we truly trust in Christ's life, death, and resurrection as sufficient to save us from our sins! And this also means that faith in Christ is sufficient to be part of God's people and be reconciled to one another! If you are truly trusting in Christ's grace, then you are forgiven, declared righteous, and part of God's holy people, simply by grace through faith!

Therefore, we are called to live in a way that is *consistent* with the gospel that we proclaim to believe. As church, as a local, visible group of God's people, we are called to be a consistently gospel-centered community. So what how can we do that, according to this passage? For starters, we see that...

## **II. Gospel-Centered Church Unity is a Gospel Issue**

The division between Jews and Gentiles in the Antioch church told a lie about the gospel; by not truly living in unity with one another around the gospel, but instead telling the Gentiles they couldn't really be part of their same community unless they lived like Jews, they were telling a lie about the gospel with their actions. They preached the true gospel - but the way they treated their fellow Christians, even in the same church, was not consistent with the gospel they claimed to believe. And this is why our church unity is a *gospel issue*.

Now, I don't think any of us here today are tempted to stop fellowshiping with each other because some people in the church demand that we all live like Jews and start obeying the food regulations of the Old Testament, and others don't. That's probably not a temptation for us today. But there *are* still plenty of things that we are tempted to divide over as a church, threatening our unity. Maybe we're tempted to divide over ethnic, racial, or cultural lines, like we see happening here between Jews and Gentiles. This is a reminder that there is no place for racism in our hearts or in Christ's church. The gospel is sufficient to save *anyone in all the world!* It breaks down racial and cultural barriers between us! So we can never hold racial prejudice in our hearts toward other people. We can never be a church that divides over racial

issues. We must preach the gospel indiscriminately, and invite all who believe to be part of our church community. If we make being part of church a racial issue - so that this is a white church, or a black church, or so forth - then we are making our ethnic, cultural identity more important than the gospel; we're saying you have to believe in Jesus *plus be the same race or culture as us*. And that is unacceptable - that tells a lie about the gospel.

And this sin't just true for racial or cultural differences. We could be tempted to do this on any other matter of preference or bias. Maybe we're tempted to divide over social or ethnic classes, between the rich and poor, the urban or rural, the educated or uneducated. Again, that is unacceptable. Even if we have nothing else in common, our background is ultimately the same: we were dead in our sins, and we trust in Christ as our only, sufficient hope to save us to eternal life! That means *the most important thing about us* is the same, if we're Christian, not matter how different we may be! We have to truly believe that *our common faith in the gospel is the most important thing about us, and is what truly defines us*, not just as individuals, but as a church community!

And we could keep going. Anything we divide over reveals what we truly believe is most important; it reveals what truly defines us. We can't fight and divide over the color of the church carpet, the style of music we play, or whether or not we sit on chairs or pews on Sunday morning. If we divide over silly things like that, then we're saying that we care more about our own preferences than we care about faith in Christ.

We are called to be a *gospel-centered community*. If we truly believe the gospel, that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, and that true faith is sufficient to save us make us part the one people of God, then *our unity has to be grounded in the gospel!* This is why we require that every member here give a credible profession of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and agree to our statement of faith, summarizing what we believe the Bible says. Our unity has to be grounded in our faith in Christ.

But there will always be challenges to our church unity, and always be the possibility that we live inconsistently with the gospel as a community, because...

### **III. We are All Prone to Sin and Live Inconsistently with the Gospel at Times**

Despite what some people may say, we remain sinners, even after we become Christians, and will continue to struggle against sin and temptation throughout the rest of our Christian lives here on Earth. And this passage makes that point very clear for us. After all, if Peter, the Apostle,

still sinned and needed to be corrected, then this is certainly true for each of us today! We are all prone to live inconsistently with the gospel - to live in a way that is “not in step with the truth of the gospel,” as we see Peter, Barnabas, and the Jewish Christians doing here.

Therefore, I think it’s helpful if we take a closer look at what Peter is doing here and why. We’re told Peter withdrew from the Gentiles when “certain men from James” came, because he feared “the circumcision party.” Most commentators agree that these are probably two different groups. It’s very possible these men from James are Christians sent from Jerusalem to see how the Jewish and Gentile Christians were living as Gentiles together. The “Circumcision party” probably refers to non-Christian Jews back in Jerusalem who were persecuting the church. And so, it’s possible that the men from James convinced Peter and the rest, even Barnabas, to stop eating and associating with the Gentile Christians in order to try and ease up the persecution going on in Jerusalem. So this wasn’t a theological disagreement, but rather Peter and the rest giving in, doing what they knew was wrong, *out of fear*, which is why Paul accuses them of hypocrisy.

Now, again, we’re talking about *Peter* here, who followed Jesus, was a leading Apostle, and wrote books of the Bible! Also Barnabas, Paul’s fellow missionary! So clearly, if these godly men, far wiser and more mature in the faith than we are - if they could still sin, still act hypocritically, still live inconsistently with the gospel, then *surely this still happens for each of us today!* Therefore, the first step towards actually living in a consistently gospel-centered way, both as individuals and as a church, is for us to humbly recognize that we all still struggle with sin and temptation, and that each of us can be wrong. We’re all tempted to live hypocritically at times. We’re all tempted to live by fear, rather than faith. Maybe we worship Christ and believe His word on Sunday, but are tempted to be ashamed of Christ at school or work on Monday. Maybe we go along with a dirty joke, or join in something we know is against the Bible. Maybe we don’t proclaim the true gospel when our friend or coworker tell us they believe all roads lead to Heaven and we just smile and pretend like that’s ok. Maybe we’re tempted to tell our friend there’s nothing wrong with homosexuality, or living with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or being transgender, or anything else, out of fear, even though we know the Bible says it’s wrong.

We’re all tempted to sin, be hypocrites, and living inconsistently with the gospel and who we are in Christ at times, hurting ourselves, our fellow Christians, and non-believers in the

process. Therefore, we need to recognize this and humbly confess our temptations and sins to one another, so that we can repent and continue to believe the gospel of Christ's grace!

And this means we need a church culture *where we help each other to do this*. This is why...

#### **IV. Consistent Gospel-Centered Community Requires Loving Rebuke and Grace-filled Encouragement**

Just as Paul rebuked Peter, Barnabas, and the others for living inconsistently with the gospel, encouraging them to remember the gospel and live in light of it, so we need to follow this same example with one another. We live in a day and age where we think that loving each other means just tolerating and accepting each other's choices, no matter how wrong or destructive they may be; or that loving people just means leaving each other alone. But that's not biblical love; it's really just laziness, because Christlike love is hard work. Christlike love means actually caring for one another more than ourselves, truly seeking each other's good - which can only be found in Christ. If we really believe that true faith in the gospel of Christ is our only hope of salvation, and that we as a church are called to live in a way that is consistent with the gospel we proclaim, then that means we need to be a church community that takes that seriously. Just as we have a statement of faith that says what we believe as a gospel-believing church, so we also have a *church covenant* that says what it looks like for us to *live* as Christians in a gospel-centered, Bible-believing church. Our church covenant is our commitment to live out the gospel consistently, both as individuals and as a church community.

But as we've seen, we're each still tempted to sin and we all live inconsistently with the gospel at times. So, we need to have a church culture in which we love each other enough to hold one another accountable to a life of consistent faith in the gospel of Christ. We need to love each other, and our church, enough to lovingly correct and rebuke each other at times when it is obvious that we're walking in a way that is sinful; when we claim to have faith, but are willfully and hypocritically embracing sin or not obeying the Bible when we know that we should. Every single one of us is going to sin and do this at times, so we all need to have brothers and sisters around us who love us enough to hold us accountable, confront us with the truth, and lovingly call us back to walking in the truth of the gospel of Christ. We need to love each other enough to do, even when it's difficult, and even when we don't know how the other person will take it. And

so, we also need to be humble enough to *allow* others to speak the truth into our lives, to love us enough to hold us accountable, even to correct and rebuke us at times.

But in order to have such a culture of humility, confession, and loving rebuke, we need to have an even firmer culture of *grace-filled encouragement in the gospel*. We need to be a church community that is *even quicker to pounce on each other with grace!* We need to constantly remind each other of the gospel - that we really are justified and saved by grace through faith in Christ alone! When we have to bring rebuke or correction, it's not to say, "you need to do better and get your act together!" No, of course not - because that's not the gospel! INstead, it's us saying, "Brother, Sister, you're not walking in a way that looks like faith in Christ! Remember the gospel - remember who you are in Christ!" And then, when someone receives the correction and repents, we remind each other, "YOU are completely forgiven by the blood of Jesus! His gracious is sufficient to forgive us, and you are still just as righteous in Christ! GOD still loves you and accepts you as His child!" When we have a culture in which we are quick and eager to remind each other of the incredible grace of Christ, then this is what enables us to have a gospel-centered church and a culture of humble confession and loving rebuke. So let us have a culture of grace-filled, gospel centered encouragement! Le us pounce on each other with the grace of Christ! Let us encourage each other to live consistently with the gospel by constantly reminding each other the good news: that we are completely forgiven and declared righteous before God, reconciled to Him *and to each other*, simply by grace through faith in the prefect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our place! Let us rest in His grace together, helping each other to walk in the truth of the gospel as a truly gospel-centered church community.

And if you're not a Christian this morning, then this is exactly what I want to tell you as well: to join the church and become a Christian, and to be saved from your sins and have eternal life with God, you don't have to clean yourself up, or get your act together, or become good enough - you could never be good enough; no, you simply have to believe this good news, turn away from living a life of unbelief, and turn to Christ in faith, trusting that His grace is sufficient to save you. Then, you can make your faith public through baptism! If you have any questions about this gospel, or about becoming a Christian, being baptized, or even joining the church, I would love to speak with you. Let us pray.