



“The Truth of the Gospel”
Galatians 2:11-14
Sermon Date: October 12th, 2014

Reflections on Sunday’s Sermon

**** (The Sunday morning Scripture reading this week will be Psalm 1 if you would like to read and prayerfully consider it in advance) ****

Since our notes are based on the text being preached on a given Sunday, the aim of this section is to provide you with a space to write notes from the sermon, any questions you may have, any truths that stood out to you, any applications that came to your mind, and/or anything you may have committed to prayer and further reflection as a result of what you have heard.

Prayer

As you begin your study this week, read through Psalm 1 and make it your prayer before the Lord. Ask that He would make His Word a delight to your soul as you meditate on its truths every day of your life (Psalm 1:2). Express your desire to be like a tree which has a constant supply of water, bears fruit in its season, and does not wither (1:3). Pray that the Lord would keep you steady, focused, and living consistently with the gospel as He grows you more and more into the likeness of Christ. Thank Him for the wonderful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ which allows you to be certain of your standing before Him, the Holy and Righteous Judge.

Review

For the last several weeks we have been working through Paul’s narrative which he provides to support his claim that the message of the gospel was not man’s message, it was God’s message for man (v. 11-12). The first support he provided was to use his own changed life from persecutor to preacher after Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the Damascus road (v. 13-17). He then furthered his defense by noting that he did not even see the apostles until three years after his conversion, making it impossible for him to have derived the gospel from them (v. 18-24). Furthermore, as we studied last week, the gospel that Paul proclaimed was confirmed by the influential leaders of the church in Jerusalem when: they did not require the circumcision of Titus, they did not add anything to his message, and they extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul (2:1-10). In our text this week, Paul continues to further the argument that this gospel is God’s gospel and is, therefore, authoritative over all men (as evidenced by his confrontation and rebuke of Peter who was not acting “in step with the truth of the gospel”).

Scripture

Galatians 2:11–14 – (English Standard Version)

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Handling the Word

1. In order to rightly understand the situation which is being addressed by Paul in our text this week, it is important that we understand a little bit about the dining habits of Jews in the 1st century. Read the following excerpt written by Philip Graham Ryken and make note of anything that gives you better insight into this aspect of the cultural context in which these events took place.

"To understand why Paul was so upset with Peter, it helps to understand a few things about dining habits. Eating is a cultural event. What we eat (and with whom) says something about who we are..."

Keeping the Old Testament food laws was one way for the Jews to show that they belonged to God: "In Judaism table-fellowship means fellowship before God, for the eating of a piece of broken bread by everyone who shares in the meal brings out the fact that they all have a share in the blessing which the master of the house has spoken over the unbroken bread." Mealtimes were sacred to the Jews. Remember the way people reacted when Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors?

Jewish dining habits created a crucial problem for the church in the cosmopolitan city of Antioch. Of a population of nearly half a million, at least 10 percent were Jews. So the Antiochene church became a multicultural melting pot. It was the place where the diverse followers of Christ were first called "Christians." People could tell that whatever this strange religion was, it was not exclusively Jewish, so it needed a special name.

Antioch thus became the first place where the early church had to wrestle with the issue of table fellowship. At their former meeting in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1–10), the apostles had already agreed that the Gentiles belonged in the church. They didn't have to keep the Old Testament law to be saved. At the same time, it was still appropriate for Jewish Christians to maintain their heritage by keeping the ceremonial law. Just as the Gentiles could behave like Gentiles, so the Jews could behave like Jews. But how was a Jew supposed to relate to a Gentile when they both worshiped in the same church? Did they have to eat together? Table fellowship with Gentiles had always been forbidden! In the words of one old tradition, "Eat not with them ... for their works are unclean." How could Jewish Christians keep kosher if they had to eat with Gentiles who ate the wrong foods, prepared the wrong way, and in some cases offered to the wrong gods?"

To an orthodox Jew, sitting down to eat with pagans was an act of defiant rebellion.

2. Read Acts 10:9-29 and explain how the events of this passage changed the way Jewish believers were to relate to their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ.

3. Why was this historical situation that Paul describes in verses 11-14 pertinent to what was going on in the churches of Galatia? In other words, how does recounting this specific event help to further confirm Paul's point to the believers in Galatia?

Understanding and Applying

1. Based on what you read in questions #1 and #2 in Handling the Word, describe what Paul's specific charge is against Peter in this passage. Explain how the actions of Peter, the Jewish Christians in Antioch, and Barnabas were a denial of the gospel they knew and affirmed.
2. Are there ways in which your actions at times may serve to deny the very gospel you know, affirm, and believe? If so, what are they?
3. On the other hand, our actions can also serve as confirmation of the gospel we know and believe. What do Matthew 5:14-16, John 13:34-35, and 1 Peter 2:11-12 say in regard to the impact of our actions in a positive sense? Are there ways in which your actions are currently serving to confirm the gospel? If so, what are they?
4. According to or text this week, Peter was failing to stand up for the gospel and instead found himself succumbing to a fear of man (v. 12). Describe a time when you found yourself guilty of this as well. Why is it imperative that we stand up for the gospel rather than caving to our fear of man?

5. Like Peter, we too are in need of constant vigilance against sin in our lives and the temptation to act out of a fear of man rather than a fear of God. What are some of the ways you have found effective in helping you to live fearing God rather than man?

6. It is clear, according to verse 13, that Barnabas and the other Jewish believers were “led astray” by Peter’s hypocritical actions. While many of us like to think that our sins don’t have an impact on others, this verse tells us the opposite is true - our sins always have an impact on others. In what specific ways might our sins have an impact on others? Why should the impact that our sins have on others matter to us?

7. It seems as though everyone Paul mentions in this scene was guilty of hypocrisy on some level. Their hypocrisy lied in the reality that they knew and believed the Gentiles were not second-class believers, but they were performing (or acting) as if they were by the way they treated them. This is at the heart of all hypocrisy: masking your true convictions and beliefs in order to play a part that is not really yours. Why was this particular form of hypocrisy displayed by Peter and the Jewish believers such a danger for the gospel?

8. According to Todd Wilson, “Hypocrisy... isn’t simply failing to live up to what you believe. That’s sin to be sure. But it’s not the particular sin of hypocrisy... When we live out our gospel convictions in one situation but then cover them up in another – that’s hypocrisy.” Based upon that description of hypocrisy, in what ways do you struggle with living hypocritically? What effect has your struggle had on your gospel ministry, if any?

9. It became evident that those who were living in hypocrisy were not conducting themselves in a manner that was truly “in step with the truth of the gospel” (v. 14). How do we avoid falling into the trap of not walking in step with the gospel we believe (Hebrews 12:1-3)?

10. What does the reality that even someone as spiritually mature as Peter was capable of living out of step with the gospel teach us? Are there areas in your life currently that seem to be out of step with the gospel? If so, what are they?
11. What do we learn about confrontation and rebuke from our passage this week? What do Proverbs 9:8-9, 2 Timothy 4:2-4, and Hebrews 3:12-13 teach us about the importance of rebuke and correction in the lives of believers?
12. What are two principles regarding the importance of protecting the truth of the gospel that emerge from our passage this week?

“This is the great threat to staying ‘in step with the truth of the gospel’: hypocrisy. Our fidelity to the truth of the gospel is constantly under threat from hypocrisy... So in order to stay faithful to the gospel, you and I must be vigilant in our fight against hypocrisy’s menacing presence.”

Todd Wilson

“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.”

Martin Luther