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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 7, 2019
4th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:10,13-15
Hymns: 7; 324; 412; 577

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Galatians 2:11-21

¹¹ Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² 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. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. 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? ¹⁵ We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

¹⁷ "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I

who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh 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 *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: “Do what I say and not what I do!”

We have all heard that, and most of us have probably said it at least partly in jest because we recognize that we are not always consistent between our words and actions. Unfortunately this inconsistency isn’t limited to our diet, or personal finances, or regular exercise, but all too easily also extends to our spiritual life. We all realize that it is not enough to simply speak the right words regarding our faith but we also need to live our faith. When we say, “*Do what I say and not what I do,*” with our Christianity we may hear back, “*But I can’t hear what you say because your actions are so LOUD!*” Haven’t we all also said, “Actions speak louder than words.” For example, if we tell others that going to church regularly is important for one’s spiritual wellbeing, as it certainly is, and then we fail to go to church regularly, which message will they hear?

So it is today that the Holy Spirit would teach us a lesson concerning--

THEME: Confessing the Truth in Our Words and Actions.

Paul was addressing a number of congregations that were in the region of the Roman Empire known as Galatia, what we know today as the eastern two thirds of modern

Turkey. Many of these congregations had been established by people fleeing the persecution in Jerusalem, taking the gospel with them and sharing it with their neighbors. Some of these congregations were also established by apostolic visit to the communities. They had received the gospel in its truth and purity, but then they received other visitors from Jerusalem who came to impose some of the Old Testament ceremonial law upon them. It was important that they not be deceived into thinking that any observance of ceremonial law added to their righteousness before God. This was Paul's message; that they not be deceived even if a false impression or message seemed to be coming to them from an apostle.

This is why it is so important that we be consistent as a church in both teaching **and** practice. What we do as a church **and** as individuals needs to conform to the truth we have learned from the Bible!--

I. When We Fail in that, it is Sin.

It doesn't matter who it is that fails, it is still sin. That is why Paul used the example of what happened with Peter in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, with the congregation that was their home base for mission trips. The Apostle Peter came to visit with them there and all was going well. There was great fellowship both in the Word and around the dinner table, until some others came from Jerusalem to also confer with the church in Antioch, very likely concerning the ongoing work of spreading the gospel among the Gentiles. That is when things "went off the rails," so to speak. When it was time for dinner, the new prestigious guests from Jerusalem seated themselves apart from the gentile members of the congregation in Antioch.

That was according to the Old Testament ceremonial law that required that Jews be separate, and that for the Jew to eat a meal with a gentile, or to visit the home of a gentile would make him ceremonially unclean. They were still observing the law which was no longer in effect, and

now undermined the gospel, and damaged the fellowship. These men made it clear that they were NOT one, not completely united with the gentile Christians in Antioch. What made matters worse was that Peter, in an obvious moment of weakness, did not stand up to his brothers from Jerusalem, but was rather intimidated by them, and joined them in separating from the brethren in Antioch.

Take a moment, to imagine the dynamics in that room. There were almost certainly looks exchanged, heads nodded sideways indicating where Peter should be; and he was afraid of what these Jerusalem brethren were thinking of him, and it played into how he was raised in Judaism. Peter walked over to those Jews to eat with them. The previous meals Peter ate mingled in with the gentiles, freely associating with his fellow Christians, but then this sudden change in Peter's behavior endorsed the wrong teaching of the Judaizers and not the truth of the gospel!

Some might try to downplay this. "Ah, what's the big deal? Peter was simply eating with his friends." NO, Peter's actions spoke a loud, clear message. Jewish members of the Antioch congregations suddenly began moving away from Gentile congregation members with whom previously they had eaten with regularly. Peter's actions spoke so loudly that even Barnabas was tripped up by Peter's wrong, sinful behavior, and separated himself from his own congregation who had received him as their brother and then sent him as a messenger of the gospel to the Gentiles! **Barnabas** was misled into this sin!

Think of the impression this instance of false practice by ONE man had on the faith of others. And then it would be picked up by the false teaching Judaizers to reinforce their false message among the Galatian congregations!

Peter knew the truth! The Lord had personally instructed Peter concerning this in preparation for Peter's visit to the home of the Roman Centurion Cornelius in Caesarea.

Peter had conveyed that lesson to the church in Jerusalem, including how this was confirmed by the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Gentiles in Cornelius' home! Yet in Antioch Peter acted contrary to this truth. And that was sin! It was a public sin.

I think we should all be able to get the message. As professing Christians, what we do is being watched far more carefully than we might imagine, and makes a much louder statement than we might think. Remember how I started out this morning, "I can't hear what you're saying because your actions are so LOUD!" Because we are weak sinful human beings it's going to happen. That's no excuse. It is important for us to realize that when we act contrary to what we profess to be true we are failing the Lord, and undermining our own testimony. That is sin that hurts other people because it may lead them into sin as Peter did Barnabas, or damage other people's faith as Peter's actions may have done to all the other Christian brothers who were present, or others who may have heard of Peter's actions that day.

So what came out of that mess?

II. The Blessing of Admonition!

Paul stepped up. That couldn't have been easy. Many might have accused Paul of creating a scene, right in the middle of the fellowship meal! But the gospel was being undermined and the fellowship was being damaged! Paul confronted Peter right then and there.

Galatians 2:14-16 "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? ¹⁵ We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the

works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

By walking away from the dinner table with the Gentiles Peter was imposing the law upon them, and effectively not only physically also but spiritually. He was leading people to question whether they needed to do more than believe that they were justified by faith, but perhaps they needed at least some of the deeds of the law. Paul didn't wait to speak with Peter privately; he confronted Peter with his error before them all. Public offense needed to be addressed publicly, not only for Peter's sake, but for the sake of all the souls present, and to curtail any false message proceeding from that unfortunate event.

Some might wonder how Peter responded. This did **not** cause a rift between Peter and Paul. In Peter's own epistles to the Galatian Christians he gives the Apostle Paul and Paul's writings not only Peter's endorsement, but the assurance that Paul's words were inspired by the Holy Spirit, that Paul's epistles must be regarded as the Word of God.

Peter was delivered from a serious slip into sin. Was it a difficult situation? No doubt it was uncomfortable for everyone in the room, but it was a blessings of the Lord that the truth of the gospel was defended, and Peter was corrected, and Peter's own reputation as a teacher of Christ's gospel was protected. It was a blessing for all!

That is what we need to remember as well. Brotherly admonition is a blessing, it is a benefit of membership in a Christian congregation. You are part of a body of Christ that cares both about the profession of the true gospel, and also about individual souls. Only when people care about your salvation will they work up the nerve to address your sin in the manner which the Lord prescribes. Sometimes it will be quietly, because few people know about the slip into sin. Sometimes it will be done more openly because as with Peter we also might slip in a way

where we can lead others into transgression, misbelief, or even to fall from the faith. I don't want that on me! And more importantly I need to know that you care enough to say something. We all need to care enough about one another that we are willing to step up and say something. If we can't do it alone, then do it with a trusted Christian friend.

We dare not lose sight of the blessing of Christian admonition. It is an increasing rare thing to find within Christian denominations. It is a precious gem within confessional Lutheranism.

We find the strength to carry out admonition because we are also

III. Professing the Gospel's Power.

We profess the gospel's power in connection with forgiveness -- I am crucified with Christ and justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law. But some will argue that Jesus makes it OK for me to sin because I will be forgiven anyway. They would make Jesus an enabler for the weakness of my flesh. It turns the gospel upside down if we say Christ should serve my sinful desires. Paul says in our text *"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!"* This isn't about preserving my sinful life, but about the unfathomable grace of our Savior who gave Himself to save a wretch like me! I dare not think that this entitles me to reconstruct my sinful life. Rather my debt of love and gratitude to Christ is increased because in His grace He continues to forgive me my daily trespasses and sins!

And so we profess the gospel's power in daily life by confessing - "I am crucified with Christ."

Just as Jesus died on the cross **for** my sins, when I by faith am crucified with Christ that His death counts as my death before God in heaven, then I died **to** sin. Sin no

longer is to be a part of my thinking, planning, and thrill of life. Now I abhor sin because of the affront sin is to my beloved Redeemer. This doesn't just happen, and it doesn't happen because of my strength.

All too often one might find oneself savoring the thought of a certain sin that plagues one in life, or entertaining the thought of committing or carrying on in a sin. Jesus taught us: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."* (John 6:63) It is God the Holy Spirit working through the Word day by day, so we are strengthened by the Word day by day that the victory over sin is attained in life. That is how one is crucified with Christ and dies to sin. And so we confess with the Apostle Paul:

Galatians 2:20-21 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh 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 *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Actions Speak Louder than Words! Just as we are all familiar with saying, let it be seen to be true in our Christian lives. We are confessional Christians. That means we really believe something, we stand by **all** the Bible declares. That is good, and that is the will of God! However we need to confess the truth also by our actions. When people in the world look at our lives we need them to see that **Christ lives in me!** That takes a good deal of prayer for the assistance of God the Holy Spirit to direct our lives according to His Word, and then also careful consideration concerning the message we are sending by our choices in daily life, and whether those choices are supporting our words.

The world is watching, more closely than you imagine, and our words will either be confirmed or undermined by our

lives. May we be found professing the truth of Christ crucified in both our words and our actions.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.