

June 24, 2007
Pentecost 4

"Speak the Truth in Love to Defend the Pure Gospel"

GALATIANS 2:11-16

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 'Gentile sinners' ¹⁶ 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.

Do you enjoy conflicts and confrontations? On a scale of 1 to 10 with "10" being something you really enjoy doing, where do you rate confronting someone about a problem? For example, You have a night job. You sleep during the day. While your neighbors are at work their dog barks all day making impossible for you to get some sleep. You know you have to finally knock at their door and confront them about the barking dog, but you are afraid because they have a reputation of being angry people.

As a Christian you cannot go through your life without having to deal with conflicts that center around God's Word. You will rub shoulders with people who believe in their heart of hearts that they will someday be there with you in heaven even though they hardly ever worship on Sunday because they try to live a good life. How do you confront them with the truth of how lost they are? Sarcasm and criticism or screaming and yelling won't get the job done just as it won't work with the neighbor and his barking dog. The Bible gives us the answer when tells us to speak the truth in love. That does not mean we avoid confrontation, but that we deal with the problem in a loving way.

In the words just read to you the Apostle Paul tells us how he had to stand up to Peter and oppose him face to face for something he had done that could really damage the lives of people. What did Peter do that was so bad and so potentially damaging to people? By his actions Peter gave the impression that people needed more than Christ Jesus to be saved. He catered to a certain group of people who said they believed in Christ but still needed to follow Old Testament ceremonially laws. Believing this was like drinking deadly poison that could send you to everlasting punishment.

The other day I as I was driving away from the Gaviota rest stop I noticed a black bird in the parking lot drinking some green coolant that had overflowed from a car. I wanted to stop and clap my hands to scare it away, but another car was pulling up behind me. That green coolant is deadly poison and I thought of the poor bird drinking the stuff and dying

a painful death. As much as we care about birds and animals, we care more about people. If you really care about people you will find yourself compelled to warn them about the deadly poison of believing in Christ plus works for salvation. You will speak to them firmly but always with love. This morning I want to speak to you about **"Speaking the truth in Love to Defend the Pure Gospel."**

Challenges will come

The Apostle Paul had to face a serious challenge when Peter came to Antioch, much more serious than talking to your neighbor about a barking dog. "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong." Talk about strong language. I opposed him face to face. He was clearly in the wrong. What did Peter do that was so bad that Paul had to oppose him publicly in front of other people? He tells us. "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 belong to the circumcision group."

Peter gladly ate with Gentile Christians. Ham sandwich? Bacon, lettuce and tomato? No problem. The Lord God had given a vision to him from heaven that it was OK to eat these things because the special dietary laws and worship laws of the Old Testament were no longer necessary since Christ had come. However, when Jews who had become Christians came to visit and did not eat pork and still thought it was a good idea to be circumcised to be a true believer, Peter hung around with them, more than the Gentile Christians. By his outward actions he gave the impression that higher level Christians were those who still kept Old Testament laws in addition to believing in Christ. Paul had to be very blunt with Peter. "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?"

Peter would do something like that! I can hardly believe it! His name means "The rock." His faith was built solidly on Christ. It was Peter who boldly confessed Jesus and his resurrection with these powerful words in Acts 4: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Peter the rock was afraid. Instead of being a rock he was like a marshmallow. He did not want to confront these people who lived their lives as if Christ plus following Old Testament laws was the better way. Actions speak louder than words. The deception or hypocrisy was so real that Paul's good friend Barnabas was caught in the trap.

If Peter could be caught in this trap and Barnabas where does that leave people like us? How many times have we been so afraid of confrontation that we have backed off from telling the full truth of the gospel to someone who falsely believes that being saved means believing in Christ plus following rules and regulations or even the Ten Commandments? Ever heard someone say, "There are two things I never talk about, politics and religion?" If I keep silent when someone confesses a false hope what impression am I giving? Am I confirming to someone that whatever they believe is OK?

Permit a little story to illustrate this point. There was once a fellow by the name of "Ben Trying" who said he believed in God, but lived a wild life and never went to church much. Then things changed. He became sick and was only given a few months to live. As his end

drew near his four sisters came periodically to visit him, hoping they could speak to him about Jesus before he died. Once sister said to him, "Ben, I know you don't have much longer to live. Why don't you try to be more like Jesus? Maybe God will take you to heaven when you die." Ben said to her rather sadly, "I've been trying!" Another sister came to visit. She said, "Ben, I know you don't have much longer to live. Why don't you try to pray to God more? Maybe he will hear your prayers and bless you." Ben looked at her sadly and said, "I've been trying!" Another sister came and said, "Ben you don't have much longer to live. Jesus died for all your sins. Why don't you just accept him into your heart and you will be saved?" Ben said to her with sadness in his voice, "I've been trying."

Finally his youngest sister came to him and said. "Ben, I love you and I know you don't have much longer to live. Both of us have something in common that we have shared all of our lives. We have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Remember how we used to fight as kids. Remember when we didn't obey Mom and Dad, and even made Mom cry one day. I think of all the evil thoughts in my heart and I know that you often think of things you have said and done when you aren't feeling well. There is no way God could ever accept us as we are, that is why he gave us his Son Jesus. Ben, Jesus took everything we did wrong, including the sins of the world upon himself. His blood shed for us makes the payment to God we could never give. He rose from the dead and it is all real for both of us. Then she shared the words of the Bible that can be shared in every situation with people who are without Christ. "God so loved the world....." Ben, looked up at his sister, he looked at her and smiled. Ben said... nothing. You see at that moment in his life, been stopped trying. The Lord opened his heart to believe with the unconditional message of the gospel, Christ alone not Christ plus works.

Satan, who masquerades as an angel of light will do everything in his power to obscure this pure gospel message. The world around us constantly confirms it makes no difference what we believe. Our hearts that our deceitful above all things always want to turn us inward to believe in Christ plus works, and not keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The challenges will come but they will also need someone to speak the truth.

Challenges require speaking the truth

Ah, how beautifully the Apostle Paul speaks the truth of the gospel here in these verses and throughout the book of Galatians. "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 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." The Jews who became Christians knew that they were not justified by keeping laws of the Old Testament whether it was obeying the Ten Commandments or not eating certain foods such as pork. They put their faith in Christ to be justified or declared righteous before God just as the Gentile sinners had also come to believe in Christ.

Notice that word "justified" occurs three times. Think of a courtroom where the judge declares a person "Not guilty." The other day I was going down the freeway and for a few seconds I was going over well over the speed limit. I thought to myself, "If a CHP stopped me, I would explain how I was going the right speed most of the time, and only for a few seconds I was going to fast." I am sure he would say to me, "OK, just be more careful next

time." He might even be impressed by the way I pleaded my case. If only it would work out that way! Everything inside of me leads me to think that what I can do to defend myself in getting out of speeding ticket, I can also do before God on the judgment day. "Lord, look at how I lived my life. I know I was bad some of the time, but look at all the good I have done. Look at how I tried to love people, and also tried to love you, doesn't that count for something? Then we hear these words this morning, "We know that a man is not justified by observing the law." God's standard for keeping the law is always perfection. See a little child first learning to color. They color outside of the lines. Mommy says, "That's beautiful." God cannot say to us, "That is beautiful. You have tried your best. We are outside the lines, short of God's glory, unable to be holy before God.

But now we have Jesus. Jesus colored everything in the lines. He lived every moment of his life perfectly. He made a perfect payment for all sin. He rose from the dead, and that resurrection was the gavel coming down on the judge's seat declaring all sin forgiven. He declared us not guilty. That's the message of the gospel, the pure message that opens our hearts to believe as Paul says, "So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not be observing the law." That's the message leads us to stop trying and leads us to put our faith in Christ alone. That's the message we want to share boldly with people who are still without hope. Amen