

Pentecost 4
June 12, 2016

“Be Ready to Fight for the Pure Gospel”

GALATIANS 2:11-21

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. ¹² 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. ¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? 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.

While hiking in Glacier National Park or Yellowstone National Park you don't want to surprise a mother grizzly bear and her cubs. Instinctively as her cubs show alarm and fear, she will go into attack mode.

So it was with the Apostle Paul. When he saw the pure teaching of the gospel threatened he went into attack mode to protect that pure teaching. He even stood up to Peter and called him out for giving the impression to dear Christians that you could be a superior Christian by adding to what Christ had done by keeping Old Testament laws.

Remember our illustration from last Sunday when we also preached on Galatians. You wouldn't think of opening up a bottle of water such as this and then add dirty, contaminated water. The salvation and forgiveness and peace with God we have in Christ is pure. How can we add something that we do to what Christ has already done? That will only contaminate it and make it impure and unsafe and ultimately destroy us eternally.

Paul was willing to stand up to Peter face to face when he gave the wrong impression about the message of the gospel. The Lord has called you and me to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. How far will we go to defend the pure teaching of the message of the gospel? How bold will we be? Will you be like a mother grizzly bear defending her cubs?

Expect the pure gospel to be challenged

If we are living in the last days, and we are, then we can be certain that Satan will try every trick in the book to lead people to think they must add something to what Christ has done to make it better. Look at what happened to Peter the great leader in the Christian church. Paul writes, “When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.” Why would Paul stand up to Peter and denounced him face

to face in the presence of other Christians? Because Peter was clearly in the wrong by something he did.

What did he do that was so bad? "Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to withdraw and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray." Face to face in front of other Christians Paul tells Peter, "You have been a hypocrite and you have led other Christians to be hypocrites by the example you have given."

What did he do that was so bad? Peter used to eat with Christians who had come from the Gentile or non Jewish world. Ham, pork sandwiches, bacon. No problem. Peter could sit down and enjoy a meal and not think twice about it because it was no longer necessary to keep these laws since Christ had come.

Peter changed his whole style when Jewish Christians from Jerusalem came into town. These Jerusalem believers were still keeping Old Testament laws and were falsely proud of it. Peter was intimidated by these people as he once was intimidated by the maid who asked him on the night he denied Jesus whether he was one of the disciples. In the presence of these hoity-toity Christians he backed away from socializing with Gentile Christians. He gave them the impression they were second class believers because they were not keeping some of the laws of the Old Testament that applied only to the Jewish people before Christ came.

Paul lets Peter know face to face how damaging this was to these Gentile believers who were still new in their faith. "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, it then that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" I wonder if Peter even realized what he was doing by his bad example. Did he even realize he was giving brothers and sisters in Christ the impression they were not good enough to have Christ alone, and that they needed to add something to their faith such as keeping Old Testament laws to be a first class Christian.

So I ask you this morning, just how clever is Satan at developing ways to think they are not good enough in Christ alone. How clever is he in leading us to think we need to add something to what Jesus has done to make it better, more real, more genuine and even more joyous?

Let me ask a question of you to show how he can trick and deceive us just as he did Peter and the hoity-toity group that came from Jerusalem. Do you want to become a better Christian? You know the answer to that question. With all your heart you want to be a better Christian. When you try to be a better Christian you often fail and so do I. It is then that Satan steps in and says to us, "See, you have not been doing a very good job lately. You need to try harder to be sure you are a true believer and your sins are forgiven. He takes us back to the law. Our sinful nature loves to take us back to the law. It is our default position. So does the world in which we are living. Don't rain on my parade! Don't take the joy out of my heart or take the spring from step or steal the song from heart. And now the grizzly bear mom comes out in each of us as we boldly stand up to face our enemies who would dare take from us a Savior who has done everything necessary to completely

pay for every sin we have ever committed. "In Christ alone, my hope is found. He is my light my strength, my song."

And when you stand up to defend the pure gospel, do as Paul did with the dear Christians in Galatia who were being told it was not enough to just have Christ Jesus as their Savior. Be emotional. Show passion and zeal. In love defend the pure teaching by going back to the Scriptures with its message of the pure gospel.

Defend the pure gospel with the Word

"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 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 Jesus Christ, 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." The keyword for defending the pure gospel is the word "justify." Carry this word with you wherever you go. Don't lose it. Cling to it. Use it often. The word as it is used here and in the New Testament means "declare not guilty." Paul says we know, we know from personal experience that we cannot be declared not guilty by observing the law.

Take a look at the prisoners at the Lompoc prison and listen to their stories. Most of them, perhaps even all of them, will tell you the same story over and over again. They will try to justify themselves, make themselves look good and even tell you how they are not guilty for what they have done. See the little girl who claims up and done she did not eat the chocolate brownie even though there is chocolate all over her face. See the neighbor done the street who is totally convinced everything is OK with him and his god because he is trying to do his best and in his mind he is a cut above all the rest. See the girl post on Facebook a picture of a nicely decorated wall in her room when the rest of her place is a total disaster. Maybe I can find one room in my life where things look half way decent but the rest my life is a disaster. As one person crassly said when describing his efforts to put himself right with God, "I'll try and do my best and hope in luck for all the rest."

No one can be justified by observing the law. The law doesn't say, "Do you best." The law says you must be perfect. The summary of the law is to love your neighbor as yourself and love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. It is that little word "All" that condemns us. Sin is not just being the worst person in town, it is falling short of the glory of God. Every effort to try and pay off past sin by trying to keep the law only adds deeper to the debt. Our national debt is well over 19 billion dollars. The debt of sin is much higher. Only God can remove that debt of sin, and he has for you through Jesus your Savior. That's the message of the pure gospel.

"So, we too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we be justified by faith in Christ." In God's court of justice every sin must be paid for. What joy Martin Luther experienced in his life when he realized that a holy and perfect God not only demands that we be righteous, he actually provides us with this righteousness through his Son. Ivory soap is said to be 99.44% pure. Only in Jesus and his forgiveness do we find ourselves 100 % pure in the eyes of our God. Carry the word "justify" with you. It means "declared not guilty."

So if we are declared "Not guilty" through Jesus does that mean we can sin all we want

because the debt will always be paid? Paul asks, "Does this mean Christ promotes sin?" He answers the question with "Absolutely not!" Then he says that he died to the law so that he might live for Christ. The law cannot condemn me. It is dead because of the verdict of not guilty Jesus won for me. Does that mean the law is no longer important? Absolutely not. Because of this declaration of "not guilty" I am free to live for Christ who loved me and gave his life for me. As Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live by faith in the body, I live by faith in Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Great philosophers of the world have struggled with the question why people love one another? Are their motives pure or do they want to get something in return? You scratch my back and I will scratch your back. Dear Christian you know why you love. You love because Christ first loved you. You love not to earn God's favor, but because God's favor was won for you by Christ. You want to keep the ten commandments not to be saved but because you are saved. As Paul says, "The life I live, I live for Christ who loved me and gave himself for me." Don't mess with mother grizzly bears. They are fast and they are powerful and they have no patience with anyone who messes with their cubs. Don't be ashamed of the pure gospel of Christ. Don't be afraid to defend it for yourself and for others. Amen.