

Fearful Hypocrisy
Galatians 2:11-14

This Week's Prayer
Requests:

Memory Verse: Galatians 3:13 - "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')."

Text: "Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter before them all, 'If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?'

Monday

What do the words
"fearful hypocrisy"
make you think of?

The title for this week's study is "Fearful Hypocrisy." Now you could take that title in one of two ways. You could take it as hypocrisy that is fearful because of its effects, or you could take it as hypocrisy that is born out of fear, that springs from the fear of what others might say and do. The second meaning is the one that I intend to convey with this title.

Imagine a politician, who has become convinced in his heart that abortion is wrong. In fact, he is so convinced that he makes speeches about it and comes out strongly against the practice. Then, as he progresses in his career, he discovers that he is out of step with many of his associates and out of step with his political party, which supports and approves abortion. But rather than taking a stand for his position, he becomes quiet about it. He just doesn't make it an issue. And then, he even begins to accept donations and funds from pro-abortion advocates, even though he knows in his heart that it is wrong. He does all of this because he wants to protect his reputation and avoid any painful confrontation or division with those that he associates with often. That is fearful hypocrisy.

Or imagine the teenager, who knows in his heart that he shouldn't be drinking alcohol. One weekend he goes to a party with his friends and is offered a beer. He knows that if he refuses, they might make fun of him or laugh and call him a prude. So rather than facing that criticism, he

Have you ever known anyone who was swept into hypocrisy through fear? What about yourself? What happened?

rationalizes, “Well, I’ll just take one and sip it, and no one will notice or think I’m any different from anyone else.” So he violates his conscience and compromises. Or imagine a person at a family reunion, who knows that Christ is the only way, the truth and the life, and that no one comes to Father but by Him, John 14:6. The conversation turns to spiritual matters, and his or her relatives begin expressing universalistic opinions such as, “Well, it doesn’t really matter what you believe, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, as long as you’re sincere and do your best, God will accept you in the end.” Someone turns to this person, who knows better, to see his opinion, and he just nods his head, or says sure, giving assent to something he knows is false in order to prevent any disagreement or confrontation. That is fearful hypocrisy, and that is exactly what happens in our text for this week.

We saw last week that there were certain professing but sham Christians in Jerusalem who traveled to Antioch and taught the people that they needed to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses to be saved. But Paul refused to submit to the pressure. The reason Galatians 2:5 gives is that “the truth of the Gospel might continue with you.” If Paul yielded, then he would have torpedoed the truth of the Gospel.

The gospel is the good news that the privilege of getting right with God was purchased fully when Christ died for our sins and rose again and that the only way to enjoy this privilege is to live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. If you add other requirements, which encourage people to rely on their own willing and working, then you torpedo the gospel. For if justification and sanctification are not by faith, they are not by anything and Christ has died in vain. Therefore Paul took his stand, and the other apostles took their stand with him. Peter even stood publicly as Acts 15 tells us and repudiated the false doctrine of salvation by any kind of works. He silenced the Judaizers.

In what ways can a person fail to be straightforward about “the truth of the Gospel”?

Again the Gospel is at stake and Gentiles in Antioch are being confronted with a compulsion to conform to Jewish dietary laws. One phrase makes the connection between this incident and the earlier incident of verses 1-10 clear. It is the phrase, “the truth of the Gospel.” In verse five Paul says, “...we did not yield submission even for a moment that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” In verse 14 he says, “...when I saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel.”

So Paul teaches us that we can contradict the Gospel in our life not only

What does Paul's confrontation and rebuke of Peter tell us about his authority?

by requiring circumcision but by other kinds of ritualistic demands as well, such as dietary restrictions. If we add these to the purity of salvation by faith alone, we are not being straightforward about the truth. But alongside of Paul's concern to demonstrate the purity of the gospel is his concern to continue his defense as an apostle. Remember that the false teachers had attacked his authority, and so Paul proved his apostleship by his miraculous personal history that gave him apostolic credentials, he proved it by his independent witness. He proved it by the commendation he received from the other apostles in Jerusalem in verses 1-10 of chapter 2, who recognized his apostleship to the Gentiles, verse 8, and now he demonstrates his office by his apostolic confidence in confronting Peter head on when Peter had a moment of weakness.

If anyone in Galatia should get the notion that Paul functioned only at the endorsement and guidance of Peter, James and John, then 2:11-14 should dispel that notion immediately. Not only is Paul not guided by Peter, but he becomes Peter's guide. Paul was intensely aware of being Christ's ambassador and not anyone else's.

What is Hypocrisy?

Now this new conflict in Antioch did not reveal a fundamental difference in theology between Peter and Paul. What it reveals is a temporary lapse on the part of Peter and Barnabas, who gave in to pressure from others and behaved in a manner that was out of step with their own personal convictions. Hence the term "hypocrisy" is used by Paul in verse 13. Hypocrisy means to put on a mask and play a part, rather than displaying your real self and following the real commitments of your heart. We normally think of Hypocrisy as a person putting on a cover of religion that cloaks a heart of wickedness as in the case of the scribes and Pharisees. But it is possible for hypocrisy to go the other direction as is the case in this text, that a godly person might put on a cloak of godlessness for the purpose of fitting in with others.

What forms can it take?

Please note, that far from being bitter or hurt by this necessary rebuke, Peter in writing after Paul had written Galatians, endorses this letter and all of Paul's letters as Scripture in 2 Pet. 3:15-16. So Peter did not disagree with Paul doctrinally. No he simply in weakness lapsed into temporary hypocrisy.

Tuesday

The conflict recorded in our text for this week developed in seven steps. First Peter comes to Antioch and begins to eat with Christian Gentiles. Now that was the real Peter. Second, certain men come from James to

If Peter is in danger of lapsing into hypocrisy on this occasion, what does that tell us about us?

Antioch, who at least had Judaizing sympathies. Third, Peter became afraid of this group and their opinion. Fourth, his fear causes him to draw back and separate himself from the Gentile Christians. Fifth, the rest of the Jews and even Barnabas, withdrew and joined the hypocrisy. Sixth, therefore Peter, because of his leadership position, was to be blamed for playing the hypocrite and drawing others after him. Seventh, Paul was forced to rebuke him publicly before everyone, because Peter was not being straightforward with the truth of the Gospel.

Consider this, Beloved, if Peter, the apostle, after standing up in the Spirit and making the statement he did in the book of Acts, silencing the Judaizers, and if Peter after all of his knowledge and experience with the Lord Jesus, His grace, and the futility of the law as a means of obtaining righteousness - if Peter can lapse into this kind of fearful hypocrisy, then surely you and I are in danger. Therefore, I think it is important to see three pitfalls from this text that can lead us and pressure us into the sin of hypocrisy. The first one is this:

1. The fear of man leads to hypocrisy (vv. 11-12). The text says simply, “But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, **fearing those** who were of the circumcision” (emphasis added).

What was the purpose of the vision that God gave to Peter in Acts chapter 10?

In Acts Chapter 10, we learn that there was a Gentile named Cornelius at Caesarea, whom God intended for Peter to evangelize. To prepare Peter, a Jew, to visit the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, God gave Peter a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven with all kinds of animals that the Old Testament pronounced unclean. God said to him, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” But Peter responded, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And God said, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”

Was the vision God gave about food or people?

This became a tremendously important turning point for Peter and for the mission of the church as a whole. God was saying, “Peter a new era of redemptive history has dawned, the Messiah has come. The sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have done their preparatory work and it is completed. I will show you something tremendous in the house of Cornelius.” So, when Peter is called for, he goes to the house of a Gentile. At the house of Cornelius Peter demonstrates that he understood what God was telling him in the vision. He says, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). That doesn’t mean that men aren’t sinners. It means that nothing in a Gentile

should keep a Jew from being with him to seek his salvation. So Peter preached the Gospel to them; and, as he was preaching the Holy Spirit fell upon them. This utterly astonished the Jews that uncircumcised Gentiles who kept none of their ceremonial laws could receive the Holy Spirit **simply by hearing the Gospel with faith.**

But now Peter is in a spot of trouble back in Jerusalem. So he has to go back and explain what he has done, and he says, “If, therefore, God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” - Acts 11:17.

What did the salvation of Cornelius and his friends and family mean for Peter?

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 ceremonial laws to be saved, but he also inferred rightly that he as a Jew was free from those very same laws. So Peter was moved by revelation to the same understanding of the Gospel as Paul had, and that was that the condition for receiving the Holy Spirit, salvation and all of God’s benefits was a true faith in Jesus Christ. – As an aside, that is in fact the true message of the Old Testament also, when it is freely read for what it says, rather than in the light of thousands of man made legalistic traditions and interpretations like the Halakah and other teachings that were added to the word of God.

Why do you supposed James sent these men mentioned in verse 12 to Antioch?

Then sometime after Peter went to Antioch and something happened. The circumcision party came to Antioch from James (v. 12). All we can do is speculate about how they were connected with James or why they came or what they said. Maybe James sent these men there in the hopes of convincing them of the validity of God’s work among the Gentiles, so that they would let go of their own hard heartedness. I think personally that is the reason he sent them.

One thing, however, is made explicit in verse 12: Peter feared this group (v. 12). Why? Perhaps they were capable of violence. Or perhaps Peter feared he might not be able to give a good enough rationale for his freedom and would look foolish. Or perhaps he feared falling into disfavor among this group in Jerusalem. We are not told why he feared, but he did. And in a moment of weakness he cut off table fellowship with his Gentile brothers and sisters. Now when Peter did it as the leader, so did Barnabas and all the other Jews that had previous been right thinking.

Put yourself in the place of a Christian Gentile in Antioch for a moment

How might the Gentiles in Antioch have interpreted Peter's actions?

and imagine what that would have meant! Proverbs 29:25 says that “the fear of man brings a snare...”

Now according to verse 14, Paul says that Peter and Barnabas and the others were not being “straightforward with the truth of the gospel.” They were not walking right with the truth of the gospel. Do you see what this means? The benefits of the gospel can only be received by a living faith in the Son of God, not by works of the law. You do not 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 and faith in Jesus Christ who loved you and gave Himself for you.

How should the Gospel impact our fears?

Moreover, the gospel does not beget fear, it begets confidence and hope and boldness. Paul says in 2 Tim. 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

A life that sees and believes this majestic gospel should say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:6). We have our temporary lapses of faith, like Peter did here. But God is gracious to his erring children. He sent Paul to Peter to bring him back in step with the gospel, and he sent me to you to remind you that since our great gospel is true you don't have to fear any man.

Wednesday

We saw yesterday how the fear of man can lead us into hypocrisy. Today in verse 13, we see a second pitfall that leads to this same sin. It's this:

What can cause a person to uncritically follow the crowd?

2. Uncritically following the crowd leads to hypocrisy (v. 13).

Verse 13, tells us that the rest of the Jews “played the hypocrite” with Peter. But even more amazingly to Paul, Barnabas “was carried away” in the same conduct. “Carried away” is συναπήχθη, a passive verb meaning to suffer oneself to be carried away together with (something that carries away), i. e. to yield or submit oneself to lowly things, conditions, employments, -- not to evade their power as one should.

This whole idea of following the crowd, or simply following after a leader without thinking about what you're doing is also a snare. It may spring from inattention. It may spring from indifference and apathy. It may spring from giving authority to the wrong person, that is making a

What should a person do when he finds himself or herself uncritically following the crowd?

man you're authority rather than God. It may spring from a basic insecurity: "I don't want to stand out or strike out on my own."

Insecurity and all of these other things are simply inconsistent with the gospel. When you feel insecure or frightened and are tempted to put up a front and avoid taking a stand for what you believe is right, the battle you are fighting is a battle to believe the gospel. The gospel that tells us of the love, death and resurrection of Christ assures us of God's love and so it gives a deep root and stability and security to our lives.

But more than that, the sheer beauty and power of Christ's resolve to suffer for me instead of putting up a front to save his skin, shames me in my fear of man and my inclination to play the hypocrite in order to avoid any kind of suffering. It should also shame me out of inattention, or indifference, or trusting authorities that go against Him, or any other sinful motivation that would make me simply follow the crowd rather than following Christ. Center your life on Jesus and his gospel and this root of hypocrisy will be severed.

How can "being a Berean" guard you from this form of hypocrisy?

Acts 17:11 says, that the people of Berea "were more fair minded (or honorable) than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." Paul and Silas came to the Synagogue in Berea and began sharing the gospel with them. Then, rather than simply taking Paul and Silas' word, and rather than simply listening to the rumor mill and siding with the Jews that hated, rejected and hunted Paul and Silas, the Bereans decided they would take a different approach. They decided that they would search the Scriptures daily to find out whether the message was true. This made them more honorable in the sight of God than the others.

The Jews of Berea avoided the hypocrisy of the other Jews who claimed to honor God, but rejected the message of the gospel, because they were unwilling to follow the crowd and made God's word their authority instead.

Thursday

Today we see a third pitfall from the text that can lead a person into hypocrisy. It is this:

3. Legalistic tendencies lead to hypocrisy (v. 14).

How are legalistic tendencies hypocrisy for Christians?

The fear of man leads to hypocrisy, uncritically following the crowd leads to hypocrisy and legalism leads to hypocrisy. Paul says to Peter in verse 14, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”

Now if Peter had said, “What compelling? I haven’t said they have to live like Jews,” Paul would, I think, have said, “Your actions speak louder than your words. 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 in full fellowship in the body of Christ unless they become Jews. That, Peter, is compulsion.”

That also is a form of legalism – requiring that a person do some works of law to be fully accepted by God and by the church. This is sheer hypocrisy, because any Christian who is truly a Christian should know that he or she is only who he is by the grace of God and not by any personal works of any kind. To act differently and to treat someone as something less, because they don’t measure up to false unscriptural legalistic standards is an arrogant, lying, hypocrisy.

For Peter it was following a certain kind of diet. What other forms of legalism can creep into the church?

Notice verse 21 of chapter 2 “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain.” If Titus has to be circumcised to be accepted in Jerusalem, or if Gentile Christians in Antioch have to keep the Jewish dietary laws to enjoy full fellowship in the body of Christ, then grace is nullified and Christ died in vain.

It was so easy for Peter to fall into his old patterns of behavior and practices, just as it is so easy for us to fall into our traditions and habits of life, including religious life. Then, whether subtly or even overtly it is so easy for us to somehow communicate to others that they are not really a part of the “in crowd” if they do not conform to our practices.

I’ve seen this kind of behavior time and again in churches. Perhaps it is some manner of dress, perhaps it is some style of music, perhaps it is home schooling your children or participating in some particular activity or program. These kinds of attitudes are often quietly elevated in the minds of some to a kind of legalistic requirement for attaining the status of a “good Christian.” Those who conform to the requirement, whatever it may be, are readily accepted and those who fail to do so are some how

looked upon as lessor.

This, my friends, is completely out of step with the Gospel. A person does not have full fellowship in the church because he conforms to some man-made code of conduct, whether it is dietary or something else. A person has full fellowship in the church, not because of any work but because he has been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The “works of the flesh” and Matthew 18 issues aside, to place any other requirement on a child of God for full fellowship in the body of Christ is to act with shameful hypocrisy. Such behavior is worthy of rebuke and needs to be immediately forsaken in repentance.

Avoid the snares that we have seen in this text and make it your aim in all you do to magnify the sovereign, free grace of God rather than the achievements of man. If you do so, then you will continue to be “straightforward with the gospel” and avoid hypocrisy in every area of life, doctrinal and practical, which is so dishonoring to Jesus. Peter, after this confrontation, no doubt repented, made things right before God through appropriate confession and apologized to the Gentile believers. For he knew the words of Paul were true and they surely pierced his heart even as he was confronted with his error. We can do the same thing too, if we fall into hypocrisy.