

**PAUL: THE SPIRITUAL ABOLITIONIST, PART II**  
(Not Man's Gospel!, Part 19)

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

July 19, 2009

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

In Galatians 1:11, Paul states his thesis statement namely, that his gospel is not man's gospel. The Judaizers falsely accused Paul of being a renegade apostle who preached at best an incomplete gospel. Paul's circumcision free gospel threatened the self-righteousness of the Judaizers.

No man would have invented Paul's gospel. It is against the nature of man to attribute sin and unrighteousness to himself. Man likes to think of himself as morally upright. Man seeks for himself a reputation and glory (cf. Gal. 4:17; 6:12). But, the gospel exalts Christ and humbles man. Thus, in order to counter the attacks of the Judaizers, Paul, in 1:11-2:21, sets forth a series of carefully selected arguments in order to preserve and defend the truth of the gospel.

In 2:11-21, Paul brings his argument to a climactic conclusion. In 2:11-21, he details for us two reactions he made in response to Peter's contradiction of the truth of the gospel.

Paul was on a mission to abolish spiritual slavery. Such liberation is possible only as people come to know the truth of the gospel. As we have seen, Paul's chief concern in both Jerusalem (2:1-10) and in Antioch (2:11-21) was "the truth of the gospel."

We learned last week that the truth of the gospel is that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not by works of the Law.

The different, distorted gospel being forced upon the Galatians by the Judaizers insisted that a man is justified through faith but not without the works of the law. This "different gospel" (1:6) was Jesus plus. It was distortion by addition, namely plus a condition (e.g., circumcision) attached to the gospel. Paul says such a distortion is in reality no gospel, for there is only one gospel (1:7).

And so Paul sets out to defend and preserve the truth of the gospel in order to liberate people from a state of spiritual slavery. In 2:11-21, Paul details for us two reactions he made in response to Peter's contradiction of the truth of the gospel.

We have been looking at Paul's first response, which was:

- I. PAUL CONFRONTS PETER'S CONTRADICTION OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL (2:11-13).
  - A. THE CONFRONTATION, v. 11

If there was any doubt as to the genuineness of Paul's apostolic authority and the authenticity of his gospel, all doubts are cast aside in his confrontation of Peter.

Paul's confrontation of Peter was not over a secondary, trifling matter.

Paul rebuked Peter because his hypocrisy threatened the most important truth of the Christian faith. Martin Luther, commenting on Peter's conduct writes,

“The fall or error of one man can so easily bring on enormous ruin if it is not corrected. Therefore the doctrine of justification is nothing to be trifled with, and it is not without reason that we inculcate it (*to fix something firmly in somebody's mind through frequent and forceful repetition-J.F.*) and insist on it with such diligence,” (*Luther's Works, vol. 26, p. 112*).

B. THE CAUSE, v. 12

The pressure of the circumcision party and Peter's heart!

**LESSON:**

C. THE CONSEQUENCES, v. 13

Peter's actions were not done in a vacuum. Because of his position as the chief pillar Apostle, Peter's hypocritical actions in regard to the truth of the gospel had serious, far-reaching consequences.

Paul appropriately describes Peter's behavior as hypocrisy (ὑπόκρισις). *What is hypocrisy?*

The word, *hypocrisy*, literally means, “play-acting; to speak from under.” It was used in Classical Greek to speak of the role of an actor on stage; an actor speaking from under a mask, playing a part (cf. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 131; Burton, *Galatians*, p. 108).

Hypocrisy is essentially the masking of one's real character, thoughts, feeling, etc., under the pretense of conduct that implies the exact opposite (Note: Lightfoot notes that the emphasis lies not in the false motive entertained, but a false impression produced, p. 113).

As we learned last week, Peter didn't sin out of ignorance but rather by willful deception. Peter's actions were hypocritical because he knew they were false. Peter knew the doctrine of justification better than we do (and certainly better than the Gentile and Jewish believers in Antioch).

His hypocritical actions gave the false impression that the observance of the law was necessary for one's justification before God.

We know that Paul was speaking of more than mere ceremonial matters of the law when he talks about circumcision, dietary laws, observing Jewish feasts, etc... because in 5:3 he says that “every man who accepts circumcision... *is obligated to keep the whole law,*” (emphasis mine).

Peter’s actions were inconsistent with the truth of the gospel. They appeared to give approval to the teaching of the false brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved,” (Acts 15:1).

And so, through his behavior, Peter was essentially masking the truth of the gospel (He was, as we saw last week, standing in the way of God, cf. Acts 11:17).

*Where did Peter’s hypocrisy originate?*

Peter’s hypocrisy sprang from the fear of man (cf. Lk. 20:19-20). It may be that the fear of man was an area of weakness in Peter’s life. You will recall that at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion a young servant girl questioned Peter. In response, he denied Jesus out of fear when his personal safety was threatened (Lk. 22:54-62).

When the circumcision party arrived in Antioch, the following thoughts and questions perhaps ran through Peter’s mind:

“These so-called messengers from James know me. They know my position in Jerusalem. What will they think of me? If I continue to eat with Gentiles, I might lose my “Pillar” status in the Jerusalem church? Or worse, I could be excluded from the Jerusalem Church or possibly be persecuted by some of my more strict fellow Jews.”

Such thoughts and questions are grounded in a sinful fear of man, rather than in trust in the truth of the gospel.

Out of the fear of man, Peter lost the courage of his convictions and caved into their demands and became like a play actor on a stage.

Rather than being driven by gospel-interest, Peter was guilty of acting out of expediency, self-interest and self-preservation. Like the Judaizers, Peter perhaps didn’t want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:12, cf. 5:11).

Unlike Paul, at this particular moment in his life, Peter’s commitment to upholding the truth of the gospel and his concern for the spiritual wellbeing of others was eclipsed by the fear of man.

One thing that is certain is this: When the gospel is preached purely and its implications are lived out faithfully, conflict will be present!

Another important observation we see here is that faith and the gospel always lead to life, wholeness and unity. On the other hand, unbelief and distorted gospels always lead to confusion (1:7), bondage (2:4), strife and division (5:14).

Peter's behavior in Antioch in response to the pressure and demands of the Judaizers was the exact opposite of Paul's in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:5). The question is why?

John Stott comments, "Paul acted as he did out of a deep concern for the very principle which Peter lacked," (Stott, *Galatians*, p. 54). The truth of the gospel motivated Paul. The fear of man motivated Peter and the consequences in each case were entirely different.

*What then were the consequences of Peter's behavior? How influential was his example?*

Paul says Peter led astray the Jewish believers and even Barnabas. What is quite remarkable to think about is that at this particular moment in Antioch Paul was left standing alone.

Peter was against him, at least in his conduct (not confession). The Jewish believers left him. And, Barnabas, his friend and ministry associate, had left him.

To be sure, there are some lonely times in gospel ministry (cf. 2 Tim. 4:16-17). As Paul stood before Caesar in his preliminary hearing during his second imprisonment, he says that everyone, most likely out of fear, deserted him. They all feared for their lives because such a stand could have come at a high price.

But, even as Paul faced the imminent sentence of death, we see once again what was the controlling factor of his life (v. 17). Paul's chief concern was that through him the message of the gospel might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

God, through the courage of Paul, preserved the unity of the church in Antioch, the truth of the gospel and the freedom of sinners!

Perhaps the newly converted Jewish believers in Antioch didn't know better and thus assumed that the Mosaic Law was still binding. But, this was not the case with Barnabas!

Barnabas' hypocritical actions were the final straw for Paul.

Barnabas was Paul's ministry partner and friend. In the beginning, the apostles were skeptical about Paul's conversion and they had good reason to be (Gal. 1:13-14)! Three years after Paul's conversion, Barnabas defended Paul before the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27).

Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch and together they taught the church the truth of the gospel for 1 year (Acts 11:26). He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey to the Gentiles. (Acts 13-14).

It was during this time that the Galatian churches were planted as a result of Paul and Barnabas' gospel preaching ministry. Barnabas had witnessed first hand uncircumcised Gentiles coming to faith in Christ. He had spoken out boldly with Paul against the Jews and sought to protect the freedom of Gentile believers (13:46).

Barnabas, like Peter, understood that justification was not by the works of the Law, that circumcision, dietary laws, Jewish feasts, etc... were no longer binding on either Jew or Gentile believers. And, Barnabas had faithfully testified to the truth of the gospel along with Paul and Titus in the private meeting in Jerusalem (2:1-10).

By withdrawing from table-fellowship with the Gentile believers in Antioch, Barnabas and Peter were in effect bringing believers back under the obligations of the Law, which was unthinkable for Paul (Gal. 3:10; 5:1-4). Their hypocrisy undermined everything they had previously taught and modeled.

It is instructive to note that Paul singles out Peter rather than Barnabas. Why does Paul do this? There are at least two reasons. First, as we learned last week, Peter possessed greater authority than Barnabas. Second, the Judaizers falsely suggested that Peter and the Jerusalem leadership disagreed with Paul (which Paul has already proven to be wrong, 2:1-10).

Therefore, it was necessary for Paul to openly confront Peter for the well-being of the believers in Antioch. Paul had to clearly and forcefully counter the Judaizers' lies and to demonstrate the independence of his apostolic authority from the Jerusalem leadership in order to defend the truth of the gospel.

There are some very important lessons to be learned from Paul's confrontation of Peter.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

1. THE GOSPEL IS THE ANTIDOTE TO THE FEAR OF MAN.
2. THE GOSPEL DEMANDS UNYIELDING FAITHFULNESS IN OUR CONFESSION AND CONDUCT.
3. THE GOSPEL SERVES AS A SOURCE OF COMFORT IN OUR FAILURES.

Peter's failure is as instructive as Paul's faithfulness. We often think that Christian leaders are immune from sins like the "ordinary believer." But, we see from Peter that even the leading apostle was capable of falling into grievous sin.

There is no such thing as "super saints." What we need to see and take to heart is this:

*Though Peter's hypocrisy was inexcusable it wasn't unforgivable!*

The Bible is not a story of “heroes” but of sinners, hypocrites, who have been redeemed by a gracious God who keeps His promises (e.g., Abraham, Jacob, Samson, David, Solomon, Jonah, Paul and the Apostles). The Bible is a story of a holy and righteous God, who justifies the ungodly (cf., Rom. 4:5, Paul holds out Abraham and David as examples of the ungodly).

Peter needed the forgiving, justifying grace of God just as much as everyone else. And, so his failure serves as comfort in that it highlights the incredible grace of God.

Peter’s conduct raises some pressing questions: What was Peter’s response? Did he ever change? What was the outcome?

Though Paul doesn’t specifically tell us in Galatians, the rest of the Biblical testimony is clear that Peter had come to understand the glorious implications of the truth of the gospel for believers in the face of hardship and trials.

Later at the Jerusalem Council, Peter courageously defends the truth of the gospel over against the demands of the false brothers (Acts 15:7-11). Still, later in his life as an older, more mature believer, Peter writes to encourage Christians in Asia Minor (Turkey) who are suffering for their faith (1 Pet. 3:14). As one who well understood the temptation to cave into the pressure of persecution for the sake of the gospel, Peter exhorts “have no fear of their persecutors nor be troubled.” Ultimately, Peter paid the highest price for standing for the truth of the gospel when he was martyred in Rome during Nero’s persecution sometime around AD 64 or 67.

We see from Peter’s life that the sanctification process is slow and at times very painful and nearly imperceptible. But, the hope (that is a certain assurance; not a wish or desire for a favorable outcome) of the gospel is that God will perfect those He has called (Philip. 1:6; Rom. 5:1-5; 8:28).

This hope is one of the fruits of justification (Read Rom. 5:1-2). Hope is an anchor to the soul. Hope provides stability to root us in our walk with Christ, especially in the times we fail. Hope is faith projected into the future. It is the assurance that God will finish what He started (Rom. 8:28-39; Philip. 1:6). Paul says that this kind of hope will never make us ashamed (Rom. 5:5).

Because of the truth of the gospel, our failures in sanctification do not have the final word. Therefore, we will never have to eat crow (i.e., suffer eternal humiliation) because there is no possibility that God’s promises will not be fulfilled but they will definitely come to pass.

Sanctification is growth in this hope that God will keep His promises. Though we fail often, He never fails. God is a promising God who keeps His promises. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench...,” (Matt. 12:20).

In our moments of weakness and failure, what we need is the truth of the gospel. We need to be reminded of the justifying righteousness of God that is imputed to us through faith alone. We need our consciences bathed in a flood of God's mercy and grace.

Martin Luther wrote,

“...when your conscience is terrified by the Law and is wrestling with the judgment of God, do not consult either reason or the Law, but rely only on grace and the Word of comfort. Here take your stand as though you had never heard of the Law. Ascend into the darkness, where neither the Law nor reason shines, but only the dimness of faith (1 Cor. 13:12), which assures us that we are saved by Christ alone, without any Law,” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 113).

The gospel is indeed a source of comfort but we must never think that the gospel is an excuse or license for us to sin (as Paul will go on to make clear in 2:17!).

#### 4. THE GOSPEL CAUTIONS US AGAINST SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Peter's failure is quite astonishing in light of who he was, what he knew and had experienced. But, his failure serves as a caution to anyone who thinks that he or she is secure and cannot fall.

The gospel forcefully argues against self-righteousness. Self-righteous people look at the sins of others and think, “I would never do that. Look at those hypocrites.”

People always seek to measure their righteousness by their standard rather than God's because they can meet their standard. This is simply a form of self-justification (justification by works of the law).

John Calvin wrote that no one ever achieves

“a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy... this pride is innate in all of us unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Moreover, we are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, who is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured” (*Institutes*, 1.1.2).

Peter's failure cautions against succumbing to the sin of self-righteousness! Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 10:12, “...let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” We must never get to a point where we forget our desperate need of the gospel and God's sustaining grace.

Luther writes, “...it is dangerous...to trust in our own strength, no matter how holy, erudite, or confident of our own knowledge we may be. For in that which we know best

we can err and fall, bringing not only ourselves but others as well into danger, as Peter did here,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 114).

As we have seen, Peter had once faithfully opposed the circumcision party and defended the truth of the gospel (cf., Acts 11:1-18). He knew the doctrine of justification better than we do. And yet, in Antioch, he was guilty of contradicting the truth of the gospel by his hypocritical conduct.

Thus, Martin Luther writes, “No man has ever fallen so grievously that he could not have stood up again. On the other hand, no one has such a sure footing that he cannot fall. If Peter fell, I, too, may fall...,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 109). However, Luther leaves his readers with this gospel hope, “...if he stood up again, so can I,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 109).

The only reason we can stand again is because of the gracious justifying act of God on our behalf. We must remember that even though we are justified in God’s sight we are not yet in and of ourselves perfectly righteous. Our “inherent righteousness” is incomplete and imperfect in this life. “The church is indeed holy,” writes Martin Luther, “but it is a sinner at the same time.”

And even in eternity, when we are glorified, we are and remain inherently holy only because God by His grace keeps us holy. This is why we always need to look away from ourselves and to Christ alone.

Believers never grow beyond their need of the gospel because they never grow beyond their need of Christ. Christ’s righteousness is the sole ground of our justification and acceptance before a righteous and holy God.

His righteousness is both necessary and sufficient. And so, we must always and forever trust in the truth of the gospel and seek to keep our lives in step with it.

It is easy to talk about the gospel. However, it is very difficult to grasp it and keep in step with its truth (to make it paramount) in the struggles of life.

Thus, Martin Luther writes,

“Therefore we are nothing, even with all our great gifts, unless God is present. When He deserts us and leaves us to our own resources, our wisdom and knowledge are nothing. Unless He sustains us continually, the highest learning and even theology are useless. For in the hour of temptation it can suddenly happen that by a trick of the devil all the comforting texts disappear from our sight and only the threatening ones appear to overwhelm us. Therefore let us learn that if God withdraws His hand, we can easily fall and be overthrown. Therefore let no one boast or glory in his own righteousness, wisdom, and other gifts; but let him humble himself and pray with the apostles (Luke 17:5): “Lord, increase our faith!”

I am making such a point of all this to keep anyone from supposing that the doctrine of faith is an easy matter. It is indeed easy to talk about, but it is hard to grasp; and it is easily obscured and lost. Therefore, let us with diligence and humility devote ourselves to the study of Sacred Scripture and to serious prayer, lest we lose the truth of the gospel,” (*Luther’s Works, vol. 26, p. 114*).

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