

LIVING IN STEP WITH THE GOSPEL

Galatians 2:11-14

Introduction:

Read Galatians 2:11-14... In our Scripture text today, the truth of the gospel is once again being threatened. We have been examining this letter that Paul wrote to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia because they were under attack by false brothers who were distorting and sabotaging the gospel of grace.

Last week – Paul’s visit to Jerusalem, fourteen years after his conversion. There were a couple of reasons for this visit to Jerusalem:

- To meet with the apostles there—James, Peter and John, among others—in order to confirm the unity of the gospel they preached...
- To confront the false teachers, the Judaizers, who were wreaking havoc in the churches everywhere by insisting that Gentile believers needed to conform to the Jewish religious system by being circumcised and observing the Jewish feasts and ceremonies.

In order to press the issue, Paul brought a test case, Titus, with him. Titus was a Greek who had come to faith in Christ. The apostles in Jerusalem did not demand his circumcision and Paul adamantly stood against the Judaizers, refusing to submit to their demands, even for a moment. He knew that if he gave in to their demands to have Titus circumcised, he would be destroying the whole message of the gospel—the message of freedom from sin and freedom from the Law.

The gospel is the good news that the privilege of getting right with God was fully and completely paid for when Christ died for our sins and rose again, and the only way to enjoy this privilege is through faith in the Jesus Christ who gave himself for us. As soon as you add any other requirements which encourage people to rely on their own ability or their own work, you destroy the gospel. Because of that, Paul drew his

line in the sand: He would not surrender to the Judaizer’s demand that Titus be circumcised so that the truth of the gospel would be preserved.

The result of that meeting in Jerusalem was two-fold. First, there was a clear-cut and resounding unity of the gospel message among the apostles. Second, there was an acceptance of everyone’s distinct calling and ministry, and a mandate set for two great missions—Paul was commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles and the Jerusalem apostles would continue to carry the gospel to the Jews.

Now, this morning we come to another issue. In 2:11-14 Paul deals with a different dispute in a different location. But the underlying concern is the same. It still boils down to the matter of preserving the truth of the gospel.

In the previous passage, the dispute in Jerusalem was over circumcision and whether it was necessary for a Gentile to be circumcised in order to be truly saved. Here the scene is in Antioch and the dispute is over the dietary rules in the Jewish Law. However the root issue is still the same. At its core, the issue is about the truth of the gospel.

Last week we looked at preserving the truth of the gospel. Look at Gal. 1:5. Paul refused to yield to the demands of the false brothers even for a moment because he was concerned that the truth of the gospel be preserved. He did not want his readers to be taken captive by doctrinal error. In today’s passage the issue is still the truth of the gospel, but the concern is that our lives be in step with the truth of the gospel – look at Gal. 2:14a – “...I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.”

Well, let’s have a closer look at the text we have before us today.

Paul’s Confrontation with Peter

This confrontation could have been serious for the early church, but it would appear that it was settled before it became divisive. As some have pointed out, this appears to be a temporary inconsistency on Peter’s part, not a deep difference in principle and understanding. Had it been a difference in doctrine between Peter and Paul, it would have essentially negated all that Paul has just said in 2:1-10.

There are a number of stages in the development of this controversy. First, Peter (Cephas) comes to Antioch and begins to eat with Christian Gentiles (vv. 11a, 12b). Second, certain men from James came to Antioch (v. 12a). Third, Peter's fear of these men causes him to draw back and separate himself from the Gentile Christians (v. 12c). Fourth, the other Jews, including Barnabas, withdrew and joined the hypocrisy (v. 13). Fifth, because of his actions, Peter stood condemned, that is, guilty of wrong (v. 11). Sixth, Paul rebukes him to his face (v. 11).

Verse 14 gives Paul's assessment of the situation and the content of his rebuke: this behavior was out of step with the gospel. As we look at these stages in more detail, let us do so with this practical question before us: How do we keep our life in step with the gospel?

Peter's Fellowship with Gentile Believers

Before these Judaizers came to Antioch, Peter had come up and was fellowshiping and eating with the Gentile believers. As Paul said in v. 14, he was living like a Gentile. This is significant, because there were some serious regulations in the Jewish Law which would exclude many of the things that the Gentiles would eat. Not only that, but there were specific washing and preparation rules which the Jews meticulously followed.

I think we would do well to consider what it was that brought Peter to the understanding that it was alright to accept the Gentile way of life and eating. Last week I mentioned briefly the incident where Peter had a vision while he was praying on the housetop in Joppa. (Go to Acts 10 and explain the incident in more detail.)

This was an utterly life-changing experience for Peter. He evidently inferred from it that not only did Gentiles not have to keep the Old Testament law of circumcision or the Old Testament ceremonial laws in order to have the same spiritual blessings as Christian Jews, but also he inferred rightly that he as a Jew is free from those same laws. Slowly but surely Peter and Paul had been moving independently by revelation to the same understanding of the truth of the gospel. The condition for receiving the Holy Spirit and enjoying all his benefits is a living faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Galatians 3:2). That is all. That is the gospel, and there-

fore, when Peter ate with Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, he was in step with the gospel. He was standing fast in *freedom*, honoring the all-sufficiency of Christ by *faith*, and walking in *love*.

Peter's Hypocrisy

But something happened. There were some men who came to Antioch from the church in Jerusalem—Judaizers. Our text calls them the circumcision party or group. They came with a message of works. They believed it was necessary for these Gentiles to be circumcised and to follow the rules and regulations of the OT Law in order to be complete in their faith. In other words, they wanted the Gentile believers to become Jewish.

We don't know much about this group or how they were connected with James or the church in Jerusalem. But what is clear is that Peter was afraid of them. We don't know why he was afraid of them, but because of his fear, in a moment of weakness, he cut off his fellowship with the Gentile believers. He gave in to the strict Jewish rule that they should not eat with or fellowship with Gentiles.

Verse 14 tells us that it was obvious that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel—their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel. Do you see what this means?

Quote – “The benefits of the gospel can only be received by a living *faith* in the Son of God, not by works of the law. But when the gospel is received by faith, your life changes. When you finally hear and believe the drumbeat of the gospel, the rhythm of your step changes. It gets in tune with the gospel. There is a life in step with the gospel, and there is a life out of step with the gospel. *You don't attain the benefits of the gospel by doing a little moral clean-up job on your life. You attain forgiveness and joy and peace and power through daily reliance upon Jesus Christ who loved you and gave himself for you.* But that faith, when it is genuine, creates a rhythm of life that is in step with the truth of the gospel.” (John Piper)

Well, we need to see some things that show up in this passage that are out of step with the truth of the gospel. There are three things I want to mention from these verses that, when allowed into our lives, will get us out of step with the truth of the gospel. They are fear, hypocrisy and legalism. These things are seen in Peter in Antioch when he got out of step with the truth of the gospel.

Fear of Man is Out of Step with the Gospel

In 2 Tim. 1:7 Paul said, “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Timothy 1:7 ESV)

When we look at the life of Peter we see a clear picture of both sides of the fear issue. At the time just prior to Jesus’ crucifixion, when Jesus had been arrested and Peter was watching the proceedings in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter was seized by a crippling fear that caused him to deny that he even knew Jesus, let alone being a close disciple. The fear of what people would do to him caused him to deny his Lord and Master.

Then after the death and resurrection of Jesus, when the full truth of the gospel became clear to the disciples and they received the forgiveness that comes through Christ’s blood. Peter was a changed man. On the Day of Pentecost, when the power of the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, Peter stood up and preached a sermon which is the envy of any preacher. He spoke without any fear, saying to the Jewish religious leaders, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36 ESV)

Later, when he was arrested for preaching the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, he again spoke boldly to the religious leaders, accusing them of their part in the crucifixion of Jesus, and responding to their threats by saying, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20 ESV)

Yet when these men came from Jerusalem to Antioch, Peter allowed fear to take over and he found himself out of step with the truth of the gospel. His conduct was no longer in step with the truth that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. That is what fear does to us. It disrupts the rhythm of our lives and we get out of step with the truth.

When we understand and believe the gospel and are walking in step with the truth, we can say with the writer to the Hebrews, “we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to

me?’” (Hebrews 13:6 ESV). We may have lapses when we give in to fear, but the Lord will bring us back.

Hypocrisy is Out of Step with the Gospel

Read verse 13. There is a term we sometimes use to describe this kind of behavior. Peter and Barnabas and the others were being “two-faced” when they withdrew from eating with the Gentile Christians. They were acting one way around certain people but a different way around other people. They were to avoid disapproval from the circumcision party at the expense of their principles. They were afraid of what man might do, and so they put up a front. They were filled with insecurity and insecurity is inconsistent with the gospel.

The gospel tells us that the death of Christ assures us of God’s love, and so it gives deep root and stability and security to our lives. And yet it is so easy to allow my insecurity and my fear of man to lead me to play the hypocrite in order to avoid suffering. What we need to do is to center our life on Jesus and his gospel in order to sever that root of hypocrisy from our lives.

Legalism is Out of Step with the Gospel

Read v. 14. Paul accuses Peter of imposing the legal requirements of the Jewish Law on these believing Gentiles. He may not have said they needed to live like Jews, but his actions spoke loudly. You can almost hear Paul saying, “When you, as an apostle, cut off table fellowship with Gentile brothers and sisters because they don’t keep dietary laws, and you take Barnabas and all the Jews with you, the Gentile believers cannot escape the impression that they are not fully Christians unless they become Jews.” *And that, my friends, is legalism—requiring that a person do some works of law to be accepted by God and by the church. And that is out of sync with the gospel.*

Paul is very clear that the gospel is a gospel of grace and grace alone. To try to add any requirement, whether it is circumcision or the keeping of dietary laws, is to change the gospel into a system of legalism. Notice what Paul says in 2:21, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.”

Conclusion

V. 14 – "...their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel..." Why? What was it that was out of step with the truth of the gospel? Three things: Fear, hypocrisy and legalism.

Let this be a warning and an encouragement to us. Allow me close with these three words of caution:

- Believe the truth of the gospel and do not fear what men can do to you.
- Believe the truth of the gospel and do not play the hypocrite. Hold to your biblical principles and be willing to suffer the consequences. There is great security and comfort in the gospel.
- Believe the truth of the gospel and do not nullify the grace of God by yielding to legalism. "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)

This is the only way to live our lives in step with the truth of the gospel.