

6. Protecting the Gospel of Grace

In our last four topics, we have seen that the Lord called Paul and Barnabas to take the Gospel of grace to the Gentiles. We have seen from their example how to help our children also learn to take the Gospel of grace to those to whom the Lord has called them. In our topic today, we are going to see how fear in the lives of strong Christian leaders can cause them to act out of fear instead of demonstrating the Gospel of grace in their daily lives. This will help us to understand why it is so important to help our physical and spiritual children see how easily it is even for strong Christians to waver in their lives and fail to practice the liberty that we have in Christ.

One day, Peter came to visit the Christians in the city of Antioch. The church in Antioch had many Gentiles as well as Jews. Both Jews and Gentiles were a part of the leadership team of the church at Antioch. As a result, this church provided an ideal example of how people of different cultures can function in unity when the Christians are yielding their lives to the Holy Spirit. We see in Galatians 2:11-12 that the visit of Peter to the church in Antioch suddenly caused some problems in that church. Those verses say, “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.” Here, we see that Peter suddenly became controlled by fear and his actions brought some division in the church at Antioch.

Here, we see that it became necessary for Paul to withstand Peter to the face. The word “withstand” means *to oppose or set against*. What Peter did was sin and so Paul opposed him. In Luke 17:3-5, we read, “‘Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.’ And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’” In this case, Peter had sinned against all of the Gentiles by his actions and so Paul rebuked him publicly. Paul did this because a very important principle that would affect the future unity of the church was involved.

Here, we see an important lesson that we want to help our children understand. There are times when it is necessary to be willing to rebuke another Christian in love in order to maintain the unity of the church. When Christ prayed for us in John 17:20-23, He said, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” Then, Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:3, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We want to help our children realize the importance of working to maintain the unity of the body of Christ.

We see what Peter had done because of fear. Peter had come to Antioch and began eating with the Gentiles. Peter felt free to do this, because God had shown him, in the vision that caused him to go to the house of Cornelius, that there was a great change from the previous pattern of the Jews

toward the Gentiles because of Christ. Acts 10:28-29 says, “Then he said to them, ‘You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?’” Here, we see that Peter had been shown by God that it was right for him to eat with the Gentiles. That was why he started eating with the Gentiles in Antioch.

One day, some other men arrived from Jerusalem that had come from James. This caused Peter to suddenly change what he was doing because of fear. He suddenly withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles and separated himself from them. Since the Lord had given Peter very clear instructions in the vision, Peter showed that he was driven by the fear of people instead of being led by the love of Christ. When leaders in any church become driven by the fear of people instead of being led by the love of Christ, their actions will quickly produce conflict. That was exactly what happened at Antioch and that is why Paul withstood Peter to the face.

However, we see that the actions of Peter had also affected other Jewish Christians. Galatians 2:13-14 says, “And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?’” Here, we see that all of the other Jews in the church at Antioch, including Barnabas, followed the example of Peter and stopped eating with the Gentiles. This could have easily led to the division of the church.

Here, we see how easy it is to cause divisions between Christians. Whenever a spiritual leader is driven by fear instead of being led by the love of Christ, that leader will lead other Christians to join him in his sin and the other Christians will also commit sin as a result. We see that is exactly what happened at Antioch and even Barnabas joined with Peter in committing this sin. James 2:8-10 says, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” Then, James 2:12 says, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.” This reminds us again why it was so important for Paul to withstand Peter.

If Paul had not withstood Peter, the church would have experienced division. That same principle is why Paul warned the Galatians in Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Here, we see that it is very easy even for a person that is a strong Christian leader to become entangled with a yoke of bondage if that leader is driven by fear instead of led by the love of Christ.

We want to help our children develop a clear understanding of the law of liberty so that they understand the importance of helping other people learn to experience this liberty. James 1:25 says, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” We want to help our children understand the law of liberty.

The Old Testament is summarized by the great commandment. When Christ was asked what was the great commandment of the law, He replied in Matthew 22:37-40, “...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Christ summarized the New Testament when He gave the new commandment in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The law of liberty sets us free to love God with our whole heart, to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love one another as Christ has loved us.

As we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit moment by moment and act in love, we are able to minister with boldness. This is due to the fact that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives and the love of Christ is flowing through our lives to others. That is why it is important to regularly remind our children of the importance of yielding their lives to the Lord moment by moment. Romans 6:16 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” We need to remind our children that life has choices and consequences. If they make the choice to yield to sin, they will find that choice is leading them to death. If they make the choice to yield to the Lord so that they have the strength to obey, that choice will lead to righteousness.

When the Christians in the early church yielded their lives to the Lord by asking Him for boldness, the Lord gave them boldness to share the Gospel of grace with others. Acts 4:29-31 says, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” Because of the boldness of the early Christians, the Gospel of grace was able to spread rapidly.

Today, we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example that the Lord will also give them boldness to speak the Word of God with boldness as they learn to be led by the love of Christ instead of driven by the fear of people. Such boldness will give their lives a powerful impact. May the Lord bless you richly as you show your children how to serve the Lord with boldness as they yield to the Holy Spirit.