

Before I came to Hickory Hammock as a layman, 25 or so years ago, and I saw things happening around me that I knew were against God's will, I often carried an attitude that there was nothing I could do about it. Brother Carl, on the other hand, consistently preached against the ills in our culture, our government, and the world. I was not used to this boldness from the pulpit in the church we attended prior to coming here. I found it refreshing, thought provoking, and challenging.

Sometimes our pastor called us to take stands that forced me to re-evaluate my personal convictions, as well as to question whether or not he had all of his facts in order. One of the first such incidents came as he called us to stand against some godless curriculum that school personnel introduced in our public schools. I began to do my own research trying to objectively see the position of both sides. The material had some good qualities in the content of its teaching, but there were concerns that its underlying purpose was to indoctrinate our children with New Age philosophy.

I went to a public hearing on the matter, but those trying to have the curriculum removed only made personal attacks against its authors and offered no evidence that there was anything wrong with the material. Afterwards I went to my daughter's school and asked if I might borrow a copy of the curriculum. They were gracious and eager to help, so I took the books home and began to look for anything that I thought might be detrimental to my daughter or be in conflict with my personal convictions.

Everything seemed, on the surface, to be benign. As I was reading through a chapter, my daughter Elle came in from school, looked at what I was reading, and said, "Oh, Positive Action." I asked her to come sit on my lap and to tell me about it. She said, "They teach you that you are your own God." Out of the mouth of babes came the confirmation that my pastor knew what he was talking about. As I looked more closely at the material, I could see the slow indoctrination process of the students who followed this curriculum. I stood with my pastor, the whole church stood with him, and eventually the whole community, so that the school board removed it forever.

This is only one of the many stands that I have since taken with Brother Carl. I am not saying that we should blindly follow any man, but we must take our stand on the truth, for who knows but that God may have raised us up for such a time as this. If you have been following along in our study of Acts you know that Peter faced a challenge of his core beliefs, and the traditions of his faith, when God commanded him in a vision to eat foods declared to be unclean, and then sent him to the home of a prominent gentile.

Through the events recorded in chapter ten, Peter learned the truth about foods, traditions, and prejudice. In our passage this evening we will read about how he had to then take his stand upon the truths learned, in the face of opposition from his peers. There are principles for us in these verses that may help us to take our stand whenever darkness tries to overcome truth. Discover these with me by reading, Acts 11:1-18.

The first thing we notice about this passage is that it is a near word for word repeat of much of chapter ten. I will not spend time tonight preaching again the principles we learned from that passage. If you are interested in reviewing those, you can download the sermon notes at gregrobards.com for free.

We find this style of writing throughout the bible, where there is an account, and a retelling of the events. Repetition like this in the bible stresses the truthfulness of the passage,

and its importance in God's plan. When challenged by his peers, Peter simply told the truth. He had a vision, where God told him to eat unclean foods. Cornelius had a vision to send for Peter so that he might hear the gospel message. When Cornelius' men arrived, God spoke to Peter and said go with them. Peter was obedient, went to Joppa, shared the gospel, and a group of Gentile received the Holy Spirit. Peter then stayed with them to help them with the first steps of their newfound faith.

Notice the Peter did not embellish the truth; he simply stood on the truth. When the devil tempted Eve in the garden, many say that she embellished on what God said, and soon fell into sin. When we take our stand, we have to be careful that, in our zeal, we do not add to the truth in a way that makes our witness untrue. We see this kind of thing in politics every day. One person will take a partial truth and twist it to his or her advantage, or take things said out of context, in order to make their opponent look bad, or to make them look good.

Just let the truth be the truth, and everything else a lie. The absolute standard of truth is God's word, but we have to be careful not to use a twist in interpretation to make the bible say something that God never intended. Apologetics by necessity require thoughtful, prayerful, internalization of the principles of God's word, under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If we are to take our stand, let it always be on the truth.

After leaving Cornelius, Peter returned to Jerusalem where the Jewish Christians argued with him, and criticized him, because they heard that he went into a Gentile's home and ate with him. Remember that the early church at this point in time was primarily Jewish in its make up. They still held to Jewish beliefs and traditions. Peter struggled with the idea of eating unclean foods and visiting in a Gentile home, so it is natural that his peers would also question his actions.

This was a serious offense. Peter might have been cast out of the Jewish community, and thus the church. But Peter did not cower under pressure. He did not apologize for his actions. He took his stand upon the truth, but notice he did not have to stand-alone. In verse 12 Peter offers the eyewitness testimonies of six of the brothers who went with him to Cornelius' house. They could testify to the truthfulness of what happened.

If we want to be in the center of God's will, and be of some service to His kingdom, we must stand upon the truth, as it is found in God's word, and taught by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we may be required to stand alone, but it is so much easier, and more powerful, when we can stand together.

When a lone voice cries out into the darkness, the world often considers that person to be a fanatic, or a nut, out of touch with the times. On the other hand, if Christians unite, and stand together on the truth of God's word, our collective voice demands to be heard, and it can have a powerful effect on those who live in darkness. The light of truth overcomes the darkness. Godliness overcomes evil. The lost find salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

We are in the presidential election season, and I firmly believe that every Christian, of legal age, has a responsibility to vote. If you are passionate about a particular candidate, you should stand behind that man or woman, pray for them, and speak out for them. However, don't confuse your stand for a presidential candidate with your stand upon the truth. In the current political climate, we have no option for a person who will stand upon the truth of God's word in the decisions he or she makes while in office.

How I wish that people would be as passionate about standing on the truth as they are passionate about politics anyway, but as we see too often, the truth is politically incorrect. Our future is not in the hands of politicians, it is in the hand of God. God will place whomever He

choses into office, and use them to either be a blessing to our nation, or to set into motion His judgment upon our nation. That is why our vote is of no value unless accompanied by our prayers, because our politicians will be ineffective in the issues that matter unless we cover them in prayer.

Notice that in his defense, Peter quoted the words of Jesus. The bible calls Jesus the word of God. He is the embodiment of God's word, and the example of how to live and to always do what is right. For the born again Christian, He is the Lord, as well as the Savior, so when Jesus speaks, Christian's should listen and pay attention to the will of God.

The word of God is the source of the truth upon which we take our stand. We quote scripture to let the world know the source of our authority. We speak Jesus' name, and quote the things He said, because He has authority over the darkness. But, this lays a heavy burden upon the Christian to handle the Word of God with integrity, and to interpret the principles of God's word in context.

Sunday morning, after church, Juliana said something to me that has really stuck with me. She said, "The jigger is in the thingy." What does that mean? That is an exact quote of what she said, word-for-word. How do you interpret that? If you use your imagination, you can come up with all sorts of situations that might cause her to say, "The jigger is in the thingy." But if I told you that she looked down at the pressure cooker that was in her hands when she said it, you would know the context, and understand exactly what she meant. Context is essential to arriving at the proper interpretation of scripture. We cannot force the scripture to say something that God never intended. We also have to receive the scripture in context, even when it says something we wish it didn't say.

We take our stand on the contextual truth. We face life, and the world, with a biblical worldview. It is interesting to note that the accusations of the Jewish Christians were lodged against Peter, and his actions, for staying with and eating with gentiles, not because Cornelius and his family received the ministry of the gospel. Peter's defense for his actions focused on God's will, and what He did to change Peter's heart, and the lengths that God went to in order to save Cornelius, his family, and friends.

When we take our stand we have to remember, "It's not about me," It's about God. It's about God's revealed will. We differentiate between righteousness and godlessness. We stand against the forces of darkness, political correctness, or cultural acceptance and say, "No, this is wrong according to the truth of God's word," and say, "There is a better way according to the principles of God's word."

We never know how people will react when we take our stand. Earlier in Acts we read that the Jews beat Peter and John, and threw them in jail for standing on the truth. In this passage we learn that Peter's stand resulted in the whole body of Christ glorifying God, and the church accepting gentile believers as brothers and sisters in Christ. In chapter twelve we read that Peter's stand once again landed him in jail.

The bible does not promise that our stands will make us popular among the people. It prepares us instead for opposition, and even persecution. But, when we stand upon the truth of God's word, we shine the light of Christ into this dark world. Where would our country, and the world, be today if there was no one who was willing to take their stand? How depraved would we become as a people, if no one presented God's point of view by standing on the truth?

Perhaps there has been no more important time in the history of the church that God's people stand up with one voice to declare the truth of God to the world. Current events suggest that time may be running out, and while technology has opened up the possibility for the whole

world to hear the gospel, we don't know how long that door will remain open. We have the truth recorded in God's word. We have the ministry of the Holy Spirit to equip us and gift us to take our stand. We have the words of life, and the message of hope through faith in Jesus Christ.

We are all sinners by nature and by choice, but the free gift of God is forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. He died for our sins, but arose in victory from the grave. He is coming again, and perhaps soon, so that there is urgency for all of us who know the truth, to take our stand upon that truth. If we stand together, our witness will be more effective than if we let someone else take the hard stands, and we sit on the sidelines. If there is anyone here who needs to know more about how to be saved, we will be happy to help you to know the truth, and how to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.