

Because He Is Mine, I Walk The Line

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Galatians: Free At Last Series

Galatians 2:11-14

Some of you, who attend Joshua House, our Twenty-Something Ministry, have heard this story before, but it is one of the best personal testimonies that I've heard in quite some time from a member of our congregation. Let me read to you the testimony:

I am currently 21 years old and am in nursing school. During one of my clinicals, a patient asked if I would pray for her. I said, "Of course, I would love to." The patient was in her early 50's and was in a nursing home to deal with lupus. I prayed a simple prayer that God would heal her. I wished her the best of luck and left for the day. The next week was finals and then we had a week's break before classes resumed.

On my break I received a phone call asking me to report to the director's office. I had no clue why I needed to see him. On Monday morning I went to his office and he asked me to sit down. He then told me that I was going to be written up. I was shocked. I had no idea what I had done wrong. I asked what I was going to be written up for and he said, "Inappropriate conduct with a patient." I had no idea what he was talking about. He asked if I recalled praying for a patient during my clinicals. My response was, "Well, I pray for most of my patients."

I admit I was a little slow because I didn't know where he was going to go with this. According to him, by praying for my patients I had broken a number of rules. I told him that I had their permission to pray for them and that most, if not all, had asked me to pray. He told me that it didn't matter, that religion needs to be kept separate from school.

He then asked if I remembered praying for a certain patient on my last day during my clinicals. I had to think about it and then remembered that I had prayed for a woman who had lupus. I told this to him and he looked very angry. He then asked if I knew what had become of her. I told her that I had not talked to her since then. He informed me that her latest blood test showed no sign of lupus, that she was not in remission, but it was rather like she had never had the disease at all. I was in shock. I had no idea that this had happened. I just smiled and told him God is good.

He was not happy with that response at all. He told me that what I did was unprofessional and unacceptable. He then asked me to leave and told me that he would have a talk with my clinical instructor and that we

would continue this conversation at a later date. I left feeling a mixture of emotions: joy, worry, stress, happiness, etc.

The following day I was called into his office and this time my clinical instructor and the head of my program were also in the room. They looked angry and mad. I was just confused. The director of the school placed a piece of paper in front of me and told me that if I agreed not to pray with any more of my patients as long as I was enrolled in this school, they would not do anything about this situation and that they would make it go away.

I was in complete and utter shock. I finally took a deep breath and said, "No." They were really angry. I told them that if God wants me to pray for someone that I will pray for them.

Once my director realized I was not going to sign it, he handed me my write up and told me to sign that. I took a minute and realized that I could either take the easy way out, or I could stand up for what I know is right. I told my director that I did not do anything wrong and I refused to sign my write up. In the comment box on my write up I simply wrote, "Prayed for a patient and God moved."

My instructors were not amused. They told me that this would not be the end of this matter. I left the office and felt like crying because I might have ruined my chances of becoming a nurse and could possibly be kicked out of school. I knew that what they were doing was not legal, but I would be the first to admit that I am young and I had no idea what to do about all of this.

My clinical instructor stopped me as I was walking to my car and told me, "I am going to take care of this. Don't worry." I told him that I would try not to worry.

The next week my clinical instructor told me that I needed to see him after lab. Of all the people in the office, he was the only Christian. So I thought he was going to prepare me for what was to come the next day from the director. He told me to walk with him. He took me to the director's office. There was a man in the office that I didn't recognize. He smiled at me and said, "You've never met me, but you changed my life and my wife's life forever." He was the husband of the patient I prayed for.

My director looked at me and told me that I was not going to be written up. I watched him tear up my write up. I looked at my file to make sure there were no copies in it and saw him delete the file on his computer. I was in complete shock. The man then told me, "Since you did so much for me and my wife, I want to return the favor. You see, I am a lawyer and I am

not happy about what your school is doing to you.” He told me that what they were doing was not only wrong, but illegal. I was so overwhelmed.

After we left the office, in the waiting room outside, was the lady I had prayed for. I found out that she and her husband are very strong Christians and are active in their church. The four of us went out to Starbucks for coffee and I got to know them. I found out that my clinical instructor was so upset by this whole incident that he drove down to their hometown, picked them up, and brought them back to the school. No other clinical instructor would do that.

The next day I got a note from the director again asking me to come to his office. He asked me to sign a paper saying I would not pray for any future patients. I was upset, to say the least. I told him in a strong, but soft voice, “If I feel like God wants me to pray for someone, I’m going to do just that whether I am at work, in a clinical setting, or passing someone on the street. If someone asks for prayer, I will pray for them. I am a daughter of Christ and not just a nursing student. Please don’t ask me to sign this paper again.”

This happened in October and now several months later I have not heard from the director since. God has really worked in my life this year.

Isn’t that a great testimony? Today, I’m going to continue our verse by verse study of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In this section, we are going to read about Paul, who like the young nursing student, had to stand up to tremendous pressure as he was opposed by virtually everyone concerning the implications of the gospel message. My title is borrowed from an old Johnny Cash song. You will find out a little later why I titled my message this way. But the title is, “Because He Is Mine, I Walk The Line.” Let’s pray.

Galatians 2:11-14

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. 14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

Now Galatians 2 is the story of two visits: First, in Galatians 2:1-10, Paul’s visit up to Jerusalem. And second, in verse 11 to the end of the chapter, Peter’s visit down to Antioch. So there are two scenes here. You could call it the “Tale of

Two Cities.” The first visit in Galatians 2:1-10 describes the content of the gospel:

The content of the gospel

Paul is communicating in 2:1-10 what the gospel is. And there is a nice little summary statement of Paul’s gospel in Galatians 2:6 where he writes:

Galatians 2:6

As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message.

Paul’s gospel was that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. His gospel was Christ alone plus nothing makes you acceptable to God. After he left the Galatians churches some opponents to Paul came into the churches and said, “Paul gave you half a message. He told you to believe in Christ. That’s important; that’s good. But we need to add to Christ some of the Jewish identifying markers of circumcision and Sabbath keeping and the laws of kashrut, eating certain foods, for you Gentiles to be full members of God’s people.” These opponents, the people Paul calls “false brothers,” came into the churches and said it is Christ plus something.

Now, these days we don’t carry much about circumcision except as a purely medical issue. But we add other things to the gospel. And we today still misunderstand the content of the gospel. When Paul says that the apostles added nothing to my message of Christ alone, most of us in the church would have to say, “Well, Paul, we totally believe in Christ alone plus nothing as the full basis of our salvation.” But do we? Do we really believe in Christ alone plus nothing?

I talk with folks all the time who say, “You know, Rich, I would like to come to Christ. I feel that I need Christ. But I don’t feel like my motives are really pure. You see, I’m going through a divorce right now. I’m going through cancer treatment right now. I’m struggling with this or that addiction. We have a problem with one of our kids. Rich, I don’t want to come to Christ just because I’m going through a hard time, or just because I’m afraid to die, or just because I’m lonely.”

What is the person saying? In order to be saved, I must have Christ plus pure motives.

Trust me. None of our motives are ever 100% pure when we go to God. We come with our needs. We come with all of our agendas. Some of the agendas are even unknown to us. None of that matters because the basis of salvation is

not Christ plus pure motives. It is Christ alone plus nothing. What do you need to bring to Christ in order to be saved? Nothing!

Now, during the second visit, Peter's visit to Antioch, we learn not the content of the gospel, but rather the consequences of the gospel.

The consequences of the gospel

What are the implications, in other words, of this message Christ plus nothing makes us acceptable to God? What does following the gospel result in?

So, in Galatians 2:11 we read this:

Galatians 2:11

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

Cephas is the Apostle Peter's Aramaic name. Peter is the name Cephas in Greek. Both names mean "stone or rock." We're going to find that Peter acts entirely in an un-rocklike way. He acts more like Jello or Silly Putty. But Peter goes to Antioch which was the third largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria. It had a huge Jewish and Gentile population. Paul accuses Peter in verse 14 of not acting in line with the truth of the gospel:

Galatians 2:14

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

Literally, verse 14 says:

They were not walking in line with the gospel.

This is where I got my title from today, "Because He's Mine, I Walk the Line." Let me unpack this walking in line with the gospel for you. The Greek word for walking in line is the word:

Orthopodeo

...which you might recognize. We use it today for orthopedist. "Ortho" means straight. "Podeo" mean to walk.

An orthopedist straightens your bones. An orthodontist straightens your teeth. Orthodoxy straightens out your doctrine. Paul says that Peter and the others in Antioch did not walk out the straight line of the gospel.

Here is a picture for you. If you are pulled over for driving drunk, in the old days, at least, the police officer would take you out of your car and draw a chalk line on the street and say, “Now, walk the line. Can you walk straight on this line without falling to the right or to the left?”

Paul says that the gospel has certain lines proceeding from it. There are implications of the gospel. You know when the gospel has impacted you. You are living out this message of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone because you are walking consistently with that message.

What’s the message? The message of the gospel tells us that we are sinners. We are weak. We are helpless and hopeless. And self help is no help at all. The gospel tells us secondly that we are loved and accepted solely by the grace of God shown in Jesus Christ alone.

So in walking the line of the gospel, you might say that tomorrow when you wake up in the morning, you are accepted by God not because you had a good day today, not because you slept well, not because of your piety, or your prayers. You are still weak. You are still a sinner. But God accepts you solely by the grace that he has shown you in Christ. And anything that smacks of self-help, lifting myself up by my own bootstraps before God is not in line with the gospel.

So what are the lines of the gospel? What does it mean to walk the line and live out the implications of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?

Well, first of all, the gospel frees us from judgmentalism.

The gospel frees us from judgmentalism

In this incident of Paul’s confrontation with Peter, there is not a hint of critical judgmentalism. You know that angry, over-bearing, self-superior tone that many people engage in when they correct another person. You see, this all has to do with the gospel. The false gospel turns us into critics and judges and makes us mean and self-superior because if I have done something that God has taken notice of, there’s something about me, something about my prayers, something about my piety, it is Christ plus my pure motives; Christ plus my obedience, then I can feel superior to others who don’t do those things. And I can judge them and condemn them.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel Prize winning author of *The Gulag Archipelago*, who was confined to a prison camp in Siberia, put it as well as anything I’ve ever read. He wrote this:

“If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us

and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

"It was only when I lay there on the rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not between states nor between social classes nor between political parties, but right through every human heart, through all human hearts. And that is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me, bless you, prison, for having been a part of my life."

In other words, we must never approach another human being, or another group of people, another race, another country saying: that's where all the evil is. Or, if we want to deal with evil, we're going to destroy you because I'm superior to you. No. The line of good and evil runs through my own heart. And the gospel tells me that.

So, the gospel frees us from being mean, from being self-righteous, from being superior, from being professional critics of others.

At the same time,

The gospel frees us to confront

Galatians 2:11, 14

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

We are freed from bashing others, from putting others down by the gospel. But we are also freed to cleanly confront behavior that is not in line with the gospel. I don't know if you've ever heard or read any of the rules that govern dysfunctional families. The classic dysfunctional family is a family in which one of the parents is an addict – an alcoholic, a drug addict. And this addiction upsets the whole family system and leaves children struggling to cope with the erratic behavior caused by their parent's addiction. People who have written on dysfunctional families say that dysfunctional families operate by a set of rules.

The Four Rules of Dysfunctional Families

1. Don't talk about what is really going on in your family.
2. Don't trust – you will be let down.
3. Don't feel – because if it is painful your parents won't validate your feelings

4. Don't question the rules

In dysfunctional families children grow up learning that it is most important to not confront, to not even speak about the elephant in the room. Don't talk about Dad going to prison, or the fact that mom can't get out of bed most mornings because she has a hangover. Don't talk about your sexual abuse, or the mental illness. Don't talk.

In a dysfunctional family, people never resolve conflicts, they just learn to avoid them. Or rather, they learn to absorb the conflict rather than resolve it. Because you see, in a dysfunctional family, if anyone violates the rule of "Don't talk," then pressure comes down on them. People say, "Well, you are the problem. We didn't have problems with social services until you reported on the sexual abuse. Everything was fine before that. Until you decided to blow the whistle on mom or dad, or brother or sister, or grandpa or grandma, everything was fine."

Back in 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a march into Birmingham, Alabama, a place that was one of the epicenters of dehumanizing segregation. Birmingham, Alabama, the home of Bull Connor, a sheriff who set his dogs on non-violent, peaceful protesters. Dr. King was thrown in prison. A joint coalition of Alabama clergymen that included the Episcopal Bishop of Alabama, the Roman Catholic Bishop, the Jewish Rabbi, the Methodist Bishop, the moderator of the Presbyterian, the local Baptist ministers – they authored a joint letter chastising Dr. King for leading his non-violent protest. They called themselves the Reconciliation Committee. And in a letter titled "A Call for Unity" these Alabama clergymen wrote:

Just as we formerly pointed out that "hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions," we also point out that such actions that incite hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be, have not contributed to the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham.

"Dr. King, you've created the problem in Birmingham by inciting a violent backlash through your non-violent protest. Dr. King, you are the problem."

Martin Luther King, Jr., in response, wrote one of the most important moral and political documents in American history. It was titled "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." February is Black History Month and if you've never read this letter, this would be a great opportunity to do so. He wrote in response to these clergymen:

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride

toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

"Don't talk," the church says. Don't protest because you are making problems. King says the problem was already there. We're just exposing it and bringing into the light. Sometimes true reconciliation only comes about after we first agitate.

But you see, the gospel, the message that we are accepted by God based on Christ alone gives us the confidence to confront, to speak the truth, to draw the line, to be agitators and shake up dysfunctional systems and dysfunctional families.

The gospel frees us from people-pleasing

Galatians 2:12

For before certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

Peter had been given a revelation, a vision, three times from God that it was now okay for Peter, who was a Jew, to eat foods that had formerly been prohibited to Jews. Now that Peter had become a follower of Christ, a new era had dawned.

Peter was living in a new day. The wall between Jew and Gentile had come down in Christ. And Peter accepted this revelation until certain people came from James, the apostle in Jerusalem. We don't know if James sent them, or if they just claimed to represent James. Sometimes people speak on behalf of the church, who aren't authorized by the church. They just take it on themselves to represent the Vineyard and the Vineyard's position, "Well, I go to the Vineyard and we would never allow this. We would always condemn that."

What they say, or the spirit they say it in, may not represent us at all. And so it may be that James was misrepresented by these folks. But in any case, these folks came down to Antioch and apparently they were intimidating enough to Peter to cause him to change his former practice. Before they came he used to eat with the Gentiles. But now they were urging separation. And Peter went along with the crowd.

Paul says that he went along because:

Galatians 2:12

For before certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

...he was afraid. This is a constant theme in Peter's life – this temptation to avoid suffering. When Jesus began to talk about going to the cross, Peter rebuked him and said, "No. This shall never happen to you." And Jesus called him Satan. Peter, you can't follow me; you can't walk the line of the gospel; you can't walk out the implications of the gospel and avoid suffering all the time.

And then on the night that Jesus was betrayed, Peter again out of fear that he would suffer succumbed to temptation and lied about who he was to a little servant girl. And now a third time, out of fear that my stand will hurt my standing with this particular group, Peter compromises.

We all understand people pleasing, don't we? We grow up with peer pressure. We have to wear certain things to be accepted by our group. You have to have a certain brand of sneakers. You have to wear your hair a certain way. You have to go along with the group's preference regarding music. We know in high school who is in and who is out – we want to be in.

Do you see how the gospel of Christ alone plus nothing could set you free from the temptation to always please people and never speak up? What makes you acceptable? What makes you valuable? What gives your life meaning? Is it Christ plus having a certain group's approval? Is it Christ plus your parent's approval on all of your choices? What do you need to live a good and valuable

and acceptable life? Christ plus your father validating all of your choices? Your mother saying to you, “I’m proud of you?” Or is Christ plus nothing?

Have you walked out the line of the gospel that would set you free from people pleasing? That you are accepted and acceptable not based on your weight, or your physical appearance, or your financial status, or your family history, or your grades, or your professional accomplishments, or your athletic ability, or your piety. Can you say, “The penny has dropped, Rich! I get it! I understand. I receive this. I am accepted and acceptable solely based on God’s grace shown to me in Jesus Christ. I’m not always wondering about my standing when I take a stand.”

The gospel frees us from convictionless civility

I have been a great advocate and have written repeatedly to you in the church about the need for civility in our talking about each other, in our blogging about each other, in our emails and text messaging towards each other. In 21st century life there is so little civility. What we have in so much 21st century news is people screaming at each other. The radio airwaves are filled with divisive and mean-spirited personal attacks. And this is on both sides of the political divide. It is on both sides of the religious divide, liberal and conservative.

Civility means that I recognize that when I speak about a fellow human being, they are people who are made in the image of God. Therefore, they are worthy of my honor and respect regardless. And this person is someone for whom Christ died.

The danger of just speaking about civility is that we can have convictionless civility – civility that won’t speak the truth, civility that won’t draw a line, civility that refuses to walk out the line of the gospel. The Apostle Paul says in verse 13:

Galatians 2:13

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

Even Barnabas went along with this group-think that violated the gospel. Even Barnabas was willing to separate from the Gentiles. And this must have been particularly painful for Paul. Barnabas, who was Paul’s supporter from the time of Paul’s conversion, Barnabas, who supported the Gentile mission in Antioch – even Barnabas was led astray.

And you know, when I think of Barnabas, I think about someone who is big-hearted, tender-hearted, someone who is a peacemaker. The problem, the temptation for those who are inclined to be tender-hearted as opposed to tough-minded, the problem for those who are inclined to make peace rather than to stir things up, is that more than occasionally you sweep convictions under the rug.

You tender, big-hearted, peace-making people can be so concerned about calming things down and relieving pain that you don't take a stand when you need to.

You see, the report had come back to the Jewish Christians in Antioch that because you Jewish Christians are not observing the Jewish food laws, you are making things difficult for us back in Jerusalem. This was a time of great nationalist fervor in Israel.

There was a movement called The Zealots who were the Jewish Taliban of the day. They wanted to overthrow the Roman government in Jerusalem. They were advocating drawing sharp lines between Jews and Gentiles. They said if you are going to be a true Jew you can't be friends with the Gentiles. You can't eat with them. You have to choose sides. And Jews from the Jerusalem church were coming down to Antioch saying, "You know, Barnabas, your eating with the Gentiles is causing us a lot of problems back in Jerusalem. The heat is really coming down on us from the Zealots."

So Barnabas, ever the peacemaker, ever the moderate, ever the tender-hearted one, who wants to make everyone happy says, "Okay. If my stand is hurting someone else, I will bend."

The religious leaders of Birmingham said to Dr. King, "Slow down. Your protests are causing problems for the rest of us. This is not the right time to take a stand. Can't we all just get along?"

Dr. King wrote back in his letter from the Birmingham jail and said:

For years now I have heard the word "wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never."

We have waited for more than 340 years for our Constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you've seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your 20 million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is

told that Fun Town is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness towards white people; when you have to concoct and answer for a five year old son, who is asking: “Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?”; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” and “colored”; when your first name becomes “N...”, your middle name becomes “boy” (however old you are) and your last name becomes “John” and your wife and mother are never given the respected title “Mrs.” ...I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

There is a time to work against type, to see if you are a Paul or Paulette, or you are married to Paul or Paulette. There is a time to work against type, to be gracious, to urge graciousness, to urge accommodation. But if you are a Barnabas, or a Barnabet, or you are married to Barnabas or Barnabet, there is also a time to work against type. The gospel sets us free from the limits of our temperaments and our resistance to feeling uncomfortable for a time. You can survive – you can even thrive while you are uncomfortable when you build your life on Christ alone.

The gospel sets us free from convictionless civility. The gospel sets us free from hypocrisy.

Galatians 2:13-14

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. 14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

See, the charge against Christians that you hear all the time is, “Well, I could never join the church. I could never become a Christian because Christians are a bunch of hypocrites.” Peter in the past had eaten with the Gentiles, but when the pressure came, he withdrew. Paul accuses him of being a hypocrite.

The word “hypocrite” comes from a Greek word. It was used by the actors in the Greek play, who wore a mask and played a role. A hypocrite is simply someone who is wearing a mask, who is not operating by their real convictions. They are doing things that violate their stated beliefs. Peter, you know better, but you are just playing a role right now in front of these Jewish Christians. You are a hypocrite. You are flip-flopping because you can’t bear the heat.

If you are a follower of Christ, what do you say to the charge that Christians are hypocrites. I can't become a Christian because Christians are hypocrites. Let me tell you what I say. I say, "Guilty as charged. We Christians are hypocrites for the same reason that everyone in all of history has been a hypocrite. It is because we are sinners. We all hide our bad parts. We all pretend to be better than we are. We all are tempted to shade the truth in our favor. We all wear masks. Christians are hypocrites? Guilty as charged."

But here is what else I say: "There is only one person in all of history who was never a hypocrite. That was Jesus Christ. He was not a sinner. He had nothing to hide. He never had anything to cover up. He always told the truth. He always acted with complete authenticity. He never wore a mask. He never hid his emotions. He didn't play to the crowd. He didn't flip-flop."

Here is the deal. Here is what I've discovered about my own life: Since I've come to Christ, I am less hypocritical than I used to be. I am less afraid that someone will find out who I really am. You see, being set free from hypocrisy is walking in line with the gospel because we are no longer dependent upon what others think of us as the basis for our identity because we are building our lives on Christ alone. We are freer to confess sin. We are freer to reveal weakness, freer to not always be competent in everything, freer to occasionally be wrong, to confess that we've over-estimated our abilities and under-estimated the challenge.

And finally:

The gospel frees us from racism and cultural imperialism

These false brothers, these Jewish Christians, were coming to Antioch saying that Gentiles had to become Jews in order to receive the blessing of God. And they required the Gentiles to take on Jewish identity badges – circumcision, food laws, celebrating the Sabbath. They said, "If you don't do these things, you are not part of God's people. Faith alone in Christ alone is not enough for the gospel." Faith alone in Christ alone creates one people, not two. But if Paul had not acted, if Paul had not confronted, if Paul had not gotten in Peter's face in public, we would have one Lord Jesus Christ and two people – Jews who follow Christ (and Gentiles who follow Jewish customs) and an entirely separate people, Gentiles, who follow Christ but who don't follow Jewish customs. One Lord and two communion tables; one for Jewish Christians and one for Gentile Christians; one Lord and two churches.

Peter's stand of separating himself from the Gentiles meant that he fell off. He stopped walking the line of the gospel.

Galatians 2:14

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

See, Paul understood, as Peter did not, that the gospel breaks down dividing walls. The gospel teaches that no race, no culture is above others. We are all accepted on the same basis, the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross.

Now, friends, I would suggest that all of us fall off of the line of the gospel to the right or to the left. We all stumble on this point of cultural imperialism and racism because we really don’t believe Christ alone plus nothing. In our hearts we say Christ plus my culture which is really superior to other cultures. And if others really wanted to be right, they would act more like my culture. See, I was raised as a Jew in New York and there is nothing better than that because we’re very direct. We express ourselves and we show emotion. We’re loud and we’re funny. We’re the best comedians. We’re not like those people who speak so indirectly. You never know what they’re thinking. They’ve got all these hidden agendas. Others of you say, “I am so glad I was raised in the Midwest. We’re not so loud and brash as New Yorkers are. We don’t get in people’s faces. We’re sensitive. We’re tactful. We are better than you are.”

We all do that. We all say, “Oh, my culture, my people are warm and emotional and we hug each other and touch each other. Our funerals are expressive. We’re not like those cold, sterile, Northern European robots who sit through funerals and you don’t hear a peep, who tell each other they love one another on their wedding days and we’ll let you know if anything changes.”

Or you might think, “We’re superior to those emotional people who wear their feelings on their sleeves.” They are not like you – calm, orderly. “No wonder they can’t get anything done.” No wonder your culture is so much more productive and clean. It’s because you’re better. If only people were more like you, more like your background, more like your race, more like your country everything in the world would be okay.

Paul says the penny of the gospel hasn’t dropped into your heart until you say, “My race, my culture, my people, my nation is not superior. We and they rest on nothing other than Christ alone.” Walk out the line of the gospel. Let’s pray.

Because He's Mine, I Walk The Line

Rich Nathan
February 6-7, 2010
Galatians: Free At Last Series
Galatians 2:11-14

- I. The content of the gospel (Galatians 2:1-10)

- II. The consequences of the gospel
 - A. The gospel frees us from judgmentalism (Galatians 2:11-14)
 - B. The gospel frees us to confront (Galatians 2:11, 14)
 - C. The gospel frees us from people-pleasing (Galatians 2:12)
 - D. The gospel frees us from convictionless civility (Galatians 2:13)
 - E. The gospel frees us from hypocrisy (Galatians 2:13-14)
 - F. The gospel frees us from racism and cultural imperialism (Galatians 2:14)