

Order of Worship for Sunday, March 7, 2010

Pre-service song

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship: Psalm 93:1-5 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Christ Alone”

Overhead

“Glory to His Name”

Song # 493

“Power of the Cross”

Overhead

Offering

How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”

Overhead

The Lord’s Supper:

Preparing our Hearts: “Come, Share the Lord”

Song # 462

Invitation and Prayer for the Congregation

Prayer for and Distribution of the Elements

Affirming our Faith: “I Will Sing of My Redeemer”

Song # 517

Message: “Diversity in Unity, Part 6, United in Truth” (Ephesians 4:15)

By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“My Life is in You, Lord ”

Song # 542

Parting Word of Grace

VESPERS

5:30 P.M. in the Library

We will be studying Article #9 of the Statement of Faith

What we believe regarding Christ’s Return

“The Prayer Closet”

March 14, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **National and District EFCA:** that President Bill Hamill and Superintendent Gil Stiglitz will be blessed with health, wisdom, safety; that they will remain humble and focused on the Lord’s will in serving the local churches, college and seminary; that they will effectively advance the work of planting new churches here and abroad
2. **President Barak Obama:** that the Lord will give him wisdom for righteous governance, humility for sincere cooperation, and faith for obedience to the Lord
3. **Children’s Ministries and VBS:** that Brandy Nyberg will be quickly understand her new position and be thankful for its opportunities; that the teaching staff will remain healthy and love their students; that Jennifer and Mia Gonzales will make effective VBS leaders for 2010
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: MSgt. David**
5. **Howell** (son-in-law, Eileen Hewitt): that he be able to remain stationed near his son and that he continue to be open to opportunities to share his faith
6. **College Student of the Week: Matthew Cook at International Academy for Design and Technology, Sacramento** (son of Joel and Virginia Cook): that he remain a light and witness to those around him at college and that his focus stays strong as he reaches the halfway point in his studies.

Today we make one last visit to the passage we have been dealing with, “Diversity in Unity”, Ephesians 4:1-16. One of the commentators I read, David Lloyd-Jones, not only wrote eight full volumes of messages on Ephesians, but wrote two of those volumes on Ephesians 4:1-16 alone. So I am just giving you a light introduction. I am moving us through as fast as I possibly can!

Today we will be spending our time specifically looking at the question, “United in Truth” and concentrating on v.15. I rarely do this, as you know, to take an isolated verse, for this can be misleading. But we have enough background by now to know that I am not misleading you. This is what Paul writes: *“Rather, speaking the truth in love...”* “If I were you I would say, “Oh, the pastor just slowed down; I probably want to notice those words!” And you do want to notice those words. *“...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ.”* Last week and the week before I spent a lot of time on a major issue in Christian life: growing up. Americans love to not grow up. Maturity is not a highly valued quality in American life. We like “young”. But today I want to talk about the truth.

Now some of you are thinking that by now I surely have exhausted all possible meanings in these verses, but it is not true. These few words Paul sets before us contain perhaps the most profound challenge that we can face. What is that challenge? We are called to live out the most demanding of all realities. That is the union of truth and love. Every parent in this room and every married person knows what I just said. How do you consistently, faithfully, always maintain the centrality of your love and acceptance while also telling the truth? Now we touched on this a little last week. A couple of comments I made, in passing as it was not the focus of my attention at that particular time, were: “Love never surrenders the truth.” True love never does, for true love knows that in order to actually love the other, you always tell them the truth: that is what true love always does. Sometimes we have a hard time with that. The other, of course, is that you cannot come to the Father and by-pass the truth. There is a simple reason for that. I can use this particular metaphor that Jesus himself lifted up. Jesus said, “I am the door of the sheep. The only way you can come into the fold of the Father, the only way you can be a part of the gathering that is the children of God is to come through Jesus, and Jesus says ‘I am the way, I am the truth and I am the life.’” You cannot come to the Father and by-pass the truth. I was praying while the men were distributing the bread, and I was praying and asking God to send and let the Spirit move over the body of believers. I prayed some more, and reflected that I know that before [God] can bless them [God] must bring them under conviction. And so when you grow up you say, “OK, in order that the body of Christ would be blessed, they must first experience the pain of conviction. They have got to know and deal with what they know.” So I prayed

There was no lie in the world until the serpent starting talking to Eve in the Garden. Lying is mortal. Lying is mortal because it distorts reality in the mind and in the heart. Lies come from defiled hearts twisting the tongue away from the truth and to deception. In fact, lies deface and defame the character of God because lies speak of the world in ways that are contrary to the purpose and character of God. This is what lies are.

I fear that we as a nation have become a nation of liars. I listen and I read the political speech that flows. Do you believe advertisements? Neither do the ones who produce them. They are hooks. They do not intend to deliver on the promise; they only intend to hook. I cannot watch most television preachers, because the lies flow. I got that far in my reflections and I said we are a perfect example of what Jeremiah describes at the end of Judah, where corruption had penetrated and come to dominate every single major cultural institution in the land.

What hope is there, then, for creatures such as we? All of us are fallen, whether by inescapable consequence or by intent, whether because we have been deceived or because we feel the need to deceive; our grasp of reality is so tenuous that we scarcely can sustain the weight of the truth. We are, in fact, in constant and enormous need of help. That is something any parent needs to remember with a great deal of clarity as you approach your child. If I

myself am incapable of telling the truth every day all day to all of those with whom I associate, why on earth do I think my child is going to be able to tell the truth consistently and constantly to me at all times?

Since moving to Oroville, Nini and I have been amazed at the sheer number of birds there are here as well as their variety. I do not know if you have noticed this or not. How many of you are native Orovillians? We pray for you constantly! Here are the facts. I grew up not very far from La Jolla, [California]. In La Jolla, when I was a young man, there was a place called the La Jolla Caves. It was a national monument, a place that people would come from all over the country to see. Guess what? The Bronsons never went there. Why would we go there; it's just down the road? So the locals rarely have their eyes open to see all the glories and the wonders that are there around us [that] God has put in front of us in order that we might see them. Birds (let me go back to birds): if I understand my wife's comment correctly, the Millers, Dick and Jane Miller, than whom none could be more trusted, say they have seen as many as 125 species. It is amazing! That many birds! We are a flyway, and lots of birds come through here. Presently our house is inundated with Robins. Hundreds of Robins are like litter all over the ground. It is delightful. Morning doves hug the earth and softly coo; hawks soar and pierce the air with their keening cry. Birds glorify God by being birds. They are simultaneously alert and ready to fly at an instant, and they are oblivious. Nothing about a bird says it sits and marvels at the beauty of the world around it. Birds glorify God by being birds; but birds do not glorify God by knowing Him as God. Birds do not glorify God by praising Him. They are just birds.

In Genesis I we are told that God made each thing according to its kind. Each kind has its unique characteristics and its purpose as made by God. When humans are just being human, doing what they were created to do, they know that all things speak to them of God, because God made us the knowing creature. They know that all things speak to them about God and they rejoice in all that they know of God and they glorify God for all that they know, because God made us as the knowing creature. Of all the creatures of which we are aware only two are capable of knowing God as God: angels and humanity. Presumably angels know God by means of pure intellection, direct intuition or inward apprehension. We know God through intuition and through sensation by way of our senses and our capacity for reasoning.

Although we cannot be sure, yet it is likely that our capacity for direct inward apprehension of God or intuition was far greater before the fall. Then came the fall. When Adam sinned, sin wrapped us in a cocoon of darkness, separated us from God, and from one another. This was a part of the death that was God's judgment against sin. No longer, therefore, do we enjoy a direct communion with God, being sinners. No longer do we walk with God in the cool of the day. No longer, in fact, can we just be human, knowing all things speak to us of God, rejoicing in all the things we know, and glorifying God. Now we are shut up inside ourselves, limited to knowing others and the world around us and God Himself by means of our physical senses and our powers of reason, neither of which are trustworthy. [For,] there are in the house of our souls powerful emotions capable of bending our minds according to the impulses of fear and desire. Under the power of fear and desire we tell ourselves lies, and then we believe them. Then we are both deceiving and deceived.

Is it any wonder that truth telling is a ceaseless challenge for us? What Paul said was this: “...*speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.*” If you cannot speak the truth in love, you cannot grow up. Every time you tell a lie, whack! You stunt growth. At the heart of the Christian faith is truth. Every Christian is called to a life of faith, but we are not merely called to a life of faith: we are called to a life of faith in the truth.

However, learning, knowing and telling the truth requires more than good intentions. It needs as well humility that counters pride. Did you every try and explain something to someone who was convinced they already knew the answer? It is an interesting thing (I am going to go over time today) Nini and I – it is the fourth church we have

pastored – it takes us approximately ten months before we can look over a congregation and say, ‘that family is headed for trouble and that family; those kids are going to run into it.’ Why? Well, they are the ones who don’t need any help; that’s why. They are the ones who very quickly let you know, “Don’t get too close, don’t give us any advice; we are doing just fine, thank you. We will drop in when we feel like and we will drop out when we feel like it.” And we’ll say, yep, and we will meet you at some point along the path as your world begins to disintegrate. Because the greatest obstacle to learning is pride. That’s why men are so good at reading maps – I’m a guy; you don’t need to read the map, you just need to go faster. Humility to counter pride and courage to counter fear. Remember being in a classroom? “I don’t want to ask for help: people will think I don’t know anything! I can’t let people think I don’t know anything. Good heavens! I’ll just make something up.” That covers most kids at about third grade as they get worried about their image. They really get bad about sixth and seventh grade. By the time they finish high school they are such a mess they cannot figure anything out. Their pride won’t bend to learn and their fear locks them up inside their self-image. Of course! There is another. We need love to counter self-centeredness. How long does it take for a person to finally understand it is not all about them? It takes a long time. Then the last thing is that it takes compassion to counter selfishness. It’s not all about me! So, learning how to speak the truth to somebody else in love is the way we grow up to be like Christ. It is no easy task. Paul says it beautifully in Philippians 2:1-4. *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interest of others.”* Whenever my children have gone to school, and Caleb right now is at the University of Michigan and therefore the battle is fierce, I always tell them this: your first obligation is to learn what the teacher has to say. You don’t have to agree with it, you don’t have to believe it; but your first obligation is to know what he has to say. Have the humility to listen! Because, if you listen, you will learn and then you can take care of others who are struggling. O! So it is not just about me! It’s not just about my grades! It’s not just about me becoming magnificent! No, it’s about you being compassionately helpful, seeking to bring the benefit of whatever God has given you that you can give it to somebody else. Grow up and be like Christ. It takes humility, compassion, and love.

Truth covers all things, but of course when we gather in an assembly like this, primarily it is the truth regarding Christ and our salvation in Him that is at issue. The truth which is spoken both within the community of faith – thinking of Ephesians 4:13-14 – is in contrast and response to the winds of doctrine and human cunning and craftiness and deceitful schemes which trouble the church. All kind of things are said in the church which should never be said, because they are false. But of course this does not mean we are indifferent or unconcerned about truth in all areas of life. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2Cor.10:3-5), *“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”* The central thrust of those words deals with false or distorted teaching regarding Christ, but the wider application covers every thought. This broadened focus in second Corinthians agrees with what we have read here in Ephesians 4:15, where we are told that we are to grow up in every way into Christ. You see, Christians indeed are to be truth seekers and tellers in every dimension of life, just as they are to be Christ-like in every way. Beloved, being a Christian is not a respectable addition to an already otherwise organized life. When we become Christians, the expectation from God is that all of our life is to be reordered according to what we believe in Christ.

We should not underestimate how challenging this is. Skip forward in your Bibles to Ephesians 4:17-23. This is the section we will take up next week, but I thought it would be good to take a quick look at it, because Paul here expands in fact on this primary challenge of what we do with our minds as we seek to follow Christ. This is what he says, *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that*

is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” When I read those words I ask myself two different questions relative to those comments by Paul. First, are people really that evil; is that really the way Gentiles (that is, non-believers) are, are they really that bad, the people we walk around with. Then I think some more about that passage and I say, “Am I that evil?” Most people don’t look that bad, unless you listen. If you listen, you begin to hear something else. If we listen to our own hearts, sometimes we will be shocked. We are sinners, of course, in any case and much that is wrong simply passes us by. God is not a sinner; God is holy. This is God’s judgment upon us. In Genesis 6:5 we read, *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* Obviously he is talking about people who live in Russia! In any case that was before the flood. The flood came and wiped out that entire rotten group of people and we had a new group beginning with Noah. Consequently we read in Genesis 8:21, after the flood, *“And the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.’”* Well, that is the Old Testament under the law before the gracious presence of God brought truth and light and goodness to all mankind and now we know that we are all brothers together walking forward in a constant upward climb, improving year after year. So the social gospel says. Well all of us I think are familiar with Romans 3:23, all the people from this group are probably familiar with it: *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* The problem with that statement is that it is so tame. *“All of us fall short of the glory of God.”* Well, of course we fall short of the glory of God. Consider; I’ve tried cooking, some of you know that I have been doing a little bit of cooking at home. But I fall way short of my wife. She is a fantastic cook, magnificent cook, and I fall short. I’m not a bad guy because I fall short. I am just not quite as good as she is. Give me enough time, I will probably be better than she is – that’ll be a long time! Nevertheless, I’m not a bad guy, right, I’m, just falling short. But that is not what it means. What we need to go back to is Romans 3:9-18. Here Paul spells out, actually before giving that summary statement in verse 23, this is how Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, described the condition of humanity citing verses from the Old Testament. *“...none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under the lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”* “Not me!” “Yes! Precisely!” And on this dividing line is where the world breaks. Do I need God and His grace, or can I really do this on my own?

How can you ever trust such people as this to speak the truth? Truth is not a case of facts, just the facts. Facts delivered with perfect accuracy can be used to pummel the mind, intimidate the weak and uncertain and confuse the uninformed. They can be used to obscure the very reality they are supposed to delineate and make clear. Human minds are not, in fact, processing bio-chemical mechanisms. To the infinite bewilderment of every branch of materialistic science, the human brain is but the physical counterpart of the human mind, and the mind is a part of the soul. Paul directs the reader’s attention to two critical dimensions of life together as the body of Christ, the church, both of which require not just attention to accuracy, but the right disposition of the soul. It is the thoughts and the intentions of the heart which are mortally twisted by sin and God’s judgment on sin. It is indeed, beloved, the thoughts and intentions of the heart which need mending if we are to mature according to the stature of the fullness of Christ. The two dimensions that are being dealt with are that we speak the truth and we act with love. We are to grow up into Christ, that is, we are to be like Jesus.

This is what Paul says: *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,*

when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” How many of you, when reading that sentence, spontaneously say, “O, Lord, am I carrying my part?” Nini and I are undergoing an interesting transition in our lives. That is known as the “empty nest.” I was absolutely persuaded that my sappy sentimentalistic wife would have a terrible time with this, because she lives for her children. It is almost an embarrassment. I mean, after all, there is me! But guess what: guess who can’t keep his mind together all the time? Guess who finds his heart reaching out, wanting to know, “How are you, what are you doing, what are thinking, is it well with you?” Yes, it’s me. Because love wants to do its part! It wants to bless! So we are the body of Christ. The question becomes for all of us, do we want to bless the rest of the body? That is the question which flows from Paul’s words.

Ephesians 4:15-16 describes God’s plan, and His means for preparing a people for Himself. Beloved, we are not our own. I Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul reminds us that we have been bought by the blood of Christ. In Deuteronomy.7:6, Moses tells the people, *“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”* But Israel just couldn’t get it. Constantly they turned away from God; ran after other worldly goods. Finally God sends them to Babylon. Through the prophet Ezekiel this is what God said: Israel *“... I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations...”* He says it three times in that one chapter (Ezek.20:9, 14, 22). *I have acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations.* Do we think that God has changed? Do you think that God no longer cares that His people profane His name among the nations? Do we profane the name of the Lord? By refusing to be His people? Do we profane the name of the Lord by refusing to bless one another with the blessings He has given us? Do we profane the name of the Lord by insisting “I am mine, and I will conduct my life as I see fit!!!!” You caught the pronouns. O, you are not yours, you are His! What He wants is that we would bless one another so that the world will say, “O my, how they love each other! What a people they have become.”

Let us pray: Our holy Father, we today reminded ourselves of that central truth: we are bought by the blood of Jesus. You gave your Son and He gave His life that we might have life. Forgive us for taking it lightly, making it just an addition, something we ‘fit it’ with all the other things that we like to do. Teach us, our Father, to speak the truth in love, and to grow up in all aspects into Christ. We ask it our Father, for the glory of your Name, and for the increase of the kingdom on the face of the earth, and for our own good. In Jesus, amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. How would you explain why it is wrong to lie to a small child, to an adolescent, or to an adult?

2. What is your favorite wild animal?

3. What seems to be the most common reason for children to lie? Do you think it is the same for adults? Are these reasons connected to or do they actually spring from emotional states?

4. Do you find it easy or difficult to speak to others about Jesus? Do you characteristically speak of your faith in terms of truth?

5. Do people you know seem to be the way Genesis 6:5, 8:21 and Romans 3:23 and 3:9-18 speak of humanity? How are we to understand the Bible’s teaching here in practical terms?

6. Why might humility be important for knowing the truth and why might compassion be necessary to live the truth?

7. If Ephesians 4:15-16 is God’s plan and means for preparing a people for Himself, what do you see as your part in that plan?

8. In your estimation in what ways has (or does) the church tend to profane the name of God today?

9. Do you think the general population of Oroville and Butte County hold churches in high esteem? Why do you think they have the opinion that they do?

10. How might our congregation better live to the glory of God’s name in our community?