

The Gospel Under Pressure (and how to withstand it)

Sunday 19th November 2023

GALATIANS 2:11-14

▶ Today, let's start at the end of our passage from Galatians in verse 14,

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?"

There was a visible inconsistency in how Peter and others, who followed his example, were acting. Paul was not going to watch this go on without confronting the hypocrisy that was being birthed.

▶ Before we take a look at Paul's words to Peter, let's remind ourselves of the Gospel of Jesus Christ from some of the most powerful words ever recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4,

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ that he describes – the one he tirelessly preached and lived – is a gospel like no other. All at once it calls you die to self and live in Christ, with Christ at the centre of everything.

▶ When the true Gospel has taken root in your heart you will develop a sensitivity to behaviour that does not match up to the simplicity of the gospel; to anything that does not reflect the very person of Christ, the Son of the Living God. This Spirit-inspired sensitivity was very alive in Paul and so we come to what he witnessed that was so un-straightforward in verses 12 and 13,

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. ¹³And the rest of the Jews also played the

hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

Peter was comfortable to live in the liberty of the gospel, stepping out of the shackles of his upbringing in Judaism. And yet when other believers with similar Jewish backgrounds arrived he flipped and decided to separate himself away from the Gentiles and eat with the other Christians who shared His Jewish heritage.

➤ Fear was at the root of Peter's decision. And his fear spread into the hearts of others causing them to follow in his hypocrisy. Peter struggled with something we often refer to as peer-pressure.

All of a sudden this gospel which had fully set him free was under pressure, the kind of pressure caused by the fear of man. Worried what others might think about him. A fear that he might lose a friend or two. A fear that he could look a fool. A fear of what others would say about him. A fear he could lose the approval of other people.

➤ Why this was so dangerous to his fellow believers and to those yet to believe is spoken of in Proverbs 29:25,

The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.

Fearing people is a snare. A snare is used by hunters to trap animals and bring them into their hands to do what they want with the creature. Trusting in the Lord on the other hand give us safety.

➤ Who do you fear? Whose approval do you fear losing? Do you fear looking like a fool for the gospel? Do you fear losing your 'in' status?

➤ So why is Paul so concerned about Peter's fear and what that lead to? The truth is revealed in when Paul describes what he saw back where we started in verse 14,

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel...

Peter (and the others) were not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel. They literally were not 'straight-footed'; they were not walking in a spiritually straight line. One thing here then another thing there.

▶ Peter had, in a moment of pressure, flipped from fully trusting in the gospel defined by grace to one defined by the old Mosaic laws held so dearly by those old connections. From a gospel with power to save, to a gospel that was, to quote Paul from Galatians 1:7 'not another'.

Once you have been set free by the gospel of Jesus Christ everything you do is an expression of God's grace— a witness to Christ himself; a witness to the power of His resurrection; a witness to His ability to save anyone to the uttermost.

So when fear drives us to not be straightforward about the gospel, we portray an insufficient Saviour; a Saviour who is not all-powerful; a Saviour who cannot save to the uttermost. A Saviour who looks more like our old self than His perfect glorified self.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

▶ Be straightforward about the truth of the gospel!

Live out the truth of Psalm 118:6,

The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

▶ Remind yourself of this truth every day. Don't step outside your front door until you have once again given thanks for the truth of the gospel. Jesus has conquered death. Jesus has rescued me forever. Jesus has made me alive.


I

WILL


NOT

FEAR!

Are you feeling the pressure of the expectations of others? From the family you were born into? From the cultural expectations you have grown up with? From the workplace norms they want you to silently agree with? From the friends you had before you were born again?

It is time to be straightforward. It is time to make a choice just as the prophet  Elijah challenged God's people to make in 1 Kings 18:21,

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.


 People want straightforward leaders, politicians, weather forecasters, parents, children, sports stars, and friends. But they are looking to in-sufficient people for an all-sufficient gospel.

What they need is a straightforward gospel.

A straightforward Saviour.

A straightforward church.

A straightforward witness.

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1. Drench your life in prayer (prayer always).
 2. Live deeply in God's word (Proverb a day).
 3. When making decisions, ask who you are doing this for?
 4. Be honest with the Lord about your struggles.
 5. Give thanks for the gospel every day (remembering it is a matter of life and death).