

This letter was recently posted on facebook.

Dear Fear-Of-What-Others-Think:

I am sick of you, and it's time we broke up. I know we've broken up and gotten back together many times, but seriously, Fear-Of-What-Others-Think, this is it. We're breaking up.

I'm tired of overthinking my status updates on Facebook, trying to sound more clever, funny, and important. I'm sick of feeling anxious about what I say or do in public, especially around people I don't know that well, all in the hope that they'll like me, accept me, praise me. I run around all day feeling like a Golden Retriever with a full bladder: Like me! Like me! Like me!

Because of you, I go through my day with a cloud of shame hanging over my head, and I never stop acting. The spotlight's always on, and I'm center stage, and I'd better keep dancing, posturing, mugging, or else the spotlight will move, and I'll dissolve into a little, meaningless puddle on the ground, just like that witch in The Wizard of Oz. I can never live up to the expectations of my imaginary audience, the one that lives only in my head but whose collective voice is louder than any other voice in the universe.

And all of this is especially evil because if I really stop and think about it, and let things go quiet and listen patiently for the voice of the God who made me and the Savior who died for me, in his eyes, it turns out I'm actually—profoundly—precious, lovable, worthy, valuable, and even just a little ghetto-fabulous. When I find my true identity in Christ, then you turn back into the tiny, yapping little dog that you are.

So eat it, Fear-Of-What-Others-Think. You and I are done. And no, I'm not interested in "talking it through." I'm running, jumping, laughing you out of my life, once and for all. Or at least, that's what I really, really want, God help me.

Have you ever wished... that you could be done... once and for all... with “fear-of-what-others-think”...?

Normally I don't title my sermons... until after they have been preached... and they go up on the internet for broadcast... But this one... I think will be titled “Once Fear Takes Over.”

Have you done anything... TODAY... where you primarily acted from fear of what others might think...? ... Does anything readily come to mind... of your behavior being influenced by fear... this past week...? ... Do you ever make choices that are fear-based... which your Biblical convictions would never lead you to make...?

This morning... our passage in Galatians deals with this very matter. ... The Apostle Paul confronted the Apostle Peter... very harshly... for being led into an action because of fear... that Peter's Biblical convictions would never have him do. ... I would like for us to investigate the manner by which Paul handles this confrontation... and whether Paul seems justified to act so abrasively ... and then... also... to look for some insight... as to how we can prevent fear from taking over... in our own lives.

Paul had been risking his life... to carry the Gospel of God's grace to the Galatian regions and beyond... He was not willing for any person... no matter who they were... to rob his churches of their liberty in Christ. ... We will see a "spiritual vigilance" that leads Paul... into a dramatic encounter his fellow Apostle – Peter... and his fellow missionary partner – Barnabas... and some of his friends... at his home church in Antioch.

As we get ready to turn to our main passage of study in Galatians chapter 2... let me remind you of a verse that I cited last week from the Bible book of James...

James 3:17 (ESV)

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

What do you suppose “**First** pure... **then** peaceable”... followed by all these other qualities... means...? ... Why is the word... “first” used... and after it... the word “then” is used? ... Does it make a difference to include them... instead of simply writing, “Wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle”, and so forth...? (ANSWER) – Yes! Because they are being ranked, here. One of the mentioned qualities is **primary** over the others. ... It has the designation of “first”... followed by all the others as secondary... because they have the designation of “then.”

So... Wisdom from above... is **not**... a peace at all cost! The most immediate sense of peace... is not given as the primary consideration for whether or not an action can be seen as “wisdom from above.” . . .

Something else is... . . . **Purity** is the primary concern. And if purity is the primary concern... then in order for a concept or action to be accepted as wisdom from above... it must pass the acid test of God’s clear revelation... . . . For us... that means Scripture. . . Not an implication of Scripture... not a debatable or obscure principle... something that is clearly (in other words... explicitly...) taught in Scripture.

So... in our evaluation of Paul’s action here... lets consider if he operated with wisdom from above.

Galatians 2:11-14

Peter's actions were very wrong... and Paul... just as much of an apostle... and having the right to speak with authority... had to confront Peter. ... The event involved an emotional... face-to-face showdown. ... Peter was caught in a glaring inconsistency... that might have gone tragically unresolved... if not for Paul's boldness. ... Paul was focused on the purity of the gospel truth. ... If Paul had thought that the primary mark of wisdom from above was "peace" and "gentleness"... he might have allowed Peter's actions to go unrebuked... and the Christian church would have a skewed understanding of the Gospel... At the very least... it would be divided into two distinct groups... and gone off their separate ways.

But isn't it interesting that in the verses right before today's passage... which we studied last week... James and Peter had publically affirmed that they were in total agreement with Paul's gospel message that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile... that a person did not have to become a Jew before they could be saved.

How could such a conflict occur between Paul and Peter after they had reached an agreement to support one another? Some early church leaders (Origen, Chrysostom and Jerome) could not believe that this conflict really occurred. They explained that Paul and Peter must have staged the conflict to illustrate the issues at stake. Augustine, however, interpreted the story as a genuine conflict in which Paul established the higher claim of the truth of the gospel over the rank and office of Peter.

Augustine was right. Paul was willing to endure the pain of conflict with Peter in order to defend the purity of the gospel.

Galatians 2:11

Paul was a courageous man to confront Peter. I say this for two reasons.... **First**, would be the solitariness of Paul. Paul stood alone. ... Even his closest companion... Barnabas... had gone over to Peter's position... So Paul had to face up to Peter... by himself. ... It is not easy to stand alone in your convictions. ... But if you are right, you may often have to stand alone. "Right" does not always take company with the majority. Numerical might does not make right. ... My **second**, observation about Paul's courage here... is the recognition of Paul's current subordinate status... UNDER Peter... at the time of this confrontation. When this event occurred... Peter was much more revered than Paul. ... Later... of course... Paul became the most revered of all the apostles. ... But at **this** time... Paul would be considered much lower in rank than Peter. ... So what I am saying is... to confront the highly revered Peter... required much courage and pluck. ... But when you base your convictions upon the revealed Word of God... you will have courage to do right.

The language that describes this confrontation by Paul indicates that the altercation was **not** a light tap on the shoulder... or a whispered suggestion in the ear. ... Rather... this was a very strong rebuke. ... It would be too strong for many church attenders today... and for many in our culture... who think that any kind of punishment needs to be mild... or even forbidden. ... Such attitudes that believe wisdom from above is first

peaceable and gentle... allow evil to grow and rule in society... in the church... at the workplace... in government... and in the home.

But notice how Paul went to Peter - personally. ... He did not whisper behind people's backs. Paul came face-to-face with Peter. ... Paul had character... he was not two-faced. ... He did not talk sweet to Peter when he was with Peter... then nasty about him... when Peter was not in his company.

Notice... also... that Paul did not go to the other leaders... nor did he write letters to the churches telling them not to follow Peter's example. ... Instead... he opposed Peter face to face.

Sometimes sincere Christians... even Christian leaders... make mistakes. And it may take other sincere Christians to get them back on track. ...If you are convinced that someone is doing harm to himself/herself or the church... always use the direct approach. ... There is no place for backstabbing in the body of Christ. ...But let me assure you... it will take the courage of Paul... when you do so.

Now... verse 12 brings in some details to this conflict... that can be very disturbing. In fact... what is introduced here... has made this a very troublesome passage for me... for years. ... I have had conflict with this conflict. ... Until recently... the opening phrase of verse 12 has presented a very uncomfortable problem for me.

Galatians 2:12

My discomfort with this verse is... “Why would James send men to stir such trouble... and spread heresy... a false gospel...” James was a pillar in the

Jerusalem church...? Why does he believe in such heresy... and why does he try to disrupt Paul's ministry...? ... Was James the worse kind of hypocrite... who we saw in last week's passage... the verses just before... where we began today's passage... that he publically affirmed that Paul's message and his message were one and the same...? ... Why would James take such a strong stand with Paul on the message that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile... and then turn right around... just a short time later... and cause so much trouble for Paul by advocating the exact opposite...? Was James such a hypocrite... and even worse... a heretic who proclaimed a false gospel...?

For years... that had been my uncomfortable conclusion. ... But this is the **same** James who gave us the book of the Bible that bears his name. ... How can a heretic write something that is considered Scripture...? Is he a flip-flopping personality... where he believes with Paul and affirms his message one week... then disagrees with him the next week and tries to drown him out with heresy... but then comes back to truth and writes a book of the Bible...? ... Do you see why this verse in Galatians has made me so uncomfortable over the years...?

Now let me tell you... what I have happily discovered... only within the last year or so... ... There are actually two different ways of resolving this problem. Here is the first possible solution.

The wording of verse 12... means they came "from James's group," ... not that James had sent them. That is... these men came from the Jerusalem church... where James was the leader. ... James had a vast range of people to deal with... no doubt there would have many... who had a difficult

time recognizing that their personal identity... their Jewishness was no longer necessary. That would be hard to let go of... after generations of grandfathers stressing to you how important it is. ... And in last week's passage we saw that they **did**... indeed exist in the Jerusalem church... We saw how they secretly came into the private meeting Paul had with James... and Peter... and John... and tried to force their falsehoods onto the gospel. ... But Paul... Barnabas... Peter... John... and **James**... all rejected their heresy. ... Well now... here they are again... this time up in Antioch... trying to do the same thing. They are from James's group – the vast church at Jerusalem... which included a group of legalists known as “the circumcision party”. ...

Here is some Biblical support for this way of looking at it. ... In the book of Acts... we read that James helped write a letter... that acknowledges certain men came from Jerusalem to trouble and upset Paul's teaching... and then James denies ever sending those heretics.

Acts 15:24 (ESV)

Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,

James did not tell them to go there... and James did not tell them to teach their disruptive heresy. ... That is one way that I could resolve my discomfort. But the second way... I think is even better.

*The circumcision group **may** be another way of referring to those who came from James — as the first solution that I proposed believes.... But why would Peter fear a delegation... of Jewish Christians... from the Jerusalem church... since he himself was a recognized "pillar" of that*

church... by everyone who was a part of it... including the legalists.
Furthermore... Peter had already stood up against extremist factions in that church (see Acts 11:1-18; 15:7-11; Gal 2:9)?

I have always assumed... without good enough reason... that the two designations... #1 - "*certain men*" (that) "*came from James*"... and designation #2 - "*the circumcision party*," (which caused great fear inside of Peter...) ... I had assumed that these **were** the **same** group of people. ... It has only recently occurred to me that... in all likelihood... they were **not**. ... The men from James... and the circumcision party could very well be... and in my opinion... ARE... **two** separate groups. ... The men who came from James... came from Jerusalem... and gave a report about what the circumcision party... violent non-Christian Jewish zealots... back in Jerusalem... were doing... and that is what made Peter take fear-based actions.

But still we have to ask... why Peter would fear non-Christian Jews... when he had been so fearless... in his own proclamation of the gospel to them. Over and over again in the Book of Acts... we see Peter fearlessly stand up to them (Acts 2:14-41; 3:17-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32)... Why would he suddenly cave to them now...?

I think that I may have an answer... but I must confess that my answer is based on historical information. ... This possible answer lays outside of any text of Scripture... and it involves some speculation.

History affirms that during the late forties and fifties... of the first Century... Jewish Christians in Judea were facing bitter antagonism from Zealot-minded Jews for socializing with Gentiles. ... The fierce Jewish

nationalism... widespread in Palestine at that time... led to harsh treatment of any Jew who associated with Gentiles. ... It is likely that the delegation from James simply reported to Peter... that his open and unrestricted association with Gentiles in Antioch... would cause (or had already caused) the church in Jerusalem... to suffer greatly... at the hands of *the circumcision group*.. the term Paul used here for these Jewish nationalists. It may NOT have been Peter's own safety that he was trying to protect. Fear may have gripped his heart... because his going to Antioch... and socializing with gentiles... may have set off another one of these horrific waves of persecution against Christians... that we do know... was happening in Jerusalem.

Now here is something else... to stop and think about ! ... When non-Christian Jews in Jerusalem... heard that Peter... who they all knew was a prominent church leader... was eating with Gentiles up in Antioch... they would not only turn away... and be repulsed by Christianity... (leaving no possibility for them to witness to them any longer...) but they would have likely... also become actively hostile toward the church... for tolerating such a practice. ... Confronted by these practical concerns for the safety of his home church friends... and its ability to witness to these zealous Jews... Peter acted against what he knew to be true... (that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile...) and he separated himself from the Gentiles.

The verb tense of the original language indicates that this was not one occasion but a repeated pattern, meaning that Peter joined with the other Jews in eating with their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ on a regular basis. To "eat with the Gentiles" meant to accept them, to put Jews and Gentiles on the same level as one family in Christ.

Undoubtedly his presence at table fellowship with Gentile Christians was taken as an official stamp of approval on the union and equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church. We can imagine that the Gentile believers in the church were especially encouraged by Peter's wholehearted acceptance of them. ... Then... abruptly... one day... Peter's fear gave way to the exact opposite message. ... We can only imagine how hurtful it was. No matter what motivation Peter may have had for doing this... it would have made the Gentile Christians now feel like second-class Christians in the church.

Galatians 2:13

All the Jewish believers in Antioch were submissive to this great Apostle's authority... and followed Peter's example. ... As a result the church was split into racial factions... Jews were divided from Gentiles. ... It is important to note that Paul accuses Peter and the rest of the Jewish believers in Antioch of hypocrisy... not heresy. ... *the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically* (v.13). ... No one had changed their beliefs. ... But their action was inconsistent with their own convictions... about the truth of the gospel.

It was bad enough for Peter to do what he did... but it was made worse by the fact of his influence. ... He even influenced Barnabas to act in this unseemly manner. When you backslide... you always take others with you... and it always seems... that we more easily influence people to do evil... than to do good.

Every Christian is a leader, at least to some degree. People are watching us and many of them will make decisions based on what they see in our

lives. The Jews and even Barnabas followed Peter's lead. When we compromise, it influences others.

The irrationality of Peter's influence is expressed in the verb Paul uses to describe the defection of Barnabas: *even Barnabas was led astray* (v. 13). Painful disappointment is expressed by that phrase... "even Barnabas." ...It is like Julius Caesar's cry when he discovered that his closest friend helped put the knife's in his back... "Et tu, Brutus?" ... Paul would have expected that **Barnabas** would remain loyal to him... and his gospel... even if everyone else turned away. ... After all... Barnabas... as the first pastor of the church in Antioch... had warmly welcomed Gentile believers. ...He had worked alongside Paul in that church... and in their mission of planting Gentile churches in Galatia. ... He had stood with Paul in the Jerusalem conference. ... How could even loyal Barnabas... behave in such a manner that denied the truth of the gospel? ... Didn't he... of all people... know that Gentile believers were to be fully accepted? ... Yes, he must have known that. ... But the emotions... stirred up in the crisis... swept him along to act contrary to his convictions. ... And so along with the rest of the Jewish Christians he was guilty of hypocrisy... behavior inconsistent with basic beliefs.

It is sometimes frightening to see how otherwise sane and sensible people can be swept away by emotions... in the midst of a church crisis. ... In the heat of the conflict they lose all sense of perspective and proportion. Behaviors in every way will deny their belief of what Romans 8:28 says

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

We should never underestimate the emotional power of our fears. ... We should not be surprised that the Jewish Christians in Antioch... acted out of fear... and didn't even consider the welfare of the church. Throughout the history of the church, conflicts and divisions have occurred because Christians have been more deeply influenced by their fear of the "what if"... Protection against those "what-ifs" from ever becoming reality... becomes more important than convictions from God's word.

"Treat others as more important than yourself" – But WHAT-IF I get taken advantage of... WHAT-IF I get walked all over... and lose everything.

Romans 15:7 – "Receive others as Christ has received you..." ... well... He received me completely by grace... even though I have deeply offended Him... and that means I need to forgive my family member... or friend... who did something so terrible to me... and receive them by grace. WHAT-IF they get off the hook and never learn how much they hurt me...? WHAT-IF they never receive proper justice...? WHAT-IF I get hurt by them again... and again...?

Galatians 2:14

Paul had the spiritual discernment to rise above the emotional trauma of the crisis: he saw the terrible consequences of Peter's action. Proper motive or not... even if Peter was trying to protect fellow Christians back in Jerusalem... or enable further witness to Jews... Peter had contradicted the gospel. ... The gospel proclaimed that salvation for both Jews and Gentiles was by way of the cross of Christ and union with Christ. ...But Peter's separation from table fellowship with Gentile Christians implied that

salvation for Gentiles required strict adherence to the law... and incorporation into the Jewish nation. ... No doubt Peter would have denied that he intended to communicate this requirement to the Gentile believers. But how else could his action be interpreted? The Gentile believers could not help but conclude from Peter's withdrawal that they were lacking something... that they were unacceptable outcasts. ... If they wanted to enjoy fellowship with Peter and the mother church in Jerusalem... they would have to become Jews. ... Their experience of salvation would be incomplete... there was something more... it was for them to become Jews and observed the Jewish law. ... Gentile believers would have seen these implications of Peter's action even if Peter did not.

Since the consequences and implications of Peter's action were so destructive to the unity and spiritual integrity of the church, Paul had no choice but to confront Peter *in front of them all* to prove that his action was wrong. A public confrontation is not pleasant. It can easily degenerate into a no-win situation. Usually there is a loss of face for all concerned. For that reason it is natural to avoid public confrontation at all costs. But when a leader avoids public confrontation with one who is causing others to lose their faith in the completeness of God's grace expressed in the gospel of Christ, the cost is the loss of their experience of God's grace. Paul was not willing for the church of Antioch to suffer that terrible loss.

Paul led Peter back to his own deepest convictions by asking him a question: "*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?*" (v. Galatians 2:14). By his practice of eating with the Gentile believers when he came to Antioch, Peter had already demonstrated that even as a Jew he

had complete liberty to *live like a Gentile and not like a Jew*. In other words, Peter had already made it clear that his convictions permitted him to be free from Jewish food regulations. But now his separation from table fellowship with the Gentile believers forced Gentiles *to follow Jewish customs*. So while Peter, a Jew, had the freedom to live like Gentiles, his recent act of separation from Gentiles robbed them of their own freedom to live like Gentiles! They were being forced to live like Jews if they wanted to remain in the same church with the Jewish Christians.

If we feel that Paul was unnecessarily harsh or rude for rebuking Peter in public... we need to recall that the freedom of all Gentile Christians... and the whole future of the Gentile mission... was at stake. ... From a human perspective, such a precedent would have spelled the end of the Gentile church. Furthermore, if the division along racial lines had been allowed, the church would never have been able to exhibit a new humanity... unified by faith in Christ... which transcends the racial and social divisions in the world. The truth of the gospel would be negated by such division.

We have such a key concept found here in verse 14... “*Their conduct was not in step with the Gospel...*” Do you see what that implies? ... It implies that there is conduct — behavior... action... things you do — that are out of step with the truth of the gospel. ... Or to put it another way... the gospel governs not just our beliefs... but our actions. ... There is gospel **belief**... and there is gospel **action**.

The most important question we can ask about any habit or action or behavior that we have... would be... is it in step with the truth of the gospel? ... Does our action say true things about the gospel? ... Does it

reflect the gospel? Does it look like the kind of action that would flow from the gospel?

Allowing fear to overshadow our Biblical convictions... will always knock us out of step.

The fear of man is an awful force. Solomon said,

Proverbs 29:25 (ESV)

The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.

The greatness of our fear usually shows the weakness of our faith.

[PAUSE]

Let me say that again... please listen very carefully... The greatness of our fear usually shows the weakness of our faith. The fear of man is one of the greatest hindrances to serving God.

[PAUSE]

It is described in Proverbs 29:25 as a **snare**. ... A snare is an awful place. It is a place of **Detainment**. ... It grasps and holds its victims. ... It is a place of **Defeat** for the prey wears itself out trying to get free. ... Finally the snare becomes a place of **Death**.

Fear cripples the work of God.

It doesn't seem to matter what decisions we make... someone will criticize our choices. ... If we are handcuffed by a fear of people's criticisms... we will never accomplish anything. ... Such fear is nothing more than peer pressure. ... Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians made a bad decision when he felt that pressure... we will too. ... But God calls us to a fearless obedience of His will... as we live in the Spirit. ...What we need is courage... courage to live according to our faith... and its implications... rather than according to our emotions... fleeting passions... and fear of others.

So I conclude with two admonitions.

1. Believe the great gospel of Christ and do not fear what men can do to you.
2. Believe the great gospel of Christ and do not play the hypocrite. Hold to your biblical principles and be willing to suffer the consequences. There is great security and comfort in the gospel.

