

THE RADICAL TRUTH

By David H. Roper

This is an era in history when Christians have no reason to be silent about their faith. There have never been any legitimate reasons for silence. But today, as never before, we must speak openly and honestly about what we believe. Everyone else does. The advocates of campus violence and disruption are stating their causes very clearly. If you have talked to any representatives of the Women's Liberation Movement lately, you know that they are not waiting for someone to ask them what they believe; they are speaking out openly. Extremists on both sides are. So I feel that today, as perhaps at no other time in history, it is wrong for us to be quiet about what we believe. We must simply proclaim the Gospel. Jesus said, "what you hear in the dark, utter in the light; what you hear whispered in secret, proclaim from the housetops." This is a time when we need to do just that. We need to proclaim the truth openly, honestly, and without fear.

Chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians has a great deal to say about this subject. This is part of a passage that we have used for several years with our interns. The whole section from 2 Corinthians 2:14 through 6:11 is largely autobiographical. Paul is describing the "new covenant ministry" as he designates it, and this paragraph (4:1-6) is, in part, a statement of the principles of that ministry. As you remember, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians because they were questioning his authority. This was his defense of his ministry as an apostle. But the principles that he spells out are binding on all of us. He begins by writing,

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, (2 Cor 4:1)

NASB

The Greek word translated "lose heart" literally means to "bad out" or quit. Paul writes, "we do not lose heart" . . . why? Because we have "this kind of ministry." The ministry Paul is referring to is spelled out in the opening verses of this section. It is a ministry of *triumph*. (2:14), Paul says. God is always leading us in triumph. It is a ministry of *influence* (2:14-16). "We are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Every where we go we leave behind the unforgettable fragrance of the life of Christ. It is a ministry of *sincerity* (2:17). He says we are not peddling the word of God; we are not dispensing truth without personal involvement. It is a ministry of *cooperation with the Spirit of God* (3.3). As we proclaim the truth of God, the Spirit of God writes on the human heart. As we witness to the truth, the Spirit is corroborating our witness by making the truth known internally. Finally, Paul says it is a ministry of *unfading power* (3:12-18).

He uses an incident from the life of the nation of Israel. Moses went up onto the mountain and received the law. When he came down to give the law to the people his face reflected the glory of God and it was necessary for him to place a veil over his face to prevent the people from being blinded. But Paul picks up something that is not obvious in the Old Testament passage. It is this: Moses left the veil on his face long after the glory faded because he was embarrassed. The power had faded away.

Paul contrasts his ministry with Moses'. In verse 18 he says, "And we all, with unveiled face," i.e., without pride, and in simple trust, "beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." In contrast to Moses, who had to go back for an occasional recharge, we *always* stand in the presence of God. He is available to us 24 hours a day. We're counting upon him, we're acting out of his life, we're drawing upon his strength and therefore he is changing us.

There is never any lack of resources; anything we need is available in Christ.

**Therefore since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart... (2 Cor 4:1)
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I am convinced that in the years ahead we are going to see mounting hostility to the gospel. People are not going to respond to the truth. This principle is going to be a comfort to us in times when we encounter hostility, when people hate us and reject us simply because we name the name of Christ.

I have a little fish decal on the back of my Volkswagen, which, as you know, was a symbol of the early church and is a way of identifying yourself as a Christian. Even many non-Christians know what it means. As I was driving down Bayshore freeway the other day someone passed me, pulled in front of me, slammed on his brakes, stuck his arm out the window, and made an obscene gesture. I started to pull around him, and he did it again. He drove to the other side and slammed on his brakes. I had to stop abruptly to keep from running into the back of his car. He stuck his arm out the window and made the same sign. Then it dawned on me that his reaction was caused by the fish on my rear window. He didn't know me, he didn't know my family, he didn't know anything about me. But something about that sign aroused hostility and anger.

I think that we are entering an era when we're going to experience more of this hostility. Because we name the name of Christ people are going to hate us. They're going to abuse us, and they're not going to listen to us. In many cases we're going to be ostracized. We need to know that we do not need to lose heart.

Many of you know that last year at Stanford we started experimenting with street rallies. Every other Wednesday during the spring quarter we set up our loud speaking equipment at White Plaza and gave students an opportunity to share the Gospel. We were not advocating violence; we were advocating peace and love and reconciliation to God through Christ. Yet we were threatened, we were cursed, and our equipment was sabotaged and locked up. Why? Well, simply because we named the name of Christ.

Many times the temptation was to give up; the pressure was too great. Carl Gallivan, who spearheaded this ministry for us, was walking across campus with me one morning. We had arrived four hours before a rally because each time we inevitably found something wrong. It took us that much time to find other sound equipment or to set up in another place. That morning we had spent two hours running around campus trying to get all the loose ends put together. He said to me, "If we were in this thing alone we'd never be able to withstand the pressure," and I really felt that he was right. Now this was no big thing. We had merely experienced opposition in small measure. But I think that in coming years it will intensify. And we can never stand, we can never carry on this kind of a ministry unless we understand the resources that we have in Christ.

He understands hostility. The Scriptures say, "He experienced the hostility of sinners against himself." He knows what it is to have to stand in a situation like that, so he can undergird us and strengthen us, and we do not need to lose heart.

Paul goes on in verse 2 to describe the methods of his ministry:

...but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor 4:2) NASB

First, negatively, "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame." We have a tendency to hide things of which we are ashamed. You have a hole in your sofa so you throw a pillow over it. If you have skinny legs you don't wear Bermuda shorts. But Paul says we do not hide the Gospel because we are not ashamed of it. He indicates two ways that people can hide the Gospel and declares that he is not guilty of either of them: "We do not walk in craftiness, and we do not adulterate the word of God."

The verb translated "walking in craftiness" literally means 'to do all kinds of work.' Bob Smith once translated it as a willingness to do anything for a buck. It conveys the idea of modifying our message so that we don't offend

people. Paul, writing to Timothy, predicts that there will be false teachers who will appeal to people "with itching ears" and who will pander to their tastes, will "scratch their ears," by telling them what they want to hear. But Paul says, "We do not do that. We do not walk in craftiness; we do not distort the truth; we do not modify the message so that it will please people. And we do not adulterate it. We do not water it down, dilute it, or mix it with anything else; we proclaim it in a straightforward way."

Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because, as he says in Romans 1, "It is the power of God unto salvation." It alone has the capacity to change people. I do not know of anything else that can change people's lives. The world has developed a number of short ranged and superficial schemes to accomplish this. But they can't change a man permanently. Paul says the Gospel can. The good news of Jesus Christ is able radically to change the direction of man's life, and give him health and wholeness. Therefore, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of it. I don't hide it. I don't try to modify the message; I just declare it.

I received a letter this past week from Pat Dillon. I mentioned last Sunday that Pat was traveling across the country with a friend. He says he is doing his "Paul thing"--revisiting the centers of Christian faith that they had established the first time around. These two young men have been hitchhiking around the country, asking God for opportunities to invest their lives in various places.

They once had gone into a city in the Midwest and found a group of so-called "Christian" students. When they walked in, hoping to find some Christian fellowship, they discovered that it was an awful, rotten mess. The man who was the "pastor" was advocating free love--primarily with himself. There was terrible dissension and Pat said that he doubted if there were one true believer in Jesus Christ in that group. But Pat and his friend began to teach the truth of the Gospel and the kids began to respond. They started a Bible study with about twelve of them. They appointed one person to teach this study, a young man who had been a Christian about a week, gave them a commentary to use, and then left.

In his letter Pat said, "We went back to this group and discovered that the pastor has been reconciled to his wife, and that there is a great hunger on the part of these students to know the Word. They're growing, and they're excited. Send us study material. We want to see these people go on in their relationship with Christ."

Peace, harmony, reconciliation, and fellowship in the Spirit. What did that? Well, it wasn't Pat Dillon; it was the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It was the power of the Gospel to change the lives of people. That is why Paul says we're not ashamed of it, we don't hide it, we don't get embarrassed when we have to declare it; we declare it straight out, because it's the only thing that can change men.

...but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man 's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor 4:2) NASB

We take the lid off the truth and let it speak. That is what truth does--it manifests itself. It doesn't need to be defended, it doesn't need to be authenticated, it doesn't have to be proved; it just needs to be declared. Luther said it was like a lion. You don't stand at the door to a lion's cage and defend the lion; you open the door and let the lion out to defend itself. That is what the word will do if we will simply expose it and let it do its work.

One of our girls, who was identified with the Mid-Peninsula Free University before she became a Christian, recently related a story to me. She is a girl who feels that God has called her into a ministry with street people. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7 that "we are to abide in the calling in which we were called," and she is taking that literally.

She feels that God wants her there because she has identified with these people and they will listen to her. She was in a meeting recently where they were planning one of the confrontations at Lytton Plaza in Palo Alto and were considering ways to provoke a riot. They were going to arouse some of the younger students who hang around the plaza and get them to trash downtown Palo Alto and engage in other acts of violence. But this girl stood up and

read these words from Luke,

It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble. (Luke 17:1-2) NASB

And she sat down. There was a long period of silence. Then the meeting broke up. The next day they chose another method, a less violent route which, in itself, was not necessarily right but was less violent and disruptive. Now the word of God accomplished that! And you will discover, when you let the word speak, that every man's conscience will approve it.

Men intuitively recognize the truth. They do not need to be convinced of it. God has so constituted our consciences that we know truth when we hear it. When it is declared a sympathetic vibration is set up inside us. Truth does not really need to be proved to us. The reason people reject the truth is not that they do not sense it is true but because they choose to disbelieve. They would rather go their own way than respond to the truth.

Dr. David A. Hubbard was asked in a meeting at Stanford last year, "why is it that so few physicists are Christians?" He said, "For the same reason that so few prize fighters are Christians. It has nothing to do with the intellect, it is a question of the will." You see, men know the truth when they hear it. They understand it, they perceive it to be true. Paul says their consciences bear witness to the truth. But often they choose to reject it.

We might ask, "If the truth is known, and if men's consciences do approve it, then why do men refuse to respond to it?" Paul gives the answer in verses 3 and 4:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:3-4) NASB

There is a satanic blindness that keeps men from perceiving the truth. It comes upon them because they are unbelieving. They have been exposed to the truth but have turned away from it. The result is a satanic hardening. We have all met people like that, people who seem unusually obtuse and perverse. They just can't seem to grasp the truth. You share the Gospel with them, draw diagrams and pictures and use illustrations and try your best to explain it as simply as you can, and they still cannot see it. Paul says there is a reason for that. Somewhere along the line they have rejected the truth that was offered to them and the result is a satanic blinding.

If this is the case, then what is our response to that blindness? Paul picks up his main theme again and tells us what we are to do:

For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Cor 4:5-6) NASB

Paul says that there are two things which we are to do and one thing that God does. First, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord." We are to preach Jesus Christ as the great inescapable One--the One who stands at the end of every life. Every road will ultimately end with a confrontation with Jesus Christ. He cannot be avoided. Paul's letter to the Philippians says that the time is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord whether or not we feel he is, whether or not we want him to be. He is Lord, and every one of us, sooner or later, will acknowledge him as that Sovereign Lord. So Paul says, we declare him as that Lord. In studying through Acts these past Sunday mornings with Mr. Stedman, I have been struck so clearly by the realization that wherever the disciples proclaimed the message, it was a proclamation that Jesus is Lord. They didn't apologize for it nor defend it; they just proclaimed it. Paul says that this is our task--to preach Jesus as Lord.

But that is not all. He also says, "We are your bondservants for Jesus sake." Our message is not a harsh, critical, unloving proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Rather, it involves giving ourselves in love to the people to whom we proclaim the Gospel. We cannot avoid this involvement. There is no personal evangelism without personal involvement. These are *people* that we are ministering to, and we must love them as God loves them even while they are yet sinners. Even if they reject our message, even if they hate us, if they despise us, we are still to love them and to give our self consistently and patiently in acts of service to them.

I spoke to a young Jewish student who told me that, the year before, someone had shared the Gospel with him. He said, "As he talked to me, I gained the distinct impression that he was looking straight through my head to somebody right behind me. And when he learned that I was a Jew and not interested in his Jesus, he could hardly wait to get away from me." That is so wrong. In our proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ we must accompany our message with grace and love, with patience and concern for the individual, regardless of what their response is. Paul says to Timothy, "The servant of God must not strive, but be patient with all men, gentle, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves." This is to be our attitude. We proclaim him as Lord, but we also make ourselves available as servants for his sake.

Paul says that if we do that, then God will act:

For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Cor 4:6) NASB

The quotation comes from Genesis 1. Paul is saying that just as God created order out of chaos and brought light into a dark world simply by a creative word, so he will do in our hearts. The primeval world was in darkness. And God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. Just that word, a creative act, and the light sprang forth. Paul says the same is true in the lives of people who hear the truth. God will speak that creative word in their hearts, "Let there be light," and there will be light. That is the answer to the satanic blinding. *We* cannot enlighten people, we can only proclaim the truth. It is up to God to enlighten them, and he will.

I'm sure that many of you have had the experience of sharing the Gospel with someone, and they don't seem to understand. But you continue to explain it and suddenly they respond by saying, "Oh, I see, I understand." That is Jesus Christ turning on the light.

In the case of Paul on his way to Damascus, Luke records that a light shone on him and reversed his whole way of living. He acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord. He turned away from persecuting Jesus and began to follow him as Lord. Why? Because God caused a light to shine. That is an illustration of the way he works in every life.

Paul says that is to be our response to a world that is growing hostile, cold, and indifferent. What do we do? We recognize first of all the type of ministry we have. We have a Lord who never fails us, never abandons us. He's our source of power. Then as we move through the world we are lovingly and patiently to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. Then we are to wait for the Father to turn on the light. And he will. We will see people respond to the gospel.

Last year one of our students who was living in a fraternity house stood up at an evening meal and said, "You men told me during Hell Week that you wanted me to get relevant. All right, I'm getting relevant. I want you to know that Jesus Christ is Lord in my life. I'm going to begin a Bible discussion group on Wednesday nights, and I'd like to get together with any of you guys who are interested, just to rap about Jesus. We'll be studying one of the books about his life."

Now that is a very difficult thing to do. He told us later that one knee said to the other "let's shake" when he stood up. That Wednesday night he had six men for the first Bible study. By the end of the quarter, when he left to go to an overseas campus, twenty-two men were meeting to study the Scriptures. A number of these men met Christ. The other day we were trying to determine which of them are coming back to that house this year and we realized

that there will be twelve Christians there, primarily because of the ministry of that one man.

Now, the power doesn't reside in that man. But he is one who believes that the Lord is adequate for anything, and he is willing to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. So he has seen that God is beginning to act in the lives of people around him. The same thing can be true of us. We can ask the Lord to give us people with whom we can share the Gospel, and can ask him to give us a spirit of sensitivity and alertness to those around us. He will do it. He will begin to use us in the same way.

Lord, we realize that you are Lord. We can't debate that. We thank you for your Lordship in our lives. It's our desire to make that truth known to others without fear or shame or embarrassment. Enable us to make it known without distortion or dilution; without fear or favoritism. We thank you for your life that is available to us to accomplish this task. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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II Corinthians 4:1-6
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