

4th Sunday after Pentecost

June 20th, 2010

NIV Galatians 2:11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, 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 could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we trust you because of your proven love to us. Please confront us with our two faced lack of integrity as your forgiven family. By your Word of law crush our cowardly stubborn hearts and by your Word of forgiveness inspire us to rally around your cross, fighting for your Kingdom!

Introduction: The word *Integrity* comes from the Latin word *integer* meaning whole or complete. Think of a whole number as an integer or a school in LA as being integrated – whole complete with all races of the whole community. Psychologists view integrity: as the ability to act according to ones values consistently. Last week we focused our sights on the different values we have as believers in Christ from the values the world has without Christ. Today we look at the problem we have with Christian integrity – living consistently according to those values. *"In looking for people to hire, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if they don't have the first, the other two will kill you."* – Warren Buffett. *"You can out-distance that which is running after you, but not what is running inside you."* – Rwandan Proverb. The world understands the problem with a lack of integrity and the only thing at stake is life on earth. How much more than is a lack of Christian integrity for at stake are human souls lost in insecurity and hopelessness? May the Lord bless us all with a purified heart and mind, eliminating our insecurities and instilling in us a firm conviction to live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself up for us all.

Theme & Parts: Disconnect from the present evil age –

Live with Christian Integrity!

Fight against faithless fear. Fight for faith in Christ.

1) Fight against faithless fear

"Integrity is doing the right thing, even if nobody is watching." – Anonymous

But what if everyone is watching? Then what do we do? Paul relates the story of Peter's lack of courage to live his convictions – his values. The congregation of believers in Antioch was mostly Gentiles. This family of believers are the ones that commissioned and sent out Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel to other gentiles around the Mediterranean Sea. In steps Peter from the family of believers in Jerusalem, this would be mostly Jewish believers. The Christians in Jerusalem still followed some of the OT ceremonies like refraining from eating certain foods, like pork and also continuing to follow the rite of circumcision as their fathers and grandfathers did before them. The apostle James and the others at a special convention of the churches asked that everyone be sensitive to the Jewish Christians around the world in this time of transition for Jewish believers. While James also stated clearly that "through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, just as the Gentiles are (Acts 15:11)."

So what Peter and the apostles said was Gentiles and Jews are members of God's family the same way by the grace of God in Christ Jesus life, death and resurrection, not by ceremonies or any or kind of food observances. So Peter doesn't follow the ceremonial laws of the OT when he is there in Antioch with non-Jews. He eats with them and doesn't observe the washing of hands – maybe he even ate pork. But when some Jews came from Jerusalem to the congregation then Peter changed his tune. He refrained from sitting and eating with Gentiles and he began observing OT ceremonies.

We might be quick to say that everyone is free to eat or sit wherever they want but in this case his actions were leading others to think that we too should be following ceremonial laws to be God's people. Peter's words and actions were not consistent and even more they led Barnabas and others to believe the same thing.

Peter knew the truth – that it can't be both. He knew and believed that God's family is made by the grace of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Acts 10, we are given the account of Peter's vision from the Lord to take and eat from a picnic of formerly unclean animals in the OT ceremonial law. It took a few times but Peter learned the lesson – eating certain foods or abstaining from others doesn't make you any worse or better in God's eyes. Then in Acts:11 we are told that Peter received some criticism for eating and worshipping with Gentile Christians – the story of Cornelius. At that time he stood strong in his conviction that we are all the same sinners and all the same forgiven saints by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Sons.

This time was different for Peter. This time we are told he separated himself from the Gentiles. Why? Paul tells us why? He was afraid. Peter had a weakness. He had a cowardly stubborn heart. Peter we could say was insecure. He didn't feel safe and secure. We remember another time when he didn't feel safe and secure in the courtyard on the night of Jesus trial before the Jewish leaders. His insecurity led him to deny the one he believes to be the Savior of the World.

Insecurity we could say is the opposite of trusting in the Lord. We know and believe that our sins are forgiven and heaven is open to us. We know and believe that the answer to this world's problems and sins is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The world lives in a constant state of insecurity. Yet how many times do we let our cowardly stubborn heart and mind convince us to keep quiet about Jesus Christ? We don't want to be criticized, labeled as a "Bible banger", lose a friend, lose business contacts and lose a job. What is there to be afraid of? We are secure in the hands of our Lord. He sacrificed his son for us. What more can he do than he already has done? All of us live with fear –the fear of failure the fear of being looked down upon. But Jesus Christ says otherwise. His love is stronger than our faithlessness. His plan cannot be stopped by our cowardice. His forgiveness overcomes our faithless fear. Remember the powerful love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember his determination to save us in His march to the cross, to the tomb and out again on Easter. Fight against faithless fear with the Law and Gospel.

2) Fight for faith in Christ

People have a hard time committing to things. I am the first one to admit I have a hard time committing. I have so many things going on from church, to wife, to kids to church softball, that even if I want to say, "Yes, we'll be there." I know that I can't commit until I check with Heidi's calendar, Nathanael's schedule and Anna's schedule. So what I end up doing is being wishy washy. I want to come, sounds like fun. Now when it comes to a 4th of July party or a meeting it's not that big of a deal to be non-committal and ride the fence, but when it comes to being a Christian it is either yes or no, not maybe.

When we confess the apostle's creed, Nicene Creed, we don't say that we believe about God the Father, or believe about Jesus Christ, God's Son or believe about God, the Holy Spirit. It is interesting that we call ourselves Christians and not Jesusers. You cannot say you are a Christian with speaking about what Jesus Christ has done. The name Christ brings out the mission of God's Son. People who omit Christ, yet say they are Christians are actually saying a lot about nothing.

Many people believe something about Jesus. They may go to church regularly. They may even say that what the church confesses about Jesus is true. They may also believe that what the scriptures say about Jesus are true that he healed the sick, stopped storms and raised the dead. But believing something about Jesus is not the same as believing In Jesus Christ. This is a statement of knowledge but more than just knowledge it is a statement of conviction, of commitment.

You confess I believe in Jesus Christ, and then you are telling people that you place all your eggs into the Jesus Christ basic. You are confessing that you are all in. All problems all trouble, all setbacks, even death itself, you confess you trust in Jesus Christ. In short we say Jesus is our life. Our life is so closely connected to his and relies on him so much that he actually is living in us by faith.

Paul tells the Galatians to convince them of the greatness of the gospel of Jesus Christ that if you say you are all in with Jesus Christ by faith then,

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Lord forgive us for attempting to ride the fence between believing in Jesus Christ and believing in the values of the world. There is no middle way or middle ground either you believe in Christ Jesus or you are an unbeliever. All of us need to copy the prayer of the man whom Jesus helped: "I do believe help me overcome my unbelief. At times all of us talk, act and feel two-faced hypocrites just like Peter. Thank God he has given to us a Christian pastor, Christian family, and Christian friends in a Christian congregation to confront us with our sins of faithless fear, insecurity and hypocrisy. May we listen to the words of our fellow believers when they confront us with the truth of our sins. May we be strong in our commitment to Jesus Christ that we might open our mouth and be ready to speak the truth in love and minimize the missed opportunities to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.