

“Religious Hypocrisy”

January 2, 2011

Text: Galatians 2:11-14

A Wall Street Journal article quoted a congressman who was

addressing the House of Representatives as saying:

“Never before have I heard such ill-informed, wimpy, back-stabbing drivel as that just uttered, by my respected colleague, the distinguished gentleman from Ohio.”

That is a good illustration of hypocrisy=> pretending to be something one is not, or to feel something one doesn't feel.

But our text this morning deals with a special breed of hypocrisy, *religious* hypocrisy—pretending to believe something one doesn't actually believe, or to value or even revere something for which one has no real value.

A religious hypocrite's words or silence, actions or inaction area calculated to cause others to think that his religious views/feelings are different from what they actually are.

Jesus condemned religious hypocrisy.

- * He said religious hypocrites pray just to be seen praying by men, so others will think of them as unusually sincere/spiritual (Mt 6:5).
- * He said they judge the specks in other people's eyes, but overlook the moral logs in their own (Mt 7:5).
- * He said they worship Him w/ their lips, but have no real love for Him in their hearts (Mt 15:7).

* Jesus was esp. severe in His judgment of hypocritical religious leaders=> “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. / Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*

” (Mt 23:27-28).

Hypocritical religious leaders can put on an outward appearance of holiness/goodness, but inwardly be rotten/corrupt at heart.

I was once told about a preacher who would adjust his glasses as he preached.

It was a secret signal to the woman in the audience with whom he was having an affair, that he loved her.

The religious hypocrite we will consider today was a key leader in the early Church—the Apostle Peter.

His hypocrisy was motivated by a desire to make some of his fellow Jewish Xns think well of him.

That put him on a collision course with the apostle Paul, who will confront Peter's hypocrisy in our text=> Gal 2:11-14.

Out of that confrontation, we will gain 4 insights into the nature/cure of religious hypocrisy itself, as it applied to Peter=>

Its condemnation/cause/contamination/correction(cure).

*** The Condemnation of Peter's Hypocrisy**

Peter stood condemned by his own behavior.

He was guilty of a hypocritical inconsistency that would have wrecked the Church, if Paul hadn't confronted it.

[Galatians 2:11] (Paul)=> “But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”

Peter was condemned in the sense that he knew he had done something wrong.

By his conduct, he was undermining the doctrine of justification by God's grace apart from works.

He had recently been a key part of the establishment of this doctrine at the Jerusalem Council.

Now he was giving Gentile Xns the impression that they & their justification were somehow inferior to the Jews and their justification/salvation, because Jewish Xns had been circumcised and observed the ceremonial Law;

That until these Gentiles added Jewishness to their faith in X, he wasn't totally comfortable associating w/ them.

This had taken place in the wonderful church at Antioch.

- * That's where believers were first called "Xns."
- * This was the church that had sent out Paul/Barnabas on the Church's first missionary journey, to establish Gentile churches in Galatia.
- * It was a church where Jewish/Gentile Xns had accepted one another without racial prejudice, creating a beautiful/loving fellowship.

But Peter's hypocrisy had threatened to destroy all that.

Gentile Xns (people like Titus) must have been perplexed/hurt by Peter's hypocritical behavior.

Even worse, this was tantamount to a reversal of the principle established at the Jerusalem Council, over which the believers at Antioch had rejoiced=>
That no one can be saved by the good works of the Law, but only by God's grace through faith in Jesus' substitutionary/aton ing death.

Peter was acting as if Jewish Xns' works gave them some sort of special standing before God.

His conduct was saying the opposite of what he'd said back at the Jerusalem Council=> "*God, who knows the heart, bore witness to [the Gentiles], giving them the H.S., just as He also did to us; / & He made no distinction between us & them, cleansing their hearts by faith. / Now therefore why do you [Judaizers] put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? / But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are*" (Acts 15:8-11).

Peter stood condemned/blameworthy, due to this hypocrisy, when his actions belied these words.

Paul says he “opposed [Peter] to the face.”

This must have been one of the most dramatic scenes in the whole NT—open conflict between apostles.

Paul realized that Peter's misconduct was so serious, he needed to confront him publicly to undo the damage he had done with his hypocrisy.

This was important for the Galatians to know, the people to whom Paul was writing this epistle.

The Judaizers had told them Paul wasn't a real apostle on a par with the original Twelve.

Paul's confrontation of Peter, the leader of the Twelve, showed that he was equal to the best of them, exercising full apostolic authority.

It must have been difficult for Paul to confront Peter like this.

* When they'd met in Jerusalem (Peter's hometown), Paul was given the right hand of fellowship.

Now, when they met in Antioch (Paul's hometown)
Peter was given a rebuke.

Paul couldn't allow his friendship with Peter to lure him into condoning Peter's hypocrisy.

And yet in confronting Peter publicly, face-to-face,
Paul might have seemed ungracious.

* Paul must also have known his motives would be questioned.

Was he being malicious/egotistical? Was he
jealous/irascible?

* If Peter didn't respond to this open/public dressing-down humbly, the Church might split, or even dissolve/die.

So the stakes were high, making it all the more difficult for Paul to do this.

Ultimately, as Paul knew, none of that mattered.

What mattered was that Peter was self-condemned, and his condemnation had become a blight on the Church.

*** The Cause of Peter's Hypocrisy=> fear/cowardice**

Peter was afraid of rejection by his fellow Jewish converts.

He may also have been afraid that they weren't true converts yet, and that his seeming to have turned his back on Judaism, would cause them leave the faith altogether.

The Church should have confronted these "converted" Pharisees when they first showed up in Acts 15:1, teaching the believers=> "*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.*"

They should have been confronted, but they weren't.

Now they were a formidable/intimidating pressure group, exerting far more influence than one might expect, based on their numbers—much like the ACLU today.

[Verse 12]=> "*For prior to the coming of certain men from James [the leader of the Jerusalem church], he [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles [in Antioch]; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.*"

Prior to the arrival of Judaizers from Jerusalem, Peter often enjoyed fellowship-meals with Antioch's Gentile Xns.

That might not seem like much to us, but it certainly was to a Jew.

* The OT had rules about the kinds of food a Jew could eat.

E.g. in Leviticus 11, rabbit meat was forbidden as
“unclean.”

What if a Gentile invited a Jew to dinner at his house
and served rabbit stew?

A legalistic Jewish Xn would feel condemned
with every bite.

Dan 1:8 tells us that Daniel didn't eat the king's food,
“that he might defile himself” if he ate it.

But X had taught Peter it's not what enters the mouth
that defiles a man, but the sinful words that
proceed out of it from a sinful heart.

* The elders/rabbis had added their own traditions to the
Law, such as washing one's hands before eating, so
that a Jew who had touched a Gentile or a Gentile's
possessions wouldn't defile himself.
Peter must have gotten past these barriers, in order to
enjoy his fellowship w/ Gentile Xns.

* Because meals were social occasions, dining with a
Gentile meant socializing with him, and that was
strictly forbidden to an orthodox Jew.

We have a clear illustration of this in Luke 15, where
Jesus had become too friendly/familiar with
Gentiles to suit the Pharisees/scribes, so they
complained:

“This man receives sinners and eats w/ them.”

That's the kind of treatment Peter himself feared, when the Judaizers from Jerusalem arrived.

Before then, he had eaten with Gentiles on a regular basis, ignoring all these old Jewish prohibitions.

But when he began to feel pressure from the Judaizers to conform to their Jewish expectations, he stopped socializing with Antioch's Gentile Xns.

The words “*withdraw and hold himself aloof*” are in the imperfect tense, depicting a gradual tapering-off and withdrawal that politely accepts fewer/fewer dinner invitations from Gentiles.

It was as if Peter had slipped quietly out the back door, knowing that his doing so was both wrong/offensive.

Peter knew that X had abolished the ceremonial Law and eliminated the OT separation between Jew/Gentile.

He had heard Jesus speak repeatedly of Gentile salvation.

* In Mt 8:11-12, X had even said many Gentiles would be accepted in the Kingdom, as the Jews were rejected because of their unbelief.

* In Luke 4, Jesus demonstrated God's concern for Gentiles by citing Elijah's saving a foreign widow in Zarephath from famine, and healing a Syrian leper.

* Before ascending into heaven, Jesus had commissioned

Peter and all the other Apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel, to Gentiles a/w/a Jews.

Moreover, God had given Peter the vision of the sheet full of unclean animals being lowered out of heaven, and had told him to kill/eat one of those animals.

He had made it clear to Peter that unclean animals and unclean Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean.

Peter showed that he had understood/accepted this new reality by going into the home of a Gentile named Cornelius, and eating with him/his-Gentile-family.

Peter's problem wasn't that he didn't understand the truth, that God was saving Gentiles, but that he feared man's rejection if he acted on it consistently.

Prov 29:25=> "*The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.*"

Peter had been snared into violating his own conscience by his fear of being rejected by fellow Jews.

But before we condemn Peter's cowardice too strongly, we need to ask ourselves how many times fear of man's rejection has caused us to stumble, instead of standing boldly for gospel truth.

If that can happen to someone who was as strong a personality/leader as Peter, it can happen to us too.

In Isa 51:7, God says=> “*Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, A people in whose heart is My law;*
(That’s us!)

Do not fear the reproach of man, Neither be dismayed at their revilings.”

Peter hadn’t listened to the Lord, so he had feared the reproach & the reviling-rejection of the Judaizers.

Let’s pray for boldness so that we’ll do better than Peter on this score.

Because of Peter’s fear to do what he knew to be right, the sweetness of fellowship between Jewish/Gentile Xns was in danger of being destroyed.

Thank the Lord, Paul opposed him to his face.

Eph 2:14 (Paul)=> “*He Himself [X] is our peace, who made both groups [Jewish/Gentile Xns] into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, / by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law [ceremonial] of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, / and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity*” [14-16].

God is in the business of breaking down walls between Xns, and uniting them into one Body—the Church.

We have no business re-erecting such barrier walls.

If you/I are dismissive or uncaring towards another Xn because we view him/her as below us, for any reason, we should repent of such hypocrisy.

Jewish Xns themselves should never go their separate way
and form “Messianic congregations”, because in
doing so, they rebuild the wall that X’s death tore
down.

* **The Contamination of Peter’s Hypocrisy**

Obviously, I don’t mean that Peter’s hypocrisy was
contaminated, but rather that it was contadously
contaminating itself: It contaminated others.

Peter was a leader by his very nature & people follow leaders.

What Peter did, others were sure to emulate, following him.

[Verse 13]=> “*And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy,
with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by
their hypocrisy.*”

There are 2 “sun” verbs here=> συνυποκρίνομαι (to join with
in hypocrisy) and συναπάγω (to carry off along with).
Sun means “with,” and it’s the key to what’s going on here.
What the Jewish Xns wouldn’t do alone, they were willing
to do with Peter, because there’s safety in numbers.

The Jewish Xns of Antioch may have thought casually in the past
about separating themselves out from Gentile Xns.
But, instead, they had preserved the harmony/unity there.
Peter’s hypocrisy caused them to rethink/reverse that
decision.

**When a Jewish leader like Peter started withdrawing from
fellowship w/ the Gentiles, the pressure increased on the
other Jews.**

What they had casually considered before, now began to look like a viable option, which Peter had legitimized.

Suddenly, the dam broke, and the rest of the Jews in Antioch's church joined Peter in his hypocritical separation.

"*Joined him in hypocrisy*" is an aorist tense verb, which means it happened all at once=> an internal split within the congregation.

They all became hypocrites together, remaining silent about their true feelings, but tacitly expressing them by separating themselves now from fellow Xns who were Gentile.

We can only guess how this made the Gentile Xns feel.

The Jews all became double-minded hypocrites/sinners together.

In fact, double-mindedness lies at the base of all hypocrisy.

Jms 4:8-9=> "*Purify your hearts, you **double-minded**. / Be miserable and mourn and weep*" (i.e., repent).

Leaders/teachers like Peter, who lead others into sin, bear a special culpability before the Lord.

Jms 3:1=> "*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.*"

This episode in our own text illustrates the fact that, those who would be Xn leaders must guard their conduct w/ great caution.

It is a gift given to them by God, and He will hold them responsible for using it according to His purposes.

The ultimate measure of this pressure which the Jews felt to separate, was Barnabas' being carried off with them all.
He exemplified the danger of going along w/ the crowd, rather than standing on the truth—alone, if necessary.

Barnabas was the senior pastor of the church at Antioch, which was famous for its harmonious interracial mix of Jews/Gentiles.

What was he going to say now to a Gentile Xn, like Titus?

Barnabas had always been extraordinary for his open-mindedness and generosity.

* He had welcomed Paul into the Church right after his conversion, when no one else trusted Paul.

* He had gone with Paul on his 1st missionary journey, planting Gentile churches throughout Galatia.

* He had stood with Paul at the Jerusalem Council, fighting off the Judaizers' demand to circumcise Gentile Xns.

But now even Barnabas had gotten swept away in the Jewish hysteria to preserve their own separate identity within the Church.

It was a sad day in Antioch.

*** The Correction of Peter's Hypocrisy**

Paul corrected Peter's hypocrisy by publicly confronting it, and rebuking him for it.

[Verse 14]— “*But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”*

** Knowledge of truth that doesn't lead to behavior in accordance with that truth, will always lead to hypocrisy.

Many Xns today would say Paul overreacted, but he didn't.

Many would have said “Paul, you had a private meeting with the Apostles in Jerusalem;

“Why didn't you extend that same courtesy to Peter at Antioch, and spare him this kind of humiliation?

Or “Paul, don't air the Church's dirty laundry in public!”

But Paul's reaction was justified because Peter's sin had been a public scandal, & its correction had to be just as public, to reverse its effect.

Otherwise, his sinful conduct would have become the accepted norm/standard in the church as a whole.

Jesus has commanded churches to publicly discipline Xns who persist in their sin, in spite of appeals from fellow Xns for them to repent.

And church leaders aren't exempt from that, when they sin.

In 1 Tim 5:19-20, Paul wrote this to Pastor Timothy=>

“*Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. / Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.*”

The other hypocrites in Antioch must have become fearful, due to Peter's public rebuke, & Xn leaders still today are to serve as such object lessons for that same purpose, when their sin becomes public.

They too are to be publicly rebuked, so the rest of the congregation will fear to emulate their sin.

Paul rebuked Peter for not having been “straightforward.”

This word meant that Peter had not pursued a straight course of conduct in accordance with the truth that he understood.

His hypocritical behavior had undermined the principle that people are saved entirely by grace through faith, implying that something more than that was required for justification.

Paul said to Peter in essence, “Though you are a Jew, you felt free (& rightly so) to ignore the Jewish traditions, and to eat with Gentiles when you first came here to Antioch. You did the right thing, because those obsolete traditions now serve only to divide believers.

“So how can you now impose those same traditions you ignored on Gentiles, compelling them to live like Jews?”

Peter's conduct had appeared to sanction the Judaizers' views, which the Jerusalem Council had just repudiated/condemned.

It suggested that ceremonial Law was still viable/important to salvation;

So important, in fact, that Gentiles who ignored it should be excluded from fellowship with Jewish Xns.

Peter's sin would have given Jewish legalism a toehold in Xnity if it had gone uncorrected.

When Paul publicly confronted Peter, he wasn't being an impolite/hot-headed exhibitionist;

He was once again fighting for the principle of justification by God's grace alone, through faith in X alone, apart from any works of righteousness on man's part.

If Paul hadn't confronted Peter, the pure truth of the gospel of grace would have been compromised, and ultimately might have disappeared altogether.

This is a battle believers will always have to fight, because the natural tendency of man's pride will always be to add our own good works, to a gospel based solely on God's grace.

Putting this differently, man will always be a legalist at heart.

We don't think we are, and we don't even like the notion of legalism/legalists, but we're all legalists at heart, whose 1st instinct is to prove ourselves morally/spiritually, and prove to God that we can meet His standards in our own strength, by our own moral efforts.

That's the essence of being a legalist.

Religious legalism leads to hypocritical spiritual pride, that is very judgmental, that despises anyone who seems less moral/spiritual than ourselves, esp. those who aren't trying to be as righteous as we are.

One area in which that kind of legalistic hypocrisy does the most damage, is our fellowship with one another.

So in Rom 12, Paul wrote=> “*Let love be without hypocrisy.*

Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. / Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor” (Rom 12:9-10).

When we pretend to love one another, but inwardly we're looking down on one another, we too become legalistic religious hypocrites—just like Peter.

Ironically, Peter himself provided the solution, having learned his lesson the hard way, as Paul had publicly confronted him.

In I Pet 2:1-2, he would later write, “*Putting aside all malice & all guile & hypocrisy & envy & all slander, / like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*”

So the way to deal with proud religious hypocrisy within ourselves, is to grow out of it spiritually=>

* Putting it away, along with the inward malice, guile, and envy that often hide behind our hypocrisy;

That means we need the H.S. to reveal these
sins to us and convict of their sinfulness,
so we can confess/repent-of them.

* Then filling the resulting void with a longing for
God's pure Word in our hearts.