

## Galatians 2:11-14. Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> Sep 2024. God's Free Gospel... Denied. (Gal #3).

**PRAY, read v14. (Q&A afterwards)**

“One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”. Neil Armstrong walking on the moon, July 21<sup>st</sup> 1969. It was a small action- a small movement- to step off that spacecraft, but as his space boot touched down on the moon's surface it was a groundbreaking moment out of all proportion to the action itself.

This morning I want us to see that the smallest movement, the most insignificant action in the religious sphere can mark a grave departure from true Christianity out of all proportion to the action itself. And the shockingly, today we see that the culprit is **Peter**- one of Jesus' closest friends and apostles.

***Galatians has been teaching us that it is a lot easier than we think to depart from the true road of true Xty (marked “Jesus only”) towards what is a hopeless dead end (marked “Jesus plus”), and today's passage is no exception.***

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We've reached 2:11-14, and in today's section Paul is coming to the end of an autobiographical section that began at 1:11 with the statement:

**I would have you know brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.**

Last week we saw from Paul's travels- independent of the Jerusalem apostles that Paul's message was **designed by God**, and needed no helping hand from people.

We saw that in all Paul's dealings with the other authorised eyewitnesses of Christ there was absolute agreement about what the message of true Christianity is. And that's crucial- if the Jerusalem church was preaching **“Jesus Plus”**, then no longer was it a message of freedom- of free grace. But no- the apostles v9 gave Paul the right hand of fellowship and unity in their evangelisation of Europe- because they were all in agreement on a message which was **“Jesus only”**.

But if last weeks' passage was mainly **positive**, today's passage is mainly **negative**, because of all people, **Cephas**- that is the Jewish name for Peter- the Rock- had now very subtly made a move – a tiny move- away from the gospel.

So we are going to look at this passage under those 2 simple headings- **A small step, A giant leap**. And then we'll ask 2 questions of ourselves by way of application.

And I believe this passage is going to be really important to us to grasp more clearly the central message of Christianity, and then to make sure that we aren't denying it by our actions, because if Peter one of Jesus' closest friends can go astray, then so can we.

So without further delay. **A small step.**

## I) A SMALL STEP (verse 11-12)

You can imagine Peter in 49AD, tucking into his ham sandwich at the

Christ Church Antioch's bring and share lunch and in a quiet moment daydreaming about his life so far...

- Brought up as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, a local Jewish lad, never lived anywhere else.
- Then meeting and following this amazing man Jesus who
  - Walked his talk
  - Cared for the poor and outcast
  - Was hated by the authorities
  - Was crucified
  - And rose from the dead.
    - And Peter will never forget that day he ran to the tomb with John and saw it empty.
    - And then later on when he saw Jesus alive from the dead showing his hands and feet during his last days on earth.
- Then there was Pentecost- Peter preaching to thousands, and thousands becoming followers, empowered by the Spirit
- And then that dream "Kill and Eat"- all foods are clean now, and by implication there's no separation from Gentiles.
- And so now here he is on his travels, around the Roman Empire spreading the good news of freedom for anyone who knows they've failed, but who comes to Jesus for forgiveness as a gift.
- And he's met some amazing people, not least the church here in Antioch who have been so welcoming.

- People from Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds, who have all found peace and hope in Jesus.
- All mucking in together, eating together at the meal. No divisions, all one in Christ together rescued by his divine amnesty that forgives sins and makes a person new.
- But then the bomb drops.
- V12.
- Some of the Jerusalem boys come to town and Peter starts to act differently. These guys
  - They call themselves Christians,
  - They share all the signs,
  - They've been associated with James himself- Jesus' brother
  - But they say, you don't eat pork do you?
  - It's forbidden in the OT.
  - (even though Peter had himself had a vision from God saying kill and eat)
- And Peter now eats on the high table away from the Gentiles. He parks his tray over with them on the Jewish table.
- He only eats kosher.
- It's just a small step.
- No doubt they were very persuasive: "it's what we've always done, it's biblical, it's right",
- And Peter makes a small step in their direction.

And I'm afraid to say, that it all started because of that old enemy rearing its head again- **the fear of man (1v10)**. Peter started withdrawing and not eating amidst the Gentiles because he was worried what others thought.

Maybe he was fearful of a **fight** (Don't fight, don't cause a scene- it's so embarrassing, just go for the line of least resistance), maybe he was fearful **of losing the argument** (I'm just not sure enough of my position to be able to stand up and argue against these people), or maybe he was just fearful of being **the odd one out** (I don't want to be a weirdo out on the edge, I just want to belong). Well whatever it was Peter feared this circumcision group, and he withdrew.

It was just a small step. Just a tiny move, just a nod in their direction. He just didn't sit on the Gentiles table any more. Perhaps many people didn't notice.

"C'mon- it's not a big deal guys. It's just an eating arrangement, I'll catch up with you later, oh and I'm off bacon- you know, it's just a small food thing, I just want to be sympathetic to these Jerusalem guys, you know".

But Paul who was also there at the time saw it not as a small step but as a giant leap away from true Christianity.

## **2) A GIANT LEAP away from true Christianity**

Let's read **v11 and v14** again to see Paul's reaction to Peter's small step.

We must be grateful for Paul. He was not one to call a spade **a flat bladed implement for agitating topsoil**.

He saw this small step for what it was- a giant leap away from Christianity. It was a shocking thing, for three reasons.

**Firstly, this move was affecting others.** v13. even Barnabas was affected- one of the very lads who we saw last week in Jerusalem didn't need to be circumcised. Yet now he's corrupted. (It's worth remembering this isn't it? When we make a false move, especially if we are in leadership in the church in some way, we don't just take ourselves down, we usually take others down with us.)

**Secondly it was hypocritical, v14.** Paul said to Peter, "Come on Peter, all this time you've been tucking into your pork pies and bacon butties, you yourself haven't been living as a Jew- you've put those ritual parts of the law to one side now that they have been fulfilled in Christ. And yet you force Gentiles to live like Jews- that is hypocrisy".

**But thirdly and most importantly it was a denial of the gospel**

**v14.** It's not in step with the truth of the gospel. The gospel is a gospel of free grace. Whoever you are, whatever you have done, you can be forgiven when you turn to Jesus.

The gospel is Jesus only! Not Jesus plus. God sent his son into the world on a rescue mission to save us from our sins. He didn't have any sins of his own to pay for, so he was the only one who could pay for our sins. And he calls us to trust his works not ours!

I've heard the gospel spelt out in terms of ABC, and I hope this is helpful to anyone new to the faith.

**A) I admit Lord that I am a failure.** I'm a moral failure, I can't keep my own standards, let alone yours. I am a wilful rebel, and I can't stop, and I don't deserve anything from you. My life is a mess, and I need a rescue. My problem is not my education, my upbringing, my parents, it's ME! A – I admit.

**B) But I believe** that you came into this world to perform that rescue for failures like me. And your rescue was not a failure, your resurrection proves that you really did kill sin death and hell once and for all for all who trust in you. B- believe.

**C) So I now come** to you Jesus, and ask you into my life. I ask you to be in charge as my **LORD**- in charge of my work life, my sex life, my money life, my talents, my dreams my ambitions. And I want to depend on you to forgive me and clean me up as my **Saviour**. Help Lord, if you don't rescue me I haven't got a hope in Hell.

**C- I come to you.**

The gospel is ABC, Admit, Believe, Come. It's a gospel of REPENTANCE AND FAITH in Jesus Only!

It's ABC, it's not ABCL. It's not admit, believe, come to Jesus, and add a LAW. circumcision, food laws, Jewish laws. x,y,z. Even the laws in the Old Testament some of which were now fulfilled in Christ were not intended to rescue us.

It seemed such a small move for Peter to take his tray and go and park it in the non-Gentile area part of the canteen. But it was a giant step away from true Christianity, because it was setting up a false Christianity. Jesus, PLUS Jewish food Laws. Jesus plus circumcision. And that led to a divided Church.

Now for us, many of us grew up in good Bible teaching churches, we know that the gospel is about GRACE – undeserved kindness. We know our ABC. But could it be that subtle things that we do show that we have fallen for an ABCL gospel.

Jesus plus

- Good works
- the right kind of baptism
- a mandatory 2<sup>nd</sup> stage blessing
- reading your Bible every day.

We wouldn't think we are adding law to the gospel, but when subtly we can be creating a 2 tier Christianity. The Keen Christians and everyone else.

▲ When Rosa Parks, a 42 year old black woman on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1955 refused to give up her seat for a white man on a bus in Montgomery Alabama, she was wanting to say that blacks would not be bullied into a two tone society. When she was jailed the black community boycotted the buses for 381 days. There is no place for a two tone humanity, and there is no place for a 2 tone Christianity.

And Paul spotted it. A denial of the gospel.

Peter: "Oh it's just a small step".

Paul: "NO, it's a giant leap, and we must call a spade a spade".

~~▲ Some people love conflict don't they, but I guess the majority of us hate it. You may know that there is quite a rivalry between Norwich and Ipswich – 2 great towns in East Anglia. Well the company that makes "Monopoly" has regional boards for local towns and cities. Apparently they made one for Norwich where for the first time in the history of the game, instead of going to jail when you pick up an unlucky chance card, you go instead to a corner of the board marked Ipswich. Imagine the horror for a loyal Norwich dweller – go straight to Ipswich and don't pick up £200! "Get out of Ipswich free" Having said that, I think it's only a bit of a laugh, and actually even the inhabitants of Ipswich and Norwich are good natured, and don't like real conflict.~~

But sometimes, you do have to face conflict. And Paul called it out.

2 questions as we bring this home...

**1) Will we spot when the gospel is being denied?**

It would have been quite easy not to spot what was happening. Just a small step. How do you spot when the true gospel is being replaced with a fake one? Well perhaps a lesson from the world of counterfeit money will help.

▲ Apparently when they want to teach bank clerks how to spot a fake £50 note, they give their trainees a good long amount of time with a real £50. They become so familiar with the real one- it's watermark, its security features, its feel, it's appearance, that it just becomes so much easier to spot a fake.

And as we get to know the true gospel more and more (and keep coming back to hear it), we'll be able to spot what's really going on.

You see people are so nice. The Mormons from the church of the latter day saints, I met in Huntingdon High Street this week are so nice. They use the same language of Jesus and faith and heaven, and good news, and one of them had just read the book of Galatians.

But dig a little deeper, and they don't believe in the Trinity or that Jesus was uncreated. And while they believe that salvation comes through Jesus, they believe that for someone to have a more comfortable eternity, Christ's work must be assisted by their good works. And if there hadn't been anything wrong with Bible Christianity, they wouldn't be out there evangelising me.

There are other fake gospels which are more subtle than this. They can be **Jesus plus** that we've mentioned.

We have to be careful about how we advertise the rota. Now we'd love it if everyone could help with the tech or the kids work or the welcome or the coffee, as we said last Sunday at Partnership Sunday. But your acceptance with God isn't affected if you don't.

It's not Jesus plus serving at church, Jesus plus confirmation, Jesus plus communion. Communion (which we'll share next week) takes us back to remember the cross, it doesn't add to it.

I'm sad to say that many forms of Anglicanism, and most forms of Roman Catholicism so emphasise our works, that they can deny grace, and they need to be resisted.

**Jesus Plus.** Equally dangerous is **Jesus minus**

Jesus minus the bodily resurrection. Jesus minus the miracles. Jesus minus repentance- the need to turn from sin. Now this last one is subtle. Of course we're not saying that you have to be good enough to come to Jesus- Jesus is rescuing us from the ocean of sin.

But that's the point, are some activities holy, like sex outside marriage, or lying or love of money are they part of the ocean that Jesus is rescuing us from, or something that we can carry on with unrepentantly.

We don't want to be heresy hunters, who are suspicious that everyone in church is going off the rails, and we, but we do need to be discerning to spot when

1) Will we spot when the gospel is being denied?

2) **Will we speak when the gospel is being denied?**

It's hard to do. It takes guts. No-one likes conflict.

At the **lunch break at work**, it's so tempting to keep quiet when something comes up that we disagree with. And of course we don't want to be known for what we are against, but what we are for.

But there are times when we need to speak. I remember the looks of absolute horror at Christmas drinks back in my home village one year when I explained that I believed only those who trust in Jesus- Christians, go to heaven. My friends looked at me with utter belief. Everything went very quiet and very awkward. But that is what the gospel says. Faith in Jesus alone.

**In the wider church.**

It wasn't comfortable writing letters to the Bishop saying that we strongly opposed the direction the leadership of the CofE were taking over the prayers of love and faith and were in broken partnership and couldn't walk together.

Some would say, "you don't need to take part in any blessings that you don't agree with", but that's not the point, a message that edits out part of the gospel is not a message that we can go along with, and as you know we left the CofE in February this year.

Will we speak when the gospel is being denied? I hope that our exit from the CofE is not the end of campaigning for the CofE. It's one of the reasons for Renew conference tomorrow. (please pray for the Renew conference next 2 days- Nicola & Charlie speaking at a conference).

**(lunchbreak, wider church)**

**But tragically there may even be a time in lifegroup or in church**

When gently, and with great humility because we may have misunderstood, we need to speak up and question whether by their actions someone is subtly replacing the lifeboat of Jesus only with the shackles of Jesus plus.

That's why you need to pray for me and I for you, and keep one another accountable. And that's part of why we have a question time now.

**But let's pray first.**

**Let's pray.**