

PAUL: THE SPIRITUAL ABOLITIONIST, PART II
(NOT MAN'S GOSPEL!, PART 19)

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

July 26, 2009

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

Over the past several weeks, we have been looking at Paul's confrontation of Peter's contradiction of the truth of the gospel (2:11-13). Paul is on a mission to abolish spiritual slavery. Such liberation is possible only as people come to know the truth of the gospel and then increasingly bring their lives into alignment with it.

Peter's problem wasn't with his confession but rather his conduct. His play-acting (i.e. hypocrisy), Paul says, Peter's behavior didn't "square with the truth of the gospel," (Fung, *Galatians*, p. 110).

The following section, Galatians 2:14-21, is of paramount (pun intended!) importance. Thus, it demands careful attention and great detail. In response to Peter's hypocritical conduct, Paul provides a carefully, reasoned clarification of the truth of the gospel.

Paul, for the first time, introduces his systematic treatment of the doctrine of justification and provides critical insight into his understanding of the gospel. It serves as a climactic conclusion to his defense of the gospel, which he started back in 1:11.

Since we are celebrating the Lord's Supper this morning and because of this passage's central importance, we will come back to this critical section of Galatians in a few weeks. What I would like to do this morning is go back to last week's message because there are some important implications in this passage that we must not quickly pass over.

The implications that we have examined so far, have been:

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.

There is a fourth implication from this passage that I want us to see this morning. The fourth implication we see from Peter's play-acting is this:

LESSON:

4. THE GOSPEL HIGHLIGHTS THE HUMAN HEART'S RELENTLESS BENT TOWARD LEGALISM.

Because of the Fall, the human heart is relentlessly bent toward legalism and disinclined toward the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel is that God does not require obedience for justification and yet man's fallen nature is prone to turn again and again to this cursed bias.

Ralph Erskine describes this legal bias, which is present even in the hearts of believers, as a slow, lingering death. He writes,

“It is not easy to get the law killed; something of a legal disposition remains even in the believer while he is in this world: many a stroke does self and self-righteousness get, but still it revives again. If he were wholly dead to the law, he would be wholly dead to sin; but so far as the law lives, so far sin lives. They that think they know the gospel well enough bewray (reveal-J.F.) their ignorance; no man can be too evangelical, it will take all his life-time to get a legal temper destroyed,” (*The Works of Ralph Erskine, vol. 2, p. 27*).

This legal tendency is graphically portrayed in Peter's hypocrisy. Man's default mode and natural drift is toward self-preservation (which was the case of Peter) and self-justification (which was the case of the Judaizers and what Peter's hypocrisy unintentionally communicated).

We often underestimate the significance and effects of the Fall. Yet, from the very beginning, we see Adam and Eve deliberately declaring their independence from God.

They willfully rejected God's rule. They sought to assert and establish their own self-righteousness, self-sufficiency and self-justification by works of the law, which is depicted in their sewing together of fig leaves (Gen. 3:7).

In response to Adam and Eve's sin, God killed an innocent animal, took its skins and clothed Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). Here we have the first depiction of substitution and justification in the Bible. An innocent substitute was slain and used to cover the sin of man. This is a type of what was to come in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The point to note is that man gets “fig leaves” (i.e., works of the law) but not “being clothed with animal skins” (i.e., “the truth of the gospel,” namely that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not by works of the Law).

Because of this cursed bias in the heart of every man, we must remember that we can never be too evangelical (i.e., too gospel-centered, too gospel-focused, too gospel-saturated!), because it will take a lifetime to get a legal temper destroyed.

The day man declared his independence from God and asserted his own self-righteousness, the Bible says he died and lost his freedom. Man became a slave to sin, which leads to death.

Paul understood the radical effects of the Fall. This is the reason why he was on a mission to abolish spiritual slavery and bring freedom to those held in bondage. This leads us to a fifth implication.

5. THE GOSPEL CAUTIONS US AGAINST SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.

On the one hand, as we saw last week, the gospel serves as a source of comfort to those who have failed. The gospel is indeed a source of comfort but we must never think that the gospel is an excuse or license for our sin (as Paul will go on to make clear in 2:17; 5:16).

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

It is in this way that the gospel forcefully argues against self-righteousness. Self-righteousness doesn't always appear so obvious as in the case of Adam and Eve. It comes in a variety of subtle forms.

For example, self-righteous attitudes look at the sins of others and think, "I would never do that. Look at those hypocrites." It is easy to decry the sins of others in order to feel morally superior or justified and yet overlook "acceptable sins," which are equally deserving of death.

The fallen human heart seeks to measure its righteousness by its own standard rather than God's because it can meet its own standard. This is simply a form of self-justification (justification by works of the law; fig leaves!).

John Calvin wrote,

"it is certain that man never 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 of the Christian Religion*, 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.

Martin Luther warns, "...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 learned, Peter 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; if he stood up again, so can I,” (*Luther’s Works, vol. 26, p. 109*).

We must remember that even though we are justified in God’s sight we are not yet in and of ourselves perfectly righteous. “The church is indeed holy,” writes Luther, “but it is a sinner at the same time,” (*Luther’s Works, vol. 26, p. 109*).

As Christians, we are at the same time just and sinner (*simul justus et peccator*). We are righteous by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness while at the same time still inherently sinners. Our justifying righteousness resides outside of us (*extra nos*) in Christ and is imputed to us through faith alone apart from the works of the law. Our “inherent righteousness” is incomplete and imperfect in this life.

St. Augustine said that our best good works are in the final analysis splendid vices!
Question 62 in the Heidelberg Catechism asks and answers:

- Q. But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?
- A. Because the righteousness which can stand before God's judgment must be absolutely perfect and in complete agreement with the law of God, (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10) whereas even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin, (Isa. 64:6).

Even 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.

Thus, on the one hand, the gospel guards us from self-righteous pride and on the other it comforts us in our struggles and imperfections.

This is why the Lord’s Supper is so crucial to our sanctification. To assure us of our right standing with God and to keep us ever aware of our constant need of the gospel, the Lord graciously gave to His church the Lord’s Supper.

To its detriment, the Lord's Supper is seriously neglected within many Evangelical churches today. Yet, it is one of the greatest "gospel-blessings" the Lord has given to His people for their ongoing assurance of their justification.

Christ instituted the Lord's Supper because the reality and nature of sanctification is at times very difficult to apprehend and because we so easily lose sight of God's favor toward us. In this ordinance, we are continually reminded and assured of our right standing with God, which was made possible solely through the atoning work of Christ on our behalf.

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 difficulties and challenges of Christian living. This is why the Lord's Supper is so crucial. It serves to help us keep our lives in step with the truth of the gospel.

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that we never grow beyond our need of the gospel because we never grow beyond our need of Christ.

In light of Peter's failure, Martin Luther reminds us,

"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).

THE LORD'S SUPPER

As we prepare to observe the Lord's Supper this morning, let us remember that these signs are given to us for assurance of God's favor and of all His spiritual blessings given to us in Christ!

God our Father wants His children to *receive* and *enjoy* all the promises of the gospel. Therefore, as Calvin taught, He graciously adapted to our small capacity and gave us visible and tangible signs of His favor toward us "in Christ."

What a great gift this is in light of those too frequent moments when we are acutely aware of our sins and failures (e.g., like Peter in Antioch).

Thus, John Calvin writes,

“Godly souls can gather great assurance and delight from this Sacrament; in it they have a witness of our growth into one body with Christ such that whatever is his may be called ours. As a consequence, we may dare assure ourselves that eternal life, of which he is the heir, is ours; and that the Kingdom of Heaven, into which he has already entered, can no more be cut off from us than from Him; again, that we cannot be condemned for our sins, from whose guilt he has absolved us, since he willed to take them upon himself as if they were his own. This is the wonderful exchange which, out of his measureless benevolence, he has made with us; that, becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; that, receiving our poverty unto himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness,” (*Institutes*, 4.17.2).

In 1 Cor. 11:26, Paul says that Christ appointed the Lord’s Supper to put us in constant remembrance of the benefit of Christ’s death on our behalf. Because of the gospel, despite our frequent failures in sanctification, we may assure ourselves that:

- we do possess eternal life,
- we do have entrance into the Kingdom of God,
- we can no more be cut off from God than Christ,
- we cannot be condemned for our sin because Christ has been condemned in our place (Gal. 3:13).
- we have confident access to God that will never be closed (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12).
- Christ has taken our sin, our unrighteousness upon Himself and clothed us with his righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

The Lord’s Supper is an invitation to believers to “Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him,” (Ps. 34:8).

Warning. 1 Cor. 11:27-32

Paul gives a sober warning to those who dishonor the Lord's Supper. It therefore should not be entered into lightly. To eat in an unworthy is to invite the strong discipline of the Lord.

It is also important to note that the apostle's warning is not designed to discourage believers from partaking. It is not designed to scare believers into holiness. Nor is the Apostle's warning designed to guilt believers into "cleaning up their act" so they are "worthy" to partake.

Because our "inherent righteousness" is imperfect in this life, we never come to the Lord's Supper righteous in ourselves and free from sin.

The warning is given to remind us to eat in a worthy manner, namely to come looking away from ourselves, acknowledging that we are sinners, totally unworthy of God's great salvation and that Christ alone is sufficient to present us justified before God. There is no seat for self-righteous people at the Lord's Table. This ordinance is not for "good" people. Only sinners are invited to this meal. The Lord's Table is for those who recognize their unrighteousness and utter need for Christ.

Let us then come to the Lord's Supper this morning with great faith and thanksgiving, looking away from ourselves trusting only in the perfect merits and finished work of Christ alone for our acceptance before God.

Words of Institution- 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Breaking of The Bread- (Read: Isa. 53)

On the night when He was betrayed Jesus took bread, "24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Sharing of The Cup (Read: Eph. 1:3-14)

"In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Doxology- Matt 26:30

It is instructive to note that after Christ celebrated the Passover with His disciples, Matthew says they sang a hymn (Matt. 26:30; possibly Pss. 113-118, which are songs of praise, thanksgiving and trust).

Singing and praise was the natural heart response to God's grace and salvation. All throughout Scripture, we see how God's acts of deliverance bring forth singing and heartfelt rejoicing in God (Ex. 15:1-18, 21; Ps. 13:5-6; Lk. 1:46-55; Eph. 1:3-14).

Since the Lord's Supper is a visible gospel, it is intended to draw forth praise and thanksgiving in our hearts. This is why it is called the Eucharist, which simply means "thanksgiving," (εὐχαριστία).

The gospel tunes our hearts to sing! Let us then respond with heart-felt joy in God, who through Christ has given to us a great salvation!

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