Peter: Living Like the People of God

PERSONAL CONFRONTATION

Wednesday, November 4

Reading: Galatians 1-2

> ***Galatians 2:11*** *When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.* ***12*** *For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.* ***13*** *The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.* ***14*** *When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "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?*

We are not told exactly when the events of Galatians 2 occurred, but it seems to me that Paul is talking about the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). This places the confrontation between Paul and Peter after the decision that Gentiles did not have to follow the Jewish rituals in order to be saved. Apparently, Peter was visiting Antioch and had open fellowship with the Gentile believers there. However, when some Jewish Christians arrived from Jerusalem, Peter separated himself and many of the other Jews followed his example - even Barnabas, Paul's lifelong missionary companion.

Paul saw this action for what it was - hypocrisy. By pulling away, Peter was in effect teaching that there WAS a difference between Jew and Gentile and that somehow the Jewish believers were better! He was acting the hypocrite by preaching that they were all one in Christ but denying this truth by his actions. This offended the Gentile believers and created a public scandal in the church.

Paul wouldn't have it! He "opposed [Peter] to his face, because he stood condemned." Paul's stinging words were meant to reprove Peter and bring him back to the right. By eating and fellowshipping with the Gentiles and then pulling away, Peter was inadvertently reversing the decision of the Jerusalem Council by saying that Gentiles had to act like Jews to be accepted. Peter did not believe this, but his fear of other's opinions made him fall into sin.

Paul's rebuke teaches us some important things about living for Christ. First, he says that we can never earn salvation. The Law shows us we are sinners. Christ justifies us from our sins when we put our faith in Him. When we try to earn points with God for salvation, we are really saying that His grace is not enough! Second, Paul teaches us that Christians have died to the Law so they might live for Christ. Our lives are not our own; they belong to Christ who loved us enough to die in our place. If we remember these things, then settling personal issues between Christians, though still difficult, will be easier.

LESSON ONE: Even seasoned believers can fail to apply God's Word to their lives. Peter believed the truth but denied it by his actions. Are there some truths of God's Word that you know and yet are not living? What steps might you take to live more in conformity to God's Word? How might others' opinions cause you to make a wrong choice?

LESSON TWO: Paul was not afraid to confront Peter for his hypocrisy. This truth was too important to just "let it slide." But he did not go behind Peter's back and gossip about it. Paul confronted Peter to his face. What are some issues in a friend's or family member's life that are just too important to let go? Pray for the Lord to give you the grace and the courage to lovingly confront them with God's Word to bring them back to the right.