

I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

SERIES: FREEDOM FIGHTERS

By Steve Zeisler

One of the dramatic moments in the final episode of the television show *Survivor* was a blistering speech by the survivor Susan. She was explaining her vote to cast someone off the island. The decision had come down to “either a snake or a rat.” The snake was devious, selfish, and self-promoting, had been from the beginning, and had never pretended to be anything else. The rat, however, whom she could not abide, was a woman who had professed friendship but had lied. Highhanded, stiff-necked selfishness was one thing, but to Susan hypocrisy was much worse.

That speech resonates with what we observe in a great many other settings. We recoil from hypocrisy. Jesus in his ministry on earth made friends with violent Roman occupation soldiers, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers--outcasts of every kind. Those for whom he had the strongest words were hypocrites, religious folks who said one thing but lived another to the hurt of those under their authority.

Galatians 2:11-14 told the second of the two dramatic stories we looked at in the last message (Discovery Paper 4684). Peter came to Antioch and began to eat with the Gentiles, sharing the food they ate, eating in the manner in which they ate with no compunctions about dietary restrictions. Peter then withdrew from his Gentile friends in order to save himself the difficulty of questions and explanations among legalistic, immature believers back in Jerusalem. But Paul confronted him in public, calling him a hypocrite.

Verse 13 says, “The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.” One of the awful characteristics of hypocrisy is that it spreads like gangrene. It is both wicked and contagious.

Hypocrisy in a leader taints not only the person but also the message. Hypocrisy ultimately tears at people’s faith. One of the reasons that many US citizens have given up on the political process is that they see so much hypocrisy, they can’t imagine that anything in the process is worth attending to. It’s not just the hypocrites themselves, but the very things they stand for and proclaim that have become offensive.

That is what Paul was worried about in Antioch, and that is why he called for Peter to publicly put things right. Let’s return to Galatians 2:14, which is probably a direct quote from the actual event in Antioch. In the following verses Paul expands on the point, probably summarizing the teaching he gave on that occasion.

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?”

“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ [barbarians, or Gentiles having no sense of the Jewish way of life] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

“If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a

lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

From consecration to competition

Paul is charging Peter with hypocrisy in the following sense: “You were raised in the Jewish way of life, with all the refinements and sensibilities that have been derived from knowledge of the Old Testament. I was raised with the same. But we discovered in the gospel that our Jewish culture and history had done us absolutely no good. All we had and did had succeeded only in keeping us as distant from God as any Gentile idolater. When the Lord Jesus called us, we received him as our Savior, and the Gentiles have done exactly the same. There is no difference.”

Let’s consider the issues in Judaism that Paul is likely referring to here. There are three. Circumcision is the most frequently mentioned. It was a radical mark of devotion to God, of being set apart as a people for God. Dietary laws are another Jewish refinement, which was at stake in Peter’s hypocrisy. They concern what Jews could eat, in what setting, how they should eat it, what pot a certain food could be prepared in, which foods could be eaten with which other foods, and so on. Orthodox Jews to this day keep a kosher table. The third issue is holy days and how they should be observed.

In appropriate circumstances, circumcision, dietary laws, and holy days did rightly mark off the people of God from others. The story of Daniel (see Daniel 1) is an example. After the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, Daniel was taken into captivity in Babylon. The king of Babylon ordered that some members of the royal family and nobility be trained for his service. Among these bright young teenagers were Daniel and his three friends. They were all to be fed the best of the king’s foods, but Daniel and his friends requested permission to eat only vegetables and water. The Lord blessed them for their heroic and proper refusal to eat the food of the idolaters. There is a place we can draw a line and remain identifiable as different and true to God. But that was a very different situation from the one Paul describes here in Antioch.

You may remember the story of Eric Liddell, depicted in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. He refused to run on a Sunday in the Olympics. By doing so he was set apart; his allegiance to God was more important than victory.

I have a good friend in our congregation who has consistently refused over the years to work on Sunday, although almost everybody in his industry finds Sunday the best day of the week to do that kind of work. He refuses in order to remind himself that he belongs to God, and that he doesn’t have to obey the love of money that runs this valley.

All of these examples are exactly the right use of the kind of distinctions that are in play here. But what happens is this: We begin these distinctions for the right reasons, but over a stretch of time, they become a source of pride rather than expressions of devotion. An attitude grows: “Not only am I loyal to my Lord, but I’m better than you.” Ultimately we withdraw from and look down on others, and our style of living becomes a way of marking us as valuable, righteous, impressive, and distinguished from the rest. It happens to individuals, to churches, to communities. It happened to the Jews.

This is particularly true in the area of table fellowship, as it turns out. There’s something about having a meal with people that naturally lends itself to fine distinctions. You may have gone with some people to a restaurant where you didn’t know the rules. Perhaps you needed to order the wine in French, but your French was poor. Or you

needed unknown cultural sensibilities to decipher the menu. The rules seemed obvious to everybody else, but you felt like a barbarian or an untaught child.

I had a similar experience the first time I went backpacking. I went with people who had a lot of special equipment and supplies--small stoves, dried food, and so on. I appreciated their special knowledge but couldn't enter into it. I was a novice, treated with kind-hearted condescension.

Another time, I was staying with a family on a visit to Australia some years ago. They served a lovely breakfast of eggs, toast, and such, and also offered on the table something called Vegemite. It looked like axle grease and tasted worse as far as I was concerned. I asked them what it was, and they said, "Well, in America you give your children peanut butter. In this country Vegemite serves the same purpose." I thought, "These people can't really love their children! Why would you serve this stuff when that's what God made peanut butter for?" It's so easy to express disapproval or exclusion in the context of a shared meal. Pride and focus on rules keep our circle of experience very small.

Peter had become free to eat like a Gentile. Freedom opens up the world. There are beautiful discoveries to be made, remarkable people to meet. I still don't like Vegemite, but sushi was a delicious surprise. Peter enjoyed all that new food! "Why would you deny others the enjoyment of the freedom that the gospel gives you? You hypocrite!" challenged Paul.

Justification, the great transfer

Beginning in verse 15 we have a theology lesson, with focus on the word "justification." Justification always speaks of a transfer made in the past that has ongoing implications. Everyone who comes to Christ as an adult does so because they have some understanding of this transfer. They understand that they need a Savior, that they are carrying guilt that is properly theirs, and that somebody needs to act in order to free them of the burden of their guilt.

John Stott in his commentary on Galatians says very simply, "There are at least two things that we know for certain. The first is that God is righteous. The second is that we are not." (1) Crying out for help in the midst of that knowledge is what leads you to justification. Someone paid the penalty for the beauty you trampled on, the lies you told, the people you hurt, the twistedness of heart that has ruined so much. You could not free yourself. Coming to Christ is falling into the arms of the Savior who says, "Let me bear you. Let me wash you. Let me forgive you. Let me take you into the presence of my Father, now no longer your Judge but your Father as well."

When the transfer has been made, your old identity is left behind and your new identity begins. Paul says in 2:20, "The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God." Having been justified by faith, you now live by faith. This faith-life goes by the theological term "sanctification."

Our sorrows and tragedies all come ultimately from some effort to avoid the justifying work of Christ, to build a fragile coalition, to reduce the greatness we were made for and long for.

The world will often say that God's righteous standards, which we intuitively acknowledge, are much less stringent than they appear to be. If we just do our best, try hard, and are basically a good person, that's sufficient. Or if we measure ourselves against those who are more broke than we are, we judge ourselves good enough. When such efforts fail, we lie.

The gospel is beautiful and terrible. It is wonderful, holy, and filled with love. And it is an awful invasion in which the fragile coalition that we were trying to hold together starts breaking apart, and we find ourselves requiring that Someone save us and love us though we don't deserve to be loved.

In 2:16 we read, "A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Christ Jesus. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus...." Justification requires personal faith. You must believe something, embrace a truth, cease attempting to be made right by self-effort. If you are not a Christian, I urge you to go beyond theological curiosity, to follow the example of Peter and Paul and "put your faith in Christ Jesus."

What the Gospel is not

In verses 17 and 18 Paul argues with a theoretical antagonist. If justification comes as a free gift, don't moral problems immediately follow? When failure is openly admitted, doesn't that make Jesus actually a minister of sin, or this gospel a promotion of sin? Of course not! Honesty is not the enemy of righteousness.

Or doesn't free forgiveness lead to licentious living? Wouldn't it lead you to live full-tilt for yourself alone and do whatever you want, then periodically return to Jesus to be forgiven? Of course not! Paul calls out, "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. I'm changed, not just forgiven. I now live my life united with Christ, drawing on his love, and changed by his presence. Instead of being tied up in exterior behaviors, trying to look good, worrying about what others will think, I'm changed from the inside so that I *want* to do what's right."

Verse 18 mentions rebuilding what was once destroyed. This is a hard verse to interpret, but Paul is probably anticipating the final verse of this chapter: "If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" He's going back to his argument with Peter: What if, having believed the gospel and received Christ as your Savior, having changed and begun making your way in life with new freedom, you start acting like a hypocrite? Then what you're saying is that Jesus died for nothing! In rebuilding what was once destroyed, you're ridiculing the cross of Christ, trashing his sacrifice. The real issue for righteousness is not how we eat our meals, it's how we regard Jesus' death and resurrection.

The love that means everything

Note the depth of feeling in verse 20. We can imagine tears in Paul's eyes and a catch in his voice as he tells of what Jesus did for him: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Listen carefully. He doesn't say, "Who died on the cross for the sins of the world," or, "Who accomplished salvation for all who would believe." What Paul cannot abide is that someone would tarnish what matters more to him than life itself: "My Lord loved me enough to die. That's why he was on that cross, being ridiculed and spat upon and rejected, bleeding from his wounds, dying from a broken heart. He did it for *me*." These matters can be discussed as law and theology, but certainly at the heart is this announcement: "Somebody loved me enough to die for me. If I had been the only one in the world, he still would have died for me. He loved me! We can't trash his sacrifice. If observing the law can make us right, than Jesus was a fool to die. I will not let anyone call him a fool in the hour of his love for me." Paul's argument comes, as it often does in this letter, to a passionate point.

We don't deserve the love of Christ. We don't deserve justification by his sacrifice. We don't deserve union with a risen Lord who gives us life and changes us from the inside. But it is a glorious reality that he does love us. And that truth is ultimately what we're fighting for.

NOTES

1. John Stott. *The Message of Galatians*, © 1968, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois. P. 60.

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5th Message

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