

SERIES ON THE APOSTLE PETER
SERMON #5: PETER STUMBLES AGAIN

by Mark Aites

(Based on Hobb's lessons on Peter; and a sermon by Dub McClish)

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-17

INTRODUCTION:

1. Today we bring this series to a close.
2. Review:
 - 1) Peter's First Test: his encounter with deity, and his awareness of his own sinfulness.
 - 2) Peter: The Impulsive Disciple his tendency to speak and take action with little thought; but even though he stumbled, he continued to try.
 - 3) Peter: The Dark Hour -- his denial of Christ, and his rise above failure.
 - 4) Last week: Peter remains teachable -- Peter learned a lesson which contradicted his Jewish heritage.
 1. Having seen in a vision that which was unclean to a Jew, God informed him, "*What God has cleansed you must not call common*" (**Acts 10:15**).
 2. This was all in preparation of God inclusion of the Gentiles into the kingdom or church.
 3. With his new found knowledge, Peter stated: "*Of a truth I perceive...*" (**Acts 10:34-35**).
 4. Peter then proceeded to teach the gospel to the Gentiles; whom upon receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit were commanded to be baptized in water (**Acts 10:47-48**).
3. In today's lesson, we learn that Peter stumbles again.

BACKGROUND and SETTING:

1. The letter to the Galatians was written to prevent further apostasy.
2. As Paul pleads with them, he has to also defend his apostleship.
3. He does so by referring to a chain of events in his life, which led to his "spiritual heritage."
4. Beginning in **Gal. 1:13**, Paul begins telling of these events, apparently in chronological order.
5. If these events are indeed in proper order, Paul's confrontation with Peter was likely after the Jerusalem conference (recorded in **Acts 15**).
 - 1) If you recall that conference was necessary, as the Jews were seeking to bind law upon the Gentiles.
 - 2) **Gal. 2:4**
 - 3) Peter spoken on that occasion at the Jerusalem conference in defense of the Gentiles (**Acts 15:7-11**).
 - 4) The decision of the conference was to send a message to the Gentiles (**Acts 15:28-29**).
6. If the order of events are correct, following this, Peter then went to Antioch (**Gal. 2:11**).

DISCUSSION:

I. THE NEED FOR PETER'S REBUKE.

A. **Gal. 2:11-13**

B. Paul "withstood Peter to the face."

1. It suggests, as we might state it, "he stood up to him."
2. Paul didn't hide behind anyone, or get someone else to tell Peter, but boldly faced him.

- C. There is an important lesson here:
 - 1. If brethren are in error, we should feel compelled to tell them.
 - 2. Dropping hints, proverbially “beating around the bush,” or finding someone else to tell them is not the biblical way to handle the situation.
 - 3. Even in personal matters, it should be face to face. Jesus afforded us that principal (**Matt. 18:15**).
 - 1) These types of matters should not be done through a messenger service.
 - 2) Unfortunately we may have learned that in school (**Illus.** children passed notes).
 - 3) I’ve known of situations where guest preachers were used to deliver messages either in the classroom setting or from the pulpit.
 - 4. It is important to handle problems face to face, and with a proper Christian spirit.
- D. Paul plainly says, “Peter was to be blamed.” (ASV: “Peter stood condemned.”)
 - 1. Peter was clearly in the wrong!
 - 2. He was condemned, really, not by Paul, but by his own actions.
- E. The situation called for a public confrontation.
 - 1. Peter was causing other brethren to stumble including Barnabas.
 - 2. Because others were involved, Paul deemed a public rebuke as a necessity.
- F. Important lesson: there are times when situations warrant a public rebuke.
 - 1. When sin is of a public nature, and shame and reproach is brought upon the church, then a public response is necessary.
 - 2. Some brethren have contended that such actions are unloving or unkind.
 - 3. As Dub McClish expressed it: They deem it “unnecessary and unchristian, or at least unloving to identify any person/s...associated with false doctrine that they might be teaching or practicing.”
 - 4. Even Jesus, when situations warranted it, made a public rebuke.
 - 1) For example: of the Sadducees and Pharisees in **Matt. 16:1-4**.
 - 2) Scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees (**Matt. 23**).
- G. My friends, there are times when a public rebuke is necessary not only for the benefit of the one in the wrong, but also the church (**1 Cor. 5:6**).
- H. We must also consider, that if a public rebuke is warranted, and we say nothing for fear of upsetting the brethren, then sin will continue. Although we may prevent an uncomfortable situation, we have actually hurt our brother or sister.
- I. And if the situation is endangering the church, then we must deal with it boldly (**Rom. 16:17; 1 Thess. 5:14**).

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE REBUKE.

- A. We should not be surprised to find Peter eating with the Gentiles.
 - 1. In our last lesson we learned that he had conversed with the Gentiles and was instrumental in their conversion.
 - 2. He was afforded the opportunity to get to know those of Cornelius’ household.
- B. All was fine until certain Christians came from James.
 - 1. James, whom most scholars believe was the James who was the Lord’s brother carried great respect in the Jerusalem conference (**Acts 15:13-21**).
 - 2. These Jews in **Gal. 2** were evidently staunch Jews; perhaps those who had questioned the Gentiles inclusion, or may have been using James’ name (**Acts 15:24**).

3. Their appearance was enough to cause Peter to play the hypocrite.
- C. **Hypocrite** - "One who plays a part, wears a mask, pretending to be someone he is not."
 1. Again, it has been observed, "a hypocrite is one who hides an evil heart."
 2. Peter didn't want these Jews to know that he ate with the Gentiles.
 3. And yes, Peter acted out of fear, but that is an unacceptable excuse!
- C. The reason for Peter's action is made clear: he was intimidated by the Jews.
 1. He evidently feared the results he might suffer if he continued to eat with the Gentiles
 2. Peter allowed himself to be intimidated.
- D. Intimidation is still a common problem among Christians today.
 1. There is the intimidation from those outside of the body of Christ.
 - 1) The world pressures us to conform to their standards.
 - 2) **Rom. 12:1-2** "*I beseech ye therefore...*"
 2. There is the intimidation also from those inside the body of Christ, actually from two extremes.
 - 1) One, to accept everything --to embrace all of the "faiths" -- to hold to the concept of unity in diversity (a contradiction).
 - 2) Two, to bind and be restrictive where God has not bound.
 3. We must not give in to intimidation, but hold fast to the truth (**1 Thess. 5:21**).

III. THE EFFECT OF PETER'S ACTIONS (2:13).

- A. Peter caused the other brethren to stumble; and not even Barnabas, who should have known better.
 1. This is the very same Barnabas whose name appears some 24 times in the book of Acts.
 2. He was a close co-worker of Paul's, especially prior to **Acts 15**.
 3. The tragedy in this is that Barnabas was a noted teacher and leader in the early church.
- C. Causing others to stumble is a serious offense according to the scriptures.
 1. **Matt. 18:6**
 2. In **Rom. 14,15**, the apostle Paul warned the church at Rome about the stronger brethren causing weaker brethren to stumble.
 3. This is why Peter's offense was so serious; it warranted a public rebuke.
- D. We must always be careful of our actions and teachings for this very reason.
 1. Especially with those in leadership positions in the church.
 2. Peter was an elder (**1 Pet. 5:1**), and an apostle, and had even been a spokesman of the apostles for some time.
 3. He was so noted and respected that even Barnabas was swayed.
 4. This is why we go to great lengths in the selection of elders, deacons, and even preachers
 5. Those in leadership positions can deeply affect others in the church.
 6. Should we think it just a coincidence that God affords us with qualifications for elders and deacons? (**1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1**).
 7. The potential damage to the church with unqualified men is immeasurable.
 8. The tragedy is that many people have been drawn away from the church or drawn into error by following the hypocrisy and false doctrines of others.

E. **Gal. 2:14**

1. **Straightforward** - rendered *uprightly* in the KJV actually means, "straight footed," to walk directly ahead.
2. Peter was proverbially walking crooked; he was being dishonest and deceitful in his actions.
3. As one translation renders the rebuke: "*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?*"
4. Peter did this because of the Jews who were present.

F. What is it that causes people to alter their conduct when different people are present?

1. We have noted intimidation, but another application comes to mind.
2. Some people alter their conduct because they are seeking to be popular with whatever group might be present.
3. For example, when the Gentiles were present, Peter lived like a Gentile, and when the Jews were present, he lived like Jew.
4. In this manner, he would be popular and excepted with both groups; until of course both groups are present at the same time.
5. One might find a similar problem in the church today.
6. When a more conservative element of the church is present, they may act and talk as though they are conservative.
7. And when perhaps a more liberal element of the church is present, they may act and talk as though they were not conservative.
8. In this way they are popular among both groups of people; but yet they are deceitful.
9. One might even be popular with those of the church, and yet at the same time be popular with those of the world.
10. Even Jesus had a statement for those who would be popularity seekers (**Luke 6:26**).

G. Truthfully, I would hope that not all men would speak well of you; for if that is the case, then something is wrong.

1. Even Jesus who is the epitome of righteousness was hated and crucified for holding to the truth.
2. **Luke 6:22**
3. I guarantee you, based upon scripture, that if you hold to the truth, and live the truth, you will be hated.
4. **Matt. 5:10-12**
5. On this basis, it can be stated confidently that if all men speak well of you, then something is wrong with your Christianity!
6. Peter was trying to appeal to groups, but didn't want the Jews to see him eating with the Gentiles.
7. Friends, we must always be honest with ourselves and others as to our motivations that they are pure and right!
8. And even though it may not be popular, we must uphold the truth!

REVIEW:

- A. In review, as we look at Peter's life, think of the lessons which we have learned from this man.

- B. Peter was open and honest, and in his encounter with the Lord (**Luke 5**), he was able to confess his own sinfulness.
 - 1. We have learned that true discipleship is to break thru that barrier of sinful pride.
 - 2. **Luke 9:23**
- C. Peter was also an impulsive man, given to act and speak before much thought.
 - 1. We've looked at Peter's life and seen a man who faltered frequently.
 - 2. And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we will readily confess our own weaknesses as well.
- D. We've looked at Peter in the dark hour.
 - 1. Peter did the unthinkable and denied the Lord.
 - 2. But Peter was willing to repent of his sins, and to continue to try.
 - 3. It is important that we as well maintain a spirit that we are willing to repent of our sins and to continue to try our best to serve the Lord.
- E. And in this series we have also noted that Peter, even as he grew in Christ, was willing to remain teachable.
 - 1. As he learned knew truths from God, he also learned to accept those truths.
 - 2. Many of us go through growing pains in our Christianity, but do we fight the truth, or do we remain teachable?
- F. And today as we have noted that Peter stumbled again, we are reminded that we are not perfect.
 - 1. Even Peter, the beloved and great apostle, was not infallible.
 - 2. True he spoke by inspiration with the reception of the Holy Spirit, but with his humanity there remained weaknesses to overcome.
 - 3. Becoming a Christian does not mean that we leave behind our human frailties; even the best of Christians, like Peter, stumble at times.
 - 4. But the mark of maturing in Christ, is the willingness to admit our errors, repent of them, and seek to do them no more.
 - 5. For children of God, we have the promise of **1 John 1:7**.
 - 1) The verb tense in this passage indicates continuous action.
 - 2) As long as we endeavor to walk in the light, and have fellowship one with another, then the blood of Jesus will continue to cleanse us of our sins.
- G. Perhaps what is most surprising in this lesson, is that Peter forgot the lesson he had previously learned.
 - 1. **Acts 10:34-35**
 - 2. Peter stumbled in being a respecter of persons
 - 3. We must remember the simple truth ourselves; that the gospel is for all!
 - 4. **Gal. 3:26-28**

CONCLUSION:

- 1. I pray that from the study of Peter's life, that you have gained strength and insight.
- 2. But even as we are strengthened by it, I remind you that Paul did not let Peter's sin go unnoticed.
- 3. You cannot hide from sin:
 - 1) As the old saying, You can't brush it aside or sweep it under the rug.
 - 2) Neither can you expect the passing of time to allow those sins to be forgotten.
 - 3) It remains the same: **Rom. 6:23** "For the wages"
- 4. Perhaps you have stumbled and you need the forgiveness of God, and like the prodigal

son, you need to come home to the Heavenly Father.

5. Or perhaps you are not even yet a Christian.
6. PLAN OF SALVATION: believe (**Acts 15:6**); repent (**Acts 17:30-31**); confess Christ (**Matt. 10:32-33**), and be baptized in order to be saved (**Mark 16:16**).
7. The Lord extends His invitation to you.