

WHEN TRUTH HURTS

Joe Slater

Paul asked the Galatians, *“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”* (Gal. 4:16). Sometimes truth hurts! It requires us to face our faults and change our ways, both of which may be painful.

Error in the Galatian churches left the apostle no choice but to speak bluntly. Promoters of a false gospel are accursed! (That is, liable to eternal destruction, 1:8-9.) Those believing that false gospel were fools, as if under a spell (3:1). Everyone being justified by the Law cut themselves off from Christ and fell from Grace (5:4). Ouch! That hurts!

But Paul didn't just routinely use such sharpness, nor should we. Some people justify being verbally brutal by saying, “I'd rather hurt your feelings than tell you lies.” In fact, however, those aren't the only two choices! Truth can, and usually should, be spoken gently but firmly. Sometimes, as with the Galatians, extreme circumstances require sacrificing gentleness. But even then, Paul made his affection clear: *“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”* (4:19).

Jesus Himself spoke bluntly in some cases. *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”* (Matthew 23:13 and six additional times). *“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of Hell?”* (23:33). But again, this was not the norm for our Lord. The hypocritical Pharisees needed to be jarred to face their sin, but Jesus used a far different approach with sincere seekers, even when they were ignorant and sinful.

Sometimes the doctor has to hurt us to make us well; but most will try to minimize the pain. Just so, speaking the truth may hurt some people's feelings. Let's be sure it's the truth that hurts, and not our unnecessarily rough manner.

Weekend Warriors

For many years I worked with some people in the National Guard. Periodically, they were required to put on their uniform and spend a weekend serving. I heard them referred to as “Weekend Warriors.” I have often thought of that designation relative to some Christians and their service to God. It's almost a case of living one life outside Sunday services, and a completely different life once the “Sunday clothes” are donned. Once they return home, those Sunday clothes are taken off as quickly as they were put on, and life resumes as before.

However, the Bible states that Christianity must entail a 24/7 commitment. I must not take my Christianity on and off as I would my Sunday clothes. I should not be identified as a Christian soldier only when I “have my uniform on.” Consider Jesus' words in Luke 9:23. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Jesus plainly says that discipleship requires a daily commitment.

This teaching is borne out in the Bible's descriptions of the early church: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Act 2:46-47). It is not a coincidence that as the Christians lived the Christian life daily, the church grew daily. Is there a message here for us?

We know certainly that the Gospel was spread daily, for we are told that brethren went about daily preaching and teaching Jesus (Acts 5:42); and once again, the church grew daily (Acts 16:5). The Bereans studied the Scriptures daily as they confirmed the things being preached and taught. With so many Christians today being “Weekend Warriors,” it is no surprise that false teaching is so readily accepted because of a lack of Biblical knowledge (Hos. 4:6-7).

Even ignoring all the Biblical commandments and evidence requiring us to be Christians daily, the very thought that Satan would only be active on weekends, or only during the service times on Sunday, is too ridiculous to even consider. Our relentless enemy requires our resistance and attention every second of every day (1 Pet. 5:8). He must be resisted at every turn (James 4:7).

The means of resistance is the “uniform” provided to us by God (Eph. 6:10-20). The armor of God protects us from the flaming arrows of the devil. How could we even consider walking around the majority of the time totally unprotected, vulnerable to a deadly enemy? God requires His soldiers always to be on duty, always watchful, always ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3:15).

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A math teacher worked ten problems on the chalkboard for the class to see. From the beginning, she heard giggles as she continued writing. By the time she had finished, giggles had turned to laughter and ridicule. Putting down the chalk, she turned around and asked the class, “What's so funny?” One student said, “You got the first problem wrong!”

The teacher responded, “I know, and I did it on purpose. I wanted to show by example that all of you focused on what was wrong. No one bothered to see that the other nine are correct!”

Christians live in a fishbowl. Jesus said to let our light shine (Matt. 5:14). We all make mistakes in judgment at times, lose our tempers, etc. It's too easy to criticize a work being done, a lesson taught, no one visited the sick, etc.

I wonder if we get so caught up in expecting perfection in others performing the works of the church that we don't notice the good being accomplished. What catches our eye is the mistake or less-than-expected result. We complain about what could've been done better, or what should've been done. Perhaps the task at hand could've been done better if we had pitched in and contributed our talents!

Worse yet, we complain about our fellow-Christians' flaws in their work or character to someone who isn't a Christian. How many times have I seen that? And we wonder why our neighbors and friends have no interest in listening when we talk about God!

Yes, we are in a fishbowl; the world will see our good; but the bad can overshadow our good. We must all work together, encouraging each other, *“exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”* (Heb 10:25). Let's focus on encouraging each other, not on joining Fault-Finders, Inc.

--Steven Prine (Turlock, CA)