

Sunday Evening 19th Feb - POPLAR BAPTIST CHURCH

Galatians 2:11-21 - 'Stay close!'

There is a phase that some teenagers can go through when they get extremely embarrassed by their parents and in fact by their whole family.

EXPAND

Now although this is a normal part of growing up it can be difficult for the family when someone who has been so close now decides to stand apart.

Fortunately teenagers eventually grow out of this stage - as someone once said - 'When I was 15 my parents were awful - however when I was 21 they had improved a great deal!'

In our reading today it was not a teenager who was standing aside from those they had previously stood with, but a grown man.

And not just any man - but a disciple of Jesus - one of the leaders - the Apostle Peter.

See vs 11-13.

Why was this so bad?

We'll look at vs 14 - NOT 'it was rude' - 'hurt people's feeling' - BUT 'not acting in line with the gospel'

What Peter did threatened the future of the Christian message -

A big issue - a real problem - requiring a swift and effective solution.

Book of Galatians - written for a very specific situation.

Paul a missionary - visits Galatia, a gentile, non-Jewish area - preaching the gospel = 'the good news' - tells them about Jesus = no matter who we are - no matter what we have done - brought into a relationship with God through Jesus - NOT through religion - NOT through family line - cultural group etc - ONLY through Jesus - all one in Christ.

BUT - some folk had followed Paul - and visited the churches in Galatia after he had left - 'thrown them into confusion'.

They said that Paul had got the gospel wrong - that the church leaders in Jerusalem - HQ - had decided that Gentile people who wanted to become Christians should accept certain Jewish practices - things from the Jewish law (such as circumcision + kosher diet) - if they really wanted to be part of God's people.

This had been very confusing to these young believers in Galatia - it suggested that faith in Jesus was not enough to bring us into a relationship with God - but we also had to do certain things ourselves - religious type things - following the Jewish law type things.

This upset Paul - he knew that the idea that there are things we can do to put ourselves right with God is the biggest lie from the biggest liar and so he wrote this letter to put matters straight and to save the Galatians from being led astray.

To prove how important it is to stick to the truth of the gospel he tells them about this incident with Peter - the disciple of Jesus.

Like Paul, Peter saw that there was no difference between the Jewish people and the Gentile people when it came to knowing God - both had to come through Jesus - and so the old things of the Jewish law which separated the Jews from the Gentiles could be left behind.

So when Peter came to Antioch (another mainly Gentile / non-Jewish area) he was happy to sit and eat with the Gentiles there - even eating Gentile, non-Jewish type food.

Until one day - some of those folk who had followed Paul around came to where Peter was staying. They had close connections with the mainly Jewish believers back in Jerusalem - and Peter began to get worried about what they might say about him amongst the folk back home. Would they say that he had completely forgotten his Jewish roots? That he was ignoring all of God's law?

Peter became embarrassed when he was with his non-Jewish Gentile friends, and rather than standing with them - he began to stand aside. Vs12 - other followed Peter's bad example! Vs 13

If this has been allowed to continue then one of two very sad things would have happened.

- 1) Gentile folk who came to faith in Jesus would have had to begin following Jewish laws. That old lie that we can do something to get ourselves right with God would be back in people's minds. OR
- 2) There would have been two strands of the Christian faith - one Jewish and one Gentile. A divided church right from the very beginning.

Paul's strong words to Peter show us that the gospel must determine the people that we most associate with. NOT culture - not family - not nationality - not class - not sports or business interests or hobbies but our faith in Jesus.

He emphasises how important this is by pointing out that if we move away from Christians it is usually because we have moved away from Christ - 'who loved us and gave Himself for us...'

So my title this morning is simply this:

Stay Close (If we move away from Christians it is usually because we have moved away from Christ!)

Look - if the disciple Peter could get this wrong then anyone can.

A serious problem - requiring a serious solution.

3 Things that Paul did to bring Peter back.

We have already noted the first -

1) He reprimanded Peter in public. Vs 11-14

If we begin to find that we are really not comfortable with Christians - embarrassed by them even - then something is going wrong. If hanging out with our business associates seems more important - or having a great

reputation in the sports club is getting higher up our list of priorities - then we too may need to be reprimanded.

We see another side of this 'cliquey' problem when churches are full of people who are all of a certain type - a certain national group - a certain social class. It suggests that what draws them together is not really the good news of Jesus but something else. Again such churches are heading for a rebuke!

It is good for us as believers to mix with Christians from other types of gospel churches - it is good for those who go off to Uni to try and get involved in a CU with students from different types of gospel churches. Also CU's in the work place - believers in a local area.

To do otherwise is to suggest that something apart from the gospel is controlling our choice of Fellowship.

Paul had to reprimand Peter because his nationality - his Jewish heritage and culture - was beginning to become too important to him so much so that he distanced himself from fellow Christians.

But as well as reprimanding Peter Paul did something else;

2) He reminded him of the truth vs 15-16

Look at how clear Paul is about the Christian message here ...

How many times does Paul use the word 'we' - talking about himself and Peter?

How many times does Paul talk about them being justified - which means that God says we are right with Him.

How many times does he say that we can't be justified by the law = what we do?

How many times does he explain that we can only be justified through faith in Jesus Christ?

NB Paul leaves nothing vague here about the Christian message - he repeats the truth over and over.

(Intellectual truth - 'we know' + The experience of faith 'we too, have come to put our faith..')

Because we can be like Peter and wander away from the truth we need these kinds of reminders ourselves -

I came across this quote recently:

'The gospel seems so foolish (according to my natural wisdom) - so scandalous (according to my conscience) and so incredible (according to my timid heart) that it is a daily battle to believe the full scope of it as I should. There is simply no other way to compete with the doubts of my mind, the fears of my heart and the lies of the world than to overwhelm such things with daily reminders of the truth'

Martin Luther said that because we are prone to wander from the truth of the gospel - to go back to 'the law' - to religious rules - believing that we can do something to put ourselves right with God - we need to 'beat the gospel into our heads continually'

One of the things that a gathering like this should do is a 'gentle beating'! Reminding us of the truth.

The patterns of the church help us - baptism and communion take us back to the gospel.

Our songs often do that - but also the way in which the Bible always leads us to Jesus is the greatest help.

One of the benefits of staying close to a local gospel church is that we get what Paul was giving to Peter - a reminded of the truth.

He needed it - and so do we.

So Paul reprimands Peter - he reminds him of the truth - and then he

3) **He re-turns him to Jesus** (*the one who loved us and gave Himself for us*) vs 17-21

When Peter got nervous, turned away from the Gentile Christians and back to the Jewish law, he was suggesting that the gospel had, for a while, led him astray - that Christ had promoted sin. But that could never be true. Vs 17-18

Peter would be making a big mistake if he tried to 'rebuild' a Jewish reputation again - by following the Jewish Law.

Rather it was the law that showed us our need of Jesus. Vs 19

So - with Peter - we need to continually return to the one who '*loved us and gave Himself for us*': anything else would suggest that Jesus had died for nothing! Vs 20-21

STAY CLOSE (Umbrella)