

“Walk the Talk”

Galatians 2:11-21

When you and I read the Bible, we have the tendency to read it through a 21st century lens forgetting that the writers lived 2000-4000 years ago writing to the people of their day who lived in a different cultural and historical context than we do. And so we don't always get the cultural significance of what the author is saying or because time has separated us from the event, we don't appreciate how significant that event was at the time.

For example, most of us clearly remember the incident 7 years ago on Parliament Hill when Corporal Nathan Cirillo, who was taking his turn at the Canadian National War Memorial was shot and killed by a religious extremist. And then that man managed to get into Parliament before being shot down by security officers. All of Ottawa was in lockdown. It was a very scary day in our recent memory.

And many of us remember very vividly Sept. 11, 2001 when the World Trade Center was attacked. We remember details of that day and where we were. And positively some of us remember very clearly historic events like Neil Armstrong walking on the moon, Paul Henderson scoring his game winning goal against Russia in 1972, the NDP's Bob Rae winning the election to becoming the premier of Ontario in 1990. It's not quite the same when you read about an historic event that you were not a part of and you can't quite experience the same shock or joy even if you do understand it.

When we come to Gal. 2 the apostle Paul has been defending his apostleship and the gospel of Jesus Christ because of a Jewish segment within the church had insisted that Gentiles (and Jews) must keep obeying the Mosaic Law in order to be justified before God. So far Paul had defended himself and the gospel of grace alone (without the Law) based on theology well, but now he adds one more argument, an historic event that altered the direction of the gospel. It was 'The Potluck that Changed the Church' or 'The Showdown in the Antioch Hall'. We should all be riveted to our seats with mouths gaping open at the shock of this event. Perhaps the headlines in the Antioch Jewish Gazette the next day read 'Paul Rebukes Peter' or 'Pork Chops Beats Bean Salad' or 'Gentiles and Jews Together for God.'

So what happened? As Paul mentioned in 2:1-10 he received the gospel from Jesus Himself and spent almost no time with Jesus' disciples who became apostles; namely Peter, John, James the apostle (who may by now had been killed by Herod) and James, Jesus' half brother who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Seventeen years after Paul's conversion he came to meet with Peter, John and James in Jerusalem where they accepted Paul as a fellow apostle and agreed with him that the gospel should go to the Gentiles, of which Paul's ministry was focused on.

After Paul and Barnabas returned to the church in Antioch (which had become the northern center), the apostle Peter and some believers from the Jerusalem church paid them a visit. They were there for a few days obviously had meals together, both Jewish believer and Gentile believer sitting at the same tables. But some of the Jewish legalists arrived supposedly from James in Jerusalem and they were not happy with Jews and Gentile eating together because according to them these Gentiles weren't part of the church because they weren't circumcised and they weren't following the Laws of Moses. So Peter broke under the pressure and maybe 'for the sake of peace' thought he would eat only with the Jewish believers. But because he was the leader, others followed his example, even Barnabas.

Paul of course saw the danger in what Peter was doing; Peter was compromising what he believed. He believed and said that Jews and Gentiles are equal with Christ (see Acts 11) but by his actions in not sitting at the table with them he was saying they weren't equal in Christ. Indirectly he was making classes of believers and encouraging the Judaizers' message that you had become Jewish if you wanted to be sure you were saved.

So Paul 'opposed him to his face' in front of the others. Public sin requires public confrontation and confession. No doubt Peter apologized and repented because the gospel went in the right direction after this. We all have our moments when like Peter, out of neglect or the fear of what people will say, we give into temptation and we blow it. When our walk doesn't match our talk. So let's use this passage to ask ourselves some good penetrating questions in case we have or so that we won't be tempted to undermine what we believe. Peter buckled under peer pressure. He was more concerned in that moment about pleasing people than he was in pleasing God. How about us?

Do I Live out My Faith Consistently regardless of Who is Around Me **(2:11-21)**

Is my testimony compromised at work, at school or with my unsaved family or at the gym or arena? Are you and I consistent in our faith in Jesus regardless of who's around us? When people ridicule us or God do we remain faithful to Him? Let's be honest and like the apostle Peter himself, admit,

We are all capable of hypocrisy (v.12)

If Peter could blow it so can you and I. And we have all had our hypocritical moments that we're not too proud of where our actions or words did not reflect what we believed. We too may have caved into peer pressure or were trying to please people more than God. Or we avoided being a witness or speaking up 'for the sake of peace'. The word hypocrite was formed in the Roman period when play acting became popular. An actor would wear a mask to disguise who he truly was. He was called a 'hupokrites'; hypocrite.

On the other hand, sometimes God calls on us to confront another brother or sister in Christ because of their compromise, as Paul did to Peter here. If Paul didn't say something then the Judaizers might have won and people would have been misled into thinking that the gospel is belief in Jesus plus works. The situation demanded a confrontation, and Paul trusted God that God would resolve the situation. Paul had to stand up for the truth because if he let this public sin continue, the church would have been damaged severely.

It's not popular but at times it is necessary to confront another brother or sister because of their inconsistency between faith and actions. If we can avoid a public confrontation than we should do so. But public sin requires public confrontation, as private sin requires private confrontation. In both cases pray first and pray a lot about it, making sure you sense God's direction based on the truth of His Word.

Being reminded we have all had our hypocritical moments is humbling, but so is this;

Someone has followed our poor example (v.13)

Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those

who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray

No one is perfect. Everyone is capable of hypocrisy. And we all need to be careful because people will follow our example. Especially less mature Christians will follow the example of older (Not necessarily more mature) believers. I think that Barnabas was led astray tells you how important they viewed Peter. But this is a good reminder that we follow Jesus and not people. Yet also that some believers will make choices about how they live out their faith based on our example (good or bad). Maybe you can think of an example where your son, daughter or friend made a poor decision because of a bad example we had set as a believer?

Thankfully, we know Peter received Paul's rebuke because all the major leaders of the church held a conference to discuss this issue and made a joint decision in Acts 15 on whether the gospel is by faith alone or that faith plus following the Law. Grace won, yet the Gentiles were asked to be sensitive to Jewish culturally issues so as not to offend their brothers and sisters over issues that they had the freedom to practice but the Jewish brothers may have felt differently. When Paul confronted Peter he argued from the Word, the truth of the message of the gospel. Peter responded to truth. We should all be so humble. Which also should challenge us:

How do we respond when confronted by the Word? (vv.11, 14)

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

When we read our Bibles by ourselves and the Word confronts an area of our life that we need to address, how do we respond? Do we ignore it? Do we momentarily agree that we need to clean up that are of our life but then we read on as if to say 'One day I'll deal with that'. It doesn't even have to be someone literally confronting us (which should happen in grace on occasion), but when we read the Word is not God Himself confronting us? Is He not pointing these things out because He wants us to grow in Christ and become a better equipped servant? This is the goal of confrontation, biblical correction and maturity in Jesus so that we can serve Him better.

Because sometimes a gracious and biblical rebuke can alter our future direction, as it did here for the church. And Paul's rebuke of Peter affected a large group of people. Our sin is never just about us. The issue of whether salvation was by faith alone or by faith and Law keeping was an ongoing issue that even though it was cleared up in Antioch at this point, didn't mean it went away completely. Because Peter responded to the rebuke didn't mean others did. So Paul continues to explain how the gospel can only be by grace through faith alone.

¹⁵ "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' ¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.

What was the point Paul was making here? Basically he says to Peter, 'we know', that even though we are not 'Gentile sinners' (probably using sinners in the sense of people who didn't have God's Laws) and received the Law, couldn't keep the Law proving that we ourselves are sinners (as

are the Gentiles) and need the Lord. That we know you can only be justified by faith in Jesus. Peter needed a reminder as we all do at times of salvation by grace alone.

Do I Remind Myself of God's Grace in Saving Me? **(2:15-19)**

Paul reminds Peter of God's grace in justifying us by faith through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are all guilty of sin. None of us can come to God by any works, especially law keeping. Justified is in the passive voice meaning, someone else justifies us, not ourselves. Who does that? God. God is our judge. But God "unfairly" sent His own Son to serve the penalty that our sin requires – death - and accepts what Jesus did on our behalf so that if we agree with the judge that we are guilty of sin and that only Jesus alone can make us right with God, then God bangs the gavel down and declares us as innocent and no charge is made against us. He declares us as justified.

Yes but these Judaizers pointed out that grace promotes lawlessness; that believing in Jesus means a license to sin. "*Absolutely not!*" or literally '**May it never-ever-in a million trillion years be**'. God is not like that. Grace frees us from the need to earn God's favour by keeping laws. The Law, Paul says proved I was a lawbreaker by my inability to keep all these laws. Instead I died to law so I can live for Christ. Death means a separation in relationship. Death frees you from your body, from this earth, from relationships. In accepting Christ we declare the Law dead and it no longer has power over us. But, in choosing Christ we choose to live in this new relationship with Him who empowers us to live for Him by grace and faith.

It's important to remind ourselves regularly that we are saved by grace through faith. We did not earn our salvation. God – not us – declares us righteous based on His acceptance of Jesus' punishment for our sin. Don't forget that so we won't be tempted to earn God's favour by our good behaviour. Instead just choose to live by grace, obeying God out of love for Him. The Law could never enable you to follow God. It only had the power to tell you what was right or wrong. But when we choose to believe in Jesus He actually comes into our life and enables us to live for Him.

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Against the charge that being saved by grace results in lawless sinful living, Paul says I live by faith in and seek to show that Jesus is living in and through me. And I do it as a response to His love for me. So a third challenge for us this morning, if we know the freedom in grace Paul is talking about....

Am I Dying to Self So Others are Seeing More of Him in Saving Me? **(2:15-19)**

When we accept Jesus as our Saviour we recognize our sins were paid for when Jesus died. The sense of 'I have been crucified' means what Jesus did for me on that spring day in 32 AD continues today and everyday. My sins are paid for. That old life was crucified even if I didn't know it or had not accepted it yet. But now I do. And now I have Jesus living in me and I choose to live by faith in Him who continues to love me even when I have periods of hypocrisy and fail to respond to His loving correction from the Word or well-being brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul aims one more bullet at the Law when he says if righteousness could be gained through the Law then Christ died for

nothing or needlessly, some translations say. That word for nothing means without cost, without purpose and without reason.

To believe that I have to add to Jesus' work on the grace by my good works actually renders the cross as insufficient to pay the full price for my sin, unable to produce the purpose of justifying me before God and to have been a waste since it couldn't do what it promised. On the other hand, to say I could lose my salvation based on sin says the same thing. That Jesus' payment couldn't keep me saved or keep me justified or promised what He said He could do. It puts the power to save or unsave us in our own hands – which is really what Paul was arguing against in this letter.

We sometimes fight with grace because we live in a sin-filled world that constantly tells us everything is about you. Everything is about how you perform. Get good grades. Get good looks. Get ahead. Impress others. Be successful. The Satanic lie of performance-based acceptance. Yet God says to us through His Word,

“I am perfect, you are not so how can you impress me? Stop trying. Let me impress upon you how much I love you. I'm going to send Jesus to die for your sins. If you accept that as payment for your sins and place your faith in Me and My Son, I will forgive all your sins and declare you justified and in a right relationship with Me. The only thing I ask is you show you appreciate My love by telling others about Me and My Son and back that up by showing them how Jesus' followers show grace and love to others, regardless of their sinfulness, the same way I showed My love to you. I will be with you. I will even enable you to do that by giving My Spirit to live in you, pricking your conscience when you're not walking with Me as you should. Encouraging you and filling you with My joy when you follow My Word and not the world.

“Your sins are already paid for. I will never leave you. Stop trying to impress Me. Just enjoy Me and trust Me as I make you look more like My Son a little more each day.”

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net