

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works

Part six - Teaching #2139

Sunday, October 31st, 2021 - 10 a.m.

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BELIEF IN THE HEART MUST BE LIVED IN YOUR OUTSIDE LIFE

Galatians 2:11-14 - “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. [12] For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. [13] Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, “If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?”

It must have been very hard for Paul to deal with this situation in Antioch.

Peter had just been involved in welcoming Paul at Jerusalem and approving of Paul’s ministry. Paul must have appreciated Peter’s support because he said it proved that Paul’s fourteen years of ministry among the Gentiles hadn’t been **“in vain” (2:2)**. We can’t imagine the encouragement Peter’s support must have been to Paul.

And then Paul mentions the presence of Barnabas very specifically as well. He says Barnabas was carried along in the very same error as Peter, and Paul had to confront him as well. In order to catch just how hard this must have been on Paul, remember it was Barnabas who was perhaps the very first one to express confidence and trust in Paul when no one else believed Paul could have experienced such a radical conversion, transformation and turning to Christ:

IPAD TEXT - Acts 9:26-30 - “When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple. [27] Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that the Lord had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. [28] Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. [29] He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. [30] When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”

Paul probably felt he owed a lot to Barnabas. Paul may not have had a ministry at all that was acceptable to the early church were it not for Barnabas. And Barnabas was a great man. Over and over we see his ministry of acceptance and love and encouragement in the New Testament. When Paul didn't want to give Mark a second chance at traveling and ministering with him (taking Silas instead as a partner) it was Barnabas who took Mark and made him his partner in evangelism:

IPAD TEXT - Acts 15:36-40 - "After some time had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers and sisters in every town where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they're doing." [37] Barnabas wanted to take along John who was called Mark. [38] But Paul insisted that they should not take along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work. [39] They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed off to Cyprus. [40] But Paul chose Silas and departed, after being commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord."

Now keep all of this in mind as background to our text for this teaching. Because Paul *must* have had some of these things in *his* mind as he confronted Peter and Barnabas so sharply in Antioch.

I think there are some timely lessons for all of us from this pricelessly honest little text:

1) IT IS POSSIBLE FOR OUR ACTIONS TO SO CONTRADICT THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL THAT A LOVING ACCEPTANCE OF THOSE ACTIONS IS IMMORAL

Perhaps that is the central, most obvious point in this text. Paul couldn't just "*let pass*" the conduct of Peter and Barnabas, even though, as we saw in the introduction of this teaching, it would have been very understandable and natural for Paul to do so. There was nothing in Paul that *desired* such a confrontation with Peter and Barnabas. In a very real sense, he *owed* these men a great deal.

Then *why* did Paul make such a fuss? The answer is given in **verse 14** - "But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, "If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?" - IPAD TEXT

You only need to read the first part of that verse - "*When I saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel....*" That was it. Paul saw the basic integrity of the gospel itself was being compromised. It's the very same phrase we read in Paul's earlier description over the Judiazer's desire to have Titus circumcised:

IPAD TEXT- Galatians 2:5 - “But we did not give up and submit to these people for even a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would be preserved for you.”

What we see when we compare these two texts is that it didn't matter to Paul *where* the compromise with truth came from. In the first instance it was from the false teachers who came in from the *outside*. In the case with Peter and Barnabas it came from sincere, but mistaken leaders *inside* the church.

It's also important to notice the *kind* of compromise Paul was confronting in Peter and Barnabas. Neither Peter nor Barnabas would have changed their *minds* about the central truths of the gospel. Certainly, as far as we know, Peter never *said* or *taught* anything that was a *denial* of the gospel or a *change* in his theological position.

But he was *acting - behaving* - in such a way that his actions, as we say, were “*speaking louder than his words.*” Look at the way Paul puts it so strongly in the last part of **verse 14 - “But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, “If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?” -**

IPAD TEXT

Imagine Paul saying that. ***“Peter, you are compelling these newly converted Gentiles to live like Jews!”*** Peter’s actions were of such power and vividness that he was as ***responsible*** for them as if he had ***preached a sermon denying the Cross of Jesus Christ.***

Peter himself would one day write to the church about the danger of false teachers who would actually ***deny the Master who bought them*** - **2 Peter 2:1** - **“There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies, even *denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves.*”** -

IPAD TEXT

Somehow Peter lost sight of the fact that he could deny Jesus without saying a word. What a reminder for all of us! Our actions can undo anything else we may believe and say about the gospel.

So I hope you can see ***why*** Paul responded as strongly as he did. When the gospel goes, lives perish. All of us exercise some sphere of leadership. Some lead in churches, some in schools, some in homes. All of us influence friends and acquaintances more than we realize. It’s a very serious thing to compromise the truth of the gospel with our actions.

2) **PAST EXPERIENCES OF GRACE DO NOT, IN THEMSELVES, GUARANTEE FUTURE FAITHFULNESS TO THE TRUTH**

Think just for a minute about Barnabas - wonderful, gracious, encouraging Barnabas. The Bible tells us a little bit about his character and walk with the Lord:

IPAD TEXT - Acts 11:22-24 - “News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. [23] When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, [24] for *he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.* And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.”

Barnabas was a ***good*** man. He didn't do ***bad*** things. He shunned sin and wickedness. Barnabas was ***full of the Holy Spirit***. It's always a wonderful thing to watch someone of whom it can so obviously be said he was ***“full of the Holy Spirit.”*** We usually like to be more politically correct. We like to talk about ***all*** Christians being indwelt by Holy Spirit. And certainly that is true. But it's also true that there are people who ***experience and walk deeply with the Holy Spirit***, and the Bible doesn't hesitate to tell us so. Barnabas was such a man.

Barnabas was also **“full of faith.”** What a wonderful thing that is! Faith to believe God for the miraculous. Faith to persist in powerful, sustained prayer. Faith to lead many others to Christ (as the text in Acts 11 indicates). Barnabas was **full** of these things. That means his life **overflowed** with these things. Barnabas stood out from the crowd for God.

But he, along with Peter failed so miserably in Antioch. How are we to explain it? Look at Peter. He of all people knew better than he acted in Antioch. Look at the lengths to which God went to straighten Peter’s thinking out on this whole issue of God’s inclusion of the Gentiles in His world-wide church:

IPAD TEXT - Acts 10:11-14 - “He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. [12] In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. [13] A voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” [14] “No, Lord!” Peter said. “For I have never eaten anything impure and ritually unclean.”

This is Peter's introduction to the radical freedom of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter is about to be sent to the house of Cornelius, who is a Gentile. To prepare Peter for his missionary enterprise God sends a vision in which God lowers a sheet in which were contained all the animals that Peter had been raised, as a devout Jew, to renounce as unclean.

The voice from heaven tells Peter to "kill and eat." Peter, of course, initially refuses out of loyalty to the commands of Leviticus chapter 11. Then, in words that must have sent shock waves through Peter's whole system, the voice comes back - "***What God has cleansed you must not call unclean.***"

This vision is what we would refer to as a ***paradigm shift*** for Peter, the church, and world history. God is telling Peter that a ***new era in redemptive history has been launched through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*** The sacrificial system and the Old Testament regulations of ceremonial cleanness and separateness had done their job. Their usefulness is over now that Jesus has shed His blood on the Cross.

When Peter gets to Cornelius' house he makes clear his understanding of what God was showing him in the vision of the sheet and animals:

IPAD TEXT - Acts 10:25-28 - "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. [26] But Peter lifted him up and said, "Stand up. I myself am also a man." [27] While talking with him, he went in and found a large gathering of people. [28] Peter said to them, "You know it's forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner, but God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean."

So Peter *did* understand what God was showing him in that vision of the sheet and animals. He *did* see God's heart to reach the Gentiles. And he *did* see God's plan to reach the whole world through the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It's wonderful to see the Holy Spirit leading both Peter and Paul, totally independently of each other, in the same direction. Paul, before his conversion, couldn't see beyond his Judaism. He persecuted the church out of his loyalty to ethnic Judaism. And Peter couldn't imagine going to the house of Cornelius (a Gentile) anymore than he would eat unclean food.

But now both Peter and Paul have been led by the Spirit of God to see the truth of the gospel. We must be careful to see accurately just what Peter and Paul came to see. It wasn't just that they came to see that God was going to reach out to the Gentiles with his love and grace. That is true, but it falls far short of what God was revealing to Peter in that vision of the sheet.

The **second** truth that Peter (and Paul) came to see was that he (Peter) **as a Jew** was now free from those same laws about separation and cleanness through the ceremonial law. These were staggering revelations to the Jewish mind of Peter. Through Jesus Christ, God was changing things for these Jewish men from the inside out, forever.

But, in Antioch, Peter and Barnabas failed in the truth they knew. Past experiences of grace and insight do not, in themselves, guarantee future faithfulness to the truth.

So the question arises, "***What went wrong in Antioch?***" How did Peter (and Barnabas) suddenly behave so **contrary** to the truth they both **knew** and **accepted**?

3) **BOTH PETER AND BARNABAS WERE LED ASTRAY BY THE FEAR OF MAN WHICH LEADS TO HYPOCRISY**

IPAD TEXT- Galatians 2:12-13 - “For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, *because he feared those from the circumcision party.* [13] Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.”

The important insight at the conclusion of this teaching comes from seeing the ***linking of two terms*** in these two verses. Notice how Paul links ***fear*** and ***hypocrisy***. And notice the linkage is a ***cause and effect*** linkage. First comes the fear (**verse 12**), then comes the ***hypocrisy*** (13).

First Peter feared the men who had come from James' church in Jerusalem. What would they think about Peter's eating with the Gentiles? After all, Peter was an apostle. He was to show leadership. What if he lost his credentials? Whatever the internal process, Peter played the wrong thoughts in his mind. He allowed the fear of man to dominate his actions:

IPAD TEXT - Proverbs 29:25 - “The fear of mankind is a snare, but the one who trusts in the Lord *is protected.*”

I'm sure Peter didn't **want** to live hypocritically to the gospel. I'm sure he loved Jesus. And he had the revelation of the truth from God about the gospel and the Gentiles. But he took his **eyes** off the Lord and put them on these men from Jerusalem. And you can't be true to the Lord with your eyes on the applause and approval of men. Jesus addressed the very same issue in very strong terms:

IPAD TEXT - John 5:44 - "How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but don't seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

"How can you believe....?" You can sense the hopelessness in Jesus' words. Consistent faith becomes impossible when, even for a moment, the receiving of **glory from men** becomes more important than the receiving of **glory from God**. And please notice the subtle difference between the easy **"accepting"** the approval of our visible, applauding, media-saturated culture and the hard work of **"seeking"** glory from a God nobody sees and most don't even care about. There's a lesson there.

So there is a closing wrap-up for all of us in this text from Galatians 2. Keeping the faith is more than an *intellectual* process. It involves more than just *knowing* the truth. Just knowing the facts of the faith will lead to a fearful and hypocritical lifestyle unless we diligently and passionately *keep our eyes on the Lord*. All of life, day in and day out, must be lived with a keen sense of it being *primarily before God's eyes, and primarily for His glory.*

Don't just *believe* in God. Live *before* God, all the time.