



## **The Power of God's Word – Part 3**

### **Refusing to Distort the Truth to fit our Culture's Demands**

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Well, it's happened more than once in the world of baseball that an umpire has ejected someone from the game. I'm not talking about a player, I'm not talking about a coach, I'm talking about the stadium organist. (audience laughing) It happened once in 1985, it happened again in 2012 when after a controversial call the organist started to play that familiar childhood tune, Three Blind Mice. (audience laughing) And the umpire didn't take the sarcasm very well and he looked up to the box where the organist was and ejected him from the game. And actually the rules of baseball allow it. So he was out, he was supposed to leave and he couldn't touch the equipment for the rest of the game.

Now you have to admit it's high stakes and high stress to be calling balls and strikes when balls are coming at you at 90 miles an hour and you got to make these split-second decisions about things, and it's very hard. You can understand that sometimes the umpire gets it wrong, sometimes the players get it wrong. Oftentimes the fans get it wrong. Occasionally the organist gets it wrong, and there are some special skills it would take for you to get it right every time. Umpires, as it is, they've got to have this laser-like ability to focus. Their perception has to be just at a high level. Their ability to even have an auditory judgment about things, kind of a spatial analysis of everything. This is not an easy job, and you can understand how difficult it is and how it's easy to make mistakes in making a judgment like that.

Well, in Second Corinthians Chapter 4, God is going to tell us when it comes to perceiving what's right or wrong, especially as it relates to the gospel, that is not a hard call at all. There's absolutely nothing confusing about the gospel. It is crystal clear. It's absolutely undeniably true. It is right. And you ought to be able to see it for what it is. It's really not the problem of the message. The message should be clear to everyone. The problem isn't that something's flying at us so fast you can't decide what to do with it. The problem is something much deeper. And of course, you know there must be a problem because we've all tried to share the message of Christianity with other people and it doesn't seem to go so well. People are not really interested in saying, oh yeah, that sounds great, let me get on board with that. There's a lot of resistance and a lot of pushback, and we need to figure out what's going on. Because the clarity of Scripture, the clarity of who Christ is, the clarity of what it means to understand this arrangement that starts so simply in passages we learned as kids in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believed in him shouldn't perish but should have everlasting life." This is an amazing, simple, straightforward offer of eternal life, a call to trust in Jesus, there should be nothing confusing about it. And yet it is seemingly very confusing to our neighbors and our co-workers.

So let's look at this text and see if we can't figure out what's going on. Because once we understand what's going on, maybe it'll change our whole understanding and our whole approach to caring about and loving the non-Christians in our world and in your life. So let us look at this. We're only going to take four verses this morning because there's a lot for us to



deal with here. And it all crescendos into verse 4 and we need to understand all of this and understand what to do about it. And Paul's going to say a lot about how we should respond to what's going on when we share the message of the gospel. So let me read it for you, the four verses that begin Chapter 4 of Second Corinthians. I'll read it from the English Standard Version. Here's how it reads. "Therefore," Paul says, "having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we've renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning." There's a word you may not have used this week, we're not trying to manipulate or deceive anyone, "or to tamper with God's Word, but," rather here he says, "by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veil to those who are perishing."

"In their case the god," and there's a word that has a small 'g' in front of it. We're not used to seeing that in our Bibles. It's the same Greek word, "Theos," here it is. And yet we understand in this case, it needs a small 'g' because the God of this world, if we're thinking about THE God that we know, the triune God, he would never do this, "has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." So verse 4 is telling us that the god of this world, as First John Chapter 5 says, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one," this problem of a spiritual issue has actually blinded the minds of the unbelievers. They don't see it, they don't get it. It's not that the gospel isn't clear, it's not the offer of salvation, it's just the call to repentance isn't as clear and evident as it should be, it's just that they're not getting it because something much deeper lies behind their rejection.

So we've got to understand this, and it's all going to hinge on verse 4. But we've got to start in verse 1 where Paul starts. And that is with the fact that we have a ministry and in this ministry we shouldn't lose heart. Now, the ministry, of course, as we constantly try to impress upon you and so often in our flesh we try to resist because we hope it's just for the career missionaries and the preachers among us. But we just need to understand all of us, as we've tried to emphasize throughout our teaching in the book of Acts and certainly throughout the first three chapters now of Second Corinthians, it is our responsibility as we come to follow Christ to now become fishers of men. We're supposed to be ambassadors of Christ as we'll learn in great detail in Second Corinthians Chapter 5 when we get there, that we're supposed to represent him in this world. We're supposed to take the message from wherever we're at to wherever we go. From Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth. We are saddled with a responsibility as we become disciples to then make disciples.

And this is our calling. And many of us are really not interested anymore in this calling, though you may have taken it seriously when you were a new Christian, you've had your hand slapped enough in trying to do it that you've said, don't want to do it. And the reason is the last few words here of verse 1, because you've lost heart, you lose heart. Literally, this word means that you no longer have the courage to continue to do it. And the word we use in our English language for that is discouraged. And I want to remind you not to be discouraged. And you're going to be discouraged because people are not going to respond the way you would expect them to. Number one, let's just jot that down and try and understand it. "Do Not Be Discouraged by Their Unbelief." You're going to try to see a neighbor, a friend, a loved



one, a grown child, your aging parents, they're going to reject the message that you think is so vital to their eternity, and you're going to get discouraged by that. And you may try this five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten times and say, I'm done and you will no longer continue to do it. And some of you sit here today, I am sure, and haven't shared the gospel for months, some of you for years. You haven't stood up and said to people, I'm a Christian and you should be one too. You haven't had any inkling of that because early in your Christian life or years ago, you had so many people say I'm not interested. And I get that. It's easy to be demoralized. I understand it.

I used to play basketball for Stanford. I think I've told some of you that. Stanford Junior High School (audience laughing) in the Long Beach Unified School District. I did play for Stanford, I wore the red and white jersey, and I will tell you something about East Long Beach basketball. We weren't very good. As a matter of fact, we were bad, and when the West Long Beach kids showed up to play, we looked really, really bad, because they were really, really good. And there are a few things more demoralizing, certainly when I was a kid, because parents were a little more rigorous back in those days. We didn't have mercy rules, and everybody's got mercy rules now. There was no such thing, right? It could be 67 to 4, and the other team's still working, and all the parents of those kids are still cheering, and it's terrible to try and continue to take shots when the six-foot-seven eighth graders are swatting everything away that you're trying to put up. And yet our coach is trying, we don't know if he's serious or not, but he's trying to get us to keep on fighting. Keep going. I mean, we're just at the beginning of the fourth quarter. You never know what might happen. It could be an amazing turnaround here, 4 to 67. It's hard. And every one of us says I don't want to do this anymore. Done.

And I just want to remind you, what did Jesus say about this whole endeavor? We're supposed to be evangelical Christians. Even that word means that we're supposed to be an organization that's trying to recruit more people to our organization. That's the essence of Christianity. Come "follow me, and I'll make you ... fishers of men." Hey, I've won you over, now you go "make disciples of all the nations." You be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria. I want you to continue to propagate this by you being the ambassadors, the emissaries of the gospel. And I just want to say what did he say about the scoreboard? Here's what he said. There will only be a few. Because the road is narrow, the gate is small, and few are those who find it. And the road is really wide, and the gate is really big, and many people are going to travel down that road. And if they're going to travel down that road all the way to destruction, well then every time they get confronted with the gospel, they're going to swat it away. So you shouldn't expect the scoreboard to be in our favor. We will always be Bible-believing, evangelical Christians, we will always be in the minority.

Even in our culture, at least in our grandparents' culture, in America, where people they were kind of germane, at least they were friendly toward evangelical Christianity. It didn't mean the majority of people in our country were Christians, I hope you know that. So here we sit where people are no longer interested in calling themselves Christians in our culture, and now I'm saying we are supposed to be as evangelicals as they were in the book of Acts. We're supposed to be as evangelical as any generation of Christians has always been. And I just



want you to know you can't be demoralized by the scoreboard. You just can't. You can't think well, I'm not going to do it because I had 87 people reject me. You can't because Jesus never promised us we would be the majority. I mean when they started to catch that the disciples looked at Jesus and said are you telling us only a few people are going to be saved? And you can read that. He answers in the affirmative, yeah, that's how it is. There's just going to be a few people here. My "little flock," he says.

It's good for us to assemble together and we'll feel like a majority when we gather for church. But when you go scatter all across South Orange County where there are a million people living within reasonable driving distance of this church, you will not feel like the majority. And when I say go recruit more Christians, go out there and share the message of the gospel, I just want you to expect the scoreboard to look like my Stanford Junior High School scoreboard often looked. It's not going to look good, but you continue to take the shot. You have to. That is the calling. And our coach has said this is what we do. Why? Because it is our ministry. I know you read verse 1 and say, "having this ministry by the mercy of God." You say, well, that's Paul. He's a career missionary. I get all that. And I understand that pastors wear microphones, and they preach from the Bible, and they do that a lot more than you may do throughout the week, but you're still called to do this.

Let me take you to First Peter to try and make this point as clearly as I can. First Peter Chapter 2. First Peter Chapter 2, look at verse 9. We like the first half of this verse because it just pumps us up. It's good. Look what it says, "You're a chosen race." First Peter Chapter 2 verse 9. "You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." Doesn't that sound good? All four of those phrases, "chosen race," we're a group of people now who are now organically connected to God. We're his children. A "royal," that's good, a prince, a princess. I like to be a child of the king. That's good. And you might call yourself that. Praise God, we are going to inherit the kingdom, the children of the king. But notice what kind of royalty it is, a "royal priesthood." Now, those are two offices that didn't mesh in Israel. But I need to tell you, the priesthood is seeing that they're the ones who can go into the holy places. They are the ones that can go into the Holy of Holies, and they are supposed to get people to connect to the God who they represent. They represent God to the people, and the people to God. And it's important that we understand ours is a missional kind of royalty. Yeah, you're a child of God, but you've got a task. You're a "holy nation." You're set apart. That's what we mean here. And there's an ethical dimension to that, but he says, "a people for his own possession." And if we are owned by God, then he gets to set the rules for what our purpose is.

And here it comes. Here's the purpose clause in the middle of verse 9. Here's where the verse gets a little thorny. "That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Now, you've got to think back to your non-Christian days and you've got to remember this. The scoreboard is the way it is because according to John Chapter 3, after Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life," this is the key, you got to trust in Christ. He goes on to say, here's why you're going to get the scoreboard looking the way it looks because, "people love darkness rather than light," because they don't want to



step into the light, "lest their deeds be exposed." And I hope you look back at your conversion and say, I can sympathize with the person who pushes Christianity away, because to be a real Christian, you have to start with understanding your sin problem. He is a savior and that assumes just by the word itself that you are in trouble.

And real Christianity doesn't begin with God loves you, right? It begins with you have a problem with God. God is your creator, and he's holy, and you don't measure up. And because of that you're a sinner. That's why the book of Romans starts with building the case that you're a sinner, no matter how much you know or how much better you may think you are than the other people in your neighborhood, you are still a sinner, "you fall short of the glory of God," and we have a problem with God, and it needs to be solved in Christ. But he loved us so much he sent his Son to solve the problem. But you've got to trust in him knowing you have a need. You need to say, as Jesus often said, and I've quoted it often recently, "have mercy on me, a sinner." That's what the tax collector said in Jesus' parable, and he went home justified. If you're going to be justified, if you're going to be a Christian, if you're going to be a part of this thing called Christianity, you have to be able to see your sin.

So we struggle with this. As Jesus said, we don't want to step into the light because our deeds will be exposed. It's one thing for you to say, yeah, I know I'm not perfect. And your neighbor will say that right now. I'm not perfect. I not saying I'm perfect, right? It's easy for you to say you're not perfect if you are a non-Christian, but you don't want me pointing out that you're a sinner. You don't want me to be saying, yeah, and this isn't perfect, and that's not perfect, and you're an idolater here, and you covet here, and you do the wrong things over there. Christ died for those sins. You need to embrace him. I don't want to admit that. People don't think they're sinners enough to be thrown into hell. They don't think that, I'm not that bad. So we've got to start with the problem. And once you understand the problem and you say, well, I've been brought into his glorious light, it says here, my job once I am is to proclaim his excellencies. My job is to say hey, non-Christian, you're still in darkness. I need you to step into the light. This is a great place to be and he is great and let me tell you why. He's so great that you are a sinner, you don't measure up. Welcome to the club. Now what we're going to do is to step into the light because he has given us the solution to our sin problem. That's what we ought to be doing.

Oh yeah, "You are chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you." Now you weren't a people, verse 10, "but now you are God's people." He owns you. He can give you a task and an assignment. "Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." You cried out to him at one point, "have mercy on me, a sinner." It's called repentance. It's called faith. You put your trust in God knowing you're a sinner, and here in this text, it says you have that mercy now. So you got a job to do. You're always going to be in the minority. Verse 11, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles." In other words, this earth is not your home. Orange County is not your home, California is not your home. Western civilization is not your home. America's not your home. You're just here as an expat from heaven because "you are now a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."





But you live here. And you have to fight the passions of the flesh. You have to abstain from those things. They're waging war against your soul. So you're always going to be unique. You are going to set apart. You can't do what everyone else does in your neighborhood. You can't do what everybody else does at your office. You got to "keep your conduct among the Gentiles," verse 12, "honorable." I hope I could go to your boss and your co-workers and say hey, so and so here goes to my church, I'm their pastor, I just wonder what's their conduct like here. I want them to say integris, good, honest, fair, they're honorable people. So that when they speak against you as evil, now why in the world would they call you an evil doer at your work? Why would your neighbors think you're evil? I mean you're all about good works, that's the point, right? "Let your light shine before others, so that they might see your good works." You're doing good things. They're calling you evil, do you know why? Because the first message of the gospel, the predicate of the good news is the bad news that you're a sinner.

So when I start saying, hey, co-worker, friend, neighbor, child, parent, brother-in-law, you're a sinner and you need Christ. When you start saying that, they start calling you evil. Now when they call you evil, you just keep doing good things, "so that they might see your good works," hopefully with your message and your deeds, "and glorify God," on the day when he shows up, "on the day of visitation." So this we've touched on last week, right? We looked at Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount. You're supposed to do good works. You're supposed to put the salt words to it all so that you're clearly continuing to represent Christ, or in the context here in verse 9 of First Peter, you are supposed to continue to "proclaim his excellencies." And the more we see the excellencies, the more we see our sin, and the more we point out the sin and call people to repentance, the more they're going to bristle at that, the more they bristle at that, keep living right and hopefully one day they will come to faith in Christ and they will glorify God along with us on the day Christ arrives. And that's important for us to see. This is our job, just put it in these words, middle of verse 9, "That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who," saved you and, "called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

I know it was hard for you to become a Christian because you had to grapple with your sin. And I know every non-Christian in your life they're going to say yeah, I may not be perfect, but they haven't yet grappled with their sin. And you've got to get them to grapple with their sin before you can ever provide the good news. This is why the false gospel of the 21st century in Western evangelical Christianity is simply saying to people without any reference to their sin, hey, you need God because he'll make your life better. Do you know how demoralizing that is? It doesn't work. You can't just tell people, hey, wherever you're at, just let me give you a layer of Jesus and that'll make your life a little better. I mean, number one, if they start reading the Bible, they start reading that Jesus says, no, it's going to make your lives harder here. You're going to be aliens and strangers. In this world, you're going to have tribulation. They're going to say, I don't know what book he was reading, but it certainly wasn't this book, because I'm reading it now saying it's going to be harder for me. We have to begin with the bad news. And if you begin with the bad news you're going to have a lot of people saying not interested. And if they say not interested long enough, you could be demoralized.



Let me just quote this little verse for you from Galatians Chapter 6. I know you know it, you don't even need to turn to it. Verse 9, simple verse, "Do not grow weary of doing good." Now do you know that verse? The good we're talking about in the sermon this morning is the good of you speaking up, standing up, identifying with Christ, and calling other people to become Christians. One way or another, working on that, thoughtfully, carefully, shrewdly, diplomatically, gently, respectfully, clearly. We want to do this and as we do it I don't want you to grow weary of doing it because in due season, do you know the rest of the verse? "You will reap," a harvest, "if you do not give up." I would hate for you sitting here today listening to another sermon about you standing up for Christ wherever you rub shoulders with non-Christians in this world and for you to say I've tried that, but it doesn't work. I'm tired of being on that junior high basketball team and losing so badly. Oh yeah, we've made four points, but that's nothing. Look at how many people have rejected me. I'm not going to be rejected anymore. I'm going to sit the bench.

It'd be bad for you to sit the bench and have Jesus quote a verse to you that's so simple you didn't even have to turn to it because you knew it. "Don't grow weary of doing good," Galatians 6:9, "for in due season, you will reap," a harvest, "if you don't give up." It would be terrible for you to stand before God one day and have him say, you could have led six people in your office to Christ. You could have led three of your neighbors to Christ, but you gave up. You grew weary and gave up. Paul says we got a ministry. We're not going to grow weary. We're not going to be discouraged. I understand it is hard. It may distress you that people don't believe the gospel. It may make you cry. Romans Chapter 9 verse 1, it may make you bummed out. It may make just go crazy like Romans 10 verses 1 and 2. I would do anything if I could to save these people. But don't be discouraged. You need to understand we got to keep taking the shot. We have to keep working on this. We cannot lose heart. If you lose heart, you'll stop. You'll give up. I can't have you give up your calling.

It may not be full-time missionary, but you have a sphere of influence. One I could never get into. I'm going to go to your lunch room this week at your office and start preaching next to the refrigerator and the coffee pot. How's that going to go? Do you have security at your offices? I'll be hauled out. But you could talk about what you did on Sunday. You could talk about what you read in the Bible that morning. You could share why Christ is so important to you. You could proclaim the excellencies of the one who called you out of darkness into light. And a lot of people say, I don't need that, it's good for you but not for me. Well, it is good for you because here's what you may not have understood, the universal problem of sin. And you are a sinner. They might say, ah, you're an evildoer now. Well, just keep doing good. Don't give up. Keep sharing the message. Don't stop. Don't let rejection, don't let resistance wear you down. You've got to reflect the light of Christ. You've got to stay faithful in speaking the truth. Paul starts that way and it's a good way for us to start. We've got a ministry by the mercy of God. We're not going to lose heart.

Well that's good, persevering is good. But if you persevere long enough, and you take the first part of this message to heart, and you say I know I'm going to get a lot of resistance, a lot a no's, a lot of people not believing the message, even though it makes perfect sense to me, it won't make sense to them, because they're blind, we're going to get to that in verse 4. If you



keep going, the next temptation you're going to deal with is found in verse 2. You're going to say, well, I can do a few things maybe to get my batting average up, just to mix some metaphors here. Maybe I can do a couple of things that'll give me a little better hit ratio here. Verse 2. Second Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 2, "We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways." What are you talking about? What are those underhanded ways? Here it is. "We refuse to practice cunning." So apparently I could be cunning, I could be manipulative, I could do something to try and get a win out of this by manipulating, "or to tamper with God's Word."

Oh, that's epidemic today. If I can just tamper with it, if I can just take a little bit of this and twist it a little bit. No, no, no. Paul says he's renounced all that, "by the open statement of the truth." That's what we need. Do you want to go in and tap dance around why people need Christ because they need a more fulfilling life? That's called tampering with the truth. Do you know why your neighbor, do you know why your coworker, do you know your adult children need Christ? Because they're sinners and they're going to have to pay the penalty of their sin in eternity if they do not embrace Christ. That's why. Not because your kids, they're going to be better kids if you become a Christian, well they might. Maybe they won't become Christians and they'll hate you for being here, maybe, maybe. Your skin's not going to clear up, it's not going to keep your hair from falling out, right? Christianity isn't going to guarantee you a better life, "In this world you will have tribulation."

But they desperately need the truth, an open statement of the truth. One in which they can say at least this person is serious about the gospel. I've heard atheists say that. If I just found a Christian who really believed what he says maybe I'd listen to them. Now, I don't know. Who knows what they mean by that? But it would sure be great if Christians believed with a clear conscience what they're saying and in the sight of God, and we really hammered on that last time. We have to do all of this in the sight of God. God is the one we care about. We want to please him in all of this. In one way or another, it always comes back to twisting the truth, either by manipulating people or by amending and editing and redacting the message. Number two, let's put it this way. Renouncing that, we could put it negative. Let's put a positive. Number two, we're going to resolve this morning, I trust, "Resolve to Never Distort the Truth." I'm never going to distort it. I'm not going to distort it by manipulating you, by changing the way we go about this. I'm not going to change the message itself.

If I try to recruit people to the Stanford Junior High School basketball team, one of the reasons they don't want to join is because they're going to say this, you're a bunch of losers. And I can't argue with that. We lost a lot. They don't want to join this team. Paul, by the way, dealt with this in First Corinthians Chapter 1 when he wrote to the Corinthians said I know everyone's calling you losers. And I know there's not many noble, not many celebrities here in Corinth who are following Christ. But it doesn't matter. We have the truth. Christ has become to us the righteousness, the wisdom of God. We're going to boast in the Lord. Everyone else boasting in other things, we're going to boast in the Lord, it doesn't matter what you think of us. You just need to realize there are a lot of reasons non-Christians in your world don't want to become a Christian. They don't want to become one of us! What do they see us as being? Well, if you really have a clear, non-distorted message of Christianity, they think, well, I don't





want to become one of those. What, am I going to be anti-abortion now and like cisgender, what do I have to be? And you, oh no, no, I just need you to say yes to Jesus and pray a prayer.

Do you know what? You can't prevent what comes after you become a Christian, and that is being taught to observe all that Christ commanded. Christ is pretty clear about the immutable nature of male and female, he is pretty clear about marriage. Even stuff that we've given up on, it seems, as a Christian culture for decades. Stuff like, once you're married, stay married and what God ties together don't let anybody separate. On into what it means to be married, on into what sexual ethics are, what the sanctity of life is about. I don't want to become some right-winger. Listen, I don't care whether you call it right, left, middle or backwards, if it's biblical that's the message of the truth. And Christianity comes with a truckload of things that God says he loves, he loves righteousness and righteousness has to be defined by him. So I know there are a lot of reasons non-Christians don't want to become Christians because they don't want to be here among us. They don't want to buy us and our values. But our values, if we're faithful, are just an open statement of truth and truth is what God says is right. But you can't distort it.

And I know we distort it for reasons we think are noble. We like these people. We don't want them to say no to Jesus. And if they really ask me about stuff like creation or abortion or marriage, I just don't want to blow the deal here by talking about that. And you become a car salesman. Apologies to all the honest car salesmen among us. But you become someone who just, you know, talks about undercoating and slapping the hood and look at this baby. And you got to stop. Give them the truth. If you and I were buddies and you said, I'm going to do a mid-career occupational change, I want to become a pharmacist and you go off to study pharmacology, you get your degree and you get a job, you happen to get a job at the same place I get my prescriptions. So you're working there at Rite Aid or Walgreens or wherever it is and you realize, oh man, I just got a prescription called in from Pastor Mike's doctor and here it is. And you read it and you go, wow, this is for a really bad disease. Pastor Mike has a terrible disease. This disease could kill him. And then you see what my doctor has prescribed and you look at it and go, oh, this stuff just wrecks your body. I can't imagine Pastor Mike having to drink this stuff four times a day. This is really gross. I mean, it makes some people just throw up. It keeps people sick in bed. And I don't know. I don't want Pastor Mike to have to go through all that.

So you sneak into the beverage aisle at Rite Aid and say, I'm going to take this little elixir that Pastor Mike's doctor says he needs, and I'm going to fill it two-thirds with Gatorade. Because you know maybe that'll cut the bitterness of all this, or better yet, Hawaiian punch. I'm going to put some Hawaiian punch in this and make it palatable. That'll be good. And then, you know, the doctor says, I'm supposed to print on the label you got to take it four times a day, no matter what. Well, I got a sticker here in my drawer. It's a little happy face. I'm going to put my little happy face right over that little instruction. And it'll say, happy face times a day. And then I'm going to take my pen out and I'm just going to say, Pastor Mike, just take it whenever you feel like it, it's okay. And then, I show up and you give me that.



I want to know how badly you hate me at that point. You say you love me, you say that's why you're giving me this, you say this because you don't want me to be sick and have my stomach feel bad, but you don't understand there's a bigger sickness that my doctor is trying to prevent. So, you have to give me the medicine. It's not love. You're going to lose your job over this. You understand you can't do that. You answer ultimately here, at least in that arrangement, to the doctor. And here's the deal. We're the pharmacists in this little analogy. And the doctor is the great physician and the great physician says we have to first realize every patient that he has a diagnosis that's terminal, it's called sin, and it needs to be dealt with by full and complete trust in Christ. And I need to give him this message full strength and he needs to ingest this. So I can't out of quote unquote love for someone change this. I can't amend it. I can't redact it. I can't do something with this that somehow makes it more palatable to someone simply because I love them.

Because you know what you'll prove. You don't really love me, you love yourself. Let me show that to you. Let me prove it to you. Go with me to Acts Chapter 20 and I just want to show you the reason we start to distort the truth is because we have ourselves in view. Look at verse 29 of Acts Chapter 20. Paul's about to leave here, Ephesus, he's talking to the pastors in Ephesus and he says to them, verse 29, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Now, if I'm sitting there as a pastor listening to that, I'm thinking, whoa, we're going to know the minute that wolf tries to knock on our door and he goes, no, no no, verse 30, "and from among your own selves will arise men speaking," now, here's what we're concerned about in Second Corinthians 4, "of twisted things." Oh, it's got some truth in it. It still has a little medicine in it but they twisted it, "to draw away the disciples after them."

Now, that's the real concern. And if you think I'm blowing that out of proportion, it's a contextual interpretation of them. They want followers. A lot like the churches of Galatia where Paul says, really, "They make much of you ... so you may make much of them." It's really about them. And false doctrines usually are about the person giving the false doctrine. And when we start to amend the gospel or tell people you can be a Christian and still be cool by the world's standards and still believe the things the world tells you to believe in. And we don't have to capitulate to everything, but just get this, sign up for this insurance for hell. And then you'll go to heaven with me and you don't have to buy all of it, that's okay. Here's the deal. It's really about you that you would ever amend the truth, ever distort it. Paul makes this clear contextually, let me prove this to you in Acts 20 verse 24, when he begins this whole discussion about him having clean hands, he starts with this, "I don't account my life as any value or precious to myself." I'm not doing any of this for me. It doesn't matter about me, it's not about me, it's not my reputation, it's not about how much you like me. And I know this is hard at work in particular because you want to keep that job because you need an income. Well, I just wonder if God would have any special interest in you. I just wondered if you lost your job because of him. You're right. You're probably going to live under an overpass. That's probably what's next for you because God's going to go, ah bummer, you lost your job standing up for me.



I really think you need to stop worrying about the consequences of you. You need to say I don't really care about me. I want to finish my course and the ministry I've received from the Lord to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. The Lord Jesus has given me a ministry, the Lord Jesus has given you a ministry. Your platform is different than my platform. I may be able to preach Christ in places you can't. You get to preach Christ where I can't. We all have our jobs as missionaries in South Orange County, California. And we all must do our job and care more about the job than we do about what people think of us. Verse 25, "Now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again." I'm leaving Ephesus, I'm not coming back. "Therefore I testify to you this day that I'm innocent of the blood of all." Why? "For I did not shrink from declaring to you," here it is, "the whole counsel of God." Now contrast the whole council of God in verse 27 with twisted things in verse 30. Now compare verse 24, Paul's concern for himself, in which he says, I really don't have any concern with myself. I care about the message. Now go to verse 30 and say they want disciples to come after them, they want you to like me join their team, they'll tell you stuff you want to hear.

And I often say this is, right? I could definitely get a lot more people gathered together to sit under my teaching, all I'd have to do is change my teaching, I could really go all out. I could probably rent a stadium, right? I mean, I don't know if I could go that far, but I could certainly say the things the world loves and get a whole different crowd in here and build a big cathedral if I just told people what they wanted to hear. But I'm supposed to not care about myself, I'm not supposed to care how big the church is, I'm not supposed to care whether or not you like me or not. I'm supposed to care about being faithful to finish the course. I've got a job to do and you've got a job to do in your office, in your family. And he says, I told you the truth. I didn't hold anything back. So he says hey, just pay careful attention to yourselves because you know there are going to be people who are going to come in and sometimes they're going to come from the outside, sometimes they're going to rise up, verse 30, from the inside. But it's always going to be about themselves. It can't be about yourself. Never bend the truth and at least diagnose that so often we hold back because we care more about ourselves even in the first point, in rejection. We don't want to be rejected any more so we're not going to share the message anymore. And sometimes we'll bend the truth or we'll manipulate people because we think, well, at least they'll be with me if I can just twist things a little bit.

Back to our passage. Now here, it really crescendos into these last two verses. "Even if our gospel is veiled," and of course it is to many, so many that I might lose heart if I'm not careful, "it's veiled to those who are perishing." These are people who are rejecting Christ and they're going to perish, to use the word found in John 3:16. "In their case," now here's the diagnosis, "the god of this world," now the word "god" here, that should at least arrest you to say, that's a pretty powerful word. Now, you got God on your business card, that's a big deal. Now, Satan has god on his business card. He just happens to be with a small 'g,' at least in the convention of English, for you to understand that he's not the God, God, God of the universe, but he's certainly a god of this world. He's "the prince of the power of the air." And you just got to know, "he has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God."



So, it's not like this was a hard call to make, like the umpire, it was not like it was close. You'd have to be blind, literally not to see this. And in fact, they are. And they are, not just because of self-imposed blindness, of course, they're sinners, that's true. But now there's a whole other spiritual dynamic force in all of this. Do you see the first word, I always, not always, but most of the time I give you the first word of every point just to make sure we're on the same page. What's the verb there? Pray. Now why would I resort to praying at this point? Because when I see that my opponent is the god of this world, I'm thinking, you know, I may feel pretty good on a Sunday morning if I get a good breakfast, but I don't think I'm up to contending with the god of this world. Even Michael the archangel, who I hope you wouldn't contend with, won't even contend with the god of this world. He says the Lord rebuke you. All I can do is do what Michael did, and that is he prayed, right? The Lord. He's calling out to the Lord. So I think we should call out to the Lord, and the context here, of course, is the conversion of blind eyes.

Let's just put it this way, number three, "Pray for What Only God Can Do." Only God can do what we need done because there's a bigger force than just me and someone else. If it were just me and I was trying to convince you, you know, this kind of car is the best kind of car to drive or this kind of whatever is the best thing. If we were just two individuals with no other forces involved, then I could really rely on my skills of persuasion. You may have shared the gospel with your kids 100 times. And in all that rejection, you might think, well, I need another apologetics course, or maybe there's some persuasion evangelism course that I can take. You know it's really not about that. This is about you recognizing that the forces of conversion are much bigger than you or I could ever accomplish. The god of this world, that's big.

Now, this is where everything starts to change in your perception. When we think about the fact that so many people disbelieve what we're trying to tell them and when we proclaim the excellencies of him who called us, and they think I'm not into any of that, not if you're going to take it all literally, I'm not into that. They don't think that's excellent at all. You're going to call me a sinner? I'm going to call you evil. We have all these bad responses. I just want us to recognize all we can ultimately do is do what God called us to do and pray. Go with me to Ephesians Chapter 2. I know you know Ephesians 6, right? Starts in verse 10, that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood." It's ultimately about principalities and powers, these cosmic forces, right? The kinds of things going on in heavenly places that are affecting the thoughts of people and what they perceive and what they think is glorious and what they think is excellent and what they think is garbage and nuttiness and craziness. The forces in this world, and when it comes to our Christianity, he does what I tried to do in the first point ever so briefly, and that is, can you just think about you loving darkness as a non-Christian? Because at one time you did.

If you sit here today as a Christian, you have to say at one time, you didn't slide into Christianity because your parents were Christians. Everybody has to go through the crisis of looking into the mirror of God's Word and saying, I am a sinner, and you have to cry out to God with a penitent faith saying, "have mercy on me, a sinner." Then you can go home justified. If you've never had that experience, you just think you're riding on the coattails of a



good heritage and a good Christian family. Don't start with me when I ask you how did you come to Christ. Well I grew up in a Christian home. Well, that's a nice story. You might as well tell me the color of paint on the wall. It doesn't really matter what you grew up in. What matters is that you came to a place of full conviction that the Holy Spirit convicted you of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and your eyes were open to the gospel. I want to know about that. It doesn't matter what kind of home you grew up in. The picture of conversion is a God thing.

Look at this first line. He's saying, hey, Ephesian Christians, all the Christians who would read this letter. I want you to think back to the time you were a non-Christian. Look at it here. He says in verse 1 of Chapter 2, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world." Okay, that could be culture. No, no, no. "Following the prince of the power of the air." Another way to say that is the god of this world, Satan. "The spirit that is now," you want to really get creeped out? "The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Every non-Christian you know, this is the diagnosis. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. They're disobeying God. The most fundamental disobedience is they won't trust in Christ. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." They should be trusting in Christ so they won't perish. They're disobeying that because they're following the course of the world but it really follows after the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that's now at work in the sons of disobedience, "among whom we all once lived."

Think back to the time you didn't want to walk into the light "in the passions of our flesh," because that was more fun, "carrying out the desires of the body and the mind," and we "were by nature," where this whole path ends, we were "children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." All of us are born sinful. But look at verse 4, someone who had taken the persuasion course in evangelism came to you. Do you see that in verse 4? Highlight that. I got to get that course, where do you get it? Three payments of \$19.99. You can get this course, Power Persuasion Evangelism. No. "But God, being rich in mercy." Now that's what I'm supposed to cry out for. Why is it your non-Christian friends don't cry out for it? Because they're following the prince of the power of the air, that spirit is at work in them. But we got to call out for this mercy. He's rich in mercies. You say have mercy on me, a sinner, man, he's ready, "because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses," now look at the passive nature of this, "made us alive together with Christ."

Now the last phrase, I know we often think of it isolated in a memory verse in verse 8, here he ends that statement and all these first four verses with this: "By grace you've been saved." Grace. This was not you finally waking up one day smart enough to spiritual things that you said, oh, aha, time for me to become a Christian today. But here is a picture of the gracious mercy of God, who now "makes you alive together with Christ -- by grace you've been saved - - he's raised us up with him and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." He's made you a "holy nation," he's made you "a people for his own possession," "a royal priesthood." This is great. I get all of that. "So that in the coming ages," you think you've seen grace? "He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." You ain't seen nothing yet. That's what this passage is saying. It's going to be so good. Now, he has a reprise of this theme that popped in the middle of verse 5. "For by grace





you've been saved through faith. It's not of your own doing; it's the gift of God, not the result of works so that no one may boast." This truth is so fundamental that it makes me get back to saying if the only way my non-Christian friends are going to get saved is but God, the power of God, doing something bigger than what I could ever do. Oh, great. Well, then we never have to share our faith. Praise God. That's what I was trying to get out of the whole sermon. You finally let me out of it at the end of the sermon.

Jacob had two wives, poor guy, he had two wives. (audience laughing) God never, I mean, this was Adam and Eve. It wasn't Adam and Eve and Brenda and Susan and Linda. This was just Adam and Eve, that's how it was supposed to be. Now God was very tolerant putting up with a lot of the heroes in the Bible with multiple wives. But Jacob falls in love with the hot one, Rachel. Do you know the story? Am I offending you in some way, for some reason? (audience laughing) And dad says, you're not marrying the hot daughter without marrying the homely daughter. So you know how this whole thing... have you read this? This is the Bible I'm teaching you right now. (audience laughing) So, Laban says, hey, you got to get the weak eyed, you know, one here, get Leah. No telling what her glasses look like, here get Leah and you can get Rachel, but you got to work for years for her. Do you know the story? And it's a beautiful story. I loved her, the seven years felt like a day. It's just oh...

Now you could write songs about all that. But in Genesis Chapter 30 and I'll just read it so I don't get a single syllable wrong here. Genesis Chapter 30 verse 1, "When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister." Okay, now this is just not good. Two wives are not good to start with, Mormons or whoever you are today. "She says to Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die.'" Well, there are some hormones involved in that statement right there. Is there not? Like, what? What am I supposed to do with that? Give you children or you will die. Now, Jacob has just the right response. Maybe a little less volume would have been good. He's angry and he says in verse 2, "Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?'" Yeah, that's the right answer right there. Now that implies a few things. Right? Number one, this is the wife that he really loved, and I mean, it's Sunday morning, I get it, but let's just put it this way, he's doing his part. He's doing his part. Now I'm not God. I don't create the children, but I mean, I know I have a part in this and I've been doing it. Unless you're Mary this is what it takes and I'm doing it. So don't blame me.

My wife and I, you might know our story, we've dealt with infertility for years. We didn't have our first kid till 10 years in and it is really tough, right? I don't have to have two wives to have my wife envy her contemporaries who are popping out kids, Fertile Myrtle is having like her fourth by the time my wife's going to her endometriosis appointments and surgeries and all this other stuff and we're not having babies and we are growing old and it's like, ah! Well, she was biblically literate enough not to say this to me. (audience laughing) But you know, my response is I'm doing my part, right? What can I do? I'm doing what I can do. Now, here's what you become when you realize you're doing your part, there's nothing more you can do. God has to do this. God creates life, right? I mean, we're working really hard in the labs to do what we can do, but still you need these two gamuts. You've got to have the right environment. Everything's got to be a God thing. God is the author of life.



So here's the deal. Here's what you become when you do all that you can do and you know the rest of it is God, you pray. And I want you to pray. You better have a list of non-Christians who you rub shoulders with, and you ought to be praying. And you cannot neglect doing your part. God has not chosen seagulls or clouds or fire rings to proclaim the gospel to people. He's picked you. He's given you this ministry, and he tells you not to lose heart, not to lose heart. Do your part and trust God for the outcome. And you cannot sit back and say, I just need a power course. Pardon this analogy going really bad. Power, I need some kind of weird course. No, share the gospel. I really was reluctant about that illustration, but it seemed to work in the other two services. (audience laughing) I just want you to say I won't stop giving a plain, open-handed, forthright declaration of the truth, an open statement of the truth. I'm going to share the message of the gospel. I'm not going to be ashamed of it. And trust the fact that God is the one who gives life. Not only biological life, but spiritual life. This is his domain. We do our part, and we pray.

One last passage, let me turn you to this in Acts 26. The Apostle Paul is telling his testimony, the second time he tells his testimony in the books of Acts. Luke, of course, gave the first accounting of it. So this is the third time his conversion story is discussed. This time he's before King Agrippa and he tells the story here. If you drop down to the middle of this chapter, he gets kicked off the horse, he hears Christ's voice and here's what Christ says in verse 16. This is Acts 26:16. "Rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness to the things in which you have seen in me and to those in which I will appear to you." I'm going to tell you things, I've told you things, I just want you to go and be a witness to that, right? Just like we heard in the first chapter of this, be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, the ends of the earth.

Now, this is interesting. This ties all the pieces together of our sermon here. "Delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles." Why would I have to be delivered? I got a message, it's good news. Why would they reject me? Why would you have to protect me? Because they're going to reject you. They're going to kick you out of the synagogues. They're going to drive you out of town. They're going to throw rocks at you. "To whom I'm sending you," though. It is your job. To do what? "To open their eyes." Now this is where you've got to understand both sides of this. Here God puts him as the subject, in this, I mean at least grammatically, who's opening their eyes? Paul is. Just like I still claim, those are my kids and they were my fault, right? I did that, but I didn't do it. I know it's a God thing, but, you know, had it not been for Dad here, you know save Mary's example, without me this wouldn't have happened. So, we had three kids and those are my kids, and I can trace that to me, but God has to do it. And a decade of infertility will help you understand that, right?

And in this case he says, yeah, yeah, I have no problem putting this in the first person. Paul says, I become your father in the faith, he says to the Corinthians, through the gospel. Well, wait a minute, I thought God was the one doing it. Well, he is, but he uses you. And that's the great thing. Don't give up. Don't grow weary. You're going to reap if you don't quit. God is going to use you for this. But you've got to understand, this is how he puts it. I have the great privilege to "open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and the power of



Satan to God." Even that phrase reminds us, well, I guess you're not the power behind it all. You're just delivering the powerful message, the powerful message of God's Word to "open their eyes, so they may turn from the darkness to the light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins in a place among those who are," set apart, "sanctified by faith in me." That's a great line. And I just add that because it never should, never, ever should make you think that you can put your feet up on the desk and not talk about Christ. God uses you, and you've got to get involved and do your part.

When that Three Blind Mice came on the sound system of the stadium, almost everybody, I think without fail, everybody was familiar. This is an old, old nursery rhyme. How old? 500 years old. They have it in a 450-year-old, this first extant reference to it, as a familiar nursery rhyme, so this is way in circulation by the time this book was written 450 years ago. 500 years ago, if you know your history, church history, you know there are some very important things going on called the Reformation. And the Reformation in England is really what many people believe back in the day was the reason for writing this, a satirical reference to three English martyrs, Latimer, Ridley, and Cranmer. These three men were all burned in Oxford Square, burned at the stake, and they were burned there because Bloody Mary, Queen Mary the first, that she was there trying to return England to Roman Catholicism. Well, there's one thing that those three English reformers knew for sure. The tampering of the Word and trying to add to the message of the gospel is absolutely something they resolved to never do. And so they said, we're not going to do that.

Now, Cranmer had a lot of pressure and Cranmer actually renounced Protestantism at one point and then flipped to renounced his renounce. But the first two to be burned at Oxford Square, and you should go there at the University of Oxford, and you can see the spot. Usually there are flowers there, there's a piece of cobblestone which usually is not paved over in remembrance of these three English martyrs. That song, Three Blind Mice, they say is a reference to those three martyrs, and they were sarcastically called, pejoratively called blind. "See how they run." And the farmer's wife, if you know the lyrics of Three Blind Mice, is the one who goes after them with the cleaver. And she did this with a stake and it was a horrific way to die. You can only imagine. And here they were being called by the culture, 16th century English culture, you guys are blind. They're blind. You don't know what you're talking about. Just give in, just could you just... I mean, it doesn't have to be this pure Bible stuff. Just can you just fall in line with Queen Mary and the powers that be? And they said no. And all three of them lost their lives there in Oxford because they said we're not going to give in. We're not blind. The clarity of the gospel is clear and we will stand courageously without tampering with it, without trying to manipulate people or double talk people. We're going to not lose heart even if it costs us our lives.

I hope that we will resolve to do the same in the 21st century, because our American culture is doing the same thing. It may not be with a religious label. It's actually with a secular label telling us to sit down and be quiet. Keep your religion in the pews of your churches. But our call is to be evangelical Christians. And I need us to do our part to proclaim the message of Christ who died for us so that our sins might be forgiven. What a dramatic story they told, what took place in 1555, October 16th, when the first two, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley



were burned at the stake. They said something there that was recorded, at least published by John Fox in Fox's Book of Martyrs, but... Hugh sees Nicholas and wants to encourage him, he says take comfort, Master Ridley, he says. And then he uses this old phrase, "play the man." Have you ever heard that phrase? If you studied Church history, "play the man," which is a clear reference to First Corinthians 16 verse 13, that calls us as Christians, men and women, both, this is a concept of strength and courage, right? Be men, like be manly, man up, we might say in our day. And so Hugh says to Nick, hey, man up, take comfort, man up. He says, and imagine this, the crackling flames are at your feet and you say to your buddy who's willing to stand up for the gospel, "today we light a candle that by God's grace will never be extinguished in England."

Now, it's waning in England, I'll give you that. But I've been to England, London many times, preached the gospel there, fellowshiped with other Christians on non-preaching times and just visited with people studying God's Word and just getting great strength from Christians. I mean, the Protestant gospel, the truth of biblical Christianity is still there. And that was a great way to view it. We are investing in the future. Even when you suffer for righteousness sake, for standing up for truth, it invests in the future. Our harvest field is South Orange County as unbiblical as that sounds. Here's where we are. And we've planted churches in other places and praise God, we want to send people out and there are other mission fields out there in other countries and in other places. But right here, this is ours. The three and a half million people in Orange County, and certainly the million within reasonable driving distance of this building. And we want to be willing to have the courage of a Ridley and a Latimer and say we will be strong and courageous. I'm not asking you to be obnoxious. I want you to be sake, respectful, gentle, but clear because the Bible's clear and we can't muddy the waters.

God, we know as First Peter 5 says, our brothers around the world certainly suffer hardship and we must say frankly, a lot more difficult in so many places than we have here. But we want to be strong, we want to be courageous, we want to be strengthened. We want to, as Latimer said, we want to "play the man." We want to do what it takes to be a strong and courageous Christian in our generation. So give us what we need, please. And just for the sake of your kingdom, may you give us a few points on the scoreboard, so to speak. We know there'll be a lot of unbelief, but may you please bring this church into the joyful experience of more new life, more people coming to faith in Christ. So God, we commit this task to you, it's ultimately your work, but we pray that you'd make us fruitful in it.

In Jesus' name. Amen