

February 25, 2007

“The Gospel-made Community” Galatians 2:11-14

FCF: Longing for community. But real threats to it.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The gospel alone makes for the community we seek.

(magnet) Therefore, if we would have community, we must live out the gospel.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Imagine a shivering group of people on a cold winter’s night, huddled together around a small fire. It is their only source of light or warmth. The night is so dark and cold, it is the only thing keeping them alive. Indeed, if the truth be told, it is the only thing keeping them together. Now imagine a few of them kicking snow onto the fire, snuffing it out. What would you make of that? *“You fools! You’re quenching the only hope you have, the very thing that holds you together! Why would you do that?”*

What we see in our text is that we could be doing the same thing – quenching the only hope we have, the very thing that holds us together. Look with me at Galatians 2.

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 2:11-14

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

A simple rule – if you want to have “this” you must take care of “that.” If you want to travel the miles on a road trip, you need to put the gas in the tank. If you want to maintain your health, you need to exercise and eat well. If you want to have something to live on after retirement, you need to invest now. If you want to maintain closeness with your spouse and your children, you need to make time for them. If you want to have “this” you must care for “that.” Oh, and one more point here. If you want to have any semblance of community, you need to embrace and live out the gospel.

Such is what we see here in our text. Keep in mind where we are. Paul is concerned for the spiritual welfare of the churches in Galatia. False teachers had crept in, claiming that Paul’s place as an apostle, compared to those in Jerusalem, was lacking, that the message he preached was lacking – that there was more to it than the finished work of Christ on our behalf, that there was more to be done on our part. Conditions placed, rules to be heeded, laws to be obeyed. And Paul would have none of it. He shows he was no second rate apostle nor was his a second rate message. To make the point, he shows that his message was both independent from and yet identical to theirs, and, as we see here, on this message he yielded to none. His authority as an apostle was such that when another apostle stepped out of line, he was not below pulling them back.

There is to be no division between proclamation practice – salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Forgiveness of sin by the work of the Son. Freedom from sin by the work of the Spirit. Hope made sure and community made real. *Indeed, it is the gospel alone that makes for the community we seek.* It is the gospel alone that brings humility in assessing ourselves and dealing with one another. It is the gospel alone that brings hope of change to the core of our being. It is the gospel alone that makes for the community we seek. All that is to say, if we would have community, we must live out the gospel. For, if we see nothing else, we can see that a compromised gospel makes for compromised community. And such compromises we dare not make.

I. POSSIBILITY OF COMMUNITY

But perhaps first we should consider the possibility of community before we go any further. And we see that plainly laid out here (**READ Galatians 2:12a**).

A) *Not Theoretical*

Think of what has happened. The realization of community there was anything but theoretical. The longing for it within the hearts of all involved was deeply seated.

1. Created for it

Jew and Gentile – each created in the image of the Triune God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternal relationship. And every human being made according to His likeness.

2. Saved for it

Every human being created for it. And every believer there in the city of Antioch saved for it. Made one that they might learn to love. Made one that the world around them might come to see that the message and power they proclaimed was real and active.

B) But Real

This was real. And so too was the place – Antioch of Syria.

1. The place

Located in modern-day Turkey, the capital of the province of Syria, the third largest city in the Roman Empire. Its strategic location on the great commercial road from Asia to the Mediterranean and its many natural resources added to its wealth and prosperity.

2. The people

This was no backwater town but a cosmopolitan city. There the followers of Jesus were first called “Christians.” There Paul found a base for his journeys. Its population was well over 100,000 people – Greeks, Macedonians, local Syrians, Jews, and Romans.

The point being that this was the stuff of which the church of Antioch was made.

Application:

Why do I bring all this up? Simply to say this: it happened. It’s possible. If it could happen there, it could happen anywhere! The longing of our hearts has an answer, the hunger for deeper relationships can be satisfied – in a gospel-made community. A place to be real, not to pretend. A place to laugh and cry, to be loved and to learn how to love. That’s what we see here and it is the Lord’s delight to give it to us for our delight.

II. PERILS TO COMMUNITY

But with the possibility for such community, we need to see the perils as well (**READ Galatians 2:11-13**). Peter had been enjoying the freedom of the gospel. We see that so plainly back in Acts 10-11 and here as well. And the community was flourishing. But then “the James group” arrived. These were groupies, lacking the maturity of their leader (**READ Acts 15:1, 24**). They were Christians, recovering Pharisees, traditional in the ways of their faith. Their presence created pressure on Peter. We’re not sure exactly why. But it led to an about face – not a change of conviction. Simply raw cowardice.

How could this have happened? Why did Peter fall? And what effect did this have? What we see here are the perils to community of which we must all be aware.

A) Of Fear

1. Inconsistent to the gospel

The first peril is simply that of fear – especially, the fear of man. But the gospel does not bring fear. It expels it. It brings confidence, hope, and boldness (**READ 2 Timothy 1:7**).

2. Destructive to community

But fear – and in particular, fear of man – is not only inconsistent with the gospel. It is also destructive to community. It allows other creatures instead of the Creator, other sinners instead of the Savior, to set the agenda. And that agenda will break community.

All this is to say that if you are tense, anxious, or worried, you need to see the gospel again. Ponder what indeed are the Lord’s intentions towards you (**READ Romans 8:32**).

B) Of Hypocrisy

But fear is not the only thing we see here. There is hypocrisy as well – a moral insincerity, a “play acting” of sorts – professing one way and practicing another.

1. Inconsistent to the gospel

This too is inconsistent with the gospel. In Christ, we are set free from pretending. There is no more need for masks, no room for hiding from God or anyone else. We’re free! No more fear and no more insecurity. What is true and real has been settled once for all.

2. Destructive to community

And what compounds the heinousness of this hypocrisy is its destructiveness to the community as a whole. Consider the effects this had to have had, not just on Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians, but on the Gentiles as well. How confusing this had to have been for Peter and the others to be stepping forward and then drawing back!

All this is to say if you’re feeling the temptation towards such folly, towards such double-mindedness, know that the gospel is a message of assurance. Here we see the Lord assuring us of His love, of His purposes for us, and that frees us to hold true.

C) Of Legalism

But then we see the other peril present here. Legalism – defined in this case as adding conditions to God’s acceptance of us, more that we must bring as payment.

1. Inconsistent to the gospel

Now we’ll be getting more into this directly next week but let me say this now. Such a mindset is completely inconsistent with the gospel. “Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to the cross I cling.” It is, as I have said already, the finished work of Christ.

2. Destructive to community

And here again, such ideas are not just toxic to our relationship with God but with one another as well. For one of two things will happen. We will either be deluded into thinking we have achieved our standards, be filled with pride, and then become aloof from those around us. Or we will despair, seeing how far short we fall, give up, and then become distant from those around us. Either way, community is destroyed.

These perils are real and present. And we need to take them seriously.

Illustration:

There are parallels to the perils here and even in the news. Think of the great dangers the world is facing today – militant Islam, AIDS, bad water, human trafficking. Some of us would add global warming as well. In all of these, the tendency is to say, “*But those things are so far away. They don’t really affect us.*” But the reality is that they may well be closer than we know. And far more dangerous than we realize.

Application:

All this is to say that this is what has done it. These perils are what has brought the destruction of the community you long for and perhaps even once knew somewhere. And this is what will do it. These things are what will surely bring the destruction of the community the Lord is building here if we do not heed the plain warnings of His Word.

III. PROTECTION OF COMMUNITY

All of which then leads us to the last thing – the need to be vigilant regarding the protection of community. Certainly Paul was (**READ Galatians 2:11, 14**). Now note that Paul’s passion here was not just the community but the gospel itself. The gospel was the main issue. And their compromised gospel showed itself in a compromised community.

A) Standing Firm

And so Paul stood firm. Peter was living inconsistently. He was not walking rightly on the path. It was a public sin. And it demanded a public rebuke. Not because Paul loved conflict or was looking to set Peter back. But because the gospel was at stake.

1. No matter who it may be

Paul shows us no matter who it may be, there may come a time to speak.

2. No matter what it may cost

Paul shows us no matter what it may cost, there may come a time to act.

Illustration:

William Wilberforce, the staunch evangelical who pressed for the outlawing of the British slave trade, comes to mind – a name we will all be hearing a bit more of with the release of the film, “Amazing Grace.” Eleven parliamentary defeats over the course of 20 years of staunch opposition. But Wilberforce was sustained throughout by his stauncher faith in the grace of God and impelled all the more to serve for His sake.

B) On Guard

We must stand firm against the opposition to the gospel, knowing such opposition threatens, endangers community. And we must be on guard as well. For we are weak.

1. Think of Peter

Think of Peter. Think of what he had seen – Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension. We read of that in the Gospels. Think of what he had done thus far – leaving all behind, standing firm against the Sanhedrin, against this same group from Jerusalem. We read of that in Acts. And yet what do we see at this moment? Such strength, such weakness.

2. Think of yourself

Such a warning. Think of Peter. And think of yourself.

Application:

And consider that both Jesus and Paul reserved their strongest words for those who compromised on this point. Which begs a question. What do we need to look out for? What are the danger signs? An obsession with what people might think. Not to say we should be callous but nor should we be preoccupied. Beware too of a duplicity within – a tendency to be one thing in private and another in public. Watch out for a confidence breeding unteachableness and an isolation cutting oneself off from others. All indicators of a self-righteousness. All obstacles to community that we need to stand against and for which we need to be on our guard. All indicators we need to hear the gospel anew.

CONCLUSION:

We wonder what we would say to a famous person if given a chance to meet them. “*Sacagawea, what was it like traveling with Lewis and Clark?*” “*Neil Armstrong, what did it feel like to be going down that ladder for the first time?*” “*Thomas Edison, what kept you going through all those near successes with the light bulb?*”

Interesting to consider. But the better thing would be to ask what they might say to us, what questions they might ask of us. And here, we have to wonder what would Paul, an apostle of Christ, say to us. We see what he said to Peter. What would he say to us? “*You were made for community. You were made with this longing within you. I know you think it’s just a matter of being too busy or too spread out that makes it too hard. But you need to understand it’s deeper than that. It’s your failure to deeply believe and fully embrace the realities of the gospel. Don’t kick snow on the fire. Build it up. It’s your only source of hope. And the only thing keeping you together as well.*”

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The gospel alone makes for the community we seek.

(magnet) Therefore, if we would have community, we must live out the gospel.