

Text: Gal. 2:11-14

Title: "The temptation of a false gospel – compromise"

Time: 3/3/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: This past week our President met with the North Korean atheist communist dictator, Kim Jong Un. The talks ended before they started, and the President explained that they did so because the Korean dictator required the lifting of sanctions in order for talks to commence.

While there has been a lot of political spin on the episode from various news agencies, one thing is clear – our President refused to compromise this week with his Korean counterpart.

As Americans we remember the way Chamberlain counseled compromise with Hitler, and the way that Churchill refused to compromise. Speaking in the House of Commons on October 5, 1938, against the Munich Agreement that days before had ceded parts of Czechoslovakia to Hitler, Churchill said the following:

"Many people, no doubt, honestly believe that they are only giving away the interests of Czechoslovakia, whereas I fear we shall find that we have deeply compromised, and perhaps fatally endangered, the safety and even the independence of Great Britain and France. . . . You must have diplomatic and correct relations, but there can never be friendship between the British democracy and the Nazi Power, that Power which spurns Christian ethics, which cheers its onward course by a barbarous paganism, which vaunts the spirit of aggression and conquest, which derives strength and perverted pleasure from persecution, and

uses, as we have seen, with pitiless brutality the threat of murderous force. That Power cannot ever be the trusted friend of the British democracy.”

Paul is the Churchill of gospel ministry. He is clear that when it comes to a false gospel, there is no room for compromise. His was not a popular view. The temptation to compromise with a false gospel to keep the peace turns out to be very tempting indeed. Paul tells us in this passage of an episode when some giants of the faith fell to that temptation, and I want us to learn four things about compromise with a false gospel from his description of these events.

I. Compromise with a false gospel is blameworthy sin (v. 11).

Illustration: Remember that Churchill’s concern over compromise with Hitler was that it could have “fatally endangered the safety and even the independence of Great Britain and France.” It turns out he was more right than he could have known at the time.

Application: Certainly, there are grave consequences for compromise with a false gospel. The gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures. Lose any part of that truth, disbelieve any part of it, compromise it with additions or deletions, and man no longer has good news that can save his soul.

But notice that when Paul explains why it is that he publicly, personally, and profoundly rebuked Peter for his compromise with a false gospel, he says he did so because Peter was to be *blamed*. That word is a passive particle of a word

meaning *condemned*. The phrase tells us that Paul rebuked Peter because Peter had already been condemned.

So who had already condemned Peter prior to Paul's doing so? Certainly, it was not anyone else at this meal, except for the One who promises His presence at every fellowship meal of His people, where two or three are gathered together in His name. Paul criticized Peter because Jesus had already condemned what Peter was doing. Simply put, we should never compromise with a false gospel because doing so is sin that is condemned by our Lord.

It is when other concerns creep in – those unrelated to whether the Lord condemns or approves of our actions – that compromise begins to look like the commendable thing to do. If we compromise, we might keep the peace, we might gain a hearing for truth, we might avoid an offence, and we might be better liked by others.

For Paul, none of these other goals were important enough to him to cause him to lose sight of the most important goal – pleasing the Lord – avoiding His condemnation. Are we concerned about whether the compromises with the falsehoods of the world that infect our lives are things that please the Lord or things that He condemns? In the final analysis, these compromises are blameworthy sin.

II. Compromise with a false gospel is hopelessly inconsistent (v. 12).

Illustration: By the time the Munich agreement gave Hitler the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, he had already annexed Austria. After the agreement, Hitler violated it by occupying the rest of Czechoslovakia anyway. Finally,

when he invaded Poland, Britain at long last stopped trying to compromise with evil through appeasement.

Application: The compromise to which Peter fell caused great inconsistency in his testimony for the gospel. This is because that compromise was motivated by the fear of man, much like Britain's fear of war motivated their strategy of appeasement.

This was a time of Roman persecution of Jews in Palestine, and of a Jewish zealot-led response that would look with great suspicion upon anyone who was willing to eat a meal with a Gentile. And so the current of public opinion in Jerusalem, the town to which James and these men would have ministered the gospel, would have demanded that Jews not eat with Gentiles.

Paul calls these men from James men "of the circumcision" rather than men "of Christ," and what made them men "of the circumcision" evidently was this concern over public opinion.

What should have been the greater concern for Peter and these men from James? Fidelity to God's Word to Peter about Gentiles should have been a greater concern for them (Acts 10:9-28). It is plain that the episode of our Galatians passage must have happened after Peter's vision, or he would not have been willing to eat with Gentile believers in the first place. He did so because of what God's Word had shown him (v. 28).

Only when God's Word is no longer our singular motive do we begin to fall prey to fear of the court of public opinion, and as a result our gospel becomes hopelessly inconsistent. Do we fear what men say, or what the Bible says more?

III. Compromise with a false gospel is dangerously influential (v. 13).

Illustration: While history looks back on the consequences of Britain's policy of appeasement toward Hitler with dismay, at the time the approach was a very influential and popular one.

The Irish Examiner: "Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler at Munich was hugely popular at the time, though mostly because of relief that war had been averted. Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier, the French prime minister, were welcomed home from Munich as heroes.

"Chamberlain was celebrated as a peacemaker and received 20,000 supporting letters and telegrams. US president Franklin Roosevelt described Chamberlain as a 'good man', while Éamon de Valera [Prime Minister of Ireland] hailed him as a 'knight of peace'" [<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/views/analysis/when-appeasement-led-to-dishonour-873111.html>; 3/1/2019].

Application: Church history shows that in every battle between the true gospel and a false gospel, there has always been a very popular mushy middle. We do not like to see names like Peter and Barnabas and James in the mushy middle, but that was a temptation even in their lives. In our day, some of the church's most widely influential gospel preachers also are found often in this mushy middle, compromising with false gospels. Paul had to stand virtually alone on this day in Antioch apart from some very good men. We can expect to need to do the same in our day at times too.

IV. Compromise with a false gospel is a denial of the truth of the gospel (v. 14).

Illustration: I am reading a Christian book about forgiveness and reconciliation in preparation for a pastors' book club meeting I have scheduled for Tuesday. I have learned much from the book, but if there is one thing I could ask the author to change it would be one quotation he uses to introduce chapter 9.

It is the practice of the book to have wise quotations about the topic of the chapter right below the chapter title. In this chapter, the author quotes from a movie called, "Kill Bill Volume 1." The movie is immoral garbage, and so quoting from it seems to not fit very well with the author's desire to provide Christian counselling for forgiveness and reconciliation. It is kind of like finding a dead fly in a delicious bowl of soup.

Application: If we can point to one thing that does not fit well with Peter's ministry as a gospel witness, this would be the thing. Peter still believed all those things he preached so powerfully on the day of Pentecost, but that powerful message could be undone by one hypocritical misstep at a meal in Antioch. Peter affirmed the gospel with his orthodoxy - what he believed; but he denied it with his lack of orthopraxis - how he lived.

We need to preach the gospel with how we live, just like we have to proclaim it by speaking about what we believe.

What is encouraging to me is the fact that Peter had a fruitful and powerful gospel ministry after this incident. He must have responded humbly to Paul's rebuke, repented of his error, and continued on as best he knew how to be a witness for Christ in both word and deed.

That is what we need to do when the Lord points out all those missteps in our lives, which undermine and even deny the gospel we say we believe in. We can respond to the Holy Spirit's convicting rebuke, repent, and go on to be filled with His power for witness.

What are the hypocritical missteps in our lives that cause us to compromise with the false gospels of our day? We will not have an issue with being tempted to suddenly need to eat at a different table because certain men with the scruples of an apostate Judaism have joined us for dinner.

But what about the false gospel today that says, "I am not a sinner" or "Evolution is true" or "I can be a faithful Christian without a local church" or "you should not try to take everything the Bible says as true" or "I really need something more than what the Bible says about something"?

Have we distanced ourselves from the doctrines of original sin, young-earth creationism, the importance of the local church, or the complete inerrancy and sufficiency of the written Word of God? All compromise with error puts us in the mushy middle that denies the gospel.

Conclusion: What if Peter had reacted wrongly to Paul's rebuke? What if he had become defensive? What if rather than repent of his error, he counterattacked? Well, we would have had a very different beginning to the church of Jesus Christ. Its foundation of apostles and prophets would have had a big crack down its middle. The consequences of that kind of response from this man could have been catastrophic.

We have seen in our time the results of a similar gospel catastrophe. Good men have denied the gospel with their

actions and decisions of compromise with a false gospel. In our own witness as individual believers and as a church, let's repent of our failures in this regard like Peter did and ask the Lord for help to stand with Paul against these compromises.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching