



**1 Cor. 15:34**

***Awake to Righteousness!***

34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

[I realize it's not normally my habit to preach on one verse, but there is a method to my madness here. Because I believe this verse gives us the answer to the vast majority of problems in the church, ancient and modern.]

In the Summer of 1997 I was working as the systems administrator for the IRI in Washington D.C. For those of you who are wondering what that means, it means I was the troll in the basement who kept the network up and running and generally managed the I.S. department for the organization. The week that I handed in my notice and told them I was going off to seminary in Pennsylvania, I remember I was coming from a meeting when one of the younger guys working there motioned me over to his desk. He was a recent college grad who was gradually working his way up the political ladder. He said something along the lines of "I hear you are going to go to seminary and become what a priest?" I said "no, a pastor, I'm a Presbyterian" to which he amazed me by saying "Me too!" So we started talking and it quickly became apparent that he had been born into a PCUSA family and sometimes attended a PCUSA church. He then asked me what I thought about the possibility that we were going to vote on whether to ordain homosexuals, and he made it very clear that he was outraged and disgusted. I explained that I disapproved of that but that it was the PCUSA not the PCA that was about to vote.

So he asked what the differences between the two denominations were and I explained that the PCA believed that the scriptures were the inerrant Word of God, we believed in miracles, in Creation, that faith in Jesus was the only way to heaven, that women were not supposed to be ordained, and basically held to all of the fundamentals of the Christian faith taught in scripture. To which he said, "***Oh, I don't believe in any of that.***" So I asked why he was so opposed to homosexual ordination, to which he replied, "it's wrong" and I said "says who?" and he said "everyone knows that" and I said "apparently not, or they wouldn't be about to vote to do it."

You see that young man exposed one of the fundamental flaws in Christian thinking over the ages, namely that it's possible to dismiss the authority of the word of God, its miracles, and its doctrinal teaching and yet hold on to morality. Because you see the fact that the PCUSA had reached a point of endorsing practices the bible called *vile passions* or *abominations* was directly due to the fact that they had cut themselves loose from the moorings of the bible in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1997 the bible had lost all authority as an objective standard or an arbiter in any matter, and men and women simply followed the leading of the progressive edge of the society or to use the phrase from Judges that described Israel when they lost the knowledge of word of God - ***everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***

You see in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the mainline denominations began to be taken over by what were called the modernists, these were men who did not believe that the bible was the word of God, some of them doubted either that God existed, or if he did that he could be known. They did not believe in the supernatural and modernist theologians like Rudolf Bultmann became famous for saying things like no man who had used an electric light bulb could believe in the miracles of the bible. So one by one the doctrines that had formed the heart of the Christian faith, the incarnation and deity of Christ, the atonement and the bodily resurrection, gradually began to be dismissed.

***Christianity became a matter not of salvation, but of moral improvement.***

But the thing was the moral society became less and less feasible. Unregenerate men have no ability to keep the law of God and no desire to do so – as Paul affirmed ***“the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”*** and Christian morality began an inevitable decline. At first men made great pretense of being moral, especially by trying to remove all the temptations to sin, rather like the Pharisees in Christ’s time, but after a while they simply began to make excuses for doing what they wanted to. They redefined morality and after a while it was not the church setting the example for the society, but society setting the standards for the church.

In particular, its worth noting that when men in the church ceased to believe in the reality of the resurrection, they too tended to slip inevitably towards adopting the moral standards of the natural man that Paul talks about in verse 32 – ***“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”***

Now as we have been discussing in Chapter 15 Paul had been defending the importance of the bodily resurrection against those in the Corinthian church who were teaching what Greek culture believed. Namely that it was impossible that the dead bodies of believers should rise again. Dead bodies were material, matter was evil, and the idea that our souls would be reunited to them was a yucky idea to the average Greek. Let’s just do away with that one. Now no doubt they thought that by doing just that, they were removing one of the major obstacles to Greeks being able to embrace the Christian faith, and thus they were advancing the gospel. In the same way the modernists thought that by taking out miracles and “demythologizing Christianity” as Bultmann put it, they were making the Christian faith more palatable to modern people.

But Paul has been showing them, you lose this doctrine, and you lose the faith. Such a Christianity is vain, futile, empty, and hopeless.

***1 Cor. 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.***

***14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.***

***15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.***

***16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.***

***17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!***

They think they are improving Christianity by conforming it to Greek culture, but what they are really doing is destroying the faith. Now he wants them to also understand, the moral drift that they were experiencing as a church, and that we have been reading about is tied directly to their doctrinal decline. So he says to them – ***awake to righteousness, and do not sin*** using a Greek phrase that literally means ***SOBER UP And stop missing the mark!***

Come out of your drunken sensual stupor, and stop following your own independent thinking instead of the revealed truth of God because it is leading your hearts astray and causing you to sin.

He then points to the cause of such teaching, *some do not have the knowledge of God*. Literally, the people in your midst who are teaching these things don't know God, sure they have a concept of God, they accept there is a divine being, but they are unconverted, they have no personal relationship with Christ, they don't love Him and because of that their theology is driven more by their desire to live in sinful pleasures in the here and therefore they persuaded people to believe that there was no resurrection, no future judgment.

Jesus encountered the same thing when he dealt with the Sadducees:

***Matt. 22:23 The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him,***

...

***29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.***

That such people were in the church was bad, but that people were listening to them was far worse, therefore he says I am saying this to your shame.

Now let me try to make 2 applications of this point:

1) ***One of the reasons why this is so very important to us today is because there is a huge drive in evangelicalism generally and our own denomination particularly to deny the importance of doctrines.*** The idea is that we'll forget all our doctrines, especially because they are divisive and cause arguments, and just love Jesus. There is a new denomination starting for instance called "Mere Christianity" that wants to simply hold to the most basic Christian doctrines and let people believe whatever they want about everything else but that never works, as D.G. Hart put it:

***"...for mere Christianity to survive, wise and constant diligence needs to be directed to as complete a reflection on biblical truth as possible. In other words, to preserve the minimum, you need to defend the maximum. This is logic that those who call themselves evangelical have instinctively avoided."***

We have already seen how by abandoning the Lord's Day we are seeing one of the central organizing principles of Christianity being lost.

2) ***The myth of influence is FATAL to the gospel.*** The myth of influence says that by compromising with the World, we will advance the Gospel.

***"The Christian's success in reaching pagans lies not in minimizing the difference Christianity makes, but in maximizing it. The Corinthians were swimming in a sea of unbelieving pagans and, to their immense shame, the pagans were having more success in influencing them than they were in influencing the pagans. Paul wanted them to understand that the hope for reaching their society lay not in compromising the truth of the gospel, but in standing squarely and unashamedly for it." – Roger Ellsworth***

We need to reach the World with the Good news of Salvation via the Only Jesus who saves, and that is the Jesus of the Bible. This is a Jesus who said

***John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.***

This is a Jesus who is the Second member of the Triune Godhead, who was born of a Virgin, who did many miracles, who lived a sinless life himself and who died to atone for the sins of his people, who rose again from the dead, who commissioned his church to preach the gospel, who ascended into heaven, and who is coming back on the day of judgment at which time the dead shall be raised.

That's the JESUS we mean when we say JESUS SAVES. And that is the only Jesus powerful enough to save. So you see why all those doctrines are important and why we must NOT be lead astray by those who know not God.