

**The grace of Christ covers even our hypocrisy.**

**Galatians 2:11–14** “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. [13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (ESV)

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As we have been packing up to move a bit further into central Escondido, into a much smaller house, we have before us the significant challenge of down-sizing. Almost a minimalist lifestyle! And a big contribution I have made to our stuff is books. So we have moved my office here. And drastically culled what remained on the bookshelves.

One book in particular that came to mind this week in relation to Paul’s interaction with Peter was “Mistakes Were Made but Not by Me” by social psychologist Carol Tavris.

“First published in 2007. It deals with cognitive dissonance, confirmation bias and other cognitive biases, using these psychological theories to illustrate how the perpetrators (and victims) of hurtful acts justify and rationalize their behavior. It describes a positive feedback loop of action and self-deception by which slight differences between people's attitudes become polarized.” Wiki

It will be available at the garage sale if you want it!

“Most people, when directly confronted by evidence that they are wrong, do not change their point of view or course of action but justify it even more tenaciously.

Even irrefutable evidence is rarely enough to pierce the mental armor of self-justification.” Carol Tavris

Since the garden we have an inherited “blame-transference-syndrome” which makes it exceedingly difficult to own our own failures and errors. And this can end up having us act out in some desperate ways to “prove ourselves.”

So week in and out we gather to be reminded that our proof is Christ and striving has ceased. But the dragon is deep. We might feel confident before God, at least theologically, but then we have to find confidence before the watching world and those around us, even brothers and sisters in the church... and the old ways, like riding a bike, come back to us. We act the part - to gain the better opinion, or to get our way.

This week’s text gives us the call to stop it, and rest in the grace that covers us. I need this today, and I bet you could use it too.

Usually when you come to this text, Peter is painted as the bad guy and Paul the hero for standing up to him, calling him out. And this is true. Peter is acting a fool. He needs correction for his sake and the sake of the church.

But when we realize that we are all Peter - that’s when the truth of the gospel breaks in and frees us from our hypocrisy.

That’s what we want to tamp into today. Seeing ourselves as Peter and finding freedom and a way forward in Christ. Temptation is real - it’s part of life. Community is vital - as a guardrail and support out of hypocrisy. And There is grace for this - in Christ we live constantly covered.

## **Temptation is Real**

*Situation* - Called Cephas here (Aramaic), this is Peter. He was one of the original twelve disciples. He was with Jesus for his whole ministry. He heard first-hand all of the teaching. He witnessed the miracles. He saw Moses and Elijah finally seeing the face of God in Christ at the transfiguration. He saw his teacher and friend die upon the cross. And he saw his tomb empty.

But he doesn't have a perfect track record. He at times would speak up when he should have been listening. And in spite of rhetoric that he would die to protect Jesus he denies he knows him to save his own skin.

And here, in Antioch he was fine dining with believers of all stripes... until he began to fear man, some Judaizers came to town. These yahoos made it known that you couldn't be a true believer if you didn't become a Jew in order to follow Messiah. What's more, those around the "unclean" could be dirtied by sharing space, fellowshiping and eating with them. So instead of going on in unity with the brothers and sister or other background, Peter plays the part of a Judaizer so their wrath wouldn't touch him.

Peter isn't anti-Gentile believers. In fact he was used by God to bring the gospel to them.

"Peter's fear-based hypocrisy was even more flagrant because, besides eating with the Gentiles in the church at Syrian Antioch, he had been previously instructed by a vision to fellowship with Cornelius, the Gentile (Acts 10)."

**Acts 11:1–3** “Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. [2] So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, [3] “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” (ESV)

**Acts 11:15–18** “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. [16] And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ [17] If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” [18] When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” (ESV)

Years later though, he would succumb to the pressure of haters and out of fear of them live out of line with the gospel he had proclaimed.

"Peter's (hypocrisy) was not fundamentally a failure to follow a particular rule but a failure to walk "in step with the truth of the gospel." For Paul, the gospel is not only something for Christians to pass on to non-Christians; it is also the daily

bread for Christians themselves to feed on. Peter evidentiary had forgotten that he had already been justified by grace, and was seeking to be "justified" by human approval - the very thing Paul had determined not to do, and from which the grace of God's eternal approval in Christ saves us." GTB

His action actually preaches the other - non-gospel that Paul is warning the churches about.

I love Peter because he is used by God but can be such an idiot sometimes!

And he stands condemned.

This is not just Peter's problem, as evidenced by the reason for this letter to the churches, and as evidenced by our own lives. This is the human condition.

**Romans 3:23** "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (ESV)

I like the imagery that God uses through Jeremiah when confronting Judah's idolatry and hypocrisy.

**Jeremiah 2:13** "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." (ESV)

Cisterns are little reservoirs meant to store water, and when we desert God and his grace for us, it is digging our own reservoir that is incapable of holding water. We are left with sludge! When we turn to the approval of others, even the influential, then we are swigging sludge. In order to appease the ache for justification we let things go that spoil us, we indulge in things that corrupt us, and we set an example for others that leaves them trying to find refreshment from mud.

"When we live out our gospel convictions in one situation but then cover them up in another - that's hypocrisy." T. Wilson.

The temptation to do it is real. I remember a conversation with the cousin of a dear friend at his wedding. And even the faithful pastor I was asking him why he had stopped going to church and seemingly rejected the truth of the gospel. His

answer was the church was full of hypocrites. I didn't disagree but asked him to explain further. He says, "they preach about trusting God and living right, but they are all at the bar with me getting drunk on the weekend..."

Now, we aren't against bars, but you shouldn't be getting drunk. But what was insightful was that his problem was all the other people and he neglected to see that he was at the bar getting drunk too.

We see hypocrites very clearly but our mirrors are very cloudy!

"This is the great threat to staying "in step with the truth of the gospel": hypocrisy. Our fidelity to the truth of the gospel is constantly under threat from hypocrisy. Most often when we fail to live out the truth of the gospel, we've veered off into hypocrisy. So in order to stay faithful to the gospel you and I must be vigilant in our fight against hypocrisy's menacing presence." T. Wilson

We are susceptible to it. When we put a different standard on other than we are willing to live. When we see ourselves as righteous as if we have a monopoly on it. When we claim the tenets of the church but live like we have to earn our way to salvation or blessing.

So we are Peter. But when we stumble, there is hope still. And to get there, othen, community is vital...

### **Community is Vital**

In this story we can see the way a community can influence negatively. Here is Peter, influenced by the Judaizers (the circumcision party) in the church no less. Peter's hypocrisy isn't a response to external pressures but internal ones from within the church.

He is being rebuked for giving into fellow members of the church, arguably believers—albeit misled, adding additional barriers or entry and hoops to jump through to get to Christ.

And his fear-induced hypocrisy spreads. Because he drew back and separated himself from Gentile believers, the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically with him... it was so bad that the "Encourager," Barnabas was led astray as well.

What a downer this is. Hypocrisy is like a virus - we all have some knowledge now of how viruses work, one person gets it, then through touch or aerosols infects someone else, usually several someones else. Whom in turn infect others, often without knowing it.

So we might hear this and think that community is the dumps. Forsake it. But being left alone is no better because there is no one to help us notice our hypocrisy, to pull us out.

That is what Paul does here for Peter and for the church.

Cherishing the gospel, he stands, confronts Peter and it's a wake-up call. It is what is needed to pull Peter back from the playacting and into step with the gospel.

Given his profile in the church Paul confronts Peter in front of everyone. It may not happen that way for us. This is the model Jesus gives us:

**Matthew 18:15–17** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (ESV)

It's the way Jesus uses community to refine and rescues us from ourselves.

**James 5:15–16** “And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Therefore, **confess your sins to one another** and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (ESV)

Not hypocritical in our hiding. But so transformed by the gospel - that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection grant us forgiveness of sin and new identity in him - that we can be seen and trusted to walk with one another.

So expect a call from someone this week! (My phone will be lighting up!)

The thing about this confrontation is that it worked. The church didn't split. Peter didn't respond that Paul has his gospel and the Judaizers have their own.

The story of Peter bears out that he was pulled back from the edge, out of hypocrisy and back in step with the truth of the gospel.

**2 Peter 3:14–18** “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. [15] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, [16] as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. [17] You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. [18] But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (ESV)

He sees how the Lord has been patient with him, and Paul's ministry as vital so that the church will grow in grace.

Community is vital and it works because the gospel is true.

### **There is Grace for This**

Confrontation is hard, but missing and dissing the gospel is worse. This confrontation served Peter and it served the church. The church in Antioch, the churches in Galatia and us today. And there can only be resolution and rescue from hypocrisy because the grace of Christ is true and available. It covers even our hypocrisy and the digging of broken cisterns in our lives.

And we can find hope in how this all played out. “For it is a great comfort for us to hear that even such great saints sin...” Martin Luther

We can see victory over hypocrisy as we anchor ourselves and our community in the grace of Christ. That he would give us what we could never deserve.

**1 Peter 1:13–15** “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,” (ESV)

“Our inherent holiness is not enough. Therefore Christ is our entire holiness; whereas this inherent holiness is not enough, Christ is.” Martin Luther

It’s what we need... **2 Peter 1:3** “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,” (ESV)

Friend, you aren’t too far, you are not so entangled in your hypocrisy that Jesus can’t pull you out. You have hope and a gospel that is true and for you.

It keeps us and enlivens us to keep going.

The grace of Jesus is our hydration; it quenches our lingering thirst, and the more we embrace him as the fountain of living waters, the less we run to the idols that leave us parched and dying.

We come over and over to the fount - to the forgiveness of Christ. We are - in the gospel - freed to say “Mistakes were made... by me.” And that honesty moves us from hypocrisy to gospel confidence and stability.

**The grace of Christ covers even our hypocrisy.**

Brace yourself. Temptation is real. Community is vital for us. And there is grace. Surrender to Christ and his grace for you.

As we get close to the Olympics, I like the illustration from Todd Wilson on seeing the truth of the gospel as a balance beam. Our task is to stay on it but with the world outside of us, the people around us, and the sin within us, there is constant pulling, tempting us to lean in one direction or another falling out of step with the truth of the gospel. How do we keep our balance?



'First look straight ahead. Don't look down. Don't anxiously worry about falling into hypocrisy. Instead fix your gaze straight ahead on Jesus. Not at the faces of the audience, frowning or smiling, but only on the One whose smile we truly long to see.

Second, hold out your arms. This is how we stay balanced. But when it comes to staying in step with the truth of the gospel we hold our arms out not merely for balance but for help. When we first learned to walk on the balance beam we had a buddy there to hold our hands. We need each other. We need each other to keep us from falling headlong into hypocrisy. We need each other to speak truth into our lives.

Third, trust that you'll stay on. Fixating on how narrow the balance beam is only sets us up for failure. The truth of the gospel is not a narrow, behavioral sliver we need to worry about staying on. Once we're on it, we realize it's both broad and wide. We can walk confident that the grace of Christ will indeed keep us because he has already walked the beam, and received the perfect score.

The grace of Christ covers even our hypocrisy. What good news. Now we can live! Let's go.