

246 *Compromise on what?*

I think I got a little confused last time on who was compromising on what, and why Paul was getting so cross. And if you *don't* think he was cross, reread the opening chapter of Galatians, verses 6 to 9, where he refers to 'a different gospel' and then says (twice!) 'let him be eternally condemned'. He's cross!

Let me try to unconfuse myself. I said that Peter was compromising, and I think I was right. Remember that Peter was called to 'go to the Jews' and Paul to the Gentiles, but first God had to very graphically show Peter (Acts 10, 11 – two whole chapters!) that the Gentiles were very much part of God's plan – following Jesus is *not* about following the Jewish cultural pattern.

Peter's compromise was prompted by fear of certain of his Jewish (but Jesus-following) colleagues (what we now call the Judaisers). He knew they were wrong in their interpretation – Christian men *don't* have to be circumcised – but he compromised and had Gentile Luke circumcised. I think Paul probably got quite cross with Peter about his having compromised on the inclusion of non-Jews.

That's one kind of compromise, but the Judaisers were also trying to say, 'No compromise!' They felt that, by allowing men *not* to be circumcised, people were saying that upholding the standards of the law wasn't important. 'The law **is** important, it's God's law, we should obey it and not compromise!' They were rightly worried about nullifying God's Word.

But Paul was insisting that we must not **compromise on the gospel**. Yes, the gospel relies on the law in that the law points in amazingly clear ways to Jesus – i.e. Jesus fulfilled the law – but Jesus showed us that the way we interpret the law has to change.

Like Jesus, we have to interpret the law on the basis of its purpose and spirit: to help us in our relationship with God and with one another – especially the outcasts of society. As we know, Jesus didn't always obey some of the letter of the law.

When culture changes – through time and in different parts of the world – our definition of the gospel has to be flexible enough to be encultured; it has to be re-expressed to communicate well God's love to everyone in every culture, which has always been God's goal – ask Abraham!

Sure, that process isn't always easy; I've already mentioned the difficulty of going to a culture that allows polygamy.^[235] However, an unbending insistence on my (our) interpretation of the law can seriously hinder the gospel.

When it comes to gay sex, I know what we've always been taught and I know how some people still **feel**, but shouldn't we rather spend time and effort promoting *faithfulness in relationships*, rather than arguing about the private actions of monogamous gay Christians? Our actions have caused them to feel excluded, and/or to compromise their belief by hiding their sexuality.

What kind of compromise makes **you** cross?