

## **Galatians 5 – Confronting Hypocrisy** **Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC - 10-6-2024**

We are in a sermon series on the book of Galatians called Freedom Through Christ. We've seen that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to address false teaching that was deceiving the Galatian churches.

False teachers called Judaizers were teaching that in order to be saved, it is not enough to have faith in Jesus Christ; one must also obey the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas were not circumcising the Gentile converts and they based the churches they planted on the principle that salvation is by faith through grace, not by keeping the law of Moses.

So, they were constantly attacked by those who taught that you cannot be saved without keeping the Jewish law. This was such a contentious issue that it resulted in the first church council convened in Jerusalem to debate this very issue. This was the issue – law vs. grace.

The Jerusalem council decided that Christians are not under Jewish law. If people want to celebrate the Jewish feasts or follow the Old Testament dietary laws or worship on Saturday –that's great! But when it becomes a requirement of Christians - it results in putting people back under the Jewish ceremonial law. We must resist any attempt to put Christians back under that law.

The first church council in Jerusalem declared what was necessary to be a true Christian – faith in Christ – not keeping the law.

After this decision was made Acts 15:22-31 says:

***Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.***

***23 With them they sent the following letter:***

***The apostles and elders, your brothers,***

***To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.***

***24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

***27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing...***

***30 The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.***

Sometime after the joyful reception of this good news, Peter went to Antioch to visit the church there. Galatians 2:11-16 says:

***When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 12 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 Peter 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? 15 We who are Jews by birth and not so-called 'Gentile sinners' 16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ."***

I'm preaching today on Confronting Hypocrisy. **One of the things I love about the Bible is that it is very real and open about the lives of biblical people. It does not hide their sin or sugarcoat their weaknesses.** And this passage reveals the sinful hypocrisy of Peter.

**One of the main things you hear from unbelievers about why they are not in church is because of all the hypocrites in the church.** Well, it's true, there have been hypocrites in the church from the very beginning.

Paul confronted Peter about his hypocrisy in front of the others. **Normally, when someone wrongs us we go to them and confront them privately. But this offense had been seen by everyone and so it had to be dealt with publicly, especially since others had been led away by his hypocrisy.**

This demonstrates that it is a heavy responsibility to be a leader. When leaders go astray, others will often follow. Satan knew that if he could make Peter take the wrong path, then many others would follow him. And it's true today: the sins of teachers teach others to sin. So, they must be confronted, like Paul confronted Peter for hypocrisy.

But what exactly is a hypocrite? Many people today think that if a Christian ever sins or does anything wrong or un-Christ-like, then they are hypocrites. This is simply not true. A hypocrite is not a Christian who sins or does something unchristian. Otherwise, we would all be hypocrites because we all sin.

**The word hypocrite literally means an actor playing a role. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be someone they are not. A hypocrite engages in intentional deception. He puts on an appearance that is not true to who he really is.**

**Hypocrites are more concerned about the exterior than the interior – the**

**appearance rather than the heart – the way they look more than the way they really are. Hypocrites are more concerned about their image than anything else.**

That was true about Peter when he visited the church in Antioch. In Acts 10, Peter had a vision from God to take the gospel to the Gentiles – the non-Jews. He did so, and many were saved. In Acts 15, Peter was also in on the decision of church leaders to not require believers to submit to the law of Moses.

However, he kind of had one foot in grace and one foot in the law because of the Jews who still believed Christians had to observe the ceremonial laws of Moses. When the Jewish believers weren't around, he ate with Gentiles and he ate what they ate. But when the Jews were around, he had nothing to do with the Gentiles. He was acting like he did not eat with Gentiles, but in fact he did.

**So, Peter was guilty of hypocrisy because he acted one way when Jewish believers were around and another way when they weren't.**

This was the kind of behavior that dominated Peter's life before he was transformed by the power of God. Peter was sort of famous for vacillation. One moment he recognized Jesus as the Son of God and the next moment he rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to be crucified.

One moment he walks on water and the next moment he took his eyes off Jesus and sank.

One moment he said he would never deny Jesus and the next moment he denied Christ three times.

In Antioch, one moment Peter ate and fellowshiped with Gentile believers, but when Jewish believers from Jerusalem showed up he spurned the Gentiles.

We see that the flesh was still present in Peter. Salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not make Peter perfect. The old Peter was still there; he just wasn't seen as often.

So, when Jews from Jerusalem showed up, Peter knew they would be offended by his fellowship with Gentiles. So, out of fear of them, Peter turned his back on Gentiles in the church, and he treated them like they were not saved at all.

To make this real to us – that would be like me – a pastor who was given a vision for a multi-ethnic church – a pastor who fellowshiped with believers of all ethnicities – hearing that a group of white supremacists were coming to our church – and then all of a sudden – out of fear of offending them - I no longer fellowship with anyone who is not white. That would be hypocrisy and I would need to be confronted about that.

That's exactly what Paul did with Peter. Paul confronted this because he was concerned for the Gentile believers. He had taught them they were saved by faith in Christ, not by keeping the law.

He clearly said in Galatians 2:16 that **no one is justified by the law**. So Peter was giving them a confusing double message that had to stop.

Jesus addressed legalistic hypocrisy in Matthew 23:27-28

**27 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.**

**28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”**

This includes those who judge everyone else to cover up their own sin. Jesus also addressed hypocrites who cover up their sin in Matthew 7:3-5

**3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**

There are some people who are pretending, acting like the real thing when they are in fact not the real thing. This goes all the way back to the early days of the church.

In Acts 5, there is the story of a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira. At that time, people were voluntarily selling houses and land and giving the money to the apostles to meet the needs of the church. Ananias and Sapphira also sold a piece of property. They pretended to give all of the money to the apostles, but they kept back part of the money for themselves.

**3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?**

**4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.” 5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.**

Soon after this, the same thing happened to his wife. We see from these verses that hypocrisy is essentially lying. We also see that God takes it very seriously and there are consequences for hypocrisy – sometimes soon, sometimes later.

**There's another reason people believe there are hypocrites in the church. There is a basic misunderstanding about the nature of hypocrisy and the nature of the church.**

We must be careful to distinguish between the true universal church composed of all true born-again believers in Christ and those who may be members of a local church, but not truly born again.

**Just because someone is a member of a local church does not necessarily mean they are a true follower of Christ.** The true church is more like a hospital for the spiritually wounded than a museum of perfect saints. If the church claimed to be full of perfect people, then we would indeed be hypocritical. But the church makes no such claim.

I don't know any Christians who claim to be perfect. We all realize our sinfulness. That's why we came to Jesus to be forgiven and to ask for help to live a more holy, non-hypocritical life. In fact, **you cannot be a Christian unless you first admit your sin.** 1 John 1:8 and 10 say:

***8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.***

But most people outside of the church don't know this. They assume that a Christian claims to not sin. So if a Christian does sin, they accuse him of hypocrisy.

**It is important to know that sinning does not equal hypocrisy. All Christians are sinners, but not all Christians are hypocrites.**

We must remember that **many people who call themselves Christians are actually not.** A Christian is a sinner who has been forgiven by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. A hypocrite pretends to be a Christian but is usually something else. Maybe they're a:

**Cultural Christian** – who claims to be a Christian because most people in their culture are – I'm a Christian because I'm an American.

**Pseudo-Christian** - they have 'prayed a prayer and 'accepted' Jesus as their Savior but have never truly submitted to His lordship.

**Social Christian** - they attend a church because it's a 'good thing to do.' Like other so-called religious people, they follow a form of 'churchianity' rather than true 'Christianity.'

All of these groups (and there are more) show a Christian façade but are not truly born again by the Spirit of God. In the midst of suffering or persecution, their true colors will show.

The issue is not whether Christians fail ... they will! The issue is that they are forgiven (if they truly are born again) and in the process of becoming holy. The Bible teaches that no one will be without sin until this life is over. Total perfection does not come until we get to heaven.

**This brings us to the third reason people believe there are hypocrites in the church. It's just an excuse that keeps them from having to face the claims of Christ.**

Having agreed that, yes, unfortunately there are hypocrites in the church – nevertheless - the question still remains, "What will you do with the perfect, non-hypocritical Son of God?"

**The ultimate issue is Christ not Christians. When people judge Christianity by Christians rather than Christ, they will always find reasons not to believe.** And some of them are looking for reasons not to believe. What should we do about this?

1. We must admit that there has been hypocrisy in the Church
2. However, we should point out that just because the Church contains hypocrites does not mean that all Christians are hypocrites. With every example of hypocrisy that can be pointed to in the Church, a counter example can be pointed out showing people who are living consistently with the teaching of Christ.

In churches sinners gather to rejoice in the knowledge that in Jesus they have forgiveness and they encourage each other to serve Him more fully.

**Since the Christian Church was designed by God as a hospital for the spiritually sick, why should we be surprised to find spiritually sick people in it?**

3. We must continually point people to Christ.

We must tell the good news of salvation through His sacrifice. Christianity does not stand or fall on the way Christians have acted throughout history or are acting today. Christianity stands or falls on the person of Jesus, and Jesus was not a hypocrite. Since Christianity depends on Jesus, it is wrong to try to invalidate the faith by pointing to horrible things done in the name of Christianity.

**The non-believer cannot be excused from believing just because it is possible to point to hypocrites who pretend to be what they are not.** Someone once said, If all that is standing between you and God is a hypocrite – that means the hypocrite is closer to God than you are.

Listen, Christianity's history is not perfect. Some very bad things were done by hypocritical unbelievers claiming to be Christians. Other things were caused by Christians who made mistakes or who may have done some things they knew were wrong just as you and I admit we do. But the truth of the Christian message does not stand or fall on the way Christians have acted throughout

history or are acting today. The truths of Christianity must be distinguished from the people who believe them.

We judge the truths simply by whether there is sufficient evidence to believe them, and the failures of Christians to live up to those truths should not stand in the way of belief. We must also understand that not everything done in the name of Christ is Christian. **The real focus of questions about the truth of Christian faith is Jesus Christ Himself.**

But if Christians have failed in so many ways throughout history, what hope does Christianity offer to the world? We offer hope by asking for and giving forgiveness. Christianity is ultimately about forgiveness. We must acknowledge wrongs done in the name of Christ.

We must ask for forgiveness – as the Pope has done for the Inquisition and Southern Baptists have done for their stance on slavery during the Civil War and Lutherans have done for anti-Jewish statements made by Martin Luther.

What Christianity does offer as hope to the world is the truth that God sent Jesus to pay for our sins so that we can have forgiveness and a relationship with God.

Lastly, we must realize that hypocritical behavior does keep some people away from the church. We cannot excuse our sin or hypocrisy. We must make every effort to not live hypocritical lives ourselves. We must ask for forgiveness when we fail.

Again, Christianity does not stand or fall on the way Christians have acted throughout history or the way they are acting today. Christianity stands or falls on the person of Jesus Christ, so our job is to continually point people to Him and telling them:

**No matter how many times Christians have failed, Jesus never failed!**  
**No matter how many hypocrites are in the church, Jesus was never a hypocrite!**  
**No matter how much wrong has been done by people in the name of Christ, He has never done anything wrong!**  
**No matter how unloving people have been, Jesus always loves!**  
**No matter how unforgiving people have been, Jesus always forgives!**  
**Church people might have condemned you, but Jesus never condemns!**  
**Church people might have rejected you, but Jesus accepts you!**

I'm not asking you to accept Christians; I'm asking you to accept Jesus. It is to Him you will ultimately answer, not to Christians.