

SESSION 4

STAND YOUR GROUND



When have you drawn a line in the sand?

THE POINT

Never compromise when the issue is a matter of biblical right and wrong.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

A man in my church called me recently in distress. He has been a member of the same social club for over 30 years. Most recently he has served as program chair. Part of that assignment was to arrange for the weekly invocation at chapter meetings. The club president asked him to refrain from using the name of Jesus in his prayers. The suggestion that he would pray without the name of Jesus caused my church member tremendous frustration. He couldn't believe he was being asked to deny his Savior. He came to me seeking advice.

What is your non-negotiable? Where will you refuse to compromise?

Paul, an apostle who encouraged believers not to judge someone on issues such as what to wear, what to eat, or how they practiced the Sabbath (Col. 2:16) was vehement on issues of truth. He was willing to face conflict to defend matters of grace to a culture and people that was very attached to the law.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Galatians 2:1-14 (HCSB)

1 Then after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. **2** I went up according to a revelation and presented to them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles—but privately to those recognized as leaders—so that I might not be running, or have run the race, in vain. **3** But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. **4** This issue arose because of false brothers smuggled in, who came in secretly to spy on the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, in order to enslave us. **5** But we did not give up and submit to these people for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would be preserved for you.

6 Now from those recognized as important (what they really were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism)—they added nothing to me. **7** On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised, **8** since the One at work in Peter for an apostleship to the circumcised was also at work in me for the Gentiles. **9** When James, Cephas, and John, recognized as pillars, acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. **10** They asked only that we would remember the poor, which I made every effort to do.

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. **12** For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. **13** Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. **14** But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, “If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?”

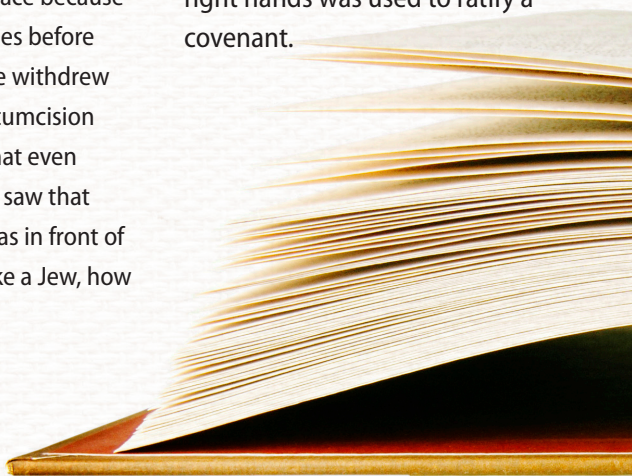
Key Words

Greek (v. 3) – The word designated a non-Jewish person (a Gentile) who spoke the Greek language, observed Greek customs, and absorbed Greek learning. To Jews, Greeks were pagans.

circumcised (v. 3) – Jews removed the foreskin of a male’s genital as a sign of membership in God’s covenant community. Jews were required to perform the rite on all Jewish male babies.

Cephas (v. 9) - The Aramaic word for “rock,” referring to Peter.

right hand of fellowship (v. 9) – The gesture of shaking right hands was used to ratify a covenant.



Galatians 2:1-5

For many of us, our preferred way of dealing with conflict is not to deal with it at all. We ignore it and hope the conflict goes away on its own. While there are some conflicts that may be minor enough to dissipate on their own, many do not. There are conflicts we should walk away from, in the sense of letting go of what we want in the matter (as we saw in last week's study). However, there are some issues on which we should not compromise by giving in, walking away, or ignoring. When conflict is due to an issue of right and wrong, it's time to stand our ground.

When I read the tenacity of Paul in the midst of adversity, I am reminded of two things:

1. Paul was passionate about what he believed.

He was willing to stand the test of time in support of truth. Paul didn't go to Jerusalem because he loved to travel. Paul was on a mission. He went "according to a revelation." Having a clearly defined purpose changes a person's willingness to defend it. Paul knew what God wanted him to do and so he willingly suffered to see the mission of the gospel grow.

2. God knew what He was doing. God called Paul from the diligence he gave to his work against Christ to a passion for Christ. The commitment Paul used to persecute Christians was the same commitment God sought in Paul for the advance of the gospel. God uses the experiences, heart, and temperament of people for Kingdom purposes.

After Paul's conversion, he became passionate about the faith he held in Christ. Nothing could or would stop him from advancing the cause of Christ into the Gentile world. Perhaps no one demonstrates like Paul a commitment to the gospel regardless of the personal cost.

How would you describe the freedom we have in Christ?

QUESTION #1

Galatians 2:6-10

Everyone needs people who believe in them. Children need parents who believe in them. Players need coaches who believe in them. Writers need a publisher who believes in them. Pastors need a congregation who believes in them.

Paul needed fellow followers of Christ who believed in him. He had plenty of people who didn't believe in him. He had come from "the other side." He was the chief prosecutor of everything Christian before God miraculously called him into service for the Kingdom. Paul may have felt at times that he had more enemies than he had friends in the church. His work of reaching the Gentiles was unpopular at best. To some it was a cause for hatred, dismissal, and even a sentence of death.

God used men like Barnabas, James, Cephas, and John to encourage Paul in his work. Would he have been as successful without their belief in him? Who has God used in your life to encourage you? Who are you encouraging?



"Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm!"

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Why was it significant that these men gave Paul their support and approval?

QUESTION #2

Galatians 2:11-14

As a pastor, I have learned there are power brokers in the church who carry a tremendous amount of influence. Some of these are helpful. Some are divisive. Cephas (Peter) had good influence sometimes, and not so good influence other times. Paul opposed him to his face.

Peter, perhaps as much or more than the other disciples, was a power broker among the early church. He was in the inner circle with Jesus. Peter was the one to step out of the boat and walk on water. He was ready to cut off an ear in defense of Jesus (John 18:10). Peter denied knowing Christ, but Jesus restored him (John 21). Peter became one of the dominant influencers in the first century church.

It was brave of Paul to stand up to Peter. I don't believe Paul did this simply because he was bold, or stubborn, or that he liked to argue. Paul faced the ridicule for one reason: he "saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel."

Peter, of all people, should have been willing to extend grace to the uncircumcised. He had been restored in his relationship with Christ. He had received enormous grace. In Acts 10, Peter encountered Cornelius, an event in which God taught him to embrace a Gentile who was a fellow believer. Paul challenged Peter's treatment of the Gentiles. Peter's hypocrisy was having an impact on the other Jews.

Choosing to challenge someone publicly or privately is a difficult decision. As a leader, I normally handle issues of correction in private. Once, however, I had a staff member who was critical of everything anyone said in a meeting. I had talked with this person before on a number of occasions. At some point, I knew I had to address it in a group setting. The group needed a precedent that this was not a tolerated behavior.

Jesus is truth. His presentation of that truth was always immersed in His love for people. Because of Jesus, Paul was on loving mission to defend and promote the gospel. Nothing or no one could stop him from defending the gospel. Salvation is available to all persons through Jesus Christ.

How do you know whether you're standing your ground on biblical principles or personal preferences?

QUESTION #3



THE CONFLICT OF COMPROMISE

A married friend confesses to being unfaithful and asks you to keep it a secret.

Keeping the secret would affect me by:

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Keeping the secret would affect my friend by:

.....

.....

Keeping the secret would affect my church by:

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.....

What role does love play in how you stand your ground?

QUESTION #4

LIVE IT OUT

- ▶ **Draw the line in the sand.** Determine your non-negotiables and make sure they are consistent with biblical teaching.
- ▶ **Practice what you preach.** If you're asking someone to live according to a biblical principal, be certain they can see it in your life.
- ▶ **Call others to stand with you.** Mentor and disciple someone else in embracing biblical teaching.



The goal of any confrontation is to be redemptive. If truth is being compromised or ignored, we should do what is necessary to correct the situation. We should do this in a way that doesn't simply condemn the other person's actions, but instead, leads him or her back to the truth and a closer walk with Jesus Christ. **That's a line worth drawing in the sand.**

Teaching Points



When it comes to rights, we often teach our kids about their own freedom to express themselves however they choose. We encourage them to share their beliefs without fear. But what about a teacher's right to do the same? Have you ever wondered what a teacher can or can't say, especially in terms of shaping your children's beliefs? And does it make a difference if those teachers are for or against your views?



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